

TROOP GEAR GUIDE



**BOY SCOUT TROOP 555
NORTH STAR DISTRICT
LAS VEGAS AREA COUNCIL**



This guide serves to help you select the right equipment for your participation in Troop 555's camping program. The guide is organized to cover the necessary equipment, and offer brand recommendations from our experts. We strongly encourage you to consider buying our recommended items, or those very similar.

For some, the discount stores like Wal-Mart are the best resource to buy everything, including camping equipment. However, Wal-Mart rarely offers the quality you will need in camping equipment. On the other end of the spectrum, REI offers quality, but expensive goods. With a little knowledge and some shopping around, you can have everything you need without breaking the bank.

Some of the equipment on this list (e.g. sleeping bag, mess kit) will be needed immediately. Others (e.g. backpacks, personal stoves) can be purchased just before they will be actually needed for the first time. Note that, like uniforms, all of this equipment must be purchased by the scout and his family. Tents, patrol boxes, and other patrol gear are provided by the troop/patrol.

In summary:

Equipment needed immediately:

- Sleeping bag
- Sleeping pad
- Mess kit
- Boots
- Flashlight

Optional but strongly recommended:

- Pocket knife
- Compass

Equipment needed at least before next backpacker:

- Backpack
- Backpacker stove

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Sleeping Bag

The most important pieces of gear you son will need will be a sleeping bag. The troop recommends a mummy-style, backpacking bag. It tapers from the head end to the foot end, reducing its volume and surface area, and improving its overall heat retention properties. It usually does not unzip all the way to the feet. The zipper is a weak point in any sleeping bag's insulating qualities. Together with the tapered shape, this design feature helps protect the feet, which are more vulnerable to heat loss than other parts of the body. It usually has a drawstring, equipped with a cord lock, at the head end, to help prevent the escape of warm air. A mummy bag often cannot be rolled like a rectangular bag. Instead, it is simply stuffed into a stuff sack or compression sack. Be sure to select a bag with a comfort rating of 30 degrees or less.



What Is a Comfort Rating?

A sleeping bag's temperature or "comfort" rating identifies the lowest temperature at which a bag will keep the average sleeper warm. When you hear a bag described as a "20-degree bag," it means that most users will remain comfortable if the air temperature drops no lower than 20°F. These ratings assume that the sleeper is wearing a layer of long underwear and using a sleeping pad with the bag. Metabolism varies from person to person, and sleeping bag temperature ratings vary from one manufacturer to the next. Use these ratings as a guide only—**not a guarantee.**

Buying Tips

Sleeping bags get their comfort rating from the "loft" or thickness. Sleeping bags are filled with either goose down or synthetic fibers. Down has a better weight to insulation ratio, but tends to be more expensive and offers no warmth if it gets wet. Synthetic bags often cost less and insulate well, even when wet, but tend to be more bulky.

Be careful with this purchase. A \$35 bag from the local mega store that claims to have a comfort rating of 20 degrees will not likely keep your son warm, even at 40 degrees. **YOU WILL NOT FIND A QUALITY BAG AT WAL-MART OR TARGET FOR LESS THAN \$50.** You will have better luck at sporting good stores and outdoor retailers such as Sports Authority, Sports Chalet, and REI. Focus the majority of your spending budget on a quality bag, because nothing will ruin a weekend like two nights of shivering sleep. Look for brand names such as *Coleman, Kelty, North Face, Marmot, and Mountain Hardware*. Do not buy a sleeping bag at a garage sale as all bags lose their insulating properties over time. Expect to pay at least \$75.

Troop Picks:

Low-end: North Face Aleutian Mummy, \$80 at *Sports Authority*.

Mid-range: Kelty Light Year XP +20, \$130 at *REI*



Backpack

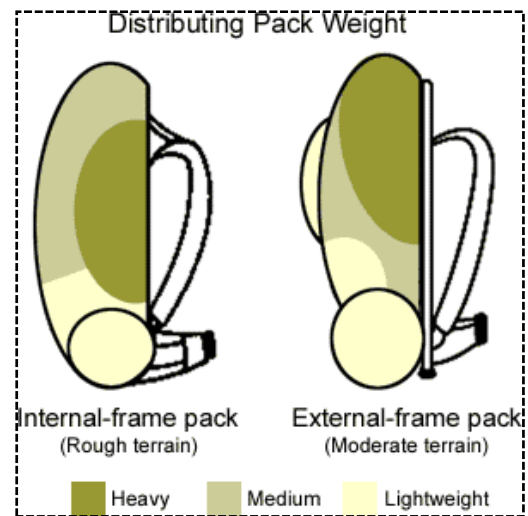
External frame backpacks do have several advantages over the newer internal frame variety. The existence of an external frame provides a great number of lash points, or points at which items can be tied to the outside of the backpack. Such a method of carrying allows the backpack wearer to easily find any item that he or she may need to access regularly. While internal frame backpacks usually have a few lash points, it is usually difficult to effectively tie large items to such backpacks. Additionally, because the external frame holds the cloth portion of the backpack away from the wearer, such backpacks are usually cooler to wear.



Of course, internal frame backpacks have their advantages too; else they would not be so popular. Although it is difficult to tie large items to these backpacks, the bags do feature large internal carrying capacities, which usually compensates for the lack of external lashing points. And while the close fit of these backpacks may make the wearer sweaty, such a fit also means that they sit better on the wearer's back. This characteristic can be especially useful if the wearer is doing something that involves upper body movement, such as scrambling over rocky surfaces.

Whichever type you choose, make sure it fits properly, and can be adjusted as your son grows and is big enough to carry all of his gear, clothing, and a gallon of water. It is not uncommon to carry 25 pounds of gear; add a gallon of water at 8 pounds, and the weight adds up. The better the pack and the fit, the better your son will feel on the trail and the more enjoyable the experience will be. Expect to spend at least \$75 on an entry level pack. High quality packs can cost as much as \$300 or more. Backpacks can be found at most sporting good stores such as *Sports Authority*, *Big 5*, and *Sports Chalet*, and outdoor gear shops such as *REI*, *Dick's Sporting Goods*.

As a minimum, an internal frame pack will be a volume of at least 4000 cubic inches and 2500 cubic inches for external frame packs.



Troop Picks:

Low-end: Stansport Willow 75L Internal Frame Pack, \$80 at *Sports Authority*

Mid-range: REI Flash 65 Pack, \$149 at *REI*



Sleeping Pad

A sleeping pad is required, as it is the insulating layer between your body and the ground. Nothing will sap the heat out of your sleeping body quicker than the cold ground.

Backpacking pads come in two varieties, self inflating and closed-cell foam.

Closed-cell foam pads are made out dense foam filled with tiny closed air cells. Positives: They're cheap, durable (won't pop when tromped on) and extremely insulative (almost no circulation of air in pad, so they can be cut thin yet still provide good insulation). Closed-cell foam is also non-absorbent. Negatives: They're relatively stiff and firm, with far less cushioning than open-cell foam (so you'll need a thicker, heavier piece to be as comfortable). Prices range from \$20.00 to \$35.00.

Self-inflating pads are open-cell foam pads wrapped in air-tight, waterproof nylon shells. Positives: They're as comfortable as open-cell foam, but much more insulating (the nylon shell limits air circulation, while also protecting against water absorption). They're adjustable (built-in air valves let you control the amount of air inside and thus the firmness of the pad) and they're extremely compact when rolled up. Negatives: They're more expensive; can be punctured or ripped (though field repairs are not difficult); can be heavier. Prices range from \$35 to \$95.



Troop Picks:

Closed-Cell Foam: Therm-a-Rest Ridge Rest Deluxe, \$35 at *Amazon.com* and others

Self-inflating: REI Trekker 1.75 Self-Inflating Pad – Short, \$54 at *REI*

Boots

Hiking boots/shoes are recommended for all campouts. They are typically warmer and provide better protection from ankle sprains and cactus spines than other types of shoes. Because boys tend to grow out of their shoes every six months, it's hard to justify expensive boots. The troop recommends ankle high boots made for hiking. Since it is such a personal choice, we don't have a specific pick. Wal-Mart carries a good selection of entry-level boots starting around \$25. They'll wear out right about when you outgrow them. Hi-Tec brand are also reasonably priced starting around \$40 and can be found at most sporting goods stores.



Knife

Upon completing the required training, a scout may carry a knife during troop activities (except where otherwise prohibited). Troop policy requires a folding blade no longer than 3.5". Sheath knives are not permitted. A "Swiss Army" or multi-tool type knife is a good choice because they typically include pliers, screwdriver heads, or other useful tools in addition to the blade. Depending on the quality, a knife could be purchased for less than ten dollars and multi-tools for as little as twenty dollars. They are available at most sporting good stores and home improvement stores.



Troop Picks:

Low-end: Gerber EVO Serrated, \$25, at *Wal-Mart*

Mid-range: Official Boy Scout Utility knife, \$30, at council trading post or *scoutstuff.org*

Flashlight



The preferred flashlight for scouts is a headlamp-style LED. This ensures that the user has both hands free in the darkness, and it's harder to lose something strapped to your head! Lights are generally measured in terms of brightness; although we also look at durability and type of batteries (common AAA is preferred). Any way you cut it, it is an essential tool and not too terribly expensive. Like most things, they vary widely in price, based on the aforementioned criteria.

Troop Picks:

Low-end: Garrity Headlamp, \$10 at *Wal-Mart*

Mid-range: Petzl Tikka Plus LED headlamp, \$35 at *REI*

Compass

A compass is an important piece of equipment in Scouting. While we do have some compasses to loan out, you'll eventually want your own. The main thing to look for here is that you want a map compass, and one that is durable. There are varying degrees of quality, but ultimately the arrow points North.



Troop Picks:

Low-end: Stansport Map Compass, \$8 at *Wal-Mart*

Mid-range: Silva Polaris Base Plate Compass with declination scale, \$13 at *REI*



Backpacking Stove

Backpacking stoves are lightweight and have only one burner. These are required during the late and early portion of the year during our backpacking months. Each patrol should have at least one backpacking stove for every two boys, but ideally each boy should have his own, otherwise he has to wait to eat. Some stoves come with built-in ignition, and if the choice you make doesn't, remember to include matches.

The only restriction on stove types is that they must be a sealed canister type (as shown above). Refillable liquid stoves are messy and exceedingly dangerous, and as such are not permitted per troop policy.



Troop Picks:

Low-end: Coleman Peak1 Micro. \$26 at *Wal-Mart* and others

Mid-range: Snow Peak Giga Power stove with Piezo starter, \$50 at *REI*

Mess Kit

Avoid military-style mess kits where everything fits inside everything else. They are made of metal, which lets the food get cold quickly and the parts are easily bent out of shape. They are also heavy.



Ideally purchase a sturdy, polypropylene plate and bowl that will not break when dropped or stuffed into a pack on the way home. Utensils can be any old mismatched set of knife, fork, and spoon that you won't worry about if it doesn't come home. For drinks use a good plastic mug.

For cookware, we recommend just a single-serving pot, preferably titanium, but any material will do. The pot can be used to boil water or heat food. Again, preference of material, size, and cost are all personal choices for the buyer.

Troop Picks:

Low-end: Coleman Anodized Cookset, \$26 at *Wal-Mart*

Mid-range: REI Ti Ware Titanium Pot, 0.9 liter, \$45 at *REI*