

## **Independent backpacking**

### **Section 1: Planning**

#### Learning Goal:

My own personal project was one I had complete control over. Having the freedom to pursue a goal without a teacher walking me through it was more than exciting. I like to think that I have always been big on the outdoors. I grew up camping and road tripping to various national parks, which is part of what inspired my project. I chose to go backpacking unaccompanied by an adult. Camping and the outdoors. Though I have been car camping, tent camping and even backpacking before, I had never been without an adult. I first started backpacking at around ten years old and have been hooked on it ever since. I would even participate in camping skills competitions against other girls my age. I have always had a passion for the outdoors and hope to pursue a career in the outdoor industry. It is because of this that I chose to have my learning goal to be how to be independent and safe on the trail.

#### Product Goal:

Ultimately, I would like to have gone out in the wilderness for three or more days by myself. However, as a fifteen-year-old female, being alone is not the best way to ensure safety, which is of the utmost importance on the trail. After pondering how to be independent but still safe, I comprised with myself to take another person around my age. This would make the trip safer seeing as the buddy system would be used and we would still have a sense of independence on the trail. In an ideal situation we would go backpacking for two-three nights without the use of technology and avoiding emergency situations.

#### Success Criteria:

Criteria	Reasoning	Example of success	Example of approaching success
Go backing for 2-3 nights	To be able to continuously be independent on the trail for several nights to get a feel for the independence and remaining safe.	The trip goes for two to three nights at different camping spots each night.	The trip does not last two to three nights or remains at the same site for more than one night.
Follow the Seven leave no trace principals (see below)	Keeping the environment around us as natural as possible without disrupting the wildlife demonstrates the ability to coexist peacefully. Being able to do so is an excellent measure of self-management.	The leave no principals are followed and the environment is left the same as before we went backpacking.	The environment is left in a worse state than before we were there.
Being prepared	If one is not prepared in the event of an emergency it is a clear sign they should not be going backpacking. Being prepared is also a part of self-management.	Throughout the trip we can deal with any situation, no matter what happens.	A situation occurs where we are not prepared and have to turn back early.
Remaining safe	Our safety is of the utmost importance. If we were to go backpacking without being able to be safe it would be very unwise.	In a perfect world if neither of us came back with a scratch it would be a measure of success, however, that would irresponsible to not plan for the worst case. If someone were to be injured on the trip and the injury was properly cared for using first aid.	One of us had a medical situation which we were unable to treat on the trail and we would turn around.

It is important to follow the seven-leave no trace principals to create a minimum amount of harm to the environment. The seven leave no trace principles are meant to be followed by hikers to keep the environment as natural as possible for the next people. The leave no trace principles vary but they all follow along the lines of: Plan ahead and prepare, travel and camp on durable surfaces, dispose of waste properly, leave what you find, minimize campfire impacts (be careful with fire), respect wildlife, be considerate of other visitors.

Plan for achieving Goal:

The backpacking season varies depending on altitude and trail conditions but it typically ranges from mid-May to late August. I knew that I would have to get an early start on my project if I wanted to

have a safe and enjoyable trip. I made sure that I had all the appropriate gear and made note of what I did not have. I was going to spend most of my summer camping to begin with so I would be well adjusted to the outdoors. The timeline of planning and completing the trip was to be finished ideally by late August or early September.

<b>Originally planned trip July 21<sup>st</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup></b>				
<u>Plan-B trip October 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup></u>				
Date	Task	To do	Relevancy to final product	Completion status
<b>Before July 1<sup>st</sup></b> <u>Before September 30<sup>th</sup></u>	Plan trip	Pick a route, research water sources, make sure the appropriate gear needed is acquired, learn of the risks of the trail	Ensuring my friend and I will have all the necessary tools to stay safe whilst remaining independent on the trail	<b>Done 6/30/21</b> <u>Recompleted 8/28/21</u>
Prior to trip	Check to make sure all gear is working	Check the water filter, backpacking stove, headlamps, to ensure they are in working condition and we know how to use them.	If one of these items were to malfunction on the trail it would lead to very unsuccessful trip, making it a vital step in planning.	<b>Done 7/13/21</b> <u>Recompleted 10/4/21</u>
Week before trip	Double check the weather	Check the weather from several different sources to see if there any complications to the trip	If the weather is exceptionally poor the trip would be unsafe. It would also inform us on what gear is best to pack	<b>Done 7/15/21</b> <u>Recompleted 10/4/21</u>
Following the trip	Reflect	State what was done well and could have used improvement.	A project without reflect is not a way to measure self-growth.	<u>Completed 10/12/21</u>

## Section 2: Applying Skills

Learning Goal Approaches to Learning Skills:

My learning goal is to learn how to be independent and safe on the trail. Out of all the approaches to learning I believe that research ties into my learning goal the most. Though I have prior experience

with backpacking and the outdoors I have always had an adult with me that I could turn to in an emergency situation. With that I was not prepared to handle an emergency, so I had to research how to be safe and independent on the trail. Furthermore, I had to consult with professionals at Mountain Chalet as well as REI to learn about gear, trails, and other technicalities. For example, I had to get professionally fitted with a backpacking backpack that would work best for me which I did at REI with the help of their staff. These tie in to communication as well as social. Even when the trip had to be rescheduled I was able to openly communicate with my friend and her parents that I was not able to do the trip and discuss future options that could potentially include backpacking. My learning goal made me approach learning three separate ways which has helped me grow as a student and as a person.

#### Product Goal Approaches to Learning Skills:

I do not think I could justify going out into the backcountry with another person my age and backpacking in the wilderness if I did not have self-management. Although I have self-management and I am able to meet deadlines and do well in school that does not ensure that I would be successful on the trail. I had to apply myself to backpacking and make sure I was prepared; I knew where we were going and what needed to be done. I had to step up and take a role I have not played before which is scary, but it has taught me more about myself and how to be independent than any class ever could. For example, I had to make sure there would be enough water filtered for dinner and breakfast because you always get cold hands filtering water in the morning. I had to make sure all of the food items and those with scents were put in the bear bag and that the bear bag was properly hung. These are all ways I took charge and managed the trip through self-management.

### **Section 3: Reflecting**

#### Product:

At first my project seemed like a failure. Originally, we had planned to go backpacking July 21<sup>st</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> On Colorado Trail Segment 11. The weather was going to be good and everything was all in check.

As always, the best laid plans do not always work out. I had spent three nights backpacking the Barr Trail on Pikes peak the week prior to the trip. What I initially thought would be good practice resulted in me being unable to go backpacking for my personal project. Unfortunately, I had carried too much weight for the rate in which we were hiking down and suffered a knee injury. I had thought about changing my project topic seeing as it was still summer and I had plenty of time though, nothing sparked my interest as much as backpacking without an adult did.

The idea of rescheduling the trip was very popular however we both do competitive swim and had important meets coming in the next weeks following the 23<sup>rd</sup> making it difficult to find time. After that school started, in which we both participate in Cross Country where we have meets on the weekends making little time. Eventually we found a date that would work for both of us, October 9th, and 10<sup>th</sup>. As mention before the typical backpacking seasons ends in late august making this date less than desirable. The original trail segment we had chosen was at too high an elevation to make backpacking in October safe. After talking to a backpacking consultant from Mountain Chalet I learned about trails near the town of Palmer Lake.

Palmer Lake is about a 30-minute drive from central Colorado Springs and has an elevation of 7,297 ft. Because of the comparatively low elevation the weather would not be entirely miserable, providing a brisk October weekend to allow such a trip. Begrudgingly I had accepted that the trip was only going to be one night seeing as we both could only fit a shorter trip in to our schedules. The trail we picked was Ice Caves Creek Trail, a short 4.4-mile loop in Pike National Forest. The trail takes you past several reservoirs all of which are reliable water sources which is always important to have when backpacking.

It is important to keep your packs light and carrying the least amount clothes is key. I had packed a light fleece to wear while hiking, a down coat, a rain coat because light sprinkling was predicted, a wool shirt, thermal pants, socks, a hat, and mittens, together these items weighed less than three pounds. All of these items were worn and very much used at night because the low for that night was twenty-eight degrees. In retrospect I would have ditched the rain coat since there was no rain but it is always better to be prepared.



Typically, one's pack should be no more than 20% of one's body weight. Seeing as I am 5ft and 110 pounds my pack should not exceed twenty-two pounds which does not allow me to carry all that much. One can tell if they are going to be with in reason for pack weight based on something known as base-weight. Base weight is the weight of your pack prior to putting perishables such as your food, water, and fuel into your pack. My base weight was around seventeen pounds which included, the weight of my pack, clothes, two-man tent, fifteen degree down sleeping bag, sleeping pad, water filter, cook ware and backpacking stove. In total with water and food my pack was around 23-24 pounds which is not terrible.



Since it is a shorter hike, I was not super concerned on how heavy my pack was so long as it was reasonable.

The trip itself was exceptionally smooth, it was a steady two-mile uphill climb to where we planned to camp for the night. We made sure to stay hydrated and to pack the right of food for proper nutrition. Proper food storage is particularly important, there are typically two ways to store food in the backcountry, the first being a bear safe canister. However, these typically range from \$75-\$150 and can be quite bulky. The other option is to hang your food in a knapsack with rope from a tree. All food items, scented items (chap stick, toothpaste etc.) and items used with food that may smell go into this bag. The bag is then tied to a rope over a tree branch and hoisted to a height where it is safe from bears. We used the bear bag to keep all of what a bear or other wild animals would find tasty.



I had packed a simple meal of dehydrated beans and tortillas to make some less than desirable burritos for dinner. I chose this because it so simple, all you need to do is heat water and add in your beans wait a bit and then its done. Another option which my friend used is the store-bought backpacking meals which are also quite simple and easy. For breakfast I had packed two packets of oat meal which are also incredibly simple making the amount of cooking being done on the trip next to none. Cooking in the backcountry could be considered not cooking at all. We used an MRS Pocket Rocket stove to heat enough water for the both of us. For me I used the extra pot to hydrate my beans and for my friend the water goes straight into the bag the food came with and that is all there is to it. The stove is attached to a fuel canister and the pot balances precariously on top.



The night of the trip was an early night, we went to bed around seven since there was not much to do after finishing dinner. Temperatures got below freezing with the low of twenty-eight degrees. Thankfully, both of our sleeping bags were warm enough, maybe not for comfort but for survival. I had

worn all my warm clothes to bed and was relatively good but needless to say October is not prime backpacking season.

After breakfast we broke down the camp, which was just our tent and taking down the bear bag which was now considerably lighter without the food. We did have to pack out what we pack in, and all our trash had taken the foods previous spot in the bear bag. The hike was brisk but pretty, we saw a beaver in one of the reservoirs. We got back to the trail head around 11 Sunday morning, feeling accomplished after our night in the backcountry.

#### Product Success Criteria:

Although my project at first seemed like it would be unsuccessful and it would not be able to take place, I had originally wanted to go backpacking for two to three nights to fully experience being independent in the backcountry. Unfortunately, due to timing and scheduling we were only able to backpacking for one night. Though it was shorted than I had hoped we remained safe. No emergency situations arose though if one were to have occurred we were properly prepared to handle those situations. We packed in what we packed out and even left the trail a little better than we found it by picking up another hiker's trash. All the Seven leave no trace principles were followed. We remained safe on the trail with no medical emergencies however, if one were to occurred we both carried first aid and are CPR & first aid certified. If a different safety issue were to have occurred we did carry bear spray to protect ourselves, though thankfully it was not used. Overall almost all of my success criterium were met except for the length of the trip which was unfortunately not met.

#### Impact of Product:

Though the product was not what I had originally hoped for I am more than content with how it ended up. To be a young woman, to be able to go out and have experiences like these and be independent teaches you so much. It is very much different going backpacking without an adult that I have always



used as a crutch in case an emergency were to happen. If something were to happen all that responsibility would fall on me, which is a huge concept to grasp. I feel I have learned to be independent and to trust myself more than I thought I could through this project. Although I admittedly packed too many snacks and might have been a bit over prepared the lessons I have learned have this project have had a positive impact on myself.

#### Product Feedback:



This is our tent set up from the trip. Our tent was on the top of hill on the flattest ground we could find. It is important to make sure your tent is not in a gully because in the case of rain your tent would be in all of the run off. As one can see there is very little in our tent just our sleeping bags and sleeping pads under that. One really should not have all that much stuff in a tent because the more the stuff, the greater the possibility of something that could attract animals to our tent. Our packs without the food were stored under the rainfly on the other side of the tent which is not shown.

After discussing the trip with both of our parents they both mentioned how we seemed nervous before the trip and came back very excited. This shows just how much we grew and how others could see it. I would agree with them I was very much nervous, despite having been backpacking before it is a tremendous change to be the adult rather than the kid. I think our excitement would have been larger if the trip had been longer and we hiked further than what we had done. But given the circumstances it was pretty cool to simply be able to pull the trip off.

Conclusion:

The idea of two teenage girls going outside and backpacking alone many would consider ridiculous. To myself the thought sounds foolish, the amount of independence needed to be able to do such a thing confidently and safely is incredible. Before going on the trip, I was nervous I went outside of my comfort zone. From pushing myself out of that zone I gained a sense of independence and confidence I did not know I could have. To have all the responsibilities of an adult at the age of fifteen is scary if something were to have gone wrong, I would have to handle the situation maturely and safely. Where as I would normally let that responsibility fall onto an adult. This project has showed me I am capable of more than I thought I could be.