

Hiking and Backpacking



Winneshiek County Conservation Equipment and Recommendations:

- **Who:** Hiking: Kindergarten and up; Backpacking: 5th grade and up
- **What:** 15 “Backyard Backpacks” for hiking; no equipment for backpacking.
- **Where:** Hiking: Lake Meyer Park, South Bear Park, Chipera Prairie, Cardinal Marsh, Marilie Ed. Forest Reserve, parks with established trails. Backpacking as a learning experience can be done in most parks with hiking trails where tent camping is allowed. Call 563.534.7145 for more information.

Introduction

People go hiking, and undertake the overnight version, backpacking, for enjoyment, exercise, challenge, and access to natural wonders. Short hikes over mild terrain are easily accomplished; longer hikes through the wilderness require more specialized equipment. Appropriate foot gear matched to the hiking/backpacking you have planned is essential. There are numerous hiking and even backpacking opportunities in Northeast Iowa with some incredible land to explore. Visit www.visitiowa.org or www.trails.com to find some of the hiking trails in Northeast Iowa.

A Brief History

People have hiked and backpacked throughout history, just without the terminology now applied to the activity. As ancient people searched for food or moved their settlements from one place to another, they needed a way to carry essential items with them. For many, “backpacking” and “hiking” were facts of life and part of working to survive.

Hiking and backpacking as forms of recreation have seen steady increases since the 1940s with specialized gear being developed for the sport. The passing of the National Scenic Trail Act of 1968, making large tracts of land available to the public for recreational use, contributed greatly to the growth of hiking as a pastime. The act helped to set up a system of hiking trails that runs throughout the country. This encouraged more people to enjoy wilderness areas both as hikers and backpackers.

Equipment & Supplies

The equipment a hiker or backpacker uses is important. **If you use low-quality equipment then your hiking/backpacking experience may be impaired.** Before you look for equipment decide what kind of hiking/backpacking you would like to do. Will it be a hike that lasts a few hours, all day, or require an overnight or more? How many miles will you cover, over what kind of terrain? What will the season and local weather conditions be like? If you are planning on

getting new equipment for your adventure, it is important to have your basic plans in place before you go shopping.

When choosing equipment, go simple & go light. A light but efficient load will allow you to have a more enjoyable time with energy left over to celebrate when you reach your destination. Pack the essentials in the lightest versions possible.

Basic Equipment for Hiking:

- Hiking boots – sturdy and appropriate for the duration and terrain; **BROKEN IN!**; made of waterproof or wicking material
- Pack – appropriate size for day or overnight use
- Raingear - pants and jacket; waterproof cover for your pack
- Extra socks – at least one pair; wicking fabric (not cotton)
- Snacks and plenty of water
- Insect repellent and sun screen
- Whistle
- Waterproof matches or other fire starter
- Flashlight with extra batteries and bulb
- First Aid Kit – including mole skin

Optional:

- Map, compass, or GPS Unit
- Trekking poles or hiking stick
- Gaiters – cover your ankles to keep moisture and snow from getting into boots
- Watch – be aware of time so you don't get caught out in the dark
- Writing materials, nature identification books, or other reading material
- Shoes/clothes left in car to change into for the ride home

Additional Equipment for Overnight Backpacking

Remember to consider weight!

- Backpack
- Cook kit including cook stove
- Food – lightweight or freeze dried; always pack a little extra
- Sleeping bag and tent
- Water filter or water purifying tablets

Regulations

Most natural and wilderness areas have some regulations. Some areas require special hiking, backpacking, and/or camping passes and possibly fees. Think about avoiding peak travel times in popular areas to minimize crowds and increase your enjoyment. Some areas require you to submit a trip plan before you start your hike. It is important to check with each area to determine what you need to do ahead of time.

As a general rule you should plan on packing out anything that you bring in and leave no trace of your passing.

Skills & Strategies

Hiking Tips

- Match your planned hike with your physical condition. Are you in shape for a rugged hike of ten miles or do you need to start with shorter hikes on more level terrain and build to the more challenging hike?
- Never step on anything you can step over. Never step over anything you can step around. Encounters with wasps, ants, and other animals can be surprising!
- When crossing a stream, unfasten the hip belt of your backpack. If you fall in, you don't want your pack to drag you downstream.
- Consider your footwear and the type of terrain you will be covering. If there are a lot of rocks or extreme ups and downs, consider sturdier boots that cover your ankles.
- If you want to avoid joint trouble or feeling off balance with 40 pounds on your back, buy a trekking pole or poles, use a sturdy walking stick, and take the hills more slowly.
- Even before you get tired or thirsty, stop to eat and drink!

Choosing and adjusting a backpack

Choose your backpack to fit you and to match the type of hiking you are planning. Try on the pack and walk around with it fully packed before starting out on your adventure.

When the pack has a load in it, nearly all of the weight should be on your hips and sacrum (the base of your spine). The shoulder straps are mostly there to keep the pack vertical and close to you. If the pack doesn't need anything moved around to accommodate you, you can fit it pretty well by just tightening the straps in the right order.

- Start by putting some weight in the pack and tighten down the pack around the load so that it isn't moving around.
- There are three main points of adjustment: hip belt, shoulder straps, and load lifters. The load lifters are the two straps that run from the shoulders up to the top of the pack.
- Loosen up all of these straps so that the pack hangs limply from your shoulders.
 1. Lift your shoulders so that the hip belt is at the level of your hips, fasten it, and tighten it around your hip bones.
 2. Next, tighten the shoulder straps so that they touch your shoulders solidly around all sides. Your shoulders shouldn't be carrying any of the weight.
 3. Finally, tighten down the load lifters until the pack presses up against your back.

Packing a backpack

Gather all food, water, clothing, and other equipment you intend to carry. Once all of this gear is put in your pack, and you've filled up your water bottles, everything should weigh less than $1/3^{\text{rd}}$ of your body weight, and hopefully less than $1/4^{\text{th}}$.

- Load your sleeping bag at the bottom of your pack (if you have an internal-frame pack) or tie it in double waterproof sacks below (if you have an external-frame pack). You won't need it before you pitch camp, and a sleeping bag is light for its volume.
- Pack heavy items and your stove, fuel, food, and extra water above the sleeping bag and next to your back. (Pack fuel below food in case of a leak.) Be sure that objects don't protrude into your back.
- Fill the remaining volume with clothing. Pack your clothes inside a waterproof bag with the top folded over. Use zip lock type baggies and stuff sacks liberally.
- Small items you won't need until you pitch camp can go inside empty spaces, such as the inside of your cooking pot, to take full advantage of space.

- Put the heaviest items closer to the small of your back. The items farthest from your back should be the lightest. Try to keep the weight evenly distributed from side to side within the pack so that it won't be lopsided when you carry it.
- Keep your rain gear, snacks, water bottles, and whistle easily available. There are usually side pockets and clips for these items or you could hang a few items from a belt.

Safety

- Leave notice
- Stick together
- Know your limits
- Stay hydrated
- Stay dry and warm
- Beware of the sun
- Learn basic first aid

Extensions

Science: orienteering, GPS, mapmaking, topography, geology, ecology, botany, biology

Computer: Google Earth, USGS

Humanities: nature writing and journaling, nature art

First aid, CPR

Resources

- Bass Pro Shops OutdoorSite Library: Hiking, Backpacking, and Outdoor Activity Tips. <http://www.basspro.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/CFPageC?storeId=10151&catalogId=10001&langId=-1>
- GORP.com: Outdoor Recreation Resources. www.Gorp.com
- thebackpacker.com: blog, trail information, beginners' guide. <http://www.thebackpacker.com/>
- trail.com: guide to finding trails across the country. <http://www.trails.com/>