

Training Topics for a Backpacking High Adventure Venture Crew 241

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The following topics were covered on a monthly basis. We held a 1 hour session each month outside of our Venture Crew meetings to review this information as a hiking crew. We spent about a year in planning, but some of the topics could be combined in longer meetings. This methodology has led to several tremendously successful high adventures!

Meeting #1: Get to Know the Crew

Purpose: Identify specialized training, and also how to use the skills of the existing crew.

- ⇒ Have each crew member inform the rest of the crew of their outdoor and leadership strengths, experiences, and areas they feel they need to grow.
- ⇒ Adult trek advisors review and evaluate after the discussion.
- ⇒ Plan a follow-up Parent's Meeting to communicate information about the trek.

Meeting #2: Go over the Trail Crew Method (attached)

Purpose: Begin to establish a mindset of teamwork on the trail. Everyone has a job, each crew member's strengths are leveraged and can be used to the best advantage of the crew.

- ⇒ Please note that depending upon the number of scouts you have, you may have more than one crew. A crew should probably not exceed 6 – 8 scouts, plus 2 adults. Any more than that makes it difficult to actually follow the trail crew method.
- ⇒ Trail Crews should be spaced at least an hour apart on the trail.

Meeting #3: Set High Adventure Goals and Start Trek Planning

Purpose: Identify the goals of the specific trek, and layout the trek plan.

- ⇒ What are the goals of this high adventure?
- ⇒ How can the trek be structured to support those goals?
- ⇒ Layout the trek plan, keeping in mind topography, shelter placement, water locations, and distance. Do not underestimate the terrain!

Meeting #4: Go Over Equipment Needs

Purpose: Identify all equipment needed as early as possible.

- ⇒ Review personal gear, are backpacks sized appropriately for the individual and for the trek?
- ⇒ Crew gear review such as tents, backpacking stoves, water purifiers, etc.
- ⇒ Put together plan for equipment needs, budget, etc.

Meeting #5: Decide what Training Development is Needed and Go On Practice Backpacker

Purpose: Evaluate the crew through an actual hike using the trail crew method.

- ⇒ Training backpacking hike with the emphasis on using the trail crew method.
- ⇒ Rotate scouts in different positions to evaluate roles of scout, navigator, crew chief, etc. Give everyone some experience in the various roles.

Meeting #6: (Conducted during outing in #5) Introduce Principles of Leave No Trace and practice on the event.

Purpose: All outdoor treks should employ the principles of Leave No Trace, and especially so in the backcountry.

- ⇒ Work and encourage each scout AND adult to earn the Leave No Trace award through preparation and participation in the trek.

Meeting #7: Review Various types of High Adventure Packing, Camping, and Cooking Styles:

Purpose: Develop a plan for the best approach for your trek.

- ⇒ Review various types of packs (internal, external) and benefits/disadvantages of each. For example if the terrain requires some climbing over rocks, the external frame bottoms tend to hang up on the rocks. Externals are more adjustable, but an internal can fit better if sized properly. Never go on a high adventure or any backpacking trip if a backpack hangs on a scouts shoulders instead of their hips!
- ⇒ Review different types of tents and shelter/tarp shelters that are available
- ⇒ Review different types of backpacking stoves.

Meeting #8: Go over High Energy Snacks and Drinks:

Purpose: Meals aren't enough! Figure out the best energy bars and snacks before going on the trek.

- ⇒ Have a food tasting night.
- ⇒ Bring samples of various types of energy bars and taste-test. Read the nutrition information of trail mix and energy bars to get those that give you the best taste, and also the protein, carbs, and fat needed for the trek.
- ⇒ Evaluate the various types of freeze-dried meals, paying special note to the calories you get. For the same weight, the calories can vary from 350 to 900. The more calories on the trek per ounce, the better, as long as they are the right type of calories!
- ⇒ Try various types of jerky, or make some homemade and taste test. Great trail food.
- ⇒ Commercial trail mixes have a lot of filler that isn't necessarily the best for a hike. Consider making your own custom trail mix.

Meeting #9: Plan the next Backpacker

Purpose: Try out what you have learned from #7 and #8.

- ⇒ Work the trail crew method with roles assigned for longer periods during the hike. For example, keep the same navigator for half of a day. Roles should be assigned based upon skill, interest, and attitude.
- ⇒ Practice Leave No trace on this trek.
- ⇒ This needs to be a full weekend hike.
- ⇒ At the end, evaluate the crew and whether or not any changes need to be made.
- ⇒ Establish mess crews of 3 – 4 scouts per mess crew. This crew will share a backpacking stove, pot, and other cooking resources. Test out the mess crews on this outing. You will use pre-established mess crews on your high adventure trek.

Meeting #10: Have the crew elect the Crew Chief and decide on crew member roles.

Purpose: Establish the roles, and any additional training required for each scout in that role.

- ⇒ This can be done on the weekend in #9, or after the weekend.
- ⇒ Crew should elect the crew chief they feel most comfortable with.
- ⇒ These roles carry on from this point forward. Begin to use your crew chief for crew communication and leading upcoming meetings.

Meeting #11: Finalize Trek Planning

Purpose: Finalize transportation, costs, trek, etc.

- ⇒ Final review of trek itinerary. EVERYONE should know exactly where they are hiking.
- ⇒ There should be a minimum of 3 trail maps per crew. One for the navigator, one for the crew chief, and one for an adult advisor. Make sure you have ordered enough!
- ⇒ Transportation, shuttling, etc, all planned out.
- ⇒ Schedule a final Parent's meeting to review the trek plan, Risk Management Plan, and all emergency phone numbers. Make sure they know everything you know!

Meeting #13: Close to the time of the Trek, Spend Time to Go Over the "DARK SIDE"

Purpose: Everyone goes to a bad place in their mind at some point on a trek. Knowing that it WILL happen is part of your success. You can't prevent it, but you can successfully deal with it.

- ⇒ This is very important. Realizing that the crew will be spending more time than usual together 24/7, it is normal to have frustration build up during intense times.
- ⇒ How this is dealt with will make the difference in the quality of success your trek will have.
- ⇒ During this time, each trek member, youth AND adult, gets a chance to reveal what they think may frustrate others about themselves, and what may frustrate them when under pressure or intense times during the trek. This can be an eye opening discussion!
- ⇒ They should also share how they want to be treated when this happens. They may want to be left alone, and that's just fine. They may need an encouraging word, and that's great too. What is not acceptable is that the rest of the crew sacrifice themselves for someone else's dark side moment. Example, if everyone wants to swim in a water hole and one crew member throws a fit and doesn't feel like doing it and wants to just keep moving, let them have their dark side moment, and jump in the water hole. You don't want regrets from your trek!
- ⇒ Everyone must be open, honest, and contribute to this discussion.
- ⇒ No pointing fingers, or any type of personal attacks on one another is allowed. This is not what this session is about.
- ⇒ Rather, it is a time to learn more about each other so when a "Dark Side" moment happens, the Crew can help that person/persons get through the ordeal and move on.

Meeting #14: Final gear review and pack shakedown.

Purpose: One final review of how everyone has packed for the outing.

- ⇒ Everyone should come with their pack fully packed with all clothes, food, and water bladders full. This is a test. Weigh each pack. Address any problems.
- ⇒ All clothing and sleeping bags need to be waterproofed. Trash bags don't work, they tear. If you use large Ziplocs, double them up. Nothing is worse than a wet sleeping bag. You should be able to throw your backpack in a pool let it sit for a while, and have everything come out dry and working.
- ⇒ Basic rule of thumb is that everything gets waterproofed in the backpack, including stoves, all clothing, food, etc.
- ⇒ Prior to this time, ALL tents, tarps, or shelters should have been water tested!!! Set them up in the rain and see if you have any leaks. Address any leaks. Don't count on shelters, through hikers get first dibs on them.
- ⇒ Check all ground cloths/tarps.
- ⇒ Eliminate redundant items (Example: not everyone needs a compass, but there should be at least 3 for each crew; Example: not everyone needs a full first aid kit. Medic carries full kit, all others basics such as bandaids, moleskin. Example: Share a cathole trowel among several scouts.)
- ⇒ Make sure you have enough fuel canisters and water purification filters. Plan on one water filter replacement for every 3 people for every 3 days. They actually clog up faster than you expect!
- ⇒ Don't forget your bear bag ropes!
- ⇒ Distribute crew gear evenly so that nobody is carrying more than their fair share of crew gear.
- ⇒ Final review of medical forms, medication, special needs, etc.

Special Notes:

1. Your crew may need more than two training hikes or backpacking weekends. That will depend on your needs as to getting the job done, proper preparation, and whether or not everyone is ready for the trek physically, mentally, and equipment.
2. ALWAYS have a Trek Risk Management Plan (See the “Guide to Safe Scouting”, and “Passport to High Adventure”)
3. Have a pack shakedown before every hike or backpacker.
4. Review and evaluate after each hike or backpacker.
5. Class 3 Medicals are required for High Adventure
6. Know what type of BSA Tour Permit is required
7. Match the adventure to the skill level of the crew!!! Don't bite off more than you can crew and ruin the trek. Challenge yourselves, but remember to focus on the goals of the trek!
8. Your crew is as fast as its slowest hiker. This does not mean that person is a slow hiker. Never outpace or outwalk any member of your crew. Nobody is ever left behind. Keep this in mind when putting your crews together.