**Troop 1857**

**New Scout and Parent Camping Guide**

As a troop, we plan to have at least one outdoor activity every month. Most often the activity involves camping and/or hiking. This guide is for new scouts and parents to give you important information, so you and your scout have a great experience as part of Troop 1857.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Troop Activity Schedule**

Every August we publish the list of planned activities dates for the year, although we don’t always have the exact activity planned. The troop plans activities every month except July. The Patrol Leaders Council (PLC) meets monthly to plan and finalize troop meeting agendas and activities. Past events have included canoeing, rock climbing, backpacking, skiing, caving, hiking, and camping. The troop normally leaves on Friday night around 6:00 p.m. and returns around noon on Sunday. Long term camping includes a 4-day winter camp and a 6-day summer camp. There is also the possibility of high adventure camps that might be longer (Sea Base, Northern Tier, Summit and Philmont). Activity locations are generally within 1 to 2 hours of Alpharetta, although some activities may be further away. The scout calendar is very busy, and we do not expect a scout to attend every activity but encourage them to attend as many as possible.

**Patrol Method for Activities**

Scouting is based on the patrol method which provides 6-9 scouts the opportunity to work together as a team. Each patrol camps and cooks together on a campout. This gives scouts the opportunity to learn new skills such as pitching a tent and cooking, in a safe environment where it is okay to learn by making mistakes. The patrols will have a duty roster to help share the workload. Adults are not allowed to tent with scouts per scout policy.

**Scout Leadership**

Troop 1857 is a scout lead troop. This means the decisions and leadership are done by the scouts. One of the goals of scouting is to give young scouts the opportunity to learn on their own with guidance. The patrol method helps guide scouts. BSA is different from Cub Scouts in that the adults are in the background instead of making all the decisions. This “letting go” of direct control is often difficult for new scout parents who have been in the Cub Scout program.

**Activity Safety**

Troop 1857 adheres to the “Guide to Safe Scouting” policy book published by the Boy Scouts of America which documents acceptable practices. We always carry a well-equipped first aid kit and as well as a copy of the medical information for each scout. All scouts learn basic first aid as part of training and advancement. The adults ensure the “Guide to Safe Scouting” is adhered to. Hazing or bullying is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. Scouts are required to adhere to the buddy system and must be with a “buddy” to leave the camping area. Scouts are not allowed to use knifes or axes until they have earned their “Tottin chip”. The adult leaders always practice the two-deep leadership method when working with or interacting with scouts. This is a national scout policy and is for the protection of youth and the adults.

**Signing up for Activities**

A Signup Genius will be created three weeks before each activity and is found on the troop website under ‘Events’. It is mandatory that each scout and adult attending to sign up so that we have an accurate record for the troop. This list is also critical so the proper amount of transportation and food can be arranged. Signups close the week before the activity since the scouts need an accurate count in order to prepare menus and purchase the food for the patrols. Any associated cost for the activity will be listed in the Signup and are payable beforehand either through check or Venmo.

**Important note on Traveling**

Scouts are required to travel to and from a campout in a Class “A” uniform (unless specified otherwise). This consists of a scout shirt, scout belt, scout pants and scout socks. All gear, including scout gear, will be stored in the troop trailer. If the troop trailer is not brought on an activity, then the vehicle your scout travels to and from the campout generally will carry their gear.

**Getting the Gear into the Campsite**

Many campouts we drive to the campsite. However, sometimes we may have to hike a short distance into the campsite. A scout should be prepared to hike their personal gear into the campsite. All scout gear needs to fit inside their own Osprey bag (more information below). These have shoulder straps to make them easy to carry if the distance to the campsite is longer. Patrol gear such as cooking equipment, food, and ice chests can ride into the campsite in the troop trailer.

**Food**

The patrols plan the menu the Monday night before the campout. Planning a menu and cooking on a campout are requirements for First Class as well as the Cooking and Camping merit badges, so often this is done by scout needing to fulfill those requirements. The cost of the food is normally included into the cost of the activity. The troop provides cooking stoves, propane, lanterns, cooking equipment, Dutch ovens etc. for each patrol from the troop trailer. The adults will supervise the setup a proper wash line to clean and sanitize dishes after cooking. This is used by all patrols. All scouts and adults must bring their own utensils, plate, and a 1-liter water bottle.

**Important note:** *No Food is allowed in the tents. Do not send extra snacks. Ants and small critters like to come into the tent to share this food.*

**Adults Attending Activities**

Parents are welcome to attend most activities, however due to number limitations and other restrictions we may limit attendance to only Adult Leaders. Most activities will also require attending adults to have completed their Youth Protection Training (YPT). This will be noted in any announcements and the signup for the activity. Adults must use the Signup Genius on the troop website, so we know you are coming and can plan accordingly. If you come, we expect you to drive and help with transportation. If a parent attends an activity, remember, you are an adult scouter for the weekend more than you are a parent. The activities are Scout led, the adults are there primarily for safety and mentoring the Scout leaders. Give your scout plenty of space to learn and experience without you doing for them. If they need help pitching a tent or cooking, you need to direct them to an older, experienced scout in the troop rather than doing work for them. If you can resist the temptation to “do it for them”, they will learn much quicker and will have a more fulfilling experience. One of the methods of scouting is to allow your scout to interact with other adults.

**PACKING LISTS**

**General Camping Equipment List**

* Tent (1- or 2-person, three season)
* Sleeping bag w/ sleeping pad
* Pillow (small & packable)
* Field Uniform + Troop Activity Shirt
* Rain gear
* Flashlight/headlamp + extra batteries
* Pocket knife, folding w/ 4” max blade (scout must have earned Totin’ Chip card)
* Toiletries
* Sunscreen/hat
* Clothing (one set/ day, +1)
* Shorts or long pants
* Shirts
* Extra socks
* Sturdy lace up shoes (no open toe)
* Mess kit w/ utensils
* Cup
* 1 liter water bottle (Nalgene or similar)
* Day pack/book bag (NO string book bags)
* Camp chair/stool
* Insect repellant (no aerosols)
* Scout Handbook
* Pen & paper
* A watch
* Personal first aid kit
* Compass
* Prescribed medications (give to adult leaders before leaving)
* Osprey Duffel bag

**Summer Camp**

* All the above (General List)
* A watch!
* Sheet for inside sleeping bag (helps prevent you sticking to nylon)
* Dirty clothes bag
* A watch!
* Rope for clothesline
* Towels and wash rag
* A watch!
* Shower shoes (flip-flops, shower only)
* Bathing suit and towel

**Winter Camping**

* General Equipment List
* Winter hat – Stocking /beanie
* Gloves (2 pairs)
* Scarf
* Winter boots
* Warm socks
* Long underwear
* NO shorts

Remember dressing in layers is important. Kids get overheated with activity, so allow them to peel off layers, or add them. A single thick warm coat can cause them to wear no coat at all. Options (layers or warm coat) is important.

First and foremost, outdoor clothing must be practical, and constructed of the proper fabrics. The secret to dressing for the outdoors is layering. The base layer is worn against the skin, an intermediate layer goes over the base, an insulating layer is next, and a shell layer is worn over everything. Cotton holds moisture against your body and moisture saps body heat away. We prefer the scouts us a synthetic base layer for their activities.

**EQUIPMENT**

What equipment will my new scout need? Your scout will need new equipment at some point; however, you do not need to rush out and everything as soon as your scout joins the troop. As they grow and attend various activities, you will learn and understand what is needed. The most important thing is to ‘Buy to Size’ and make sure everything fits and is comfortable. If you have any questions on what to buy or not to buy, you can always ask any of the adult leaders. We have plenty of expertise and experience and are always willing to help!

**What the Troop provides:**

Basically, all group-oriented gear is bought, maintained, and replaced by the Troop. This includes dining flies (tarps), cooking gear, wood cutting equipment (axes, saws, etc.), stoves and lanterns, propane tanks, ropes, full sized First Aid kit.

**What the Scout provides:**

All personal gear: this includes (at a minimum), tent, duffel bag (eventually a backpack), three-season sleeping bag, sleeping pad (air or foam) (full size for the sleeping bag), personal eating gear (bowl, fork and spoon, cup, 1 liter water bottle), headlamp/flashlight, proper clothing, proper footwear, rain gear, standard personal Scout gear (a decent knife, a compass, eventually a personal first aid kit) and items for maintaining personal cleanliness.

**Duffel Bag**

The recommended troop duffel bag is the **OSPREY TRANSPORTER® DUFFEL 120L or 130L** 

This is used for all campouts and fits everything your scout will need into one bag (do not buy the wheeled version). Currently the best price can be found at the Sportsman’s Warehouse, although it is always best to shop around.

**How and Where to Buy Equipment**

One of the principles of the Scout Law is that a Scout is Thrifty.  Often that means buying gear that will be durable enough to last several years of the wear, tear, and abuse of 10–11-year-old Scouts.  Additionally, at this age it may be difficult to find gear that will fit, or they may quickly outgrow gear as they age.  Generally, the cheapest way to acquire equipment is to plan ahead and buy gear when it is on sale or through a cheaper online source than buying it last minute at REI or a similar store.  Along those lines, below are some general thoughts on how to approach buying camping gear.

Brick and Mortar Stores:

* **REI** - REI has the best in-store selection of high-end camping gear of any store in our immediate area.   Generally speaking, equipment one buys at REI is generally high quality, durable, and lightweight.  Instead of carrying cheap mass market brands, such as Coleman, they carry brands that typically focus on specific types of equipment and are category leaders for those types of equipment (e.g., Osprey for packs, Big Agnes for tents, etc.).  Additionally, the REI house brand designs and manufactures its own equipment, equipment that is usually competitive with the other high-end brands at a slightly less expensive price point.  REI also has a pretty good warranty to back up their sales.  Lastly, most purchases at REI can earn you an annual 10% rebate called a dividend (if you join as a member).  That selection, quality, warranty and dividend comes at a cost -- cheaper versions of gear sold at REI can often be found elsewhere (some joke that REI stands for “Requires Extra Income”).  Regardless, I find myself returning time and time again because of the selection, quality, and ease of shopping.  If you plan on shopping at REI, here are some suggestions to save you some money:
  + Become a member.  REI is a coop and joining the coop costs $20.  After joining, most subsequent purchases count towards your 10% rebate/dividend (given in the spring).  Additionally, joining usually gives you a coupon worth 20% off a single item (which pays for the cost of the membership if that item costs $100 or more).  Additionally, you’ll receive a couple of additional 20% off coupons throughout the year.
  + Try to avoid buying major items (tent, backpack, sleeping bag) last minute at REI, otherwise you may be surprised by the sticker shock (each of those items at REI may cost $250+), while you may find a perfectly acceptable compromise version for your scout for half that price or less elsewhere.
  + REI’s website has a discount section called REI Outlet.  The Outlet section often has gear that is clearance priced but not otherwise sold at REI.  They may be great deals, or it may be that there is a design issue, and something isn’t as competitive as other products, hence the clearance price.  These items usually are not in the store, so it pays to be more deliberate when shopping the outlet items.
  + If buying a backpack, bring the gear you plan on carrying to see how well it carries everything.  REI can also help you lock in the perfect adjustments for the pack.

REI also has excellent articles to help you chose what equipment is best for you and your scout. I highly recommend reading them before you purchase your equipment.

* **Sleeping** **Bags**: <https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/sleeping-bag.html>
* **Sleeping** **Pads**: <https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/sleeping-pads.html>
* **Tents**: <https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/family-base-camping-tent.html?series=intro-to-camping>
* **Backpacks**: <https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/backpack.html>
* Other big box Sporting Goods Stores (**Dicks Sporting Goods / Academy Sports**) - These sporting goods stores may all gear you need for basic camping trips at a cheaper price point, the selection is more likely to be (i) limited, (ii) focused on cheaper house brands or national brands at cheaper price points (e.g., Coleman tents), and (iii) restocked less frequently.  Typically, the gear you buy at these stores will not be as high end and high quality as REI, but likely will meet the needs of a new scout.  Depending on the price point, they may be heavier or less durable than more expensive options.
* **Walmart --** Very similar to the above other big box sporting goods stores, but the selection will be even more limited, intended for a cheaper price point, and focused on Walmart house brands (like Ozark Trails).  Regardless, for many smaller or basic items, Walmart has serviceable gear.

Online Sites

* **Amazon.com --** Amazon is a clearing house that has many of the same brands that you can find at REI (for mostly similar prices) as well as a number of cheaper imitation products that may be much cheaper, but of lower “quality”.  Additionally, many Chinese companies market their products to the US market on Amazon and the sizing or even features of their gear may be roughly similar, but not the same type of features generally found in Western camping gear.   Additionally, equipment may be made to different standards.  For example, all sleeping bags at REI are rated to a certain European EN standard temperature rating.  This allows for easy comparison of two different bags to see if they are as warm as each other.  Sleeping bags on Amazon may use a different option from those standards or not follow the testing at all, meaning the temperature ratings are less reliable.  This can result in great prices for perfectly serviceable camping gear for a Scout, or it can result in ill-fitting or underperforming gear.  Thus, the buyer should beware when purchasing less well-established brands.,
* **REI.com** - See above
* Competitors to REI (**Backcountry.com**; **Campmor**; etc.)  There are a number of companies very similar to REI that sell similar gear that may have competitive or better pricing than REI.  Many of these started out as Brick-and-Mortar stores and have made a successful transition to online retailers.  I’ve found Backcountry.com to be the most similar to REI in terms of selection, but it often has slightly different brands with competitive (or even better) price points
* **HikerDirect.com** - This is a free discount program from Alps Mountaineering for those in Scout units.  Generally, all the equipment from Alps Mountaineering and some related brands is on sale at varying discount levels, sometimes 40% off or more compared to what can be found elsewhere.  (For example, at the time of writing this, a 2-person ~4 lb backpacking tent (Helix 2) is $200 on Amazon but $140 at HikerDirect).  Alps Mountaineering generally makes gear that is a reasonable value for its blend of affordability, quality, and durability that many scouts appreciate.  Their gear generally isn’t as lightweight as what would be found at REI but will be better quality and more durable than what is found at Walmart.  One caution, often Alps Mountaineering gear can be found at a significant discount to the MSRP and other retailers (Amazon, Backcountry, etc.) may have cheaper prices than even HikerDirect.com.
* Niche camping gear manufacturers, including cottage vendors - Many of the highest end or most specialized equipment manufacturers have small manufacturing operations and sell their equipment directly to consumers.  Generally, they will not be found in any other location.  For most Scouts, more mass-market channels work perfectly fine.  For Scouts or families that do a lot of backpacking, these manufactures may have great gear that fits your needs at a better value then what you can find even at REI.  This gear, however, may require more care and attention that is appropriate for all young scouts.  Some examples:
  + Ultralight backpacks
    - <https://www.ula-equipment.com/>
    - https://zpacks.com/collections/backpacks
  + Ultralight down quilts
    - Hammockgear.com
    - enlightenedequipment.com
  + Ultralight tents
    - Tarptent.com
    - Sixmoondesigns.com (e.g., Skyscape Scout or Lunar Duo-Outfitter)

**Personal Clothing** - Most scouts should already have the personal clothing they need.  One strong recommendation is to avoid cotton clothes (including socks and underwear) where feasible.  When camping, Cotton absorbs water and can be difficult to dry.  That can quickly cause irritation or discomfort, especially if it is raining

**Scout Activity Essentials**

* Water bottle - Scouts don’t need anything fancy or expensive here.  Generally, we recommend a 1 quart or Liter sized water bottle.  The key consideration here is it should be reasonable durable and not likely to leak.  A used Gatorade bottle works perfectly fine.  Alternatively, many Scouts use Nalgene 1L bottles (which come in a variety of colors)
* Raingear - This is something more than a disposable emergency poncho which is ultra-thin, tears and rips easily, and is impossible to pack up as small as it was originally.  In many cases, a decent waterproof jacket (especially in warm weather) is all a scout needs.  In colder temperatures, having a complete set of raingear is more helpful.
  + One inexpensive complete rain suit is from Fogg Toggs / DriDucks.  These are generally available at Amazon as well as Academy and Dicks for $20-30.  At this price point, they are a great value since they are very lightweight, pack up reasonably well, and moderately durable (the material is much thicker than emergency ponchos, but could rip or tear if doing if very active in underbrush, for example).

**Basic Camping Gear**

This category is where many families will spend most of their time and money trying to outfit their scout.  Of these, the sleeping bag and tent are some of the most expensive items on this list.  There may be options to defer some of this equipment on the first campout or two, but eventually the scout should have a good quality sleeping bag and tent.  (while COVID is a concern, we ask the scouts to not share tents; otherwise, two scouts generally share a backpacking -style tent.

* **Eating kit** (e.g., plate and cup and utensils) - a simple non-disposable plastic bowl, cup, spoon, and fork are all a scout needs here.  They are free to bring plastic versions of these from home (as long as mom or dad doesn’t mind if the scout forgets to bring them home).  Otherwise, below are a couple of camping-focused suggestions:
  + GSI Outdoors Cascadian Bowl and cup (each separately ~$3.50, available at Amazon and REI)
  + GSI Outdoors Cascadian 1 Person 6-piece table set (~$15, plate, bowl, cup, knife, spoon, and fork, available at Amazon and REI)
  + UCO 4-Piece Mess Kit (bowl, plate, and spoon/fork combo (~$15, available at Amazon and REI)
  + humangear GoKit Light 5-Tool Mess Kit (~$15, available at Amazon and REI)
* **Sleeping bag** - a good sleeping bag is a long-term investment for a scouting career.  This one item will be used more than even a tent (which will often be shared between two scouts) and should be the first major scout purchase.  A sleeping bag should always be paired with a sleeping pad -- not only is it more comfortable, but the pad’s job is to insulate the sleeper from the ground.  For most scouts in Georgia, I recommend they purchase a 3-season synthetic sleeping bag with a 30-degree rating or so.  Additionally, I recommend purchasing an inexpensive fleece sleeping bag liner that doubles as a sleeping bag itself in warmer months or as an additional layer in colder months (they run $15-25).  Try to find a bag that weighs 3 lbs or less (2 lbs or less is strongly preferred) and is compressible and packs up to a small size (some very inexpensive bags are very heavy and bulky).  Many high-end sleeping bags use down as an insulation--these bags are lighter, pack up in much, much smaller volumes and can be much warmer for the weight, depending on the quality of the down and construction of the bag.  However, because they require a little more care to ensure they stay dry (otherwise they don’t insulate) and are often 2X-3X the price of a similarly rated synthetic bag, I don’t recommend them for most scouts.  Generally, scouts should buy mummy-style or semi-rectangular bags and not rectangular sleeping bags.  Some examples:
  + Sleeping bags
    - BSA 30 Degree Mummy Sleeping Bag, Adult (from the BSA Scout shop - ~$70.  I have no personal experience with this bag, but it is pretty inexpensive and 3 lbs or less).
    - REI Traibreak 30 - $100 (REI)
    - Marmot Trestle 20 or 30 ($140-160)
    - Nemo Forte 20 ($200)
    - Sierra Designs Shut Eye 20 ($100)
    - Sierra Designs Synthesis 20 ($160)
  + Sleeping bag liners:
    - Coleman Stratus Fleece Liner ($15-25)
    - Quest 50 degree sleeping bag ($20 - Dicks Sporting Goods)
  + Niche lightweight backpacking option - Enlightened Equipment Revelation APEX 30 Degree (<https://enlightenedequipment.com/revelation-apex-custom/>  ~$200) -- This is a technical quilt, so it needs to be paired with a pad.  Because it skips the zipper, it is lighter.  The insulation used is some of the warmest synthetic insulation for the weight and compresses better than most.  This will outperform any $200 synthetic sleeping bag, and you get to customize the color, length, and width.  (for Scouts who aren’t very careful with their gear, I’d pick a 20D fabric instead of the ultralight and less durable 10D fabrics).
* **Tent** - A 2-person backpacking style tent is ideal for scout outings.  Something lightweight (4 to 5 lbs.) is preferable, with lighter tents generally more expensive.  Simple square dome tents are very easy for Scouts to set up.  Some features to look for
  + -- aluminum poles (often abbreviated DAC) instead of fiberglass poles.  Aluminum poles are more durable
  + For a 2-person tent, it is useful to have two doors, so scouts don’t need to climb over each other
  + Freestanding tents are easier to setup and may not require staking down (still a good idea regardless), non free standing tents are generally lighter and may be more complicated to setup
  + A full-coverage rainfly does a great job of keeping rain away from those on the inside
  + With the hot and humid Georgia summers, I generally prefer tents that have all mosquito mesh for the main body with a full coverage rainfly for better ventilation.  Those who are in colder/windier climes often prefer fabric panels to reduce the ventilation and heat loss.
  + It is difficult to find a quality tent that weighs less than 5.5 lbs. for $100; one that weighs less than 4.5 lbs. for $150-200, and one that weighs less than 4 lbs. for less than $250+.  A cheap ($50) tent may weigh 6-7 lbs.  These pounds quickly add up on a backpacking trip.

Some examples:

* Kelty Grand Mesa 2 person backpacking tent - (available at Amazon for $130)
* Alps Mountaineering Zephyr 2 (available at Amazon for $125, HIkerDirect.com for $120)
* Alps Mountaineering Helix 2 (available at HikerDirect Dec. 2021 for $140)
* REI Trail Hut 2 (REI for $200)
* REI Half Dome SL 2+ (REI for $280)
* Niche lightweight backpacking option 1 - Six Moon Designs Skysape Scout -- This is a crazy lightweight tent for one person, but it requires trekking poles to setup and is non-freestanding and more challenging to setup than most tents.  For that complexity, you get an incredible steal of a $150 tent that weights 2.5 lbs (<https://www.sixmoondesigns.com/products/skyscape-scout>)
* Niche lightweight backpacking option 2 - Sierra Designs Clip Flashlight 2 -- a $200 sub 4 lb tent that sleeps two.  This is not freestanding, so it will require a little more work to setup.
* **Sleeping Pad** - sleeping pads provide comfort on sometimes uneven ground, but more importantly they provide insulation so cold ground does not rob the heat from a sleeper.  There are two main types -- closed cell foam and some version of inflatable pads.  Closed cell foam has the advantage of never developing leaks (which in my experience happens all too soon with inexpensive inflatable pads), provide more insulation (warmth in winter) than cheap inflatables, but less comfort.  Some options:
  + Closed Cell foam
    - Ozark Trail Closed Cell Foam Blue Camp Sleeping Pad ($10-15 from Walmart) - these are great and virtually indestructible but are more bulky than accordion style closed cell foam pads.
    - Nemo Switchback or Thermarest Z Rest (both ~$40) - these accordion style foam pads pack up much smaller than the above and these versions from major manufactures provide much better insulation that cheap copycats
  + Inflatables - most inflatables less than $100 provide little to no insulation, making them fine for summer use in Georgia but not well suited for winter weather
    - Klymit Static V Short (or Junior) -- this is only 50” long, so it works great for youth - ~$40-50
    - Klymit Static V - ~$55-65
    - Other leading brands ($90-150 or more) Sea to Summit, Big Agnes, Thermarest, Nemo - different versions are lighter, thicker/more comfortable, and warmer (R Factor)

**Great Sites for Equipment Reviews and Purchasing Gear**

<https://www.rei.com/>

<https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/>

<https://www.backcountry.com/>

<https://alpsmountaineering.com/>

<https://www.amazon.com/camping-hiking/b/ref=dp_bc_aui_C_3?ie=UTF8&node=3400371>

<https://campgrasp.com/best-tent-for-boy-scouts/>

<https://www.sportsmans.com/>

<https://hikerdirect.com/>