

Hitting the outdoor scene has changed since old days

Warm ice cream and cold nights are enough to make a hiking enthusiast pack up his old kit bag and head out for the open spaces.

But camping equipment and the attitude toward these great spaces have changed since the early days when the National Geographic first featured pictures of exotic expeditions.

Nowadays the old canvas bag has been replaced with a lightweight vinyl backpack and frame fitted to the size of the wearer.

Comfort has become important in roughing it, said Emil Hutton, co-owner of the Benchmark in Farmington Hills.

"Without the proper equipment, you can spoil your good time," said Hutton.

"Good equipment doesn't make a good camper, but bad equipment doesn't help make a good time."

Fitted backpacks help make the going more comfortable, according to Hutton and his partner, Chuck Spriggs.

Designed to carry camping equipment and to share the load, backpacks should fit between the shoulders and the top of the wearer's hips.

JUST AS THE frame fits comfortably on the wearer's back, the pack should be in proportion to the frame.

That means small campers wear smaller packs. But just as in furnishing an apartment, possessions seem to accommodate available space.

For the stubborn who want to carry a large pack on a small back, Hutton points out that the sack would overlap the wearer's head and hamper hiking progress instead of sharing the weight.

Adjustable backpacks with frames that accommodate different sizes have been altered so the curve of the aluminum supports will follow the lines of the wearer's back for all sizes.

Unlike earlier packs, which were adjusted at the top, the newer packs slide forward at the bottom of the frame.

Camping for the night can be improved by the use of a proper sleeping bag. But that big bag that looked so comfortable in the store could turn out to be too heavy to carry with ease.

Buying a sleeping bag should be undertaken with consideration to the type of trip that is being planned. A heavier, larger bag could be fine for a car trip, but it could be misery for the backpacker.

"LOOK FOR a minimum of bulk and keep a maximum weight in mind," recommended Hutton.

"Remember, you'll have to carry it," he said.

Down filled and polar guard types of sleeping bags are light and will protect the hiker from cooler evening weather.

Just as the sleeping bag should be packed with warmth and weight in mind, the same applies to a tent.

That canvas set-up with the wooden poles may have been great for camping and driving, but campers who attempt to take that type of tent on a hike are in for a nasty surprise. Nylon is lighter than canvas and offers protection against the wind, rain and bugs.

Some nylon tents feature a protective outer shell that diverts rain from the tent. An inner shell keeps the tent dry and warm. If campers touch the sides of this sort of tent during the rain, the walls won't leak, Hutton said. Canvas can leak in the rain, if the sides are touched.

With a backpack, sleeping bag or tent to carry, the hiker needs a good foundation for his venture. A good pair of hiking boots will provide a stable platform for the hiker's foot. This stable platform in the sole of the boot compensates for rough terrain.

SHOES SHOULD BE chosen with the terrain in mind as well as the wearer's weight. A pair of boots could be considered lightweight by someone who weighs 150 pounds, but a 110

pounder would consider them medium-weight.

The heavier the backpack and the larger the person, the thicker the soles should be considered, Hutton said.

While some stalwarts might consider trekking through Colorado wearing tennis shoes, Hutton recommends against it.

"I've seen grown-ups in sandals and tennis shoes with feet raw with blisters on the Colorado River. And they knew they were facing an 11-mile hike back," said Hutton.

Once the backpacker finds a spot for the night and settles in around the campfire, there's still the matter of deciding what to eat for dinner.

Freezed dried foods make it possible for the backpackers to enjoy warm ice cream that looks like candy chunks or a meal of porkchops on the top of a mountain.

"The high point of my trip to Alaska was eating shrimp cocktail on Mt. McKinley," said Hutton.

But litter should be kept to a minimum, he said.

Persons who would avoid throwing a wrapper out of a car window will unconsciously leave used matches on a campground.

The less trash left behind, the less of an impact the campers will have on undeveloped land, he said.



Aiding customer Jim Dunn in trying on a backpack is Skip Harrison. (Staff photo)

Water is office plant chief enemy

By SUZIE MARKS

Green plants have a penchant for death in business offices. Employees get so concerned about their foliage friends that they send them to unlikely deaths by over watering.

As an answer to that depressing eventuality, a local horticulturist grows her stock on lava rocks which keep the plants from too much contact with their needed but potentially harmful source of drink.

The unusual but increasingly popular method of plant care is practiced

by Green Plants for Business, Inc., in Birmingham. The technique is called hydroponics.

The rocks are very water-absorbent and feed the plant roots through capillary action, explained owner Cheryl Green. In a clear pot, the water level can be viewed. In an opaque container, there is a water level indicator.

The water level must be kept to the lower third of the pot. Otherwise, the plant will get root rot and die. Hydroponics are usually safe because their roots stay above water. However, Ms. Green warned, if the water level is too

high and the roots are submerged, the plant will go the way of its soil-bound counterparts.

"IT USUALLY takes between two to six weeks for the plants to needed to be watered again," she said.

Commercial maintenance costs are cut in half, Ms. Green explained, because it only takes her crew half as much time to care for hydroponic plants as it does for soil plants.

Advantages of hydroponics are many, Ms. Green said. "Hospitals and restaurants like them because there is no soil to be knocked over," she added. "Since they don't have to be watered often, people can go on vacation and not worry about them."

Ms. Green calls herself an interior "plantscaper. After determining what plants will live in a given environment, she sells or leases the plants.

Southfield Eccentric

Published every Monday and Tuesday, by the Observer & Eccentric News Service, 1225 Bowers St. Birmingham, AL 35202. Second-class postage paid at Southfield, Michigan 48075. Advertisers: All mail (subscriptions, change of address, forms, 35791 to 1225 Bowers St. Birmingham, Michigan 48012. Telephone 352-5400.

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3 get degrees

Three local residents received Juris Doctor degrees from Wayne State University's law school. Earning their law degrees were Susan Lister-Long, 2918 Oak Point Drive, Farmington; Geoffrey H. Nickel, 5586 Castlemeadow, Farmington Hills; and Deborah E. Zukin, 2854 Rockledge Drive, Farmington Hills.

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