



**Outdoor Adventure Connection**  
Backpacking Workshop & Overnight Trip  
September 20-21, 2014  
Trip Report

*This is a one night, backpacking trip for first time backpackers and beginning backpackers. It includes six workshops on backpacking essentials that every backpacker should know. This trip is designed for those with little or no backpacking experience who have always wanted to try backpacking under guidance of experienced backpackers. Experienced backpackers are welcome too! Share your tips and hints!*

*--Outdoor Adventure Connections®*

I have been a Dayton Hikers member since 2013 and have 62 hikes under my belt. I considered myself a day hiker—in and out of the woods in a day was no problem. But I had been considering the challenge of becoming a backpacker for the past 2 years. But, I'm female and 60 something. The thought of walking on foot into backcountry with food, clothing, and shelter on my back was both intimidating and exhilarating. *Have always wanted to try backpacking? No backpacking experience?* The attraction was too hard to resist, so I paid the fee and signed up. This is my trip report.

### **Day 1**

I arrived at the designated trail head at Germantown Metro Park. Grabbed my new Osprey® backpack loaded with gear, locked my car, and checked in with the trail guides. I made my way over to the picnic tables to meet fellow beginner backpackers. It was a pleasant day. There were no clouds to block the sunshine, but it was not uncomfortably warm. I dropped my backpack by a picnic table, smiled and introduced myself to hikers closest to me. We made small talk to pass the time as we waited to begin.

Lead Guide, Andy Niekamp, called us together for introductions. The group was eclectic. Couples, singles, young and young at heart, strangers to each other who had come together because we shared a common interest—to eat, sleep, pee outside, and just enjoy nature. Now we were learning to be backpackers. Our hike leaders were our teachers and the outdoors was our classroom for a series of six workshops meant to prepare us for outdoor adventure.

**Workshop 1.** The first workshop, Backpack Fitting and Trekking Pole Adjustment instruction, was held at the trail head. Andy instructed us on pole and backpack adjustment. We were checked for fit and comfort, and ready to begin the hike.

We were all anxious to get “on trail.” My mood was light. The experience itself created an atmosphere of sociability. When I wasn't chatting with a fellow hiker, I could hear the happy chatter

of people around me. We had something in common already and welcomed the opportunity to socialize.

**Workshop 2.** About 2 miles in, we arrived at the next workshop destination, backcountry sanitation training, or as one of our guides called it “yoga potty.” Joy and Yvonne were our workshop leaders. We gathered in a circle. Some of us claimed the few benches available. Others found a spot on the grass.

Bodily waste care and disposal, a private and typically highly personal subject in any other setting, became very entertaining as guides and guide-selected volunteers demonstrated techniques, positions, explaining all the while, the how’s and why’s of healthy body maintenance with minimal environmental impact.

The youngest member of our cohort, 8-year-old Mason, was the grandson of a fellow backpacker. Mason was educated on a “need-to-know” basis in matters of hygiene, and so was shuttled off on a treasure hunt with Glenn, one of the experienced guides. Glenn writes:

*One of my memories was of the treasure hunt Mason and I did while Yvonne taught the finer points of “potty yoga.” He was full of questions, and had a couple of original approaches to “find something that used to be alive” and “find something green that’s not a plant.” He also was interested in learning about using a compass and reading a map – both skills that Grandpa can help him develop and refine on their future hikes. He also liked learning how to use sticks to leave messages for people behind you. A really neat kid – and according to his grandfather, we got him hooked on backpacking, which is a real bonus.*

**Workshop 3.** With a new-found appreciation for hiker hygiene, we continued an easy two miles to our next workshop area, Sunfish Pond. It was lunchtime by this time. We had been on the trail now for about an hour. We settled in for lunch and the next workshop. There were a few seats at the picnic table. Most of us found a spot on the grass under the trees. We relaxed to enjoy our packed lunches and the workshop. The topic was the Leave No Trace Seven Principles© and was the most academic of the workshops. Andy and Joy took turns explaining each principle: plan ahead and prepare, travel and camp on durable surfaces, dispose of waste properly, minimize campfire impacts, respect wildlife, be considerate of other visitors.

Following the presentation, we practiced what we had just learned with an ethics game. Andy divided us into teams. We took turns answering questions like..... Which is worse?

***Litter On The Side Of The Trail or Food Remains In A Campground Area?***

***Pet Waste On A Trail or People Feeding Wildlife***

***Soap Bubbles In A Lake or Cigarette Butts Along The Trail***

It was the most challenging for me because it presented scenarios that required a decision between two behaviors. Which choice was correct? Was an unattended campfire more hazardous than improper waste disposal on the trail? Which had the greater potential for harm to the animals and/or the plant life? I tried to be thoughtful in my answers and realized that my rationale for my answers was based on my own personal values and beliefs and what was ethically right for me.

The Leave No Trace Awareness workshop ended with a very fun mock graduation ceremony. As a recording of *Pomp and Circumstance* played in the background, Andy and Joy called each hiker to the front of our outdoor classroom to hand us a certificate of completion for the Leave No Trace Awareness Workshop. Each hiker proudly posed for a picture with our teacher guides.

Workshop 3 was the highlight of the six because I became conscious of the impact of my own careless behavior toward the environment. I made a personal decision to make positive changes in the future.

### **Arriving at camp.**

When we arrived at camp a short while later, we were instructed to pick a level, relatively smooth surface in the treed, but grassy open area to pitch our tents. It was an individual decision that required some thought. Pitch near the bathroom? A good idea for a late night bio break. Near the campfire? As the center of social activity, maybe not a good idea for early turn-ins. Then there was personal space to consider--not too close to a neighbor, but not too far either.

In whatever way each person arrived at a decision, our 21-person tent neighborhood came together in an organic and beautiful way. Tents of oranges, greens, grays, and browns neatly dotted the landscape. Our temporary tent city was a colorful reminder to leave no trace. We are all just visitors here.

**Workshop 4.** I settled into my gray, Big Agnes tent, slipped on my comfortable camp shoes, and made my way back to the fire ring. Bear bagging was our next activity. I had a fairly good idea what food bagging was--putting camp food, toothpaste, any scented product into a bag and hanging it from a tree to make it difficult for hungry bears (or other rummaging critters) to help themselves to a meal—good for the bear and good for me.

The presentation, How To Hang Your Food In a Tree, was hands-on. Joy demonstrated the steps: toss a weighted rope over a tree limb approximately six feet from the tree trunk; attach the food bag to the rope, hoist 10'-12', and secure the rope. I watched as volunteers practiced. Judging the height and distance of the limb with the weighted rope was not as easy as Joy made it look. I surmised that it's a skill that will take practice.

**Workshop 5.** Another skill-based task that was not as easy as it looked, was the Fire Building Workshop with Glenn. We gathered around the large camp fire pit as Glenn instructed us on tinder and placement of the kindling and various ways to begin. I found a partner, and we set to work. My

partner found dry leaves, twigs and constructed a tiny tipi, leaning twigs upright and inward against each other. We opted to use matches as opposed to flint. Lighting the fire was no problem. Keeping it going was. It was a trick to balance the heat, fuel, and oxygen, and we weren't able to maintain our little fire as well as fellow hikers were. Our efforts, however, were tributes to success, and the six or seven individual fires, with added wood and space, merged into one big campfire as nighttime approached.

**Workshop 6.** I relaxed, pleased with the result of my first fire building attempt, and sat at one of the picnic tables that surrounded the campfire to await the next workshop. It was dinnertime now. I was hungry. The trip itinerary had said that the evening meal would be provided, so it was not a surprise that the final workshop was a stove demonstration.

Andy set up several different types of stoves at the picnic tables designated as the camp kitchen (aka, the food and water area). The energy I had expended attempting to start a camp fire made it obvious to me that stoves, as a heat source for cooking, are convenient and fast, especially when really hungry or really tired. Another advantage I learned is that a stove may be the only alternative a hiker has for a hot meal when an open fire is not an option.

Andy explained the pro's and con's of each stove. The liquid fuel stove is good for large groups because they hold more fuel, but not the best for ultra lightweight backpacking. The canister stove, which runs on pre-pressurized gas, is efficient. It boils water quickly and is easy to use. The alcohol stove is small and reliable; but the alcohol must be packed and stowed separately. Spillage can be a problem. If cost is a consideration, the alcohol stove is a good option. Andy's alcohol stove was homemade from two pop cans and tinfoil.

Andy's compare/contrast analysis was actually a demonstration because set atop each lit stove was a small pot of water. It was a competition to see which stove could boil water first. I watched with great interest because as soon as we had boiling water, it was supper time.

The menu items for supper were packages of Mountain House® freeze-dried meals—beef stew, noodles and chicken, Mexican chicken and rice, pasta primavera, rice pilaf, mashed potatoes, cheesy mashed potatoes, and my personal favorite, Italian spaghetti. There was food which appealed to every palate.

Dinner was enjoyable in our makeshift outdoor restaurant, and the ambience was ideal—good food, picnic table seating under the stars next to a roaring campfire, and good company. Joy, Andy, and Yvonne were the servers. We sat with spoon and bowl in hand as our hike leaders served us up spoonfuls or two of each meal they brought for us. Dinner was filling, tasty, warm and fast, and clean-up easy because the meals were cooked and served directly out of the packages. Dessert was campfire smores.

I was a happy camper, and there seemed to be a sense of satisfaction that pervaded our cohort of first time and beginning backpackers. I sat with fellow hikers long after the end of dinner.

The fire was pleasant and the conversation among us was engaging and interesting. We shared work stories, family stories, and life experiences.

Some conversation was just plain fun. I asked questions like, is eating an apple seed harmful and how harmful is it? Is it the arsenic in the seed or the painful possibility that the pointy end of the seed will lodge itself somewhere in the lower intestine? As I grew comfortable with my new found friends, I asked questions that evoked entertaining answers like, if you volunteered to be on the first manned Mars mission scheduled for 2024, what would your job be?

I found myself chatting happily, laughing, and enjoying the company of my fellow hikers. We were no longer strangers to each other like we had been at the beginning of the day.

I eventually retired to my tent and crawled into my sleeping bag for a night's rest. It was a good close to my first day as a backpacker.

**Day 2.** Morning the next day started at sun-up. The hike leaders had hot water ready for coffee and tea at the camp kitchen. I made my way to the camp ring to join other early risers. I sipped tea and chatted as, one by one, others joined us at the fire ring. It had rained during night which made the air fresh and especially invigorating.

It would soon be time to break camp and head back. Our final group activity was a review game of the Leave No Trace Seven Principles<sup>©</sup>. No teams this time, but contestants who were chosen to participate by game host/hike leader, Andy, received a special prize—a left over candy bar from dessert the night before. It was fun and a good reminder of our lesson on outdoor awareness.

Back at the trail head where we had started the day before, I felt such a sense of pure enjoyment, accomplishment, and satisfaction. Others felt it, too. Comments and feedback in the following days on the meet-up site were upbeat and complimentary. When I decided to write a trip report, I asked fellow backpackers to reflect on their best memories of the weekend. Here's what they shared:

Judy. *What are some of my favorites? Finding that I didn't mind the tent camping when I had the whole tent to myself. I liked the early morning hours when I could hear the rain on the tent and I was nice & cozy inside. I also loved hanging around the campfire and getting to talk with so many diverse and friendly people. I have one friend that always worries about me when I am out hiking alone. She just doesn't understand that being out on the trail pretty much everyone you encounter is a friend. Andy, Joy & Yvonne made it so easy that it is impossible to say no to another outing.*

Glenn, hiker leader. *Teaching fire building was a challenge for me, considering that on my own trips, I don't light fires. (They're too much like work.) I was afraid I would let people down by the rather simple presentation I did on how to build one – but I was very pleasantly surprised at how*

*everyone took that basic “make sure you use small stuff and let lots of air get to it” instruction, and proceeded to develop half a dozen perfectly viable ways to start their fires.*

*Glenn summed up the experience well for me. Great hiking, great food (for backpacking food), near-perfect weather, and wonderful hiking companions – trips just don’t get a whole lot better.*

They say each experience changes a person in some way. How have I changed? I’m committed to becoming a seasoned backpacker, and have begun to envision the possibilities ahead. My next challenge is Introduction to Backpacking II, another Outdoor Adventure Connection® trip to Red River Gorge, Kentucky in the Daniel National Forest. I’m looking forward to writing my next trip report.—Karen Power

*Karen Power is a freelance writer, International Student Advisor at Urbana University, and a client of Outdoor Adventure Connection®.*

*For more information about Outdoor Adventure Connection visit:*

<http://www.outdooradventureconnection.com/>