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Hiking Info: Backpacking

Hiking Info: Backpacking Preparations

Before beginning your hike, there are a few preparations you should make. All backpackers should try to learn as much about this recreational activity as possible. Read pamphlets offered by individual parks and recreation areas. Visit your local outdoor supply store for handbooks and guides about backpacking. Obtain good, clear maps and learn to read a compass well. And above all, in case of an emergency, be sure to tell someone where you are going and when you will return.

Physical Condition: Know your own limits. Do not try to go too far too fast. Listen to your body. If you are: Tired? Stop and rest. Cold? Put on another layer of clothes. Warm? Take off a layer. Take care not to allow your clothes to become wet with perspiration. Drink plenty of water and drink before you feel thirsty. Dehydration starts before you actually feel it. Above all, use common sense and do not ignore small problems or possible warning signs.

Clothing: Wear proper clothing: natural fibers such as wool, cotton or down are best. Some of the new synthetics are good, but make certain they breathe and wick moisture away from your skin rather than absorbing it. For this reason, cotton should be worn primarily in warm weather only. Dressing in layers makes it easy to regulate your comfort. Long sleeves and full length pants will protect you from sun, insects, and briars. Remember, much of your body heat is lost through your head. Good cold weather advice is: "If your feet are cold, put on a hat."

Footwear: Hiking boots or good, sturdy walking shoes are essential. Sandals, thongs, high heels, or loafers are a "no-no." Break in your boots before an all-day hike. Wear them around the house for several days, wear them to work, or on a shopping trip or two. Two pairs of socks--one lightweight inner, and a heavy outer sock--are strongly recommended with boots.

First Aid: Always carry a first aid kit. Make sure at least one person in your group has had first aid training, knows beforehand the contents and use of the kit, or has equivalent knowledge of how to deal with injuries.

Heat Exhaustion: Heat exhaustion, which can afflict individuals in excellent physical condition, is caused by prolonged physical exertion in a hot environment. Cool the victim down by whatever means available. Have the person rest and drink plenty of fluids (non-alcoholic).

Hypothermia: Ignoring cold or wet conditions and letting your body's core temperature drop can be a life threatening situation. Without treatment, the decline in body temperature can lead to stupor, collapse, and death. Prevention is the best treatment. Stay dry, and beware of wind; put on your wool clothes before you start to shiver; and make camp before you are exhausted. Symptoms include shivering, slurred speech, memory lapses, fumbling hands, and drowsiness. Treatment includes getting the victim out of the weather, removing wet clothes and replacing them with dry ones. Build a fire for additional warmth and give the person warm drinks. If victim is semi-conscious, or worse, try to keep him awake. Put him into a sleeping bag with another person. Skin-to-skin contact is best to transfer the warmth. If a person's body temperature is dropping, they will not produce enough body heat, even when insulated with a sleeping bag, to provide enough warmth.

Storms and Lightning: In wind, rain, snow, etc., take shelter and keep warm and dry. Do not take risks. If thunderstorms are predicted, avoid planning trips to high risk areas such as exposed ridges and open country. If you find yourself in a thunderstorm, find a place to hide. Never be the high point. Never shelter next to a high point, such as a lone tree or cliff base. Avoid metal structures and equipment. Metal pack frame? Take it off and get away. Avoid natural electrical conductors such as water. Find a grove of trees, a space between two boulders or any low spot.

Hunting Season: In Arkansas, there is a hunting season of some type scheduled from September through the middle of June. These are also the most popular seasons for hiking. Many hikers may like to hunt while they are hiking; however, many others are concerned with potential safety conflicts. There are few conflicts which actually occur between hikers and hunters, but it is a good idea to use extra caution during this time. The recommendation is to wear bright colors (preferably blaze orange) on your torso and on your head, or any other garment that may help a hiker be more visible in dense woods.

Hunting is prohibited within developed state park boundaries; however, it is allowed on most other public lands, such as the Buffalo National River and the National Forests. Some State Park facilities, such as the Butterfield Trail at Devil's Den, are actually constructed on National Forest lands, so you may encounter hunters in these areas. The Pigeon Roost Trail at Beaver Lake State Park is the only overnight trail in Arkansas which is constructed on lands where deer hunting is prohibited; but it is currently open to other types of hunting. If you are in doubt, please contact the trail manager's address listed in the guide.

Rent-A-Backpack

For those who want to backpack on some of Arkansas's finest backpacking trails, but do not have their own equipment, three of Arkansas's state parks have a Rent-A-Backpack program. All the necessary equipment for an extended trip on park trails is available at:

Devil's Den State Park: West Fork, AR 72774; (501) 761-3325

Lake Ft. Smith State Park: Mountainburg, AR 72946; (501) 369-2469

Pinnacle Mountain State Park: Roland, AR 72135; (501) 868-5806

DID YOU KNOW?

Witts Springs – *Witts Springs, AR:* We have had at least 1000 or more people attend our parade. We have vendors, music, we have a huge cookout by our local EH club and then around 5pm our Volunteer Firefighters have a fish dinner. [Learn More ...](#)

ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF PARKS & TOURISM

1 Capitol Mall - Little Rock, Arkansas 72201

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