

Troop 398 - Equipment Guide for New Scouts

He could feel his heart pounding through his shirt as he leaned back in his chair to let his mind dream:

Splashing his kayak through the white-frothed waters of the Nantahala River; Braving the icy cold as his snow shoes crunch the frozen snow near Canada's Northern Boundary Waters; Basking in the warm summer sun while canoeing for seven days through the Florida Everglades; Forging friendships through patrol competition and troop challenge contests ...

Has your son kept you spellbound as he recounts tale after tale of the great adventures which he plans on enjoying in Boy Scouts? Do you wonder how you can take this seemingly giant leap from Cub Scouts into Boy Scouts?

Your son has decided to embark on an exciting adventure with the Boys Scouts of America that will last him a lifetime. In addition to your moral support, your son will need your help in getting quality equipment. Where do you begin?



Plan ahead. Many people go out immediately and spend \$500 on equipment before finding out what their scout really needs. Different troops utilize different equipment. If your troop does mostly car camping and “go see ‘em” trips, then that 10-pound family camping bag may work fine. Troop 398 generally packs their gear in duffelbags or backpacks even on car camping trips, and goes backpacking one to two times a year, so the weight and bulk of the pack and bag is important. **Wal-mart is one of America's top retailers, but please do not buy your pack or bag from them.** See the end of this article for recommended stores for buying equipment.

As you start shopping for equipment this is a suggested order of importance in which you should buy it:

SLEEPING BAG AND STUFF SACK. A good sleeping bag is a must. Invest in a good bag now and it will last years. We recommend a bag that is rated for at least 20° weather and which weighs 4 pounds or less. You can add a fleece blanket or inner liner for \$15-20 to increase the warmth during colder weather. **Stay away from Down bags** at this point and look for bags filled with Thermolite, Thermolite extreme, 3M Thinsulate LiteLoft or Polarguard-3D or similar poly-fill synthetic material that breathes well and is lightweight. Make sure it has a synthetic inner liner, NOT cotton. Look for a draft collar on the inside zipper. **Remember, the lighter and smaller the bag, the better – but you need the 20° temperature rating to use it year round.** The stuff sack should fit the sleeping bag tightly and if it is waterproof, that is even better. The stuff sack

serves as a way to keep the sleeping bag clean and dry. Compression sacks will allow the sleeping bag to take less room, but are not a necessity. You will also need a couple of Bungee cords or easy to use straps to hook the sleeping bag to your pack if it does not have attached straps.

SLEEPING PAD. A good sleeping pad means a good night's rest and encourages the scout to go camping again. This is necessary not only for cushioning, but for warmth. We recommend a closed cell foam or **ThermaRest** type pad or one of it's clones like the **Camprest**. These are self-inflating and lightweight. Without a pad your son is sleeping on very cold ground. However, DO NOT send him with a mattress; a pad does not have to be thick to work. Suitable closed cell pads can be found at Wal-mart or Target for under \$10. More high tech pads can be found at any sporting goods store. Closed cell pads are very light, but do not roll up very small. They can be carried on the outside of a pack and do not absorb water. Inflatable Pads should be small and very light weight (most are only a few ounces) and take up very little space. Do not buy the cheap ones that roll up the same size as a closed cell foam pad – these are generally very heavy. (Never send a bed pillow either. He can roll up his jacket, or use a small camp pillow.)

BOOTS. One of the most important investments a parent can make in their son's Scouting Adventure is their selection of his footwear. However, please do not go out and spend \$150 on a pair of boots for your son. He will often outgrow the boots within six months. Good quality hiking boots can be purchased for less than a pair of brand name athletic shoes in many area stores. (\$50-75) Your more serious multi-day backpacking will start around 7th grade.

Have your son size the boots with two pairs of socks (we recommend 2 pairs of socks for hiking – a thick hiking sock for cushion, and a thin polypropylene wicking sock inside that). Please don't buy boots too big for your son, thinking he will grow into them.

Boot Buying Tips:

1. Buy boots in the afternoon, when your son's feet tend to swell and always fit boots with hiking socks that will be worn on the trail.
2. Be sure that the toe box is roomy enough for him to wiggle his toes. When your son slides his foot forward in the boot, be sure you can slide / squeeze one finger down the back of the boot.
3. Have your son walk in the boots and be sure that the boot does not slip up and down as he walks.
4. Fabric-and-leather boots are lighter in weight than all-leather boots, and they are often easier to break-in.

After the purchase, have your son break in the boots by wearing them around the house and to troop meetings.

5. Don't wait to have your son wear his new hiking boots for the first time on a troop outing.

CANTEEN / WATER BOTTLES. We highly recommend Nalgene or other polycarbonate bottles – they are pretty indestructible. (See page 209 of the Boy Scout Handbook.¹) This should be a good quality water bottle that will fit easily into a backpack and not leak. He should have two 2-quart bottles.

FLASHLIGHT. The basic light source of Troop 398 is a metal, twin AA flashlight. We recommend that each Scout have one of these in a bright color other than black (easier to find if lost) and carry extra batteries and a spare bulb during campouts. A spare bulb is often included in the base of the flashlight. LED flashlights and headlamps are also good and have extended battery life, as well as bulbs that will last virtually forever. They have dropped in price over the last couple of years and are now very affordable.

MESS KIT. Pliable plastic bowls work very well as a mess kit. Don't forget silverware – Lexan polycarbonate utensils work very well. A set of 4 is available at Wal-mart. Mark them with a sharpie marker. If you have to get a mess kit style, look for the least expensive one you can find with copper-bottomed pots, lightweight steel or titanium if money is no object. Aluminum is cheaper but tends to bend up very easily and will last only a short time. The copper kits come with a drinking cup, a small pan with lid, and a skillet that can be used as a plate.

STOVE. Troop 398 provides stoves.



TENT. For all campouts, the Scouts will sleep with a buddy in a tent. Troop 398 has invested a lot into well constructed tents and the boys use them within their patrol. The tents are heavy for backpacking, but we usually put 4 scouts in a tent during the trip, so it lightens the load per person. Additionally, we have purchased tarps to go under the floor.

COMPASS. All Scouts will need a compass. The proper one to get is one similar to the Silva, Sunto, or Brunton Starter Compasses (see page 361 in the Scout Handbook¹). These are available from the Scout Shop for around \$10-\$12. Liquid filled compasses are best.

HAT. In the summer, you need a Boy Scout hat (does not have to be the official Green hat – We do have a Troop Hat) with a brim to shade the neck and face in

the summer. In the winter, a stocking cap is needed for daytime and sleepwear. You lose a lot of body heat at night from your head.

GARBAGE BAGS. Troop 398 practices *Leave No Trace* camping. **“Pack it in, Pack it out.”** A large plastic garbage bag is used for trash and emergency rain gear. He should carry a couple.

KNIFE. Once a Scout earns a “Toten-Chip” card, he may carry a knife on campouts. We recommend one with a locking blade. A basic folding pocketknife is all he needs. The blade must be no longer than the width of the scout’s palm. No need for a multi-tool. Do not buy him a fixed blade sheath knife.

RAIN GEAR. A Scout is prepared. An inexpensive, but sturdy light-weight poncho can be obtained at Target or Wal-mart for a few dollars. A rain jacket and pants are a better option. Do not purchase ultra-thin emergency one-time use rain gear.

TOILETRIES. Comb, deodorant, shampoo, bio-degradable soap, small roll of toilet paper, toothbrush, toothpaste. Make up a kit inside a small cloth bag or large ziplock bag. Take on every campout. It is much more sensible to purchase small travel items and keep them in his camping gear. If he uses his home stuff, it is very easy to forget it in the rush of packing. (Note: Realistically, all he will generally use on a weekend campout is the toothbrush.) A small plastic garden trowel is what we use to make a latrine when hiking, it can stay with his backpack

FIRST AID KIT. See page 127 of the SH for First Aid kits parts. You will need to build your own first-aid kit for Second Class Scout rank, and for the First Aid Merit Badge. They should carry this on campouts and day hikes and be familiar with the contents. *During campouts, adult leaders carry advanced first-aid kits for the troop.*

BACKPACK AND COVER. Backpacks will not be required until they go on their first backpacking trip – usually in the fall. There are two types of backpacks – external or internal frame. The external frame tends to be less expensive and easiest for the boys to use. Frequently they are lighter than internal frames to start with. Ensure the pack has padded shoulder harnesses, a padded hip belt, and support webbing across the back. Page 297 of the SH shows both types of packs. This type is best if you are going through brush as it hugs the body but is difficult to pack because most brands have only one large compartment. Also, internal frame packs can get a little pricey. We do have a company we deal with that has good sales once or twice a year and we



¹ All future references to the BSA’s Boy Scout Handbook will simply be listed as SH.

combine orders to get the best deal. Regardless of the type pack you get, don't forget to get a pack cover. The pack cover is a waterproof cover with elastic around the opening, and stretches around the backpack to keep it dry. It can be used with the pack on or off.

We recommend for first year scouts that you consider an external frame pack for youths that is expandable. (Typically this will fit the 13-21" torso length) We recommend a youth pack like the Kelty Yukon or Tioga, Coleman Bozeman, Jansport Scout, or REI's LongTrail. Kelty's Trekker may be too large for most 11-12 year scouts. A good pack should cost you from \$50-200, depending on whether you purchase wholesale or retail. Don't buy a pack with too large a volume or the scout will be unable to carry it. Quality stores like Good Sports or REI will fit the pack to the scout.

GLOVES. A set of work gloves to use on projects and a set of warm gloves for winter wear will be a necessity. Few things are worse than cold fingers.

MATCHES/LIGHTERS. A new Boy Scout is not allowed to carry matches or any other kind of fire starting materials until he has demonstrated knowledge of safety skills by earning his *Firem'n Chit*.

HELPFUL LESSONS.

1. Your son is going to lose things. Most items that are small, dark colored, or (Sad but true) extremely desirable to Scouts in other Troops, tend to have unusually high mobility. Therefore, it is in your best interest to:

- A) Customize all gear with name tags or specific markings (bright paint etc.);
- B) Buy bright colored, lower quality substitutes for younger Scouts (11-13);
- C) Avoid camouflage or other dark gear that blends in with the scenery; and
- D) Keep your patience.

2. "Buy to Size." Don't subject your son to a "Bataan Death March;" although you will be tempted to buy oversized equipment ("he'll grow into it!") or surplus military gear ("it was good enough for Guadalcanal!"), **don't do it!** Overweight or oversized gear will run your boy into the ground – and a few months later, you'll be yard selling everything off at 5 cents on the dollar because: "I really don't like Scouting very much."

Packing Personal Gear. See the Troop 398 Packing List for packing hints. Also look at your Scout Handbook (Page 292, page 272, and page 264) for a good list.

Resources:

Academy Academy Sports and Outdoors.
multiple San Antonio Locations
2727 NE Loop 410, Perrin-Beitel 590-0500
2024 B, Loop 1604 E. Northwoods 507-4001
15350 IH-35 N, Selma 637-2600
www.academy.com

Sports Authority The Sports Authority/Oshman's
125 NW Loop 410 341-1244
San Antonio, TX
www.thesportsauthority.com

Good Sports Good Sports
12730 IH-10W @ DeZavala 694-0881
www.goodsports.com

REI Recreational Equipment Inc.
11745 IH-10 W, Suite 110
San Antonio, TX 78230
(210) 877-2329
www.rei.com
<http://rei-outlet.com>

Bass Pro 17907 West IH-10
San Antonio, TX 78257
(210) 253-8800

Whole Earth Provisions 255 East Basse Rd
San Antonio, TX 78209
(210) 829-8888

Dicks Sporting Goods 18103 Rim Drive
San Antonio, TX 78257
(210) 558-3444

Cabela's 15570 IH-35
Buda, TX 78610
(512) 295-1100

Campmor 1-800-CAMPMOR
<http://www.campmor.com>