

Intro to Backpacking

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This handout is a conglomeration of helpful hints and exercises to go along with your Intro to Backpacking course by Get Outside. If you have any questions please let us know.

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Have fun exploring the backcountry!

How to Make a Campsite Booking

Head on over to the [Parks Canada Reservation site](#). On the left-hand side choose “backcountry camping” under Reservation Type in section one. This will bring you into the reservation site specifically for Banff, Kootenay, and Yoho. The map will also update showing you all three parks. Once you choose an arrival date all available campsites will have a green diamond next to them. If you want to backcountry camp at Jasper National Park you will need to choose Jasper in section three and then click “backcountry reservations” located in the top left-hand corner of the map.

Trail Reports:

The National Parks and Alberta Parks put out regular trail condition reports. These reports are essential to check, reporting trail closures. Make sure you check these before heading into the backcountry.

- [Banff National Park](#)
- [Yoho National Park](#)
- [Kootenay National Park](#)
- [Jasper National Park](#)
- [Alberta Parks](#)

Animal Reports

[Wildsmart](#) provides a weekly bear report. They release it every Friday and you can sign up for it to be delivered to your inbox

Ways to Check the Weather

Two of our go-to sites for checking the weather are

- [Spotwx](#)
 - o Drop a pin wherever you plan to go backpacking. You can then choose which algorithm you’d like to use for your forecast. The two 3.5day forecasts are our go-tos.
- [Mountain Forecast](#)
 - o This site allows you to choose a mountain close to your destination. You can use the map to find your area. The red triangles mark a mountain with a forecasting station on it. You can then choose the elevation on the mountain that you want the forecast for. One of the best features is the freezing level. This will help you determine if you’ll get rained or snowed on and if the high alpine trail you hope to hike is still snow bound.

Injury Prevention

Here are some [general tips](#) on how to train for upcoming backpacking program. We also put together a series of information to help you with:

- Pre-trip: a [6-week training program](#) to get you ready for a backpacking trip. For more physically demanding trips, like the West Coast Trail, we recommend going through it twice.
- At the Trailhead: Before starting your hike for the day go through this [dynamic warm up](#) to get your body ready for the trail
- At the end of the hike: Change into your sandals and before hopping in your car, or into your tent, go through this [stretching program](#) to help your body adjust to the rigors of the day.

Campsite Setup:

When you arrive at the campsite find the designated tent pads, outhouse, and the cooking area. Once you're oriented to your surroundings, set up your tent. With your tent pitched place your sleeping bag (keeping it in its stuff sack), sleeping pad, and extra clothing into your tent. Completing this, take all your smelly items (food, wipes, sunscreen, toothpaste, etc.....anything with a smell to it) over to the cooking area and place it in a bear bin or hang it. **You never want to leave smelly items in your tent unattended. Never!** A clean campsite is a safe campsite, for you and the wildlife. Keep your area as clean and tidy as possible.

If the campsite you're staying at allows fires there will be a metal fire pit in the cooking area. If one does not exist, **it is illegal to build a fire ring out of rocks**. Never build one close to your tent and **never cook close to your tent**. Only cook in the designated cooking area. Fires and cooking are attractants for wildlife. You don't want bears poking around (or through) your tent.

Tents

We highly recommend buying a tent second hand until you discover what you prefer. Here is a blog post with suggestions on [where to get cheap gear](#). If you liked the tents you used on Get Outside's adventure we use the following tents

- [MSR Hubba Hubba](#)
- [MSR Hubba](#)
- [MSR Elixir 2](#)
- [Yanes Sentential 2](#)

The lightweight tents are expensive, however, if you have knee or low back issues we highly recommend making the investment. The downside to these tents is that they won't be as durable. If you backpack with kiddos or dogs we recommend a less expensive and more durable model.

Camp Stoves

There are two main types of backpacking stoves and the kind of fuel they use. There are positives and negatives to both:

- 1- White Gas

- This is the type of fuel that Get Outside's stove uses
- Pros – the canister is refillable
- Cons – it takes more “skill” to light the stove. You cannot simply turn it on and light it. The stove requires priming.

2- Isobutane

- Many hikers use this kind of stove. Jenna uses it for personal trips
- Pros – lighter, easy to light, no need to prime it
- Cons – the canister is not refillable, does not work well in colder temperatures as a result of being pressurized and the pressure decreasing in cold temperatures. It is also less efficient as you can't use a wind screen unless it has a separate fuel line as you could heat up the fuel canister and cause an explosion.

Some of our favorite white gas stoves are:

- [The dragonfly](#) – it simmers really well but is very loud
- [Whisperlite](#) – it doesn't simmer as well, but is much quieter and if you purchase the universal version you can use various types of liquid fuel.

Some of our favourite isobutane stoves are:

- [The pocket rocket](#) – simple to use. The con is you cannot use a windscreen
- [Jetboil](#) – this is a great option if all you need to do is heat up water
- [Optimus vega](#) – this stove has a separate fuel line, allowing the use of a wind screen. The fuel canister can also be flipped upside down for colder temps.

Where to Find Affordable Gear

Hopefully, you've come away from the Intro to Backpacking course feeling inspired to go on adventures. Here is a [resource](#) that will help you find affordable gear without stressing about the financial aspect.

How to Dress in Layers

Determining your clothing system takes time. Over the years Jenna has switched between various items until she was able to narrow down her key items. Watch [this video](#) for ideas on how to layer for winter hiking. The same principles can be applied to the summer time.

Backcountry Food

If you enjoyed the meals we cooked on our adventure it is your lucky day! We created blog posts with our [favourite backpacking recipes](#) and we even included printable pdfs so you can keep it handy.

We also created a [5-day backpacking meal plan](#) for people to use. The plan includes the recipe and instructions for at home and in the field.

Bear Hangs

While all of the campsites in the National Park system will have either lockers or a hang it is good to know how to make your own. Here is a [post](#) that explains the ins and outs of making your own bear hang.

Navigation Tips

If you'd like to learn more about navigation Get Outside has developed a [navigation course](#) to help with that. We've included some helpful hints below

Hiking Time Estimation

- A general time estimate for travel is 3km/hr. This is what Jenna uses when guiding regardless of the trail type.
- Other estimates include:
 - o Well maintained trail 5km/hr
 - o Established trail but not well maintained 4km/hr
 - o Off trail 3km/hr
- A general time estimate for elevation gain is 1hr/300m
- A general time estimate for elevation loss is 10min/300m
- Over time you will begin to notice how fast you hike. You may find the estimates above are either too fast or too slow. With this new knowledge you will be able to make more accurate estimates
- You can read more about time estimation in this [blog post](#).

Calculating distance on a map

- String on compass – follow the string along the trail and then place this section of string on the scale in the legend.
- Edge of piece of paper – mark the start of the trail on the edge of the paper. Follow the trail along the edge of the paper pivoting the paper where necessary to stay in contact.
- Numbers next to the trail – sometimes they just give you the information. Thanks!

Calculating elevation gain on a map

- Check the legend to see what the contour interval is for this particular map. Count how many lines you cross as you follow along the trail you want to hike. Ensure you're not counting the same line twice. An example of this would be a large dip in the trail as you hike up. Multiply this number by the contour interval.
- Subtract the highest known elevation from the elevation of the starting point

Other navigation videos providing tips can be found on Get Outside's [YouTube channel](#)

- Here you will find videos showing ways to find north without a compass and videos reviewing some of the techniques we covered on the course.
- If there is a video you'd like to see let us know and we will do our best to create it!

Great navigation resources

- [Backpacker Trailside Navigation Book](#)
 - o This is a great resource to help you progress your navigation skills
- [Beginner's Guide to Backpacking](#)
 - o This is a blog post Jenna put together so you can share this information with friends and family

More Questions?

- Have more questions? Feel free to reach out to us. We'd be more than happy to help you out! If we cannot direct you to the right resource we will put together something for you. 403-478-1331. info@getoutsideadventures.ca