



American Heritage Dictionary Definition:

Backpack - To hike while carrying supplies in a backpack.

Our definition:

Backpack - To be self-sufficient while hiking in the out-of-doors for one or more nights.

To these definitions you can add: sharing and observing nature, leaving work-a-day stress behind, getting away from it all (whatever 'it' is), and all the other pleasantries connected with this marvelous sport.

But, before we go too far . . . Remember that backpacking is a strenuous sport. Get your doctor's permission first, then get into a regular exercise program before heading out on the trail. Do not over stress yourself. Do not backpack after a do-nothing period like winter. Work up to it with gradually increasing exercise. Hiking up and down hill, on uneven ground, with 30-40 pounds on your back, in whatever the weather may be, is a lot more demanding on your heart and body than strolling around your neighborhood on a pleasant evening.

Backpacking is one of the many activities offered by the Tidewater Appalachian Trail Club (TATC). We are one of 30 volunteer clubs that maintain the over 2,168.8-mile Appalachian Trail (A.T.). 'Our' section of the A.T. starts at Reeds Gap (2,645-ft) at milepost 13.5 on the Blue Ridge Parkway. From Reeds Gap it extends south over Meadow Mountain (3,144-ft) to the Maupin Field Shelter (2,750-ft), then over Bee Mountain (3,304-ft) and Three Ridges (3,970-ft) to Harpers Creek Shelter (1,840-ft), and down to the Tye River (997-ft) at US Highway 56. It is a rugged, beautiful, and strenuous section of trail, one of the most scenic on the entire A.T. Refer to the TATC Education Handout titled "TATC's A.T. SECTION - SKETCH MAP."

One does not step into a store, buy equipment and food, and start backpacking. There is much to learn. A beginner should obtain information from outfitting stores, experienced hikers, how-to books, and other sources before venturing out under a backpack. Hikers must know their equipment, and their own capabilities and limitations. Though backpacking can be a simple overnight or weekend trip, it may range all the way up to six months. The trail hiked may be easy and relatively flat, or rugged and very mountainous.

Equipment varies from inexpensive items purchased at discount stores to highly complex equipment available only from a reputable outfitter or supplier. Don't be taken in by the 'I wants.' Watch the weight, your's and the pack's. TATC offers backpacking and hiking tips in its bi-monthly newsletter. Occasional, very informative, all day Beginner Backpacker Seminars are held during the year.

Seminars include information on: back and day packs, blisters, camp lights, clothes, cook kits, food, footwear, hypothermia, insect repellent, rain gear, sleeping bags, snakes, stoves, tents, water, water treatment, and other subjects. Additionally, Counselors are available at monthly TATC meetings to offer advice.

TATC offers a variety of day hiking and backpacking trips. Backpacking ranges from short and easy, to strenuous winter trips. We hold periodic maintenance trips on 'our' section of the A.T. Outings are announced in the newsletter and ACTIVITY SIGN UP sheets are available at each meeting. Your signature on the ACTIVITY SIGN UP sheet certifies that you have read and understand the 'Waiver And Release Of All Claims' included on the form.

Always read the announcements and talk to the trip leader to determine the degree of difficulty. Leaders are willing to help beginners know what is required for a particular trip. Inexperienced hikers should hike with a group and not venture out alone. Safety is a primary concern.

Backpacking can be a one person, family, or group adventure. TATC members include a wide range of backgrounds, ages, and interests. Backpacking offers personal challenges and satisfaction. Trail maintenance is an activity that contributes to the health of our wild areas.

It is highly recommended that day trips be limited to not more than 20 people, and that backpacking trips not exceed 10 persons. 'Wilderness' overnight hiking groups are limited by law. **If you have signed up for a trip and find that you cannot go, please call the trip leader as soon as you can and cancel so that someone else may take your place.**

TATC members are offered discounts at several Tidewater area stores, receive a bi-monthly newsletter, and enjoy fellowship on the trail. Do come with us as we explore the wilds of Virginia and maintain our beloved Appalachian Trail. Occasionally give back to Mother Earth some of the love that she has given us.