

Camping Basics with the Gravois Trail District

The Boy Scout Motto, *Be Prepared* has served Scouts well for over One Hundred Years. Being prepared for life's journey is what most parents strive to instill in their children and the BSA program is designed to help with that endeavor. The Gravois Trail Camping program is designed to give Scouts, their parents, and their leaders an introduction to the outdoors and build an appreciation of nature. The Webelos program also helps to facilitate the transition from Cub Scouting to the Boy Scouts and offers each Webelos the opportunity to learn in a safe and fun camping environment.

When camping with the "District" there are a few additional items that have to be taken care of in order to *Be Prepared*. The first and probably the most important, is to pre-register your Pack or Troop with the District staff. This allows the staff to properly plan for important necessities such as porta-potties and campsite allotments. Another reason to pre-register is to give the Pack or Troop leaders the time to gather all of the permission slips and medical forms necessary for all of the Scouts and adults that will be attending the camping event. These items are not only required to satisfy the National BSA legal responsibilities, but can also prove to be valuable in the case of a medical emergency. If a Scout or adult becomes injured at an event, medical personnel will need this information to properly treat the injured person. Copies of these forms are usually found on the Council website or are available from a District staff member.

District camping events usually take place over a weekend, which means two nights of sleeping in the great outdoors. The National BSA only allows for Webelos aged Scouts and above to camp overnight on Council properties. This means that Bear and Wolf Scouts are welcome to attend day events on Council property, but will have to go home when the campfire show has ended. Minimum adult leadership requirements should also be considered, with the Rule of Four being the guideline to follow. Because of their age and lack of experience, Webelos Scouts need more adults on site than Boy Scouts, but the BSA will never turn away any adult that wants to volunteer. The old adage "the more, the merrier" is a good way of looking at camping with the Scouts. The Council always encourages adults to become registered leaders and they make it easy to join – just call, click or stop by the Council offices.

St. Louis is known as the Gateway to the West and in that spirit the Boy Scouts have always made their camping events more fun by

dressing up the campsites. When attending a large event, such as a camporee or jamboree, each Pack or Troop is allotted a campsite proportioned to the number of people registered for the event. The Scouts then make themselves at home by setting up their "front door" or Gateway. These entrances can be made of wood poles, metal frames, plastic pipes, whatever the Scouts want to use to make their camp "unique". If the event has a theme, such as The Wild West or Rock and Roll, the Gateway may reflect that theme, sometimes in the most unusual ways. In addition, at some events, the Gateways are judged, with those that best reflect the event theme winning awards.

Having campsites restricted in size presents a unique set of challenges as well as a different camping experience. Parking, for instance, is always a problem, so carpooling is strongly encouraged. Campfires have to be limited in size, and firewood should be brought in by the Pack or Troop (there is no guarantee that you will be able to find wood to burn around the campsite). Food cooked over an open fire always taste better, but it is not always practical at a large event. The Scouts are usually attending planned activities during the day, so camp stoves using pressurized fuels are utilized to speed things up. However, when pressurized fuels are being used in a Scout campsite, there must be trained leaders in attendance and monitoring their use. A Toasted Chit can be earned by any registered leader by simply attending a training course offered by the Council or District at various times and events throughout the year.

There are many things to consider when planning a camping trip with the Scouts. Hauling and storing the food and equipment, having all the proper forms and permission slips in a folder or binder, marking the leaders tent with a big red "X" so they will be easy to find in the event of emergency - these are all things to be planned in advance. Teaching the Scouts what to pack and how to act (campsite quiet time at 10:00p.m.) as well keeping the raccoons out of the potato chips, are the things that are planned but not always learned until they are experienced. A Scout usually learns to bring extra dry socks when it is raining and he does not have a raincoat - he then realizes the Scout Motto is more than words in a book. Adult leaders can also learn from the Motto by planning ahead and working together. Baden Powell developed more than just the patrol method - he developed a framework for teamwork, not only for the boys, but for all the volunteers involved in this great program we call Scouting. As for the details concerning specific events, your District staff has those answers. For a complete list of all the camping rules, please refer to the *Guide to Safe Scouting* available at any Council office.