

The MacScouter -- Scouting Resources Online

Cooking for Scouts and Scouters

Young Backpacker Food Hints & Recipes

By Claude Frenner, Lake Ridge, VA

This was originally written to be given to parents of new Scouts who had just joined our Troop (885) in Chula Vista, CA. Many of the boys, and their parents, came from urban areas and had never cooked in the wilderness before, so we prepared this information to help them out. I hope this helps you with some ideas about food in the wilderness for youth. In the interest of being politically correct, I should mention that this applies equally well to young female hikers. Hopefully, you and your children will have a much better time hiking in the back country when you are well fed.

Food for New Hikers

General: Several of us in Troop 885 think of ourselves as gourmet cooks on our backpack outings. We also realize that a new Scout going on his first hike, probably for the first time in his life, is "leaving civilization and Mom." We would like to suggest food for these inexperienced cooks that usually is nutritious, is always something he will eat, and is easy to fix, particularly when he is tired.

Hopefully you have read everything else up to this point and have purchased your Scout a Silverstone frying pan and a small pot. The official Scout mess kit is just exactly that - a MESS - because it takes a lot of skill and patience to cook on uncoated aluminum. Nothing will turn a boy off quicker than the frustration of having all his food stick to the pan and burn when he is tired, hungry, and away from home. The meals recommended below are relatively easy to fix and are appealing to most boys. Have your Scout use his camping equipment and practice cooking some of these meals at home on a weekend. This way, he will already know what he likes and how to fix it. Other than freeze-dried eggs, nearly all of the food items listed are available at local supermarkets.

Parents will notice a distinct lack of vegetables in these meals. If your Scout likes vegetables at home wants to take some hiking, then by all means add them to the menus. Otherwise, remember that the adult hikers will also be tired and hungry at dinner, and cannot be expected to force a boy to eat his spinach on a weekend hike. Let the Scout look forward to a hike with minimum hassle and make him eat vegetables at home. Then, after he gets tired of the same old food after a few hikes, he will start looking at what the gourmets are eating and will begin to appreciate some vegetables and other weird foods. (As an aside, when we go on week-long Sierra Treks, we do make them eat vegetables, fruit, other healthy stuff.) You will notice that we sometimes include "junk foods" in the menus as we believe a little bit won't hurt much and the Scouts really like the stuff. We do recommend that each Scout take 3 or 4 pieces (not pounds) of hard candy per day along for the steep stretches of trail. Sucking on the hard candy will provide additional quick energy. However, please don't send a lot of candy and junk food instead of the meals listed below. All that sugar tends to make kids hyperactive and we don't need a kid along who is higher than a kite on sugar. Our meals have a little protein, a little fat, and a lot of complex carbohydrates, which is what the body needs for sustained energy on a hiking weekend.

Feel free to rearrange these items - these are merely suggestions. As a Scout's experience grows, he may like to add in some of the options. When you help him organize his food, remember to help him repackage everything from large boxes or bottles into small baggies or Ziploc bags. Please do not pack more food for a meal than he will eat, because he has to carry it on his back. For example, don't send a 16 oz. jar of instant Tang - put enough for one cup of juice into a baggie and tie with a twister seal. If the item is already in a single serving size, such as individual Kool-Aid packets or hot cocoa packets, then leave it in its original wrapper. Put all the ingredients for a single meal into a single larger baggie or Ziploc. Then put all the bags into a small trash bag, or plastic grocery bag, and tie shut. This way, all food is together for a single meal and not lost throughout his backpack.

Breakfasts

1. Instant oatmeal

Tang
Hot cocoa
Dried Fruit

2. Bagel with jelly

Tang
Hot cocoa
Dried Fruit

Bagels are the preferred bread for hikers. They taste good, don't crush, and won't dry out appreciably.

3. Bacon (2 slices)

Freeze-dried scrambled egg
Bagel (pre-buttered)
Dried fruit
Hot cocoa

Take 2 strips of bacon, cut in half, and pre-cook at home until it's almost done (still a bit limp). Wrap in plastic wrap securely. Bacon prepared this way will keep for a few days and can be easily reheated in his frying pan.

4. 2 Breakfast bars or Pop-Tarts

Tang
Hot cocoa
Dried fruit

5. Pancakes

Bacon
Syrup/butter
Hot cocoa

Buy the pancake mix that only needs to add water (Krusteze is good), and put just enough for 2 or 3 pancakes in a baggie for him. For syrup, get an extra one next time you go to a fast food place in the morning, or he can mix a one-quart package of Kool-aid with only a little water. For butter, put some margarine into 1 or 2 of the little plastic salsa containers that come with Mexican take-out food.

6. Dry cereal (pre-sugared variety)

Powdered milk
Hot cocoa
Dried fruit

Lunches

The best time to eat lunch when backpacking is from about one hour after breakfast until about one hour before dinner, continuously. In other words, frequent small snacks of complex carbohydrates all day long. That way the body has a constant source of energy available and the Scout is less likely to get too tired. We generally recommend nibbling on trail mix all morning and afternoon, with a little more substantial food for lunch. Carbohydrates come in two main types, simple and complex. Simple carbohydrates are sugars. These cause a rush of energy that lasts an hour or so and leaves you with a jittery feeling from low blood sugar/too much insulin. Your system yo-yos back and forth and you don't really have the sustained energy you need. Complex carbohydrates are like tiny time capsules of energy: the body needs to digest them, and when it does they release energy for long period with no waste products. Examples are breads, cereals, beans, pasta, etc. So, what kinds of complex carbohydrates should a Scout take hiking? All kinds!

Trail mix is a good snack food for the day-long lunch. You can buy trail mix already put together at the Price Club (inexpensive) or nearly all supermarkets. You can also mix your own and put in exactly what your Scout likes. Most trail mixes consist of dried fruit, nuts, seeds, etc. A recipe that most Scouts like is one part of M&Ms, two parts peanuts, and one part raisins. You can also throw in a little shredded coconut and some dried banana chips, if he'll eat them. Other good things include shelled

sunflower seeds, carob, mixed nuts, pretzel sticks, or the little Japanese cracker-like snacks. (Go easy on the candy part - it's better to have less candy and more other stuff.) As to how much he will need, for each day of hiking the most he will need is a double handful (less than a cup, if you have to measure it). By comparison, one pound of trail mix will last for a week in the high Sierras. Whatever you get for him, make sure your Scout likes it by having him try it at home first.

Bagels, or the small bagelettes, are great breads to take along for the more substantial food break around noon. Make some up at home by cutting them in half and putting jelly and/or peanut butter in it, then wrapping it in plastic wrap. Crackers such as Triskit, Wheat Thins, and Ritz are also good. Granola bars are also a good form of complex carbohydrates.

You should stay away from fats entirely during the day while hiking, as the body takes a fair amount of time to digest fats and convert them to energy. Some fat in the evening meal is good for the hiker, as the body can make use of it while asleep, but it is not good for you while working hard. Jerky, salami sticks, beef sticks, dry salami, etc. are good meats to take along, but only in small amounts for lunches. Other foods that are good are sardines, ham spread, chicken spread, and so forth, although he will have to carry the weight of the can around with him. In addition, small chunks of cheese or a package of string cheese also tastes good. Remember, however, that meats and cheeses contain a lot of fat and the Scout should not have much of this during the day; the best hiking lunch going is a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

Dinners

This is the second most important meal for a hiker's physical needs (breakfast is first), but the most important for his mental well-being. By the time dinner rolls around, the Scout will be tired, his feet will hurt, he'll be sunburned and mosquito-bitten, he'll itch, his patience will be nonexistent, and he'll be very hungry. This means the meals need to be simple and quick to fix and appealing to his palate (something he will eat) as well as containing the right foods for the body. The evening meal is when he should eat the majority of the day's supply of protein and fats. Since fats take more time to digest than carbohydrates, his body will be using the fats and proteins to repair itself while he's asleep.

The ingredients and possible dinners listed below are always changing but will give you an idea what's available. All it takes is a little imagination and you have a first class meal. When you must repackage things that need directions, cut out the directions from the box, put into the baggie with the food, and then seal with a twister; rewrite the directions in simple language on a piece of paper, portioned according to the amount he will prepare, and include with the food.

Try to include soup with each dinner; this is to help get more water back into his system to prevent dehydration, and also gives him something quick to eat while the rest of the meal is cooking. Listed below are some ideas for new hikers. If your Scout really wants some more vegetables, or you insist he have them, send along carrot and celery sticks; most kids will eat them. Deserts can be just about anything. Instant puddings mixed with dry milk are always good. Other alternatives are anything made by Hostess, such as Ding Dongs, Twinkies, Fruit Pies. Also good are home made cookies or brownies.

1. Chicken Noodle Cup-a-Soup

Hamburger patty
Mashed potatoes
Corn
Punch
Hostess Fruit Pie

Make up the hamburger patty at home and freeze it. As he gets ready to go on Friday afternoon, wrap the frozen patty in foil, shiny side in, and seal in a small Ziploc bag. Buy instant mashed potatoes and send one serving sealed in a bag. Add a dash of powdered milk to make it creamier. Buy frozen whole-kernel corn; send one serving along, sealed in a bag. Wrap the hamburger and corn in his spare T-shirt for insulation; it will thaw slowly during the day Saturday and be ready to cook at night. For punch, we recommend artificially sweetened Kool-aid or Crystal Lite as they are light weight and taste good. He won't need the sugar in the evening from the other kind. Fry the hamburger until done enough. The junk food dessert is because he's a kid!

2. Vegetable Cup-a-Soup

Chicken Top Ramen

Bagel
Small can chicken
Punch
Hostess Ding-Dongs

Dump the chicken into the Top Ramen while it is cooking.

3. Chicken Noodle Cup-a-Soup
Small can chicken
1/2 Cup White Rice
1/2 package Chicken Gravy Mix
Punch
Twinkies

Put the rice (regular long-grain rice) in the small pot with 1 cup of water, dump in the chicken, cook for 15 minutes on low heat, covered. Mix the gravy up according to directions, dump in with chicken and rice, reheat until boiling.

4. Chicken Broth Cup-a-Soup
Two hot dogs
1 Tablespoon Spaghetti Sauce Mix
Spaghetti Noodles
4 packages McDonald's Catsup
Punch
Instant Pudding with powdered milk

Break spaghetti noodles into smaller lengths at home. Boil in pot for 10 minutes or so. Pour off most of water, put sauce mix and catsup into pot with noodles. Cut hot dogs into small chunks and add to noodles and sauce. Cook over low heat, stirring, until hot dogs are hot. Clean out pot after eating out of it, put pre-measured instant pudding and powdered milk into pot, add proper amount of cold water, stir, let stand until thickened, eat.

5. Chicken Broth Cup-a-Soup
1/2 package Kraft Macaroni & Cheese
Small can tuna
Corn
Punch
Home made chocolate chip cookies

Repackage the 1/2 of macaroni in a Ziploc. Also 1/2 of cheese packet in another Ziploc bag, along with some powdered milk. Cook according to directions; add the tuna at the end, reheat, eat.

6. Chicken Noodle Cup-a-Soup
Stew
Bagel
Punch

Freeze some stew at home in a small 2 by 3 by 4 in Tupperware. Put into a Ziploc in case of leaks. Put a piece of cake into another Tupperware and send along for dessert.

Gourmet Suggestions

Below are listed some ideas for menus that have been prepared by the High Adventure Gourmets of Troop 885.

- Fettucini Alfredo with White Clam Sauce and fresh Broccoli with Hollandaise Sauce
- Mexican Tacos with Spanish Rice and Refried Beans
- Corned beef, cabbage, and new potatoes (St. Patrick's day)
- Beef Stroganoff with Green Beans and Corn Bread
- Roast Beef, Mashed Potatoes, Peas, Gravy
- Roast Turkey, Mashed Potatoes, Stuffing, Broccoli with Hollandaise Sauce
- Beef Burgundy, Braised Noodles, Steamed Carrots

Listed below are pre-packaged, canned and dry foods from the local supermarket that are great for preparing delicious meals on the trail. Many of the meats and seafoods can be found in very small cans. The fresh or frozen vegetables are great for variety, but do tend to be somewhat heavy for a younger Scout. Take a tour through the supermarket and make up your own list with what your son likes.

Supermarket Backpacker Foods

<p>Pasta/Rice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kraft noodles and Cheese <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Fettucini Alfredo ◦ Cheddar Broccoli • Lipton's Noodles and Sauce <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Butter Noodles ◦ Sour Cream and Chives ◦ Cream Garlic ◦ Alfredo ◦ Stroganoff ◦ Parmesan • Macaroni & Cheese • Rice a Roni • Lipton's Flavored Rices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Spanish ◦ Cheddar & Broccoli ◦ Chicken • Long-grained white Rice • Wild Rice <p>Sauces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brown Gravy • Chicken Gravy • Mushroom Gravy • Hollandaise • Taco • Teriyaki, etc. 	<p>Soups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lipton Cup-a-Soups <p>Vegetables</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frozen Corn • Frozen Peas • Frozen Green Beans • Fresh Broccoli <p>Breads</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bagels • Marie Calender Corn Bread Mix • French Rolls • Bisquick biscuits <p>Canned Meats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chicken • Mexican Chicken • Tuna • Beef • Corned Beef <p>Desserts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anything by Hostess • Fresh Fruit • Small Pies
--	---

In conclusion, you can send just about anything the Scout will eat, but please send stuff that is easy and quick. Eventually, as he gets older, he may take an interest in his food and become a good wilderness cook, experimenting with all sorts of stuff, just like the rest of us. If parents or Scouts have any questions about any of this, please don't hesitate to come down to a Troop meeting and talk to us about it. Any of our High Adventure Leaders will be happy to discuss and debate at great length the various aspects of cooking in the great outdoors. We especially like to receive new ideas or suggestions from others.

--Thanks to :

Claude Frenner
Lake Ridge, VA



The MacScouter, Scouting Resources Online web site is provided by
R. Gary Hendra, Advisor Crew 92, ASM Troop 92, Milpitas, CA
President, US Scouting Service Project



