

Trading city gray for mountain green

Hints, tips on backpacking for beginners



Backpackers at Rock Mesa

Photo by Larry Schmidt

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Of the Emerald

Backpacking is a popular form of recreation in Oregon.

Last weekend I became an "Instant Expert" on backpacking by scrambling five miles down the French Pete Creek Trail and staggering five miles back up, both ways with the necessities of life for modern civilized man precariously attached to my tired, civilized back. (The uphill stagger was made a bit easier by a lighter pack as I had consumed many necessities.)

On the basis of this experience, I feel qualified to recommend backpacking to anyone in moderate or better physical condition who enjoys green Oregon scenery and occasionally gets tired of the gray Oregon scenery found in many gray Oregon cities.

A good backpack with a light aluminum frame generally costs from \$30 to \$60. However, if you aren't sure you want to invest that much, most Eugene outdoor stores rent backpacks for about \$1 to \$1.50 a day.

Be sure that your backpack fits you. When you pack it, distribute weight throughout it and put the heaviest things on top.

Since your feet are what you'll be walking on, it's a good idea to make them as comfortable as possible. A pair of inside-out cotton socks, covered by thicker

wool socks, keep feet relatively happy and blister free.

For many trails, sturdy shoes can be substituted for hiking boots. The type of boot or shoe that is best for you depends a lot on what type of feet you have and where you plan to be hiking. Whatever you wear on your feet, be sure it's waterproofed.

If you plan any swimming or wading, a pair of tennis shoes will help protect against sharp rocks and bottle caps. (Unfortunately, there are bottle caps in many otherwise beautiful places—be sure not to add any.)

An easily accessible bag for storing empty food containers and other trash until you get home keeps trails the way they're meant to be—natural and clean.

Food should be as compact as possible. Protein and sugar are two important elements to keep stocked up on when you're hiking. Cheese, crackers and salami (or a similar meat) make excellent meals, require no cooking and store well. Oranges are heavy but thirst-quenching. Dried fruits are available at most grocery stores. Packets of Kool-Aid can be added to water along the way and provide a lot of sugar.

Instant foods that need only hot water added weigh little and are ready to prepare. Freeze-dried meals are available at outdoor stores—however, they are often expensive and not really necessary for short backpacking trips. Plan to take more food than you think you'll eat in case of emergencies.

Although you may not need to use it, a first aid kit is vital. It should contain any medication you take regularly or for emergencies, bandages, antiseptic, possibly a needle and thread, sunburn lotion, scissors and moleskin. (Moleskin is used for treating blisters and is sold with foot supplies in most drugstores.)

In your pockets you should have a pocket knife, matches in a waterproof container and insect repellent.

In Oregon, it helps to be prepared for rain. Ponchos which fit over backpacks are very convenient. Instant tents cost around \$3 and provide a one or two-man sleeping shelter in case of rain. Layer clothes on and off as the temperature changes. A wool shirt or sweater worn close to the body is good insulation when it's cold.

The most important thing to remember is to enjoy yourself. Stop frequently to rest and look at things. It's hard to observe the scenery while you're actually walking because many trails need caution to avoid falling off. Stop (if it's warm) before the warmest part of the day and wade in a creek or fish or just enjoy being surrounded by the color green.

"Try it—you'll like it!"

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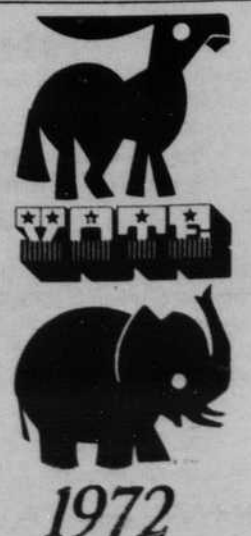
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