

Backpacking Program Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Do I have to be a Camp Fire USA member to go on trips with the Backpacking Program?

Yes, and it's easy to join. Just send in a membership form and the annual membership dues, \$30 for your family or \$15 for one youth or adult. Membership forms are available on this web site or by calling the Camp Fire Office at 512-349-2111.

Our Camp Fire Club is interested in Backpacking, but we would like to go as a club, or on our own schedule.

Can the Backpacking Program help us get started?

Yes! Contact the [Balcones Council Backpacking Coordinator](#) or info@campfireusabalcones.org. An experienced volunteer will make a presentation to your club meeting, bring Orientation to your club meeting, and help you plan and carry out a club trip.

Do I have to be in a regular Camp Fire USA club to do the Backpacking Program?

No. You can become a member of Balcones Council and just attend the backpacking events.

Is this for just girls or just boys?

Camp Fire USA programs are for both boys and girls. Camp Fire USA philosophy does not favor segregating boys and girls into separate programs, but instead includes all the youth so that boys and girls may learn to be friends and work together.

How old do I need to be?

Youth who are 6th grade age or older are eligible to participate in the Backpacking Program. Youth need to be physically large enough to carry their gear. Camp Fire USA strongly encourages youth of all ages to spend quality time in nature and the outdoors. Balcones Council offers two family campouts each program year, and day hikes and family paddle days for all ages. Younger youth and their families are encouraged to participate in these activities as an excellent preparation for backpacking. In addition, Starflight and Adventure Clubs are encouraged to include outdoor activities in their meeting plans.

Can parents go on the backpacking trips? Do they have to come along?

Youth may participate in the Backpacking Program with or without a parent. Parents should attend orientation with their youth. Parents may participate in trips, and are invited to assist as volunteers with other program tasks.

Can I bring a friend on a trip?

Your friend is welcome to come backpacking with Camp Fire USA. Your friend will need to become a member, just like you did, and attend an Orientation before going on their first trip.

Who leads these trips?

Adult trip leaders are experienced Camp Fire USA volunteers. Trip leaders have experience and training in trip planning, management, youth chaperoning, and safety. For more information about trip leadership standards and risk management, contact the Balcones Council Outdoor Chair Alex Thompsen or email info@campfireusabalcones.org.

Why do I have to go to an Orientation first? I think I know enough already.

Backpacking has its challenges—you need to have gear you can carry comfortably, food and water to keep you feeling great on the trip, and clothing to keep you safe and comfortable. There are additional safety considerations everyone should know. To be sure everyone stays safe and has a great time, we require Orientation. If you already have a lot of backpacking experience, you still have to attend our Orientation, and you are invited to speak with our Backpacking Coordinator ahead of time, about helping present the Orientation to youth who know less than you do.

How much does the Backpacking Program cost?

Event costs are shown on each listing in the Events section of this site. In general, one-night trips are \$22.00, two-night trips are \$29.00. Trips are led by experienced volunteers, and this keeps the trip fees much lower than what a private outfitter would have to charge. The Balcones Council is supported by volunteers, donations, fundraisers, grants, and event fees.

Can I get a scholarship?

If your family really can't afford to send you backpacking with the Balcones Council without help, you may download a scholarship application from the Forms section of this site. Scholarships are subject to the approval of the Executive Director.

How do I sign up for a trip?

Trip registration forms are available at Orientation, on the Forms section of this site, and from the Balcones Council office by calling 512-349-2111. Fill out the form, make sure to have a parent sign it, and send it to the Balcones Council office along with your trip fee, in time to reach the office by the due date listed for the trip. If you are late and need to hand-carry your registration to the office, it is located at 1603 E. 38th 1/2 Street, Austin, Texas 78722. Call for directions or view the map.

How do I get a pack and a sleeping bag and a tent?

Balcones Council keeps a lending library of outdoor equipment that members can check out for a nominal maintenance fee. Backpacks, tents, sleeping bags, and many accessories are available. You may also find that you can borrow equipment from family members or friends. It is important that your pack fit comfortably. Ask ahead of time, if you would like help with pack fit. This is one of the topics covered at orientation.

Do I bring my own food on trips?

For weekend trips, you bring your own food. Experimenting with what to eat on a backpacking trip is part of the learning process. For the week-long mountain trip, the trip organizes the food. Youth participating in the mountain trip are given the opportunity to learn how to do group menu planning, shopping, and advance food preparation.

Where do we go?

For the program year 2008-2009, weekend trips will be to central Texas destinations: Bastrop State Park, Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, Pedernales Falls State Park, and Lost Maples State Natural Area. In past years, advanced trips have gone to Pecos Wilderness in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, Santa Fe National Forest, near Santa Fe, New Mexico, to Big Bend National Park, and to Guadalupe Mountains National Park in west Texas.

Will there be restrooms where we camp?

Most of the Texas state parks and natural areas we visit have composting toilets at the backcountry camp areas. For those that do not, and on the mountain trips, we go in the woods. We provide instruction on how to do this in a comfortable, safe and ecologically sensitive way.

I am a member of a Camp Fire USA Discovery or Horizon club. Can I earn beads and emblems for backpacking?

The Backpacking Program is a great way to practice your skills and earn Honor Beads and emblems. Through the Backpacking Program, you will have the opportunity to complete steps in the Outdoor Skills Progression, a Torch Bearer in Camping, and many Beads. We have even written specialized backpacking activities for you to complete a Torch Bearer in Camping. Horizon youth who love outdoor activities and are seeking another Advocacy Issue for their WoHeLo Award, are invited to volunteer as youth assistants in the Backpacking Program. Contact Outdoor Chair Alex Thompsen for more information regarding volunteering.