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Backpacking; Theory and Practice

by Kathleen Coyne

(a note on the process of writing this article: I originally intended to write one article on the politics and practicalities of getting started in backpacking. Instead, I ended up with the two following articles, one on the politics and another on the practicalities of backpacking.)

Backpacking is one of the most accessible sports I know. By accessible I mean that it requires a minimum of equipment and can be very low-cost. Getting started may seem confusing at first, but the following are practical hints based on my own experiences.

The best and most primary source of information is other backpackers. What do they take with them? What are their favorite trails? Most backpackers are more than willing to tell you their favorite "tricks" for successful trips. Generally clerks in stores which sell equipment can be invaluable resources, not only for information on equipment, but also on trails, food, and weather.

Books are another source of information. Many are available at public libraries, as well as bookstores. My advice is to use books cautiously. Some are excellent, some mediocre, and others are downright dangerous. Always keep in mind that information has to work for YOU and look for the type of information and ideas to fit YOUR needs. For example: I wanted a backpacking cookbook recently. After looking in bookstores at many books I found one with recipes that used the sorts of foods I like to eat.

Another source of information is the Forest Service. The regional office, located behind the old post office on Broadway, has maps, pamphlets, recreational guides and information on forest regulations for all the National Forests in this region. Local ranger districts also have local maps and more specific local information.

Basic equipment for backpacking may seem expensive, particularly if you are looking at mountaineering stores. Shopping for sales can reduce the price of equipment as can buying used equipment. Talk to experienced backpackers to find out what priorities they see for equipment. For example, I recommend investing in a really good pair of boots first. Equipment can also often be rented either from college recreation depts. by students or even from sporting goods stores or other outfitters. Also, friends may loan you some equipment. A sewing machine can allow you to make your own equipment from kits. I have found kits to be high quality at reasonable prices, also kits allow you to build in custom features.

Food is another problem area for many novices. I had a difficult time figuring out...
alternatives to the expensive and (to me) unappealing foods commercially available. There are many good backpacking cookbooks. Spend some time looking through them for one to fit your needs. Remember, if you won't eat it at home, you probably won't eat it in the woods.

Trail information is available at local ranger stations. Maps are often inaccurate or out of date, so it is a good idea to check, especially if you are in a new area. Wilderness Guards can provide the most accurate information on wilderness trails, including degree of difficulty, how well the trail has been maintained, and water. Trail crews can also provide information, or ask for the Forest Resource Ranger. A word of caution; some trails are being allowed to "die a natural death", and may not even exist any longer, so try to get up-to-date information.

Experience is the best way to learn to backpack. If you are not sure about undertaking a long trip, just plan some day-hikes or car camping. With minimal equipment and transportation to the trailhead, all of the wilderness areas are waiting for you.

Backpacking, like almost all outdoor sports, until recently was a male domain. Advertisements and outdoor magazines showed us large, hearty men in plaid wool shirts, who were out "conquering the wilderness". My brother's Boy Scout Handbook was full of information on outdoor skills while my Campfire Girl Book focused much more on the traditional feminine skills.

Yet, a growing number of women are spending time in the wilderness. Many of these women are discovering the positive aspects of developing and sharing wilderness skills with other women. Why go backpacking (or canoeing or bicycle touring) with other women? The simplest explanation I know is that offered by the woman who introduced me to the great outdoors. "The thing about camping with men is that they never let you do any of the fun stuff, like building fires."

I enjoy spending time outdoors; hiking in the summer and skiing in the winter. An observation that never fails to strike me is how few women I meet compared to the number of men, and how rarely I meet women traveling just with other women. There seems to be a feeling that we need to take along men, that somehow women cannot cope alone in the woods. An all too common scenario is the woman who is having a terrible time because her male companion is hiking too far, too fast for her and then being pushy because she can't keep up. I often wonder if these women will ever know how wonderful being outdoors can be.

While the need for women to learn day to day survival skills such as home maintenance is readily apparent, outdoor skills may seem to be less important, or even frivolous. Yet for me, learning to live in the woods has been a valuable experience. In the wilderness, I have learned the meaning of self-sufficiency. To me it is a marvel that everything I need, food, shelter, and clothing can be carried on my back. That I can be very comfortable without much of modern technology. It is a wonderful feeling to know where my physical limits are, to know I can hike all day, to find myself in some beautiful place. Many of the skills I have learned in the woods also serve me in town; learning to take time to really look at the world around me, learning to appreciate and listen to my body, learning to get up as much as I can. I like to think that women have an attitude of kinship with nature, rather than the prevalent patriarchal attitude of conquering and controlling nature.

TIPS FOR OUTDOORS

In the years past we spoke of wilderness survival as the ability of people to survive the wilderness. Now we speak of wilderness survival as the land's capability of surviving people.

What can we all do to be sure the wilderness will survive our use? Here are a few suggestions:

Avoid crowded dates and places
Take a litterbag to carry out all refuse
Buy only gear in subdued forest colors
Stay on the main trail even if wet or snow-covered
Seek ridgetop or timbered campsites
Never cut standing trees
Make camp 100 ft. from shore areas
Use lightweight, soft shoes. Avoid trampling vegetation
A clean campsite without tempting or strange odors will best insure a night's sleep untroubled by bear visits.

**Taken from:** BACKPACKING
Forest Service
USDA

**TRAILS**

**BITTERROOT NAT'L FOREST**

Como Lake Loop Trail
15 miles S. Hamilton Mt.
Trail route offers fishing, swimming, camping and scenic mountain viewing. N. shore restricted to hiking only, otherwise suitable for hiking, horseback, cross-country skiing, and snowshoes.

**FLATHEAD NAT'L FOREST**

Griffin Creek Trail #287
32 miles W. Kalispell Mt.
Trail closely follows Griffin Creek; cross-country skiing is popular along this trail during the winter, also suitable for hiking and horseback.

**GALLATIN NAT'L FOREST**

Palisade Falls Trail
16 miles S.E. Bozeman Mt.
Trail suitable for use of blind with aid of sighted companion; interpretive exhibits in Braille and English. Features a 98' waterfall. Hiking only.

Bridger Mountain Trail
3½ miles N.E. Bozeman Mt.
Wide variety of habitat types; numerous campsites make side-trips possible; outstanding scenic views. Suitable for hiking and horseback.

**HELENA NAT'L FOREST**

Hanging Valley Trail #247
and Vigilante Trail #248
28 miles E. Helena Mt.
Trail winds through variety of geographic features. Trail

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"**WOMEN AND NATURE**
the roaring inside her"
by
**Susan Griffin**

The following excerpt is from the Prologue of Ms. Griffin's book:

"He says that woman speaks with nature. That she hears voices from under the earth. That wind blows in her ears and trees whisper to her. That the dead sing through her mouth and the cries of infants are clear to her. But for him this dialogue is over. He says he is not part of this world, that he was set upon this world as a stranger. He sets himself apart from women and nature. . . . We are the bird's eggs. Bird's eggs, flowers, butterflies, rabbits, cows, sheep; we are caterpillars; we are leaves of ivy and sprigs of wallflower. We are women. We rise from the wave. We are gazelle and doe, elephant and whale, lilies and roses and peach, we are air, we are flame, we are oyster and pearl, we are girls. We are women and nature. And he says he cannot hear us speak.

But we hear."

"Women and Nature
The Roaring inside Her"
**Susan Griffin**
Harper and Row Publishers
New York
Copyright 1978
WILDERNESS;
WHAT'S IN IT FOR WOMEN

Lost in the woods, the Wilderness Ranger criticized herself for neglecting to use her map and compass. She climbed to the top of the highest ridge, pulling her pack up behind her. Finally getting her bearings, she felt the familiar feeling of confidence surge through her. She smiled to herself as she surveyed the beautiful surroundings.

It seems to be fundamental for women to be able to rely on themselves. Total self-sufficiency produces an attitude of confidence and independence that is unmatched. Experiencing the outdoors on it's own terms can provoke such feelings. The knowledge that one can escape from society for awhile and return refreshed and proud of the ability to survive would necessarily elicit feelings of freedom and accomplishment.

Backpacking in the wilderness is one way to return to life's basics. On top of a mountain, or in a valley, there is but one person to rely on. Only one person is responsible for your well being and survival. You. Everything and nothing is within your control. We are one with the earth, it is not a separate entity. Time spent in the wilderness only serves to increase awareness of this concept.

The skills used in backpacking are survival skills. The ability to survive alone, with no house, no supermarket, not even a street sign, is a satisfying prospect. Satisfying and terrifying at the same time. Yet, as the survival skills are learned and firmly committed to memory, the world becomes less foreboding and more enticing. To know your limitations, your capabilities, to know yourself; this is the foundation of all learning.

The ability to navigate by use of a compass is critical. The knowledge of edible wild plants, of building fires and shelters to withstand any and all of nature's furies is imperative. These skills are the key to life at it's most basic.

As awareness of the outdoors increases, so does your closeness and involvement with wilderness issues. Political consciousness may be raised giving invaluable experience, knowledge, and involvement with the government, state and local.

There is much to be gained from an involvement with the world around us. Much more than just a sound mind and fit body. Though, that in itself isn't such a bad deal.

BACKPACK CHECK LIST

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<td><strong>CAMP STOVE</strong></td>
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<td><strong>FIRST AID KIT:</strong></td>
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<td>roll 3&quot; gauze</td>
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<td>½ oz. tube bacitracin</td>
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<td>6 headache tablets</td>
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HERBS
by
G. Caroline Brand

What is an herb? This is difficult to define because it can be a plant which dies down at the end of summer; it might also be a perennial; perhaps a shrub or a tree; or, it can also be one of the weeds that you feel spoils the appearance of your lawn, like dandelions or plantain.

The earliest written record of the medicinal uses of herbs can be found in the Nei Ching, the Classic of Internal Medicine, attributed to Huang Ti, the Yellow Emperor. He ascended the throne of China in the year 2698 B.C.

In early days of the Christian church, knowledge of herbs was considered pagen, hence, many herbal manuscripts were destroyed by war-like leaders because of the mystical rites associated with their use. During the late middle ages, monks and nuns cultivated herbs in what were called physic gardens and kept careful notes which they passed on, to other cloisters. The members of their flock knew these gardens and would ask the priests for the right herb for their health problem.

Over the ages, as people travelled from one part of the world to another, they carefully carried seeds of plants known to correct health problems and would exchange their seeds for some native to their new location. Because this exchange has been going on so long, you can depend on an herbal remedy in any country. However, because of the difference in soil of two separate countries, you may not achieve the same results from the one herb found growing in both countries.

Two hundred years ago, the housewife kept an herb garden outside her kitchen door and collected what she called pot-herbs for the family meal. Today, we buy our pot-herbs at the supermarket and call them vegetables.

You have many things in your pantry, to solve health problems; Blackberry Brandy (2 or 3 tablespoons) for loose bowels or diarrhea; it has a very astringent action and is a very old remedy. Asparagus, cucumber or watermelon cause a better flow of urine. Make a point of eating that sprig of parsley that restaurants use as a garnish - it's good for the heart.

Boil 3 carrots in a pint of water - eat the carrots and drink all the juice to help the eyes. You can make a tea from the herb Eyebright Euphrasia officinalis, save a little to strain through a filter so you can use it as an eyewash. "If more people knew about Eyebright, it would put oculists out of business." Gerard.

REVIEW

WOMEN IN THE WILDERNESS is an excellent publication about women and the wilderness. It is a newsletter that contains a lot of information, containing an extensive list of camping, canoeing, mountaineering, hiking, and backpacking trips for women, men and children.

This newsletter also lists organizations that are headed by women, and does a profile of these women.

Your ideas for future trips are welcome, and for a small fee, your organization and events will be included in their listings.

Information is offered on different aspects of women and wilderness, including fire-fighting and rock-climbing.

The publication offices are located in:
San Francisco Ecology Ctx
13 Columbus Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94111

WILDERNESS AND CIVILIZATION
The Wilderness Institute is sponsoring a special course offering "Wilderness and Civilization", Fall Quarter, 1979.

The program focuses on understanding wildland in itself and in relationship to contemporary American Society.

Students are cautioned that the program is designed to be academically and physically demanding.

For more information contact:
Wilderness Institute
School of Forestry
University of Montana
Missoula, MT 59812
(1-406-243-5361)

GOINGS ON

HEADWATERS ALLIANCE presents
Bonnie Raitt at the U of M campus in September

BROWN BAGS AND WORKSHOPS
will be announced soon for the fall. Check with the Women's Resource Center for information.

ROCKY MOUNTAINER
upcoming trips

AUG 11-12 Family overnighter. For details call:
Jim Lynk 721-4892

AUG 11 Moderate to difficult day-hike to Lappi Lake in Bitterrots. For details call:
C. Hanna 549-0463

AUG 18-19 Car camping and hiking near Libby. For details call:
A. Easterling 728-5145

AUG 26 Start Mountain day-hike. "Eat your way up the mountain with Kim Williams", For details call: 543-8598
#247 leads to overlook of limestone cliffs. Hiking, horseback, cross-country skiing and snow-shoe.

IDAHO PANHANDLE NAT'L FOREST

Hanna Flat Trail
80 miles N.E. Spokane WA.
Trail loops through a grove of western redcedars; interpretive exhibits describe vegetation. Trail is available for handicapped with limited assistance. Hiking only.

LOLO NAT'L FOREST

Blue Mountain Nature Trail
15 miles S.W. Missoula, MT.
Trail’s vista point provides view of Missoula area. Hiking only.

Rattlesnake
Missoula area
Trail follows Rattlesnake Creek; eventually connects with Bob Marshall Wilderness.

NEZPERCE NAT'L FOREST

Heaven’s Gate Scenic Trail
15 miles W. Riggins, ID.
On a clear day, one views four states from the 8,400’ overlook. Hiking only.

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University Center
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