

Those First Hikes!

With over 10 years as a Scoutmaster and hike leader and over 1,000 backpacking miles, I feel I have discovered the obvious and that is: *Hiking should be planned so that the hiker will want to do it again.* For most new scouts, hiking is a new experience. The first hike they go on can make a big difference in their long term interest. And any scout who eventually completes that long term backpack will have something to remember for the rest of his life. So planning those first hikes is very important.

Mileage

Five to seven miles during the weekend is a good rule of thumb for new scouts on moderate terrain. Remember, they are carrying packs for probably the first time. Even if these scouts have been with a Webelos leader who was into hiking, the trained hike leader should not assume that these new scouts are ready for any kind of challenging hike.

Awards

Earning a patch on the first hike can be rewarding. A great set of award patches to start with is the Hiking Activity Awards, a set of four hiking awards. This set of four awards combines recognition with advancement. Another award that can be earned for any 5 miles weekend hike is the Training Hike Award which can be earned multiple times. A reference for the four hiking awards is:

http://www.bsa-ciec.org/orgheaders/1618/CIEC_HA_Awards.htm#hikactiv

Physical Ability

A rule of thumb is that with the proper training, scouts are ready for the week-long 50 hike after they have been in the troop for two to three years or are at least 12½ years old. They are beginning to develop the physical strength about that time. Of course this varies based upon hiking experience, attitude, and physical maturity.

Two Hikes in One

If you are lucky enough to have the time, enthusiasm and set of maps, planning one activity with two hikes is ideal. The ideal scenario is to start on a Friday night with a full moon and four adult leaders. Hike for about 2½ to 3 miles into a campsite. All new scouts, scouts who do not want to continue and two adults can stay and enjoy the next day without hiking. The more experienced hikers can continue to the next campsite a few miles further. These more experienced hikers can hike as much as they want the second day with the objective to return to the first campsite to join the other scouts. A good planning distance for the experienced hikers is 15 or more miles over the weekend. This will allow those scouts to log a weekend backpack for the Backpacking merit badge. With all scouts camping together on the last night, experiences can be shared and many younger scouts will look forward to trying a longer weekend hike in the future. Everyone will hike out together the next morning.

Bottom line, if you are into hiking, plan hikes so that you keep the boys coming back. Do not plan the hikes around your desires.