



PREPARE FOR THE WILDERNESS

How to come prepared for the Field Research Course

Unless you are an experienced backpacker, the thought of living in the wilderness for over a week can be a little daunting. Rest assured that our Field Educators have a great deal of experience leading wilderness expeditions and will be able to help you live happily and comfortably in the backcountry. The following sections are designed to help you prepare for this experience and arrive at Yosemite Institute with all that you need for the trip.

Equipment

Generally, people are most comfortable with their own clothing and equipment. However, we appreciate that backpacking gear can be expensive. Therefore, Yosemite Institute has the following gear that you can borrow: backpacks, long underwear, warm fleeces, and some raingear. Please let us know ahead of time what your needs are and we will try to find gear that fits you.

When you arrive at Yosemite Institute to prepare for our backpacking trip, you will want to have two bags. One is your backpack and the other is a duffel with a change of clothes for when you come back! In the duffel you'll also want shampoo, deodorant, PJs, a pillow, etc. You will appreciate these items after two weeks of backpacking. Your duffel will be stored in a safe place for the duration of the expedition.

In addition to the equipment checklist (at the end of this document), we believe it is important to provide some more information on choosing the proper gear. Packing too light could leave you cold and miserable, while carrying too much will be a serious burden. Safety and preparedness, for all our participants, is our primary concern. The following descriptions and lists will provide critical information and insight about gear and clothing that you will need for your adventure. If you need further help, your instructors have many years of experience using backpacking equipment, ask them questions!

How to Shop For Equipment

Selecting appropriate gear is a process that can be overwhelming and expensive. Check your current collection of clothing and gear, and only buy or rent what you really need. If possible, borrow from friends or relatives. Keep in mind that you will be in the rugged backcountry and therefore function is far more important than fashion!

Buying and Renting Gear

Many participants will come to Yosemite Institute with a combination of purchased, borrowed, and rented gear. You need not buy the most expensive gear to get equipment and clothes that meet your needs. Shop around, ask friends, and find the best deals. Some stores including REI actually sell used gear that is in good condition. Here are some suggestions on where to get outfitted for your trip.

One retail chain with a comprehensive selection is Recreational Equipment Inc. (REI), with outlets throughout the country. REI also rents high quality backpacking gear at reasonable rates. Call for a catalog and location of their nearest store: (800) 426-4840.

In the Bay Area, Marmot Mountain Works is an excellent source of equipment and information and they have stores in Berkeley (510) 849-0735.

We suggest that you rely on the expertise of knowledgeable salespeople to make your gear selections, rather than just purchasing items from a mail-order catalog. There is no substitute for actually trying on boots, gear, and clothing!

Sleeping Bag

Each participant must bring their own sleeping bag. A mummy style bag with drawstring hood rated 20 degrees or lower is ideal. We prefer bags with synthetic fill (Polarguard, Primaloft, etc.) because, unlike Down and Flannel, they insulate even when wet. If you already own a Down bag, be aware that extra care is required to keep it dry.

Be sure your sleeping bag can be compressed into its own small stuff sack. A stuff sack with sewn-on compression straps is a worthwhile but expensive option.

A bulky, flannel "My Little Pony" bag is perfectly acceptable for the backyard slumber party, but is not appropriate for the backpacking portion of this trip.

Backpack

Your backpack must have sufficient space to carry your clothing, some group gear and food. We recommend you choose a pack with a minimum of 5,000 cubic inches. Your pack must have well-padded shoulder straps and a thick padded waist belt.

The differences between external and internal frame packs are not nearly as important as solid construction and good fit. Try it on! Load it up with 45 pounds! Walk around!

Sleeping Pad

These are thin, lightweight mattresses that insulate you from the cold ground. We provide one for each student on the trip.

Staying warm and dry

In general, Sierra summers are dry. Temperatures can reach the mid 80s during the day, and fall to the 30s and 40s at night. Freak snowstorms and afternoon thunderstorms are always possible.

Warm weather is easy -- just wear shorts and a T-shirt. It is the nighttime and wet days that require a good layering system. Layering involves wearing a few layers of clothing that can be taken on or off as conditions change throughout the day.

Base layer

The best base layer to wear next to your skin is light or mid-weight synthetic long underwear; this is a requirement! You will wear this constantly, so pick a fun color!

Insulating layers

As your primary insulating layer, we suggest a thick fleece jacket or wool sweater. An additional lightweight fleece, wool, or down top or vest is optional. Finally a warm hat is essential for cold nights!

A note on 'Down' jackets: Down layers are very compressible, lightweight, and wonderfully warm, but are expensive and useless when wet! If you already own Down, be sure to have an excellent waterproof layer to protect it, both when you wear it and when it's in your pack.

Waterproof layer

Each participant must bring a waterPROOF layer for the upper body. Gore-Tex is a breathable, waterproof material used in most expensive rain gear. A mid-weight Gore-Tex "shell" is ideal (Not a thick insulated jacket). A less expensive nylon shell will work but be sure to buy one that is seam-sealed and fully waterproofed (ie. "coated nylon"). Rain ponchos are your cheapest option, however they tend to shred apart quickly. If you must bring a poncho, invest in the best-coated nylon model available, with metal snaps and sewn seams. Plastic rain gear is also an option, but can break down very fast.

Taking care of your feet

Boots

Your feet will thank you if you bring a good pair of hiking boots. It may be the most important piece of equipment you wear!

It is absolutely critical that you wear a pair of comfortable hiking shoes. It is not necessary to purchase a pair of expensive, heavy, all-leather hiking boots! If you already own a pair of all-leather boots that are broken-in to your feet and that you have used before then that is your best bet. Otherwise, there are a number of good lightweight but supportive boots that are more comfortable and more affordable than the big heavy leather boots out there. Get professional help but don't let them convince you to buy something too expensive or uncomfortable.

The perfect boot is lightweight, has a leather or nylon/leather exterior, good padding, a good lug sole and is well broken in.

It is very difficult to fully waterproof boots (water has a way of getting in) but it is helpful if you treat your boots with commercial water repellent to minimize water absorption.

Finally, a brand new boot (even well-fitted) can cause serious blisters and ruin your trip. Please, if you buy new boots, make certain they are broken-in before you arrive... Start wearing them at least a month before you arrive.

Socks

Some hikers prefer a single thick synthetic/wool blend sock while other use a two-layer system (thin liner with thick outer sock). We strongly recommend that you take some training hikes to both break in your boots, and experiment with different sock options.

Do not bring cotton hiking socks.

A few words about feminine hygiene

Menstruation is a concern for many young women when they go backpacking. A change or increase in physical activity can greatly alter your menstrual cycle. Having extra products ensures that you will be covered if this occurs. The list below contains recommended items to bring so you are adequately prepared should you have your period while on your trip. We recommend panty liners as a back up for tampons even if you typically wear only tampons. Doubling your protection reduces the chances of spotting. Even if you do not expect to get your period, we recommend you bring a small amount of supplies in case you fall into the cycle of other participants.

- Twice the number of supplies you normally use during your period
- 3 – 4 large Zip-Lock® -type plastic bags
- A travel pack of feminine wipes or baby wipes
- Yeast infection treatment (Monistat) if you are prone to infections

At Yosemite National Institutes, we practice a Leave-No-Trace® camping technique. Therefore, we pack out all that we pack in. The plastic baggies work well for keeping fresh supplies clean and dry and will be used for storage of used products, as well. Because of the short duration of your backpack trip, there will be no way of disposing of these items until we get out of the backcountry. In our experience, used products stored in this manner have not been known to attract animals; burying them does. Other options are some plastic devices called the keeper and mooncup. Information on these devices can be found at: <http://www.mooncupsandkeepers.com/index.html>.

There are several soaps on the market that do not require the use of water. The use of this type of soap for your hands after pad or tampon changes is a convenient way to clean up. A travel pack of feminine wipes or baby wipes will help you to stay clean and fresh, as well.

Should you bleed through your clothing, there are several things that you can do. If you know that you are going to have your period while on course, most instructors are not adverse to you bringing more than the recommended amount of underwear from the clothing list. Also, if you catch the spotting soon enough, rinsing the garment out with water, away from streams and creeks for contamination factors etc., is very effective at removing stains.

Lastly, know that if you need help, instructors have been trained and are very experienced in helping you deal with your period in the backcountry. There is somebody menstruating on every trip with females attending. Your instructors are approachable and know that being discreet is a priority.

What to bring

For this expedition, Yosemite Institute will provide sleeping pads, food, water purifiers, tents, ground tarps, bear canisters, stoves, fuel, pots, group cooking utensils, toilet paper, biodegradable soap, maps and compasses, wilderness permits, and first aid equipment and radios.

Here is a list of what you need to bring. Read the notes above for details of these items:

Required Clothing:

- Hiking boots (must be well broken-in)
- Waterproof and hooded rain jacket and rain pants
- 1-set long underwear top and bottom (NOT cotton)
- Fleece jacket or thick wool sweater
- Fleece pants or quick dry warm pants
- 1 - 2 pair lightweight shorts, quick drying, used for wading as well, flat or seamless waist preferred (less likely to create blisters)
- 1 pair lightweight pants, flat or seamless waist preferred (loose fitting, quick drying pants-nylon or 50/50 or 60/40 polyester/cotton blend No Jeans)
- 3-4 pair of thick hiking socks
- Camp shoes, one pair (Sandals or old sneakers)
- Sports Bra or supportive Bra
- Sun hat (baseball caps are O.K., but hats with a full brim offer better protection)
- 1-2 T-shirts for hiking (non-cotton only)
- 1 long sleeved shirt (non-cotton)
- 2-3 pair underwear
- 2 bandannas/handkerchiefs
- Wool or fleece hat (beanie)
- Gloves or mittens (lightweight and warm, not bulky ski gloves)

Required Personal Equipment:

- Backpack (See notes above about choosing a backpack).
- Any Personal Medication (2 sets of each) and any ankle or knee brace that you currently use
- Trekking poles or old ski poles if you are prone to ankle/or knee injury
- Sleeping bag (rated 20 degree or lower, as light as possible) with stuff sack
- 1 large nylon stuff sack for clothing
- 3 large trash compactor bags, no cheap garbage bags because they rip (for lining and waterproofing your backpack, sleeping bag, and clothing stuff sack)
- 2 water bottles (1 quart each, wide mouth, leak-proof screw top, Nalgene® type work well. Gatorade bottles with screw tops are cheap, light and will work for this trip.)
- 1 bowl (light weight, plastic, durable)
- 1 spoon

Required Personal Equipment (cont.)

- 1 Mug (Small plastic thermal mugs work great)
- 1 travel size pack of baby wipes
- Sun-screen (SPF 15 minimum)
- Mosquito repellent (consider citronella or non-DEET products)
- Lip balm with sunscreen
- Dark sunglasses
- Moleskin, pre-cut is best (for blister prevention)
- Toiletries (toothbrush, toothpaste)
- Feminine hygiene products
- Headlamp or small flashlight with extra batteries
- Journal and writing utensils
- Bath towel/washcloth
- 4-5 zip-lock bags of varying sizes
- 2-3 hair ties
- 1 small brush or comb (if needed)

Optional Items:

- Camera and film
- Binoculars
- Field guides or paperback books
- Camp towel (small and quick-drying)
- Gaiters

What not to bring

Please, for bear safety and weight concerns do not bring the following items for the backpacking expedition: deodorant, soap, shampoo, conditioner, books, magazines, first aid kit, mouthwash, mirrors, tissues, toilet paper, snacks, hair products, cosmetics, lotions, money, games, toys, stuffed zebras or other animals, jewelry, cell phones, radios, CD players, electronics, candy, and pillows. For safety, your instructors will be carrying two radios with extra batteries and an extensive first aid kit with extra supplies. Cell phones are not a dependable emergency device for the locations we will travel to in Yosemite National Park.