

Spring 2003

Five Rivers Environmental Education Center

My Ten Best Backpacking Tips

Backpacking in the Adirondack Mountains affords many rewards, such as the privilege of finding solitude in nature, a beautiful environment any time of year, the opportunity to learn something new every time out, a great physical workout, and memories and stories that last a lifetime. But you cannot simply venture into the wilderness overnight without first making a few important preparations.

First plan your complete itinerary, and then pack the right gear for that plan. Gear and supplies can add up quickly, both in cost and in weight. It is also important to plan ways to minimize the environmental impacts your camping style and itinerary may have, both for the sake of nature and of the fragile biodiversity of the wilderness.

It took me some time before I was able to find a nice sized, good looking, comfortable, practical and reasonably priced (on sale) framed backpack. I settled on the North Face Minuteman. One feature I particularly like is that the pack can be detached from the frame for use on shorter day trips. I've found that it is a good idea to line the inside of your pack with plastic garbage bags to keep your clothes, food and supplies dry.

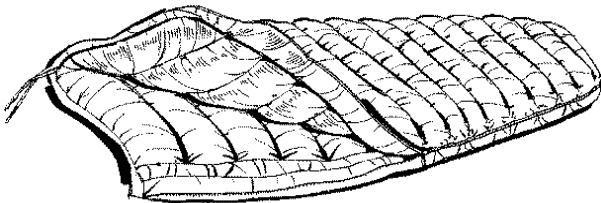
My tent was designed for two people and three seasons of the year. It cost \$40 at Sears and still works well after many years of use. When sizing a tent, you should always take into consideration the camping gear that you may wish to store in the tent. A two-person tent, for example, may just barely have enough room for one person's sleeping bag, backpack, and boots. And, of course, always be sure to keep your food secured outside your tent.

I bought my Polar Shield sleeping bag on E-Bay. The mummy-style bag compacts into a carrying sack about the size of a pillow case and is rated to 0 degrees (F).



Using a backpacking stove will help minimize your camping impact. While a campfire is nice, the continual pressure of wood gathering in and around popular campsites has generally denuded the local landscapes. My stove is very small and runs off propane. Small propane tanks are not too hard to carry, are quieter, lighter and less messy than liquid fuels, and will prepare several meals before needing a change, and my single-mantle propane lantern, which has lasted me for years, can give several hours of light per tank. I also carry a flashlight for emergencies.

Speaking of emergencies, packaged first aid kits can be expensive. It is often easier to customize your own from spare items in your medicine chest. I also take several kerchiefs. They are inexpensive, lightweight and can be helpful in a variety of situations.



Of all the things a person needs to survive in the wilderness, clean water is perhaps the most important. The problem with water, though, is that it is very heavy. I never carry more than for my immediate needs. Instead, I carry water purification tablets. For safety, it is recommended to bring the treated water to a boil, but that sure beats carrying several days worth of water every step of the way. Purification tablets sufficient to produce several liters of potable water only cost a few dollars, which is much cheaper than spending \$50-\$100 on a water purification pump.

There is an old saying among backpackers that “cotton kills”, because cotton clothing does not hold in body heat

when it gets wet. Wool is a much better insulator, even when wet. There also are many synthetic materials that work just as well as wool, plus are lighter and do not itch. Choice of fabric aside, when camping in inclement weather, it is always wise to dress in layers. This allows you to take one layer off at a time to best regulate comfort and minimize sweating. Most of our body heat is lost through our head, so a good wool hat is very important as well.

Planning out a day-by-day menu for your trip is an absolute must. When backpacking, you burn up more energy than you otherwise normally would. For this reason you should pack food which is high in nutrients. And filling. It is a good idea to bring plenty of spare food, especially ready-to-eat items both for snacking and for emergency situations.

All backpackers should know the basics of how to use a map and compass to find where they are and where they are going. With experience, it is even possible to determine your movement rate. Topographic maps of popular Forest Preserve areas can be found in many local sporting goods stores or bookshops.

Now after everything is put together and you are ready for your wilderness quest, remember to leave your planned itinerary and estimated schedule with your significant others. If for some reason something were to go awry while you were incommunicado, they would know where and when to expect to find you. Be sure to register your ins and outs at trailhead registers where applicable.

Camping alone can be wonderful for the silence and solitude, but I do not recommend that you go it alone. Bring a friend. It can be safer, easier, cheaper...and even more fun!

Brian Willson
Naturalist Intern

***Naturalist's Notebook:
The Frog Chorus***

In spring, the earliest nighttime voice heard is often that of the spring peeper, a tiny amphibian no bigger than a thumbnail. These small frogs usually live in trees and have tiny suction cups on the tips of their toes that help them climb. But in spring, they, like all amphibians, head to water to breed. As soon as they get to a wetland area, the males start to call to attract females and keep other males away from their territory. They do defend a breeding territory even though it may only be a few inches in diameter. The spring peepers are the frogs that sing earliest in the season, with a high-pitched sound like a sleighbell or a whistle.

The next frog that's often heard is the wood frog, which has a sound similar to the quacking of a duck. If you say the words "pick-it-up, pick it up," over and over again, it sounds a bit like a wood frog. American toads produce a trill, sort of like a cross between a hum and a whistle. The green frog says "gunk," a single note like a banjo string being plucked. The last frog to join the chorus is the bullfrog, which doesn't begin singing until all danger of frost is past, usually in June, and adds a deep bass voice to the night chorus.

All of these frogs sing in marshy areas and around the edge of ponds. Flashlight beams may be reflected back from their eyes with a jewel-like sparkle. If you're lucky, you may sometimes be able to spot the amphibian, although this is difficult since their call has an almost ventriloquist-like quality. Often, if one or more people work together, they can triangulate on the noise and find the hidden singer. Join us for the annual Peeper Open House on April 24 to see some of these spring singers for yourselves!

Director's Notebook

Lions, Tigers, and Bears, Oh My

Where does a 300 pound polar bear sit? In one of our storage buildings! ... along with about 100 other unusual taxidermy specimens which the Bureau acquired recently. You'll see the best of them in exciting new exhibit treatments planned for this year.

Spanning the Generations

Back in 1997 when former Game Farm Superintendent Steve Fordham and his family visited their old home (aka, Teacher Resource Center), I asked sons David and Malcolm what it was like growing up in Building 8. They gleefully recounted spending endless hours dabbling in the Vlomankill behind the house.

I can't visit that area today without invoking the sense of curiosity that so nourished their love of the outdoors. Sadly, David passed away in December, so I especially look forward to re-building Fordham's Crossing bridge this spring so that others may likewise be inspired, and David's memory fittingly preserved.

Flush with Pride

As this newsletter goes to bed, contractors are installing roof trusses on our new Comfort Station, which we expect to be fully operational in early May. The structure incorporates many energy and water conservation elements, such as photo-voltaic lighting, solar gain, low-flush commodes, and faucets with automatic shut-off, yet tastefully reflects the spirit of the site's architectural ambience. This project is one of several short term initiatives envisioned in our draft Unit Management Plan, which is currently under internal review.

Craig D. Thompson

Five Rivers Environmental Education Center Spring Program Schedule 2003

Programs are free of charge unless otherwise noted. Participants should dress for the weather! We regret that we cannot accommodate organized youth groups at these programs. Please call to make special arrangements for a group.

We welcome those who have any type of physical challenge to all of our programs. If you call ahead to let us know your needs, we will be happy to learn how we can best serve you.

For further information or for pre-registration, call Five Rivers at (518) 475-0291. In the event of severe weather, programs may be canceled. Please call the Center to confirm.

SPRING TEACHER AND YOUTH LEADER TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Saturday, April 5 PROJECT LEARNING TREE WORKSHOP 10am-4pm

Project Learning Tree is a hands-on, participatory workshop full of classroom activities that focus on trees, plants and the outdoors, as a way of teaching children about environmental issues and natural history. The workshop will be presented by John Graham, a DEC Forester. There is a \$15 fee for this workshop. Participants will receive a Project Learning Tree workbook filled with activities suitable for students in kindergarten through grade 12. Call to pre-register by April 2. Teacher in-service credit can be coordinated through the Greater Capital Region Teacher Center.

Saturday, April 12 PROJECT WET WORKSHOP 10am- 3pm

This workshop will introduce "Project WET" (Water Education for Teachers). Participants will receive a manual of activities suitable for teaching about water science, aquatic wildlife, and environmental issues. Pre-register by April 9. Dress for the outdoors. Teacher in-service credit can be coordinated through the Greater Capital Region Teacher Center.

April 29 *or* 30 NASA LUNAR ROCK WORKSHOP 4pm-7pm

The NASA Lunar and Meteorite Certification Teacher Workshop will provide educators with the authorization to borrow samples of lunar rocks and meteorites. The lunar sample kit contains lunar rock and soil samples along with classroom activities, slides and video tapes. The meteorite kit contains meteorites, activities and a slide set.

NASA makes these materials available only to educators who complete the certification workshop. Please call to pre-register by April 25. This workshop will be taught by Ron Ernst, Aerospace Education Specialist at the Goddard Space Flight Center. Call soon, registration will be limited.

Tuesday, April 22 **NATURALISTS AS READING PARTNERS** 10:00am

Join us as we discover spring, both in the pages of books and outdoors. A naturalist will read a story, and then we'll go outdoors on a discovery walk to explore some of the themes in the book. We'll end with cocoa and popcorn while watching birds out the window. Please call the Center at 475-0291 to pre-register by April 20. All are welcome, but the programs are most appropriate for children ages 3-7. Adults must accompany children. FOFR Members fee is \$1.00 each. Cost per non-members is \$1.50 each.

Thursday, April 24 **NATURALISTS AS READING PARTNERS** 10:00am

A repeat of the program on Tuesday, April 22. Please call the Center at 475-0291 to pre-register by April 22.



SEARCH FOR SPRING PEEPERS

Thursday, April 24

Such a small animal, such a raucous display ! Come see for yourself if you think I am 'fibbian!' Join us on our annual spring frog open house and hunt.

6:30-7:30 Open House

We'll prepare for our peeper search indoors in an informal open house with many types of live frogs and toads on display. Come anytime between 6:30 and 7:30 to find out what peepers and other frogs sound like, view some amphibians close up, and learn more about their lives.

7:30 Peeper Search

We'll go outdoors armed with flashlights to attempt to locate some peepers. We'll observe them up close! Please wear footwear that you don't mind getting wet, and bring a flashlight. No nets, please!

Saturday, April 26 *Watchable Wildlife: AUDUBON'S BIRDS* 10:00am

Like all art, bird portraiture reflects the spirit of its time. And how times have changed since the birth on this date 218 years ago of the great ornithologist John James Audubon. In fact, some of the birds he painted no longer exist! Join us for a field study of birds as we compare the pictorial ideas in Audubon's magnificent folio *The Birds of America* with our own bird sightings.

THE EARLY BIRDER

Walks are held on Thursday mornings: **May 1, 8, 15, and 22.**

The early birder gets the bagels! Plus some great birding in Five Rivers' woods, fields, and wetlands. This spring, birders will get some great coffee, too. We serve **shade-grown organic coffee** at our bird walks. This coffee is grown in a manner that preserves the rainforest canopy that is such an important habitat for so many migratory birds. It is "fairly traded," organically grown, and on top of all that, it tastes great!

Join us at 7:00am for refreshments and feeder birds. The outdoor walk begins at 7:30.

Beginners are always welcome! Bring binoculars and bird identification guides if you have them—we have some to lend.

Friday, May 2 *Watchable Wildlife: THE AMERICAN WOODCOCK* 7:00pm

In the last decade, the American Woodcock has had its ups and downs. Changing land use practices and other factors have had a significant effect on this squatty gamebird throughout the eastern seaboard. But they're doing fine at Five Rivers! Join us for an uplifting tour of prime woodcock habitat as we search field and fen for this most extraordinary bird.

Saturday, May 17 *How To Do It: NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS* 9:00am

The goal of the New York State Breeding Bird Atlas is to identify birds singing in territory, carrying nesting material or displaying other breeding behavior. Join us on a field foray to census our breeding birds and learn how you too can participate in this five-year state-wide study.

Sunday, May 18 HALL OF FAME DAY RECEPTION 2:00pm

DEC's Delmar staffers have contributed mightily over the years to America's conservation movement and have endowed our site with a proud and colorful legacy. Join us in inaugurating the DEC/ Delmar Hall of Fame as we celebrate the lifetime achievements of professionals who made a difference. The slate of inaugural inductees will be announced in March. A permanent exhibit recognizing the honorees will be installed as part of the induction ceremony.



Saturday, May 24

SPRING BLOOMS

2:00pm

The flowers of spring have a very small window of opportunity for blooming. Soon most of them will be under the shade as trees leaf out. On this outdoors walk we will search out the elusive palette of spring colors.



Saturday, May 31

DRAGONFLY HUNT

2:00pm

This is the third year of our dragonfly censusing. If you would like to be a dragonfly counter or are just interested in learning more about these fascinating creatures, join us for this indoor presentation and outdoor walk. Dragonflies are so quick-moving that they're hard to spot, but binoculars will help us get a close enough view to appreciate their beautiful colors and delicate wings. Bring binoculars if you have them, we have some to loan.

Saturday June 7

SUMMER FLOWERS

2:00pm

A walk to enjoy the beautiful sights and sounds of an early summer meadow. We'll identify some common and not-so-common field flowers and discuss their natural and human history. Field flowers provide habitat for butterflies and other insects as well as food for songbirds, and also were used extensively by people as medicine, food, and even for witchcraft and wizardry!

Saturday, June 21

HUDSON RIVER SEINING

Ever wonder what's swimming beneath the surface of the Hudson River? Come find out as we pull a special net called a seine through the river itself. We'll see fish and other aquatic animals up close and personal and learn about their habits and the river they call home. This is an exciting, hands-on program, so you might want to bring clothes that you don't mind getting soaked, but even if you don't want to get wet you'll still be able to participate. Call for times and location.

Staff: Nancy Payne, Anita Sanchez, Dee Strnisa, Craig D. Thompson, Lori Whiting, Nicole Donato (SCA/Americorps), Tiffany Fleming (SCA/Americorps)