



# CHAPTER

# 4



# Planning a Trek

*“Good planning means living the experience in advance.”*

—Sir Edmund Hillary (along with Tenzing Norgay, the first to reach the summit of Mount Everest), 1953



Planning is one of the great joys of an adventure. Anticipation builds when a group pores over maps and plans what to see and do in the out-of-doors. As you form a trip itinerary, you can imagine hiking a woodland trail, casting for catfish in a slow-moving river, or carving turns in fresh snow with cross-country skis. As you gather your gear you can almost see your tent pitched in a deep forest, your pack leaning against the summit marker of a high peak, your canoe paddle dipping into the waters of a quiet lake. As you repack provisions, you can look forward to tasty dishes cooked outdoors. Once everything is prepared, anticipation will turn to action, and you can enjoy every adventure to the fullest.

## Why Plan?

Adventures begin as daydreams. Transforming those dreams into reality requires thoughtful research and a written itinerary. Your goal is to make good estimates of what to expect and then to prepare well enough so that you are ready for the unexpected as well.

The more challenging the trek you consider, the more thorough your planning should be. Anticipating trail conditions, changes in elevation, distances to be traveled, expected weather conditions, the availability of water, and the locations of campsites will help your group plan an appropriate itinerary.

The most useful trek-planning tools may well be a notebook and a sharp pencil. Putting ideas on paper forces you to think them through. Checklists increase the likelihood you won't forget anything. After a trek, you can refer back to your notes to see which aspects of planning worked well and what can be improved the next time around.



**Planning a trek, whether to a favorite campsite close to home or clear across the continent, is a matter of looking ahead, making realistic predictions of situations that might be encountered, and then preparing to meet them.**

## Planning Group Adventures

The chapter titled “Organizing for Adventures” discusses some of the ways that people come together to form groups and then to select outdoor activities. Treks should be satisfying for the most experienced group members, yet not so difficult that some in the group are pitted against situations far exceeding their abilities. In a group composed of people with varying levels of skill, part of the challenge for more capable members can be to help those with less experience succeed, ensuring that the entire group reaches its goals.

## Planning Well

Backcountry lore is filled with cautionary examples of people going into the woods poorly equipped, lacking outdoor knowledge and skills, or unaware of potential dangers. The result of poor planning is often a dismal experience that leads to entertaining stories after it is over—a night in a wet sleeping bag, a day with no food, a long hike home with blisters and sunburn. Ill-prepared individuals have, in fact, sometimes managed to endure storms, deal with injuries, and become found after having gotten themselves quite lost. Unfortunately, there also are many cases of people whose lack of planning led to disaster.

### ***Plan Ahead and Prepare—The First Principle of Leave No Trace***

Trek planning can help you protect the environment. Research the area where you will travel and you’ll know if group size is limited, whether campfires are allowed, and where you can pitch your tents. Be realistic as you lay out your itinerary, and you can ensure that everyone will reach appropriate campsites at a reasonable hour each day. You also can prepare for the proper disposal of waste and ways to travel and camp without disturbing others.

For more on planning ways to enjoy the outdoors responsibly, see the “Leaving No Trace” section of this book.



## Where to Go

America is blessed with terrific places for adventures. Wherever you live, you aren't far from lands that invite exploration and outdoor activities. Parks, forests, seashores, rivers, lakes, wetlands, deserts, and mountains abound. You can find small areas just right for a day hike, and great regions of forests, mountains, deserts, and plains that invite treks of days, weeks, and even months.

Many of America's recreational areas are on public lands administered by land management agencies. Depending on the popularity and condition of a particular area, agencies might regulate outdoor recreation with permits, reservation systems, and other management tools. Regulations exist for a reason, usually to enhance safety, minimize human impact, protect the resource, and ensure that future generations can enjoy visiting the areas, too. In addition to information about regulations, agencies can be valuable sources of information about the terrain, prevailing weather, and the current conditions of trails, rivers, snowfields, and other natural features.

The agencies administering the greatest expanses of public lands are those of the federal government. They include the Bureau of Land Management, the USDA Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

**Note:** Abbreviations at right are for federal lands shown on this map. In many places, exact trail locations have not yet been determined. Portions of the trails indicated on this map may not be accessible for public use. Please check with individual trail clubs and managing offices for the latest available trail locations.

### National Park System

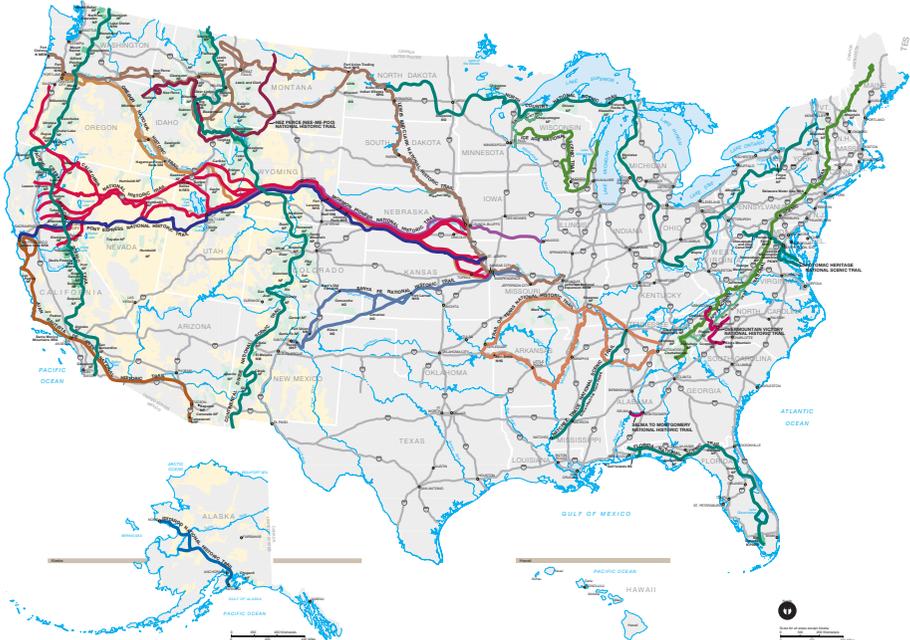
	<b>MEM</b> Memorial	<b>NP</b> National Park
	<b>NB</b> National Battlefield	<b>N PRES</b> National Preserve
	<b>NHP</b> National Historical Park	<b>NRA</b> National Recreation Area
	<b>NHS</b> National Historic Site	<b>NRR</b> National Recreation River
	<b>NL</b> National Lakeshore	<b>N RES</b> National Reserve
	<b>NM</b> National Monument	<b>NS</b> National Seashore
	<b>N MEM</b> National Memorial	<b>NSR</b> National Scenic Riverway
	<b>NMP</b> National Military Park	<b>PKWY</b> Parkway

### National Forest System

	<b>NF</b> National Forest
	<b>NG</b> National Grassland

### Bureau of Land Management


---



The American landscape features a rich variety of places for trek adventures. See the Fieldbook Web site for a larger version of this map. 



### USDA Forest Service

Gifford Pinchot, the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service, stated the guiding principle of the agency as “the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run.” The mission of the USDA Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. One of the many public interests served by the Forest Service is providing opportunities for recreation in open spaces and natural environments. The Forest Service manages 191 million acres of America’s forests and rangelands, including national forests, experimental forests and ranges, grasslands, and land utilization projects.

Portions of some national forests are set aside as wilderness areas to preserve the unspoiled quality of the environment. The forests also are home to many of America’s national trails, national wild and scenic rivers, and national recreation areas.



### National Park Service

The National Park Service, established in 1916, is directed by Congress “to promote and regulate the use of the . . . national parks, monuments, and reservations, . . . to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein . . . by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” In addition to protecting natural resources, the National Park Service strives to provide the public with opportunities for camping, wilderness exploration, hiking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, watercraft adventures, and the study of nature and American history.

The National Park Service administers approximately 84 million acres of our natural, historical, and cultural heritage with units in almost every state in the Union and in Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Among Park Service areas are Yellowstone (America’s oldest national park), Alaska’s Wrangell-Saint Elias National Park and Preserve (at more than 13 million acres, the largest park), and the Thaddeus Kosciuszko National Memorial in Pennsylvania (the smallest facility with just .02 acres).



### Bureau of Land Management

The territories of the Bureau of Land Management contain rugged desert landscapes, evergreen forests, snowcapped mountains, and an abundance of wildlife. An agency within the U.S. Department of the Interior, the bureau administers 262 million acres of America’s public lands, located primarily in 12 western states. The bureau sustains the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. Its areas are managed under multiple-use principles that encourage outdoor recreation as well as fish and wildlife production, livestock grazing, timber harvesting, industrial development, and watershed protection.



## State, County, and City Agencies

Most states, counties, and cities have agencies dedicated to the management, preservation, and maintenance of the natural resources within their jurisdictions. Their names indicate the scope of their responsibilities—for example, departments of ecology, state park and forestry departments, county forestry commissions, fish and game management agencies, departments of natural resources, and offices of parks and recreation. Many have Web sites explaining their functions and recreational opportunities.

## BSA Local Council High-Adventure Bases

High-adventure bases operated by Boy Scouts of America local councils can drop you right into the middle of terrific action. Whitewater kayaking, extended backpacking, and sailing are just a few of the activities that groups can enjoy. (Links on the BSA Web site describe these and other high-adventure opportunities. See <http://www.scouting.org/boyscouts/directory/>.)



## BSA National High-Adventure Bases

For real excitement beyond your council, it's hard to beat the national high-adventure bases of the BSA. Designed for Venturers, older Boy Scouts, and Varsity Scouts, each base offers the training, equipment, and support needed to set out on wilderness treks that will challenge your skills, knowledge, and willpower.



## Philmont Scout Ranch

Wander the rugged high country of northern New Mexico on a backpacking trek, as a member of a conservation work crew, or by taking part in an advanced wilderness adventure. Philmont is a backpacker's paradise, covering more than 137,000 acres of mountains, forests, meadows, and streams.

Staffed camps offer program opportunities including rock climbing, black-powder rifle shooting, living history, horseback riding, archaeology, environmental awareness, and many others.





**Florida National High Adventure Sea Base**

Explore the clear waters of the Florida Keys and the Bahamas by watercraft. Snorkel and scuba dive among schools of brilliantly colored tropical fish. Investigate a primitive island, search for the wreckage of galleons, fish the Gulf Stream waters, practice windsurfing, and study the marine life of North America's only living coral reef.

**Northern Tier National High Adventure Program**

The Sioux and Chippewa once traveled this northern lake country. French-Canadian trappers followed, their canoes loaded with furs. Headquartered in the beautiful Superior-Quetico boundary waters of Minnesota, Ontario, and Manitoba, the Northern Tier offers wilderness canoeing expeditions and programs featuring fishing and winter camping.



## 4

## Planning How Long

Where you can go in the out-of-doors and what you can do will be strongly influenced by how much time you have for a trek. A group's weekend outing nearly always will be fairly close to home and involve a limited number of options. With several weeks to travel, the same group can greatly extend the range of its wanderings. The longer or more distant a trek will be, the more important the planning process becomes, both to cover all the details of the trek and to explore all the possibilities.

Include in your plans sufficient time to travel to and from the points at which your adventure will begin and end. If necessary, also include time to acclimatize to significant changes in elevation.

Good planning has been at the heart of many successful treks. The Lewis and Clark expedition, for example, set out in 1803 on a three-year journey of exploration that would take them across North America and back. As he prepared for the expedition, Meriwether Lewis tried to think of everything that 33 men would need for a trip of several years in uncharted terrain. His long list of items included 193 pounds of dried soup and three bushels of salt. The expedition eventually ran out of nearly all of



their supplies except for two items—gunpowder and the lead to make bullets. Lewis knew that as long as they could hunt, the men would be able to feed themselves. To that end, he had arranged to bring along three times the amount of gunpowder and lead that the expedition actually used.

## Planning How Far

The distance a group can cover depends on weather, terrain, physical conditioning, and the weight of the gear. Is the country rugged? In terms of time, a mile of flat trail is far different from a mile that gains a thousand feet in elevation. Paddling across a lake will take longer than guiding a watercraft down a fast-flowing river. Are group members lean and strong or a bit out of shape? As a group, do you walk with a fast, steady stride or at a leisurely pace with frequent pauses to examine vegetation, watch wildlife, and take photographs?



Plan the distances of your first treks conservatively. It is better to have too much time to reach a destination than too little. By not rushing, you might enjoy yourself more, be less apt to make mistakes, and have time for activities other than traveling and setting up camp.

For more on determining travel distances, see the chapter titled “Mountain Travel.”

Even the best-prepared group should allow extra time for unforeseen events. Give yourselves anywhere from a few hours’ to several days’ leeway in case headwinds kick up during trips by watercraft or bicycle, bad weather moves in, or the terrain is more rugged than you had expected. A layover day during a longer trek allows group members to rest and relax, enjoy side trips, or prepare a lavish meal.

## Planning Alternatives

Trek plans should include plenty of flexibility. Cover the basics, ensuring that you have the right people, gear, food, and a decent itinerary, but try not to set anything else in stone. That way you will be better able to adapt to changing circumstances in the field. It also is a good idea to devise an alternate itinerary in case your original plans are disrupted by unforeseen events.

## Planning What to Carry

The amount of food and equipment you will need is a crucial consideration in planning any trek adventure. Most groups find that taking five or six days of food is about the maximum weight they can reasonably carry and the maximum bulk that will fit in backpacks or in panniers on bicycles or pack animals. If your group requires cold-weather clothing or other extra gear, pack space will be even more limited. One solution for longer treks is to arrange to be resupplied along the way with additional provisions.

For more on equipment, see the chapter titled “Gearing Up.” For more on food, see the chapter titled “Outdoor Menus.” For more on resupplying a group, see the chapter titled “Backpacking.”

## Planning How to Get There

As you design a journey, don’t overlook the means by which your group will reach the starting point of the trek. Public transportation can be a possibility, though traveling by private motor vehicle is often more convenient. It might be possible for your group to be dropped off at one trailhead and picked up at another, allowing you to complete a route without backtracking. Find out where vehicles can be safely parked and whether parking permits are required. Land management agencies and local guidebooks often have that information.

## 4

## Writing a Trip Plan

When your group arrives at a consensus of what your itinerary and alternate plans will be, write them down. Include a description of your intended route, where you want to camp, and what time you will return. Leave copies with several responsible adults. A written itinerary lets support people know where you are going and when you intend to return, but only if you stick to it.

### Trip Plan

**Trip plan of** \_\_\_\_\_

#### Where

Destination \_\_\_\_\_

Route going \_\_\_\_\_

Route returning \_\_\_\_\_

#### When

Date and time of departure \_\_\_\_\_

Date and time of return \_\_\_\_\_

#### Who

Names of participants \_\_\_\_\_

#### Why

Purpose of the trip \_\_\_\_\_

#### What

Gear and other items to be taken:

Outdoor Essentials

Other clothing and gear \_\_\_\_\_

Permits required \_\_\_\_\_

Special equipment needs \_\_\_\_\_

Special clothing needs \_\_\_\_\_

#### How

List the principles of Leave No Trace that relate to your trip. For each one, write a sentence explaining what the patrol will do to follow that principle. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

HANDICRAFT

*"Our belief at the beginning of a doubtful undertaking is the one thing that assures the successful outcome of any venture."*

—William James (1842–1910), American psychologist and philosopher



## Being Prepared for Emergencies

Perhaps the most critical test of a group's level of preparation will occur if emergencies arise. Precious time needed for response to a crisis can be added by having on hand emergency contact information and an emergency action plan. This is true on a day hike, an overnight or longer unit camp, and all other activities, including high-adventure treks.

### Emergency Response Plan

An emergency response plan informs group members of an approach to be taken in case of injuries or illnesses. It is strongly recommended that the group members practice this plan before setting out. Along with your trip plan, copies of the emergency response plan should be provided to those persons in the frontcountry who can assist your group.

If you are delayed for a nonemergency reason, make every effort to notify your contacts so that an emergency response is not activated. And when you return, be sure to notify everyone with whom you have left a trip plan so they won't report you missing or worry unnecessarily.



## Sample Emergency Response Plan

**Trip Location and Description**  
(Attach a copy of the trip plan.)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Group Information

Group leaders \_\_\_\_\_

Medical training level of leaders \_\_\_\_\_

Group members \_\_\_\_\_

Medical training level of members \_\_\_\_\_

### Resources

Locations of nearest public telephones \_\_\_\_\_

(If a mobile telephone will be carried, ensure that batteries are fully charged.)

Group first-aid kit: Are contents up-to-date? \_\_\_\_\_

Who will carry it? \_\_\_\_\_

### Emergency Contacts

Telephone numbers of people and organizations to notify

(Land management agency, BSA council officials, emergency response system, and/or search-and-rescue alert numbers)

Driving instructions from trailhead or activity area to clinics, hospitals, and other health-care facilities \_\_\_\_\_

### Action

Steps to be taken in the event of an emergency



## Emergency Contact Information

Each person planning to go on a trek should provide emergency contact information to group leaders and support personnel, either through official organization forms or a card such as this one:

### Sample Emergency Contact Information Card

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

#### Primary Emergency Contact

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship \_\_\_\_\_

#### Telephone numbers

Home \_\_\_\_\_

Work \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile \_\_\_\_\_

#### Secondary Emergency Contact

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship \_\_\_\_\_

#### Telephone numbers

Home \_\_\_\_\_

Work \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile \_\_\_\_\_

For more on planning ahead to maximize the safety of a trek, see the chapter titled “Managing Risk.”

The process of planning can enliven the days and weeks leading up to a trek by focusing your group’s attention on the possibilities ahead. Preparing well for a trip also can ensure that you have considered the gear and provisions you will need, the itinerary you will follow, and the actions you will take if an emergency arises. That will leave you free to enjoy all that you discover along the way.