**Longterm Hikemaster's Handbook**

**Introduction**

Longterm is a great opportunity to put into play all of the skills the Scout has learned throughout his Scouting career. It is a time away from civilization and an experience he will remember forever. Every longterm is unique. Even if they travel the same route, things like group dynamics, Mother Nature, and random events all add up to make each hike one-of-a-kind.

Pulling off a successful longterm backpack trip is not an easy task. A lot of planning and hard work goes into each one. This handbook is intended as a guide to help the leader of the hike.

**Guidelines**

These rules are for safe and enjoyable High Adventure Program activities. They apply to all participants, at all times.

1. Take emotionally mature Scouts that you trust. Show that you trust them. Tell them the importance of these traits when you are two days from outside help. (If your Unit climbs peaks, as we do, you know how many peaks have 1,000 foot cliffs).
2. Stay together. If Scouts are scattered all over the mountainside, and someone in back gets hurt, the ones in front can't help. If they are too far away, they can become a part of your problem.
3. No one passes the "pathfinder" (the Scout or adult who takes the lead). I prefer it be a Scout, as this helps build trust and participation. Pick a pathfinder who will set a pace that is reasonable for everyone. That person is to be instructed to stop whenever he has not seen the trail sweep for over 5 minutes.
4. The hikemaster sets the time limit for hiking at each rest stop. The pathfinder, or person behind him, keeps time. Stop at the designated time for the next rest stop. This is generally 40 minutes (almost never more). Going uphill, or early in the hike with full packs, you may want to make it 30 minutes. (Note that the ideal time for iodine to purify water is 40 minutes). Minimum rest time is 10 minutes, measured from when the trail sweep arrives. We often stop for 15 minutes.
5. Stop at all trail junctions. Wait there until the whole group arrives and the hikemaster says to proceed. This way you make sure that everyone takes the same trail. Having a lost person can ruin everyone's day, or worse.
6. The trail sweep is last. No one gets behind him. The trail sweep stops for any person having difficulty. The Hikemaster is generally the trail sweep, although he may designate another adult. A specific transfer to that adult must be clear and unambiguous. The trail sweep generally carries the first aid kit. He also checks the rest area for trash/personal items as the Unit is leaving. The trail sweep generally gets the most dust and the least view of wildlife.

It is nice to get there first, but the group is only as fast as the slowest member.

1. Never throw rocks. 95% of all injuries on a longterm hike are caused by rocks - falling on them, kicking them, being hit by them, stepping badly on them, etc. No need being hurt by someone's thrown rock that bounces off another rock (no skipping rocks on water, either).
2. Wear shoes at all times, except in a tent. If you go swimming or wading, wear your camp shoes, unless the bottom is specifically cleared by the hikemaster and approved for bare feet (sandy, no rocks or glass). Follow Safe Swim Procedure (different topic). It is really bad to kick a rock in the dark with bare feet, since they are your method of transportation. Scouts will sometimes leave their tent at night with bare feet, to get something from their pack. This should be pointed out to them as a big mistake.
3. As you leave the trailhead, have participants count off and remember their number. When you want to account for everyone, have them count off again. We left a restaurant once (the banquet after longterm) and left a Scout behind. We then added this rule! This also works on a dark and stormy night after a nearby lightening strike when you want to be certain that everyone is OK in their tents.
4. On arrival at your campsite, Scouts may want to go exploring. They can, provided that:
   1. They go in a group of two or more.
   2. They must stay together.
   3. They must file an approved flight plan, i.e., they tell the hikemaster where they are going ("We're going over to that little peninsula at the end of the lake to look for fish"). You generally want to have them in sight at all times.
   4. They must give you a specific time that they will be back.
   5. They must check in upon return.
5. Scouts tell the hikemaster when they take off to use the trowel, and in which direction. Check in upon return. If hiking at the time, then leave their pack on trail while they are gone.
6. Give the person in front of you 10 feet. This is minimum spacing, especially when you have a slow person with others stacked up behind. You need this spacing to keep from running over a person that trips or stumbles.
7. Adults fill/refuel stoves. Scouts never open fuel containers or pour gas. Establish a container storage and stove fueling location well away from the fire/cooking area.
8. Scouts pick tent partners. Scouts don't tent with adults, unless it is a parent. It is best to always have Scouts tent with other Scouts. If you have an odd number of Scouts, there will usually be an older one that would prefer to be alone. Most Scouts consider it a penalty to have to tent with their parent.
9. If you go swimming or wading, wear your camp shoes, unless the bottom is specifically cleared by the hikemaster and approved for bare feet (sandy, no rocks or glass). Safe Swim Defense is required. Enough said!
10. When rock climbing (a mountain), go as a group. Use the buddy system. Don't follow your buddy too closely, as he might kick a rock down on you. For the same reason, don't climb above or below a person. Get trained.
11. Explain why you have the rules that you have (as they are explained here). Let the boys know that you may be 2 or 3 days from help. Stitches need to be taken in less than 6 hours to minimize scarring. When you explain the reason, the rules will be much easier to follow.
12. Take your Scouts on a trail building project. They will stop cutting switchbacks and take care of the trails, once they find out what it takes to rebuild one.
13. No candles in tents. We've had this rule since the Chicago Fire.
14. Make cook groups and tent pairings so that tent partners are in different cook groups. The one not in the cook group sets up the tent. Sons are not to be in a cook group with a parent (parents are harder on their own sons because they don't want to show favoritism).
15. A crew of 15 should have 3 cook teams, which rotate each meal. Over a 7 day trip, each group will do about 3 breakfasts and 3 dinners (no cooked lunches). Dinner group fills and purifies water for breakfast, so that it is ready in the morning. We wash dishes in hot water after breakfast and dinner. This is very important in bear country.
16. The hikemaster checks every evening to be certain that:
    1. All food and smellable items are put in a bear canister or properly bear bagged, as a defense against bears. It's a real problem for you if a bear gets your food. It's also a problem for the bear. Once a bear is successful at getting food from hikers, it becomes a pest and eventually becomes so aggressive that it has to be destroyed.
    2. Boots are in tents.
    3. Packs are covered in case of rain. Wet gear ruins a hike.
17. Pray for rain, it builds character!

There are other rules about taking care of the environment, etc. However, they are out of the scope of this manuscript. Once the Scouts have been given these rules and taken their first longterm, you will be surprised at how well they will be able to repeat them back to you.

Dick Rose, Troop 849  
Written May 1993, updated February, 1996

**Hikemaster Wisdom**

Before the Hike

The last weekend longterm training hike should be more strenuous than longterm. For first time hikers:

* Get them up to altitude to see if there is going to be any problems there.
* Physically stress them out at least once on a training hike to determine their reaction.

Longterm is by invitation. You don't have to take anyone you are not comfortable with.

Anybody can make it up any hill; it is just a matter of how fast.

Plan a leisurely layover day so you can sleep in and enjoy pancakes.

Schedule the SPAM dinner after 3-4 days of dehydrated food so it will be appreciated more. Don't do it on a layover day. It is best eaten after a good day of hiking. Leave ample time (2 hours) for preparation and clean up.

Hiking cross country takes twice as long as hiking on a trail. Double the backpack hours. The same goes for snow travel.

Bear canisters hold slightly over three days of food plus personal snacks and smellables. That does not include trash.

During the Hike

Get an early start to minimize hiking in the heat of the day and to have some margin should something unexpected happen.

Think ahead. Keep a mental estimate of where the group will be during the day.

* Try to have rest breaks around water stops and in shady spots.
* Adjust the duration of the rest breaks to fit the hiking schedule. Easy hiking days can have longer breaks.
* Lunch should be at a rest break but doesn't have to occur at noon. Pick the time based on how the group is doing and what lies ahead for the day.
* Allow 45 minutes to 1 hour for lunch so everyone can digest and get fully rested.

The cook group typically eats last.

Select a campsite that is consistent with the Leave No Trace guidelines. Tents should be well upwind of the cook area if possible. Determine the area where tents can be pitched and designate a cooking area. Tent site selection is typically adults first, then order-by-rank.

Try to get off the peak by noon. Localized thunderstorms are very common at high noon.

When climbing a peak, stay as close together as possible. The slower, less experienced climbers can benefit from the faster, wiser climbers it they are close enough to observe them.

Occasionally equalize the fuel level in all Molotovs. At least once mid-week.

If fires are permitted then most trash can be burned. Do not leave any bits of foil in the fire ring.

Collect all troop garbage and redistribute it to everyone. Again, mid-week is a good time.

Unloading equipment from a Scout should be done privately and judiciously. Consider it if the Scout is dragging and cannot walk properly. Watch the Scouts feet. (Being out of shape is not a cause to be off loaded.)

Don't hesitate to declare a bear watch when it is needed. In rare instances, bear watches can also be used to distract attention from other things.

The traditional order for showers is adults first, then Scouts, order by rank.

**Longterm Traditions**

Travel in full uniform (class A), both ways.

Sleep in and enjoy pancakes on lay day.

A mid week dinner of SPAM, mashed potatoes and gravy.

Canned oysters and/or sardines for first time hikers.

After the hike an all-you-can-eat banquet at Sizzler followed by all-you-can-eat at Baskin-Robbins.

**Credits**

This handbook is based on notes that were compiled from longterm hikes in 2005 and 2006. (CDs containing all of the planning materials and documentation are also available.) It is also based on the "Troop 849 Weekend Backpack Hike Preparation" documentation that was written by Richard Hoesly in 1998.

Many thanks to Richard Hoesly, Mike Vahey, Dick Rose, and the many others of BSA Troop 849 who preceded them and whose experience and wisdom went into this publication.

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