



Equipment Costs - A Heavy Load?

It is very difficult to determine your equipment cost for this course. Attached is a work sheet to assist you in estimating your personal costs. Students who wish to pursue a lifetime of outdoor hiking are usually willing to spend more money on brand name high quality gear. Many students prefer to buy just enough to get them through the course. The following are my recommendations for both approaches towards buying equipment purchases:

Lifetime of Hiking: Do not rush out and buy a lot of equipment. It is best to rent or borrow as many items as possible. If

you sample several backpacks, tents, sleeping bags and stoves over a period of several months, you will have a strong opinion about which items are best for you. You will much happier with your decision when you do finally spend the “big bucks” to get the good stuff. Talk to leaders, staff, and other experienced hikers and get recommendations about wear, utility and comfort of various items. Wait until gear goes on sale (it always does, eventually). Buy brand name gear! Sports Chalet, A16, Nomad Adventures and REI will usually carry the best brand names. Don’t be fooled by a lifetime warrantee on items stocked at discount retail stores. A lifetime warrantee doesn’t help when the item falls apart in the middle of the Grand Canyon!!! Read equipment reviews in Backpack Magazine, or visit their website at www.backpacker.com.

Equipment to get you through the course: Do not rush out and buy a lot of equipment! Borrow or rent as many items as possible. The biggest pitfall of borrowing or renting is that you must inspect it before you pack it. Do not assume that a tent, which has been sitting in someone’s garage (or rental gear that was just returned to the retailer 10 minutes ago), has all of the tent pegs/poles, or is free of rips and tears. Do not assume that the zippers really work. Put the tent up in your yard, test the stove, and check the zippers on the tent/sleeping bag. Check everything. Do not wait until the night before the outing to check your equipment. You will be busy enough trying to figure out how to put 80 pounds of gear into a pack that is designed to hold 50 pounds.

Look around the house to find suitable items for each outing (i.e.; wool sweaters, pile gear, windbreakers, etc.).

If you cannot borrow or find similar items, go to an Army/Navy military surplus store. Cal stores, Big 5, and Sportsmart will frequently carry low cost hiking equipment. Military camping equipment usually favors sturdiness over weight considerations. New equipment at these stores usually is of low-end quality. A last option is to make/sew your own clothing. Patterns for mittens and gaiters are provided in the WBC handbook provided by this course. A perennial favorite is to use hospital saline drip bottles for water bottles (if any are still available). Other cost savings ideas:

- Use a fuel bar stove instead of a gas stove
- Use germicidal tablets instead of a water filter.
- Use a close cell piece of foam instead of a Thermo Rest.
- Use a plastic sheet for a ground cloth
- Make your own 1st Aid kit from the medicine cabinet
- Also, Backpacker magazine frequently gives cost saving tips for selecting low cost gear.

Important Note: Equipment that is acceptable for the first three outings may not be acceptable for the snow camp outing. For example, a cheap poncho purchased at a military surplus store may be considered to be acceptable for desert outing, but would not be acceptable for snow camp. The WBC handbook provides a listing of items required for snow camp. You will want to review these items upfront and take them into consideration while shopping for gear for the earlier outings. Leaders will personally check all of your gear before you will be accepted on the snow camp outing.

Important Note: I have selected the Campmor catalog to give you a frame of reference for making equipment purchases. The Campmor catalog frequently has sale items that are very competitive priced in brand name equipment. The attached Cost Estimate worksheet will provide you with a reference point for those items that you are not able to find around the house or borrow. Two great catalogs for discount hiking gear are Campmor and Sierra Trading Post. Their telephone numbers for a free copy are:

Campmor: 1 800 525 4784 (EST)

Website: WWW.campmor.com

Sierra Trading Post: 1 800 713 4534

Website:

WWW.SierraTradingPost.com

Important Note: There will be a separate class that will give discount cards and opportunities at local stores. There will be several equipment lectures during the course that will demonstrate what to look for in the various items of backpacking gear.

Last Important Note: While on weekend outings, talk to your leaders, staff and experienced hikers to develop an eye for good backpacking equipment. Be able to discern the “good” from the “not so good”, before you go to the store. Rent/borrow first, buy later. Adjust equipment and ask for assistance when things don’t feel right (the best backpack in the world will feel like a sack of bricks if not fitted properly, and the best stove rarely works perfectly on the first try). One of the joys of hiking is the endless debate over backpacking gear. By the middle of this course you will

have a pretty good idea about what gear is best for you. Wait at least until then to spend your money. Six months or more of avid hiking is ideal before you spend big bucks on quality equipment. Most likely you will be like the rest of us and upgrade most everything you own about three times before you settle down with the gear you really love!!!

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Wilderness Basics Course
January 18, 2004