

The long pathway

Plan carefully before you start walking

By RANDALL MURRAY
Of The Morning Call
Last of a Five-Part Series

Two words should guide you in outfitting your hike — plan carefully.

The best gear is not always the most expensive. It can, however, make you a little more comfortable. With a little ingenuity the would-be hiker can save a little money.

We set out with stuff we already owned, gear we borrowed, things we bought. Some of what we took proved invaluable. Other items were superfluous.

And, of course, we soon discovered that some things we really could have used we hadn't brought.

In reflecting on equipment, clothing and supplies, the memory of three teenage boys we met on the trail comes to mind. They were an example of practically everything not to do while hiking.

They were clad in sneakers and shorts and were approaching one of the most hazardous sections of the trail we had traveled, the cliffs. They carried sleeping bags and other items in their arms, not in packs. Two of them were toting a large cooler chest.

Their destination? The New Tripoli Shelter, nearly three tough miles ahead of them.

The basics for a successful and relatively comfortable hike are just that —

basic. It doesn't take much common sense to realize that a good, sturdy pair of comfortable hiking boots are a must.

According to the National Geographic Magazine, a 68-year-old grandmother hiked the entire trail — twice. She wore out seven pairs of tennis shoes on each trip.

Tennies, however, just don't give the support needed in the rock-strewn stretch of the trail in Pennsylvania.

Genuine hiking boots aren't cheap. A good pair will run \$40 or more. However, Murray settled for a pair of light brown leather, 8-inch high boots with thick-ribbed white neoprene soles, purchased for \$22.

They were great. The high tops, laced tightly, saved ankle sprains. The inner cushioning helped cut down the wear of many miles and the heavy soles softened the impact of the rocks.

Probably the next most important consideration is the pack. Experienced hikers claim there is no substitute for the lightweight frame pack. They're probably right.

Devlin wore a German army pack with a frame — not a match for the elite gear sported by the seasoned hiker, but far superior to Murray's choice, a standard Boy Scout Yucca, or Yukon, pack. With no frame for support and weight distribution, it pulled constantly at the shoulders.

Nearly \$30 worth of freeze-dried food, lightweight and most convenient, partial-

ly filled the pack. Just add boiling water, stir and chow down. Some meals included beef stroganoff, chicken stew, tuna salad and cheese omelette.

"Don't carry nothing that dangles," was the advice of a scout leader. He was right. Murray slung the strap of a 2-quart aluminum canteen over his shoulder.

The constant sloshing and swinging, plus having to cope with an equally-irritating camera, nearly drove him nuts. Devlin, however, carried an army-style canteen on a web belt.

Experienced hikers will carry a light plastic water bottle attached to the pack or inside it.

Jeans are probably the best pants to take along. Although they can be hot in summer weather, they wear like the rocks on the path. A couple of flannel shirts are advisable.

Woolen socks are preferable. But a comfortable pair of thin socks — possibly nylon — should be worn next to the feet with the woolies on top.

Being a tea freak, Murray carted a small plastic bag full of tea-leaves for his morning warmup. Forget it. Too much hassle. Take tea bags or learn to like coffee or cocoa.

Premoistened paper towel-type cleaners are handy for a multitude of purposes.

Be sure to take a scouring pad for

cleaning cooked-on food from mess kit or dishes.

For washing yourself and utensils, take only biodegradable soap — and use it sparingly.

Obviously, a basic first aid kit and a snake bite kit are musts. We saw no snakes, but copperheads and rattlers are common along the trail.

Although we depended on a campfire for cooking, we took cans of sterno to start the fires. A spoonful of the jellied fuel under the kindling worked quickly and well.

A good sturdy hat and bandana or neckerchief are worth taking.

A small hatchet is a great help, and not just for chopping firewood. It can come in handy for bashing trailmates who snore.

Sleeping bags have been improved tremendously over the past few years. Long-wearing, comfortable mummy-style bags weigh just a fraction of what their bulky forerunners weighed.

Although keeping the over-all weight down is the prime consideration in getting your pack together, don't skimp on the essentials.

An old-timer told us how he gets ready for a long hike. "I put everything I know I'll need, very carefully in my pack. Then I try it on."

"Then," he continued, "I decide it's too damn heavy and throw out half the stuff. Then I'm ready to go."



RON DEVLIN



RANDY MURRAY

Attention to detail pays

By RON DEVLIN
Of the Morning Call

Without a doubt, the planning and preparation stage can make or break a backpacking trip. A blister on your heel, getting caught in a rainstorm without rain gear, or a defective sleeping bag can drain all the will power and determination one musters before the trip.

Speaking of blisters, you know those old Army combat boots you have stored: Well, throw them away if you were intending to use them for hiking on the Appalachian Trail. The old boots might have been good for pounding the sand at Ft. Jackson, S.C., but the massive glacial rock deposits of the Appalachian Trail is another story.

Actually, the Army's combat boots are among the best constructed that can be bought anywhere. But they're just not the best type of shoe to wear when hiking long distances over rough terrain.

Before leaving on the four-day trek, Devlin dusted off his old GT boots and took them to the shoemaker for an overhaul. However, the relatively thin soles didn't effectively cushion the razor-sharp edges of the trail's rock.

The moral: "Don't sell yourself short on quality footwear." It's not necessary to buy an officially sanctioned, Mount Everest-tested pair of \$75 hiking boots, but the right type of boot is essential. Murray's purchase of a \$22 pair of over-the-ankle, leather, thick-soled, working boots was one of his better decisions.

To the true backpacker, carrying an air mattress is unthinkable. However, after spending three sleepless nights on a plywood shelter floor, a pine-slap bunk and the good old earth, Zdevlin recommends an air mattress to anyone going on short hikes. The added bulk may be a slight burden, but it will be worth its weight in sleep.

Another thing! Check your equipment before leaving on the hike, particularly your sleeping bag zipper. After spending 12 hours climbing 45-degree inclines in 90-degree temperatures, you will be dismayed to find that the zipper doesn't work when you crawl into the bag. It can get pretty cold on the trail at night, and if one side of your sleeping bag opens, you'll notice it.

A great many hikers are into freeze-dried food. It's surprisingly good. But, whatever you do, don't follow the directions as to the amount of time you should allow the dried food to soak in water, unless you like beef stroganoff that tastes like ground styrofoam. Allowing the dehydrated food to soak longer than the time specified will greatly improve the taste.

You know those plastic garbage bags that make people so glad on television. Well, they fit very neatly over a back pack. You'll be especially pleased that you took one along if it starts raining. You're carrying everything you own in that pack. There's not much sense changing from wet clothes to wet clothes.

I hope our suggestions will improve your enjoyment in your encounter with Mother Nature. One last word, remember the old backpacker-ecologist's saying, "If you carried it in, you can carry it out."



Murray inches along hazardous stretch