



SOAR Gear Guide

Did you ever receive a gear list from a wilderness program and panic? So much stuff! Likely questions arise. Where do I begin? Does my child need to be ready for an Everest expedition, or can I just go to Wal-Mart? The outdoor gear industry is like anything else. You get what you pay for. Do you need to purchase expensive equipment from a specialty store? No, not necessarily. The following guide will help provide you with a few tips in looking for the most critical items. First ask yourself a few questions:

- How much am I willing to spend?
- Will this equipment ever be used again?
- How comfortable do I want my child to be?
- How quickly will he or she grow out of this equipment?

With all of this in mind, let's talk gear! There are several retailers that provide quality gear. Some options include REI, Diamond Brand, Dick Sporting Goods, etc. By purchasing gear in the store, you may take advantage of the customer service these stores provide. We recommend bringing your gear list with you to the store and having them help walk you through the list. Or you may want to take advantage of deals available on the internet. Sites such as rei.com & reioutlet.com, campmor.com and sierratradingpost.com are all great resources.

Amazon Smile is a program that donates a portion of your purchase to your selected charity. Simply go to smile.amazon.com and select SOAR as your designated charity to help give other campers the SOAR experience.

BACKPACK *(Note: Not all courses require a backpack. See your course gear list for specifics.)*

What is critical? Essentially, there are two types of backpacks: internal frame packs and external frame packs. One is not better than the other. They are made with different types of use in mind.

External frame pack: This pack consists of an external aluminum, plastic, nylon, or composite frame that is outside of the pack — you can see the frame. The external frame pack is designed to be used on maintained trails and in moderate terrain. External packs generally have many pockets and divided compartments for ease of organization. In other words, you can find your stuff easier. Be sure the frame, hip belt and shoulder straps are the correct size for your son or daughter. External packs generally are less expensive. Some suggested name brands are: REI, Jansport, Kelty, Camp Trails, Diamond Brand, Peak One. (Note: This is not an exhaustive list.) If your child comes with an external frame pack, it is recommended to send them with Bungee cords that will help in attaching gear to the frame of the pack.



Internal frame pack: This type of pack has the frame sewn into the back of the pack. This pack uses your back as part of the frame. Balance and agility are improved by keeping the pack close to the back. Most internal frame packs have one or two large compartments with a top "lid" pouch. This can be frustrating for folks that are challenged in the area of organization. There are methods for organizing these packs such as using color-coded stuff sacks and adding external pockets. The zip lock bags required on the gear list are intended to assist with organization and waterproofing. Suggested brands include: Camp Trails, Dana Design, Gregory, Kelty, L.L. Bean, Lowe, Osprey, Mountain Smith



Here is a link to REI's Backpack Sizing Guide: <https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/backpacks-torso-hip-size.html> . See each course gear list for required size!

Other issues concerning a backpack:

1. Suspension: This refers to the manner the pack is attached to your body via the shoulder straps, back bands and hip belt. The hip belt should wrap around the waist in front of the hips bones while allowing some room for tightening. Some cheaper packs will only have webbing attached to the frame. The hip belt should be very well padded. A typical pack when loaded will weigh 20 – 40 lbs.

2. Size and Fit: The external frame pack should hold **60 – 75 liters (3,500 – 4,500 cubic inches)** with available room and lash points to place a sleeping bag on the outside of the pack. The internal frame pack should hold **65 – 80 liters (4,000 – 5,000 cubic inches)** to allow room to place the sleeping bag inside the pack. Often smaller individuals benefit from utilizing a women's framed backpack regardless of their gender.

BE SURE YOUR CHILD TRIES ON THE PACK LOADED WITH AT LEAST 25 LBS BEFORE PURCHASING AND HAVE THE STORE MAKE ANY FITTING ADJUSTMENTS NECESSARY.

DUFFEL BAG

Please pack all of your gear and clothing in a duffel bag. Your child will store gear in this bag while on base camp. For some courses, this bag will also be used in the field. The best duffel bag is one that has a zipper running the full length rather than the top-loading model. Sizes of 30-35" are typically adequate.



DAY PACK

A day pack is a small backpack used to carry essential gear for day excursions. A medium size day pack (15-30 liters of volume) with a hip belt for distributing the weight of the pack to the student's hips is the best choice. A school-type "book bag" will suffice if it has padded shoulder straps, is fairly large and is well constructed. The day pack must be large enough to carry the "five essentials" and have room left over for extras such as food or gear. The five essentials include: rain gear, water bottles, headlamp, whistle and sunscreen.



HIKING BOOTS

For backpacking courses, a good pair of boots is important. Boots should do a few things well-support the ankle, support the arch, get good traction on trails, keep the feet reasonably dry and be as light as possible. ALWAYS HAVE YOUR CHILD TRY ON THE BOOTS AND FIND A PAIR THAT IS COMFORTABLE AND SUPPORTIVE. When trying on boots, wear the socks they plan to wear on course — one pair wool (Smartwool) or synthetic outer socks and one pair light inner socks are good choices. Boots should have a snug fitting heel to prevent blisters. There should be plenty of toe room, even when walking downhill. Some details to look for include: ankle support, a stiff sole that flexes at the ball of the foot and padding around the ankle cuff. Make sure your child wears new boots for a few days at home prior to coming in order to break them in.



It is not necessary to buy the more expensive all leather boots for hiking courses — combination nylon and leather boots will be more than adequate. There are several companies making good lightweight hiking boots. These include: Coleman, Nike, Reebok, Hi-Tech, Danner, Vasque, Merrell.

Boots can be water proofed at least three ways:

- Leather/nylon boots can be sprayed with a silicone base spray like Scotch Guard.
- Painted with a liquid silicone treatment such as Aquaseal.
- You can purchase boots with a Gore-tex liner built in to the boot.

Check with the manufacturer for the “best” method for waterproofing the boots.

RIDING BOOTS

A horsepacking program allows for a wide range of appropriate footwear. Western boots, riding boots, or lightweight hiking boots work well. Each has their advantages and disadvantages. Western and riding boots work best while in the saddle, while hiking boots might be more comfortable around camp. The choice is up to you. Do not purchase steel-toed boots. Ensure the boots have a heel of some sort so that the foot cannot slip through the stirrup and become lodged.



SYNTHETIC/WOOL CLOTHING

Synthetic (also known as fleece, pile, or polyester) or wool clothing is an important component of a safe and comfortable outdoor experience. Synthetic and/or wool clothing will keep your child warm under the most unfavorable conditions, even when the clothing is wet. Cotton will not! DO NOT substitute cotton clothing for synthetic or wool clothing items indicated on the Gear Lists. Cotton is an ideal material for jeans and t-shirts as long as your child has synthetic or wool clothing available as well for cool or rainy weather.



SLEEPING PAD

A sleeping pad is an important part of camping equipment. It is used as a barrier between a sleeping bag and the ground. The pad is an essential item providing insulation from the cold ground. It also provides extra cushioning and comfort needed to enjoy a restful night's sleep. There are two different mattress styles - closed foam and self-inflating open foam. The closed foam mat price ranges \$9 – 25. The self-inflating mattresses are more expensive (i.e. Thermarest brand), starting at \$40. The two different styles are just as effective regarding insulation. The difference is in cushioning and comfort.



SLEEPING BAG

Summer weather can be unpredictable in the mountains, with temperatures varying greatly. We suggest a sleeping bag rated 40 degrees Fahrenheit for courses in North Carolina, 20 degrees Fahrenheit for courses in California, and 15 degrees Fahrenheit for courses in Wyoming. Florida and International courses utilize a sheet and fleece blanket.



What to look for in a sleeping bag:

- The comfort rating is measured in degrees Fahrenheit. Remember the temperature rating is relative. If you are cold or warm natured, remember to compensate accordingly.

- Weight is important. Look for a bag that is as light as possible. A 40 Fahrenheit degree bag should weigh no more than 2 – 5 lbs.
- Compressibility refers to the size of the stuff sack in which the sleeping bag can be stuffed. The smaller the better. Be careful, manufactures know you will be evaluating compressibility, so they sell very small stuff sacks with their bags. Make sure you and your child can get the bag back into the sack without difficulty.
- The most efficient sleeping bag design is the mummy bag with a hood or draw string.
- The fill or insulation in a bag will determine the warmth-to-weight ratio. There are two types of fill: synthetic and down. We require synthetic because it will maintain some insulating value even when wet and will dry much faster than down.

RAIN GEAR

The price of adequate rain gear starts at \$30. Rain gear consists of a jacket and pants made of plastic coated fabric. **WARNING: DO NOT BUY A VINYL PONCHO — IT WILL SELF-DESTRUCT IN 30 MINUTES OR LESS EVEN UNDER GOOD CONDITIONS.** There are two types of jackets that are adequate: waterproof non-breathable and waterproof breathable. Breathable materials allow sweat to evaporate through the jacket. Non-breathable will not. Some companies have added vents to non-breathable jackets to release body heat and moisture. Look to see where vents are placed as a backpack could block the vent. For courses involving horseback riding, a rain suit (top and bottom) works best.



WATER BOTTLES

NOTE: ALL FIRST YEAR STUDENTS WILL RECEIVE A SOAR WATER BOTTLE ON THEIR FIRST DAY OF CAMP.

Water bottles should hold at least 1 quart or liter and not leak. The best water bottle is a plastic Nalgene bottle. Please ensure your child has a minimum of two water bottles on their course. Proper hydration is essential to your child’s enjoyment of the course!



RASH GUARD (Florida, California & International Courses only)

Rash guards are available in both long-sleeve and short-sleeve. They are key elements in the enjoyment of water sport activities as they help protect your child’s skin from the sun (if they have UV protection) and from common irritations associated with sand and saltwater. We recommend you purchase a rash guard that is the same size as the t-shirt size you would normally wear. Rash guards are meant to fit skin tight and are made of Spandex Lycra which stretches quite a bit. Companies that make rash guards include O’Neil and Body Glove. Some sites are: www.rei.com, www.wavejammer.com, www.altrec.com and www.swimoutlet.com.



WATER SHOES

Water shoes will be worn for all water-based activities, including swimming. They can be purchased at any Wal-Mart, Target, Kmart, etc. The price is fairly inexpensive, between \$10 and \$20. Please purchase water shoes that are close-toed and non-Velcro and that fit like a slip-on shoe (except for FL which require “Croc” type sandals). SOAR will provide neoprene booties for whitewater rafting on Wyoming courses.



SUNGLASSES

Sunglasses should filter infrared and ultraviolet rays 95-100%. Ground glass lenses that are optically correct are best. Dark, cheap sunglasses can actually cause more damage to your eyes than having no sunglasses at all.



EATING GEAR

Eating gear should be sturdy but does not need to be fancy. A plastic bowl or a metal sierra cup, spoon, fork and butter knife are sufficient. They do not need a full blown mess kit or cook set.



HEADLAMP

While camping, students typically have to perform tasks after the sun goes down that require the use of both hands (e.g., adjust tents, pack backpacks). Also, some courses offer caving as a program activity. Consequently, we strongly recommend students bring headlamps instead of flashlights. Headlamps are inexpensive (\$10 – 15) and are widely available in stores such as Wal-Mart, Target, or KMart.



SUNSCREEN

There are many effective sunscreens on the market. A few even combine sunscreen with insect repellent. One suggestion is to try several brands prior to the trip to see which one works best for your child. The sunscreen should be waterproof and with a SPF rating no less than 50.

All ocean-based courses (FL, CA, Caribbean, Belize, Costa Rica) require REEF SAFE sunscreen.

Here is a link to help you find what you need: <https://www.snorkelsandfins.com/reef-safe-sunscreen-brands/>



INSECT REPELLANT

A non-aerosol repellent is required (cream or liquid). Aerosol sprays can damage the waterproof characteristics of fabrics including tentage.



REMEMBER:

ALL PERSONAL ITEMS AND CLOTHING MUST BE LABELED!

Recognizing that organization can be a challenge for some of our students, it is very important that you label EVERYTHING with your child's name. This includes all clothing, underwear, socks, towels, books, cameras, etc. This will help your child keep track of their items, and help SOAR return any gear found after the course has ended. SOAR will make an effort to return labeled items of \$25 value or greater. SOAR is not responsible for returning items that are not labeled. You may label your items with a permanent marker, or may order pre-printed labels from websites such as:

Kidecals – <http://kidecals.com/>

Mabels Labels - <http://www.mabelslabels.com/>

Label Daddy - <http://labeldaddy.com/>

