

Let's Go By CLIFF JACOBSON Camping!

If you've ever been camping, you know how much fun it is. You can hike in the woods, spot wildlife, roast marshmallows over an open fire, stay up late and see shooting stars, and just sit around and talk.

This story is about simply pitching a tent in the wild. Tent camping is magic. Inside a tent, you can hear, feel, and even smell what is going on outside. Listen for the deep hoots of an owl or the shrill *keow* of an eagle.

Tune in to the pitter-pat of a field mouse, the confident swagger of a raccoon, or the shy curiosity of a white-tailed deer.

My favorite sound is the *plip-plop* of rain hitting my tent at night. Cuddled in my sleeping bag, I am warm and dry and at peace with the world.

You don't need fancy gear to be a happy camper. You just need to learn some basic skills for outdoor living. With the secrets I share here—and a little help from an experienced grown-up—you can go camping and have a blast!

Summer Camp Basics

Shelter

- ___ Tent
- ___ Plastic ground cloth
- ___ Extra stakes
- ___ Waterproof nylon rain tarp
- ___ 50 feet of $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch nylon rope
- ___ Sleeping bag and pad

Personal

- ___ Change of clothes
- ___ Rainsuit
- ___ Sweater or jacket
- ___ Shoes or boots
- ___ Baseball cap and stocking cap
- ___ Bandana
- ___ Sunscreen, sunglasses, insect repellent
- ___ Soap, toothbrush, comb, towel, toilet paper

Tools

- ___ First-aid kit
- ___ Duct tape and safety pins
- ___ Small flashlight or head lamp
- ___ Matches in waterproof case
- ___ Multipurpose knife on a cord (so you won't lose it)
- ___ Compass and map
- ___ Whistle (to signal if you're lost)

Cook stuff

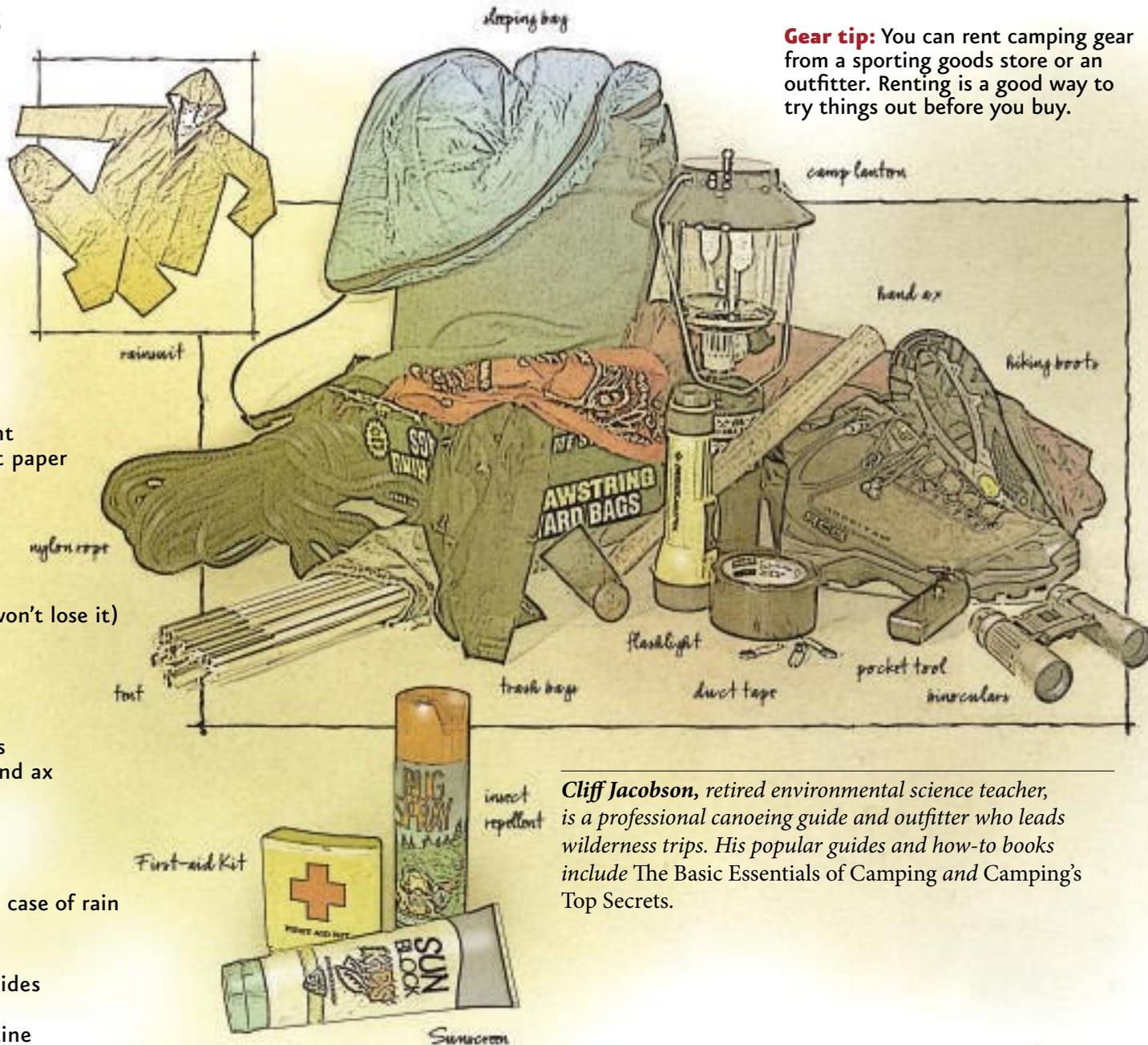
- ___ Plastic water bottle
- ___ Cooking pot, one or two, and utensils
- ___ Camp stove and fuel, firewood, or hand ax
- ___ Mug, spoon, and bowl
- ___ Biodegradable soap and scrubber
- ___ Water or water purifier

Storage

- ___ Backpack or duffle bag, plastic lined in case of rain
- ___ Heavy-duty trash bags

Fun stuff

- ___ Binoculars, magnifying glass, field guides
- ___ Books, notebook, pencil
- ___ Minnesota Conservation Volunteer magazine



Gear tip: You can rent camping gear from a sporting goods store or an outfitter. Renting is a good way to try things out before you buy.

Cliff Jacobson, retired environmental science teacher, is a professional canoeing guide and outfitter who leads wilderness trips. His popular guides and how-to books include The Basic Essentials of Camping and Camping's Top Secrets.

Your Tent

In good weather with no bugs, you can get by with just a nylon tarp tied between two trees. I love this way of camping because you can see everything that's going on around you.

But a tent is a lot more comfortable in wind and rain. Any tent will do if it has a waterproof fly (separate top sheet) staked nearly to the ground. Make sure it's tied down tight, with no wrinkles or flapping corners—a loose fly can blow away or let rain drip through into your tent . . . and onto your head!

Pitching your tent. At most designated campsites in forests and

parks, you'll find a steel grate for cooking over a campfire, a latrine (outdoor toilet), and places to pitch your tent (called *tent pads*). Tent pads are places that are fairly level and free of rocks and plants, so they are the most comfortable spots for sleeping.

A good night's sleep. You're half asleep when you hear rain on your tent. The patter grows louder. Your tent shivers and shakes and starts to leak. Suddenly, you're wishing

you were home.

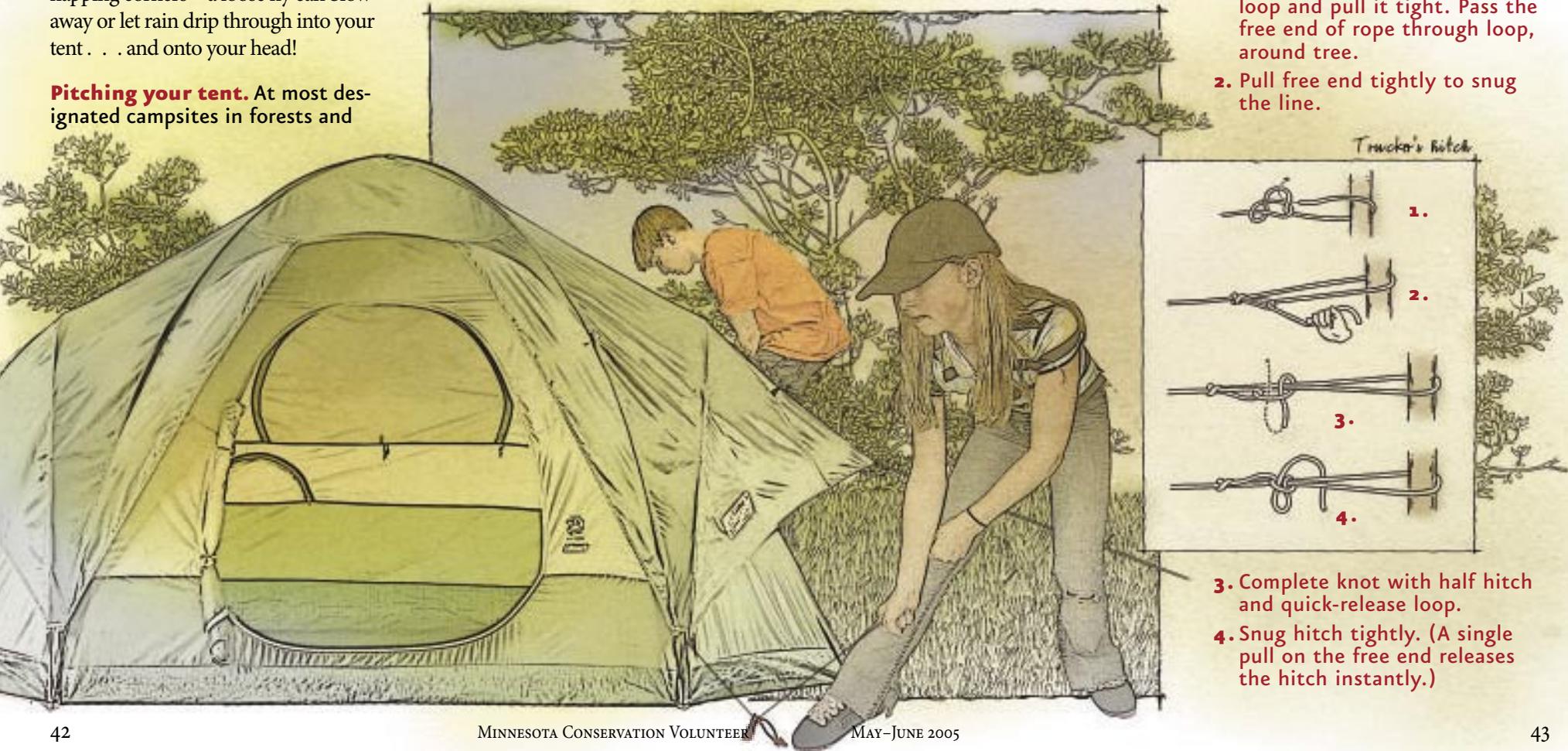
This happened to me on a camping trip when I was 11 years old. I grabbed my rubber poncho and slid it under my sleeping bag just in time! Water flowed under the poncho rather than onto my sleeping bag. Though I stayed dry, I didn't get much sleep because my tent mate kept complaining he was wet and miserable. That experience taught me an important secret: Always use a plastic ground cloth inside your tent!

Rig a tarp. I rig a tarp every night, even when I don't expect rain. It makes a good windbreak and keeps dew off stuff I don't want in my tent.

Rig the tarp by stringing a tight rope about 6 feet high between two trees. Tie one edge of the tarp to the line and stake the other.

Knot tip: A trucker's hitch with quick-release loop works well to tie tent lines to stakes and rig a tarp or clotheslines.

1. Make a loop. Make a second loop and pull it tight. Pass the free end of rope through loop, around tree.
2. Pull free end tightly to snug the line.



Build a Fire

It was 40 degrees and raining in the Boundary Waters, and the teenagers I was guiding were miserable. Eventually, we found a campsite, and in 20 minutes we had a blazing campfire and water boiling for hot chocolate. Life was good again.

To make a fire, rain or shine, follow these guidelines:

- Start with tinder no thicker than a matchstick. Don't use paper because it absorbs moisture from the air on damp days.
- If allowed where you are camping, gather dead wood in various lengths and thicknesses from the ground. Don't cut standing trees.
- Break thick wood into 12-inch chunks.
- Because chopping is dangerous, have an adult split thick chunks into slivers with a hand ax.
- Build from small to larger sticks, leaving space between them because fire needs air.
- Add big wood only after your fire is burning brightly.



Simple Food

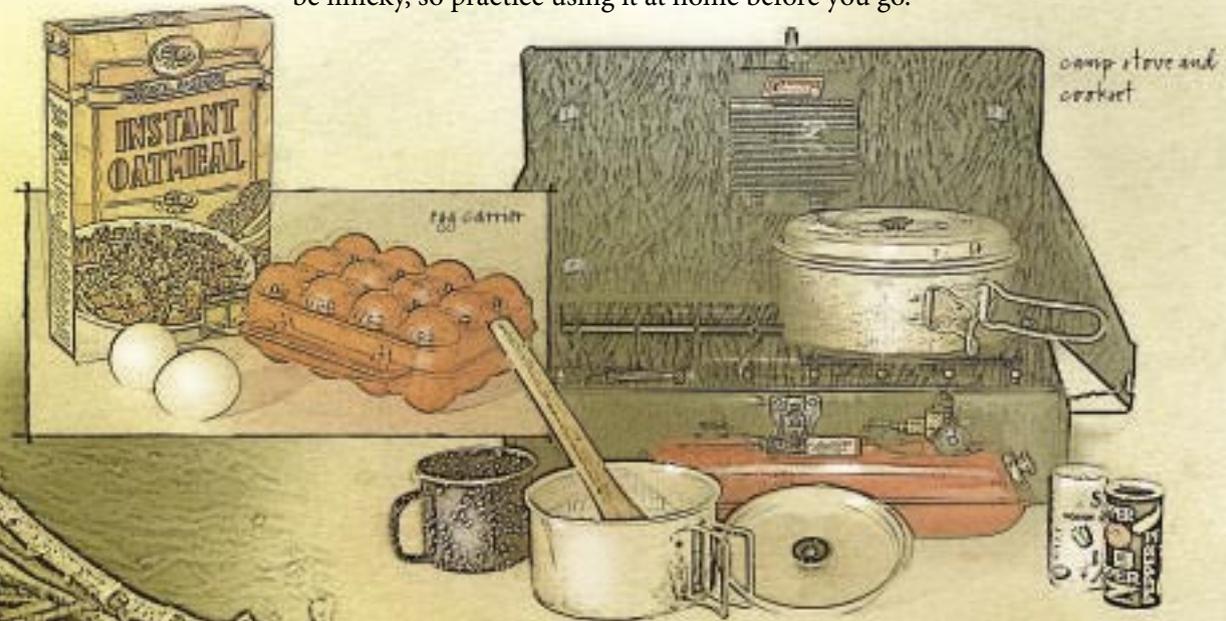
Many campers like to keep meals simple. I often just boil water in a pot and add instant soup and rice or noodles. I also like to munch trail mix, cookies, energy bars, and dried fruit.

Best breakfast: oatmeal, brown sugar, dried fruit.

Favorite lunch: pita, peanut butter and jelly, cheese, nuts, chocolate bars, and Kool-Aid.

Super supper: spaghetti or ramen noodles and vegetables or macaroni and cheese.

Fire or stove? Cooking on a campfire is fun, but not all places allow fires. A camp stove is fast and easy, but it can be finicky, so practice using it at home before you go.



Drinking Water

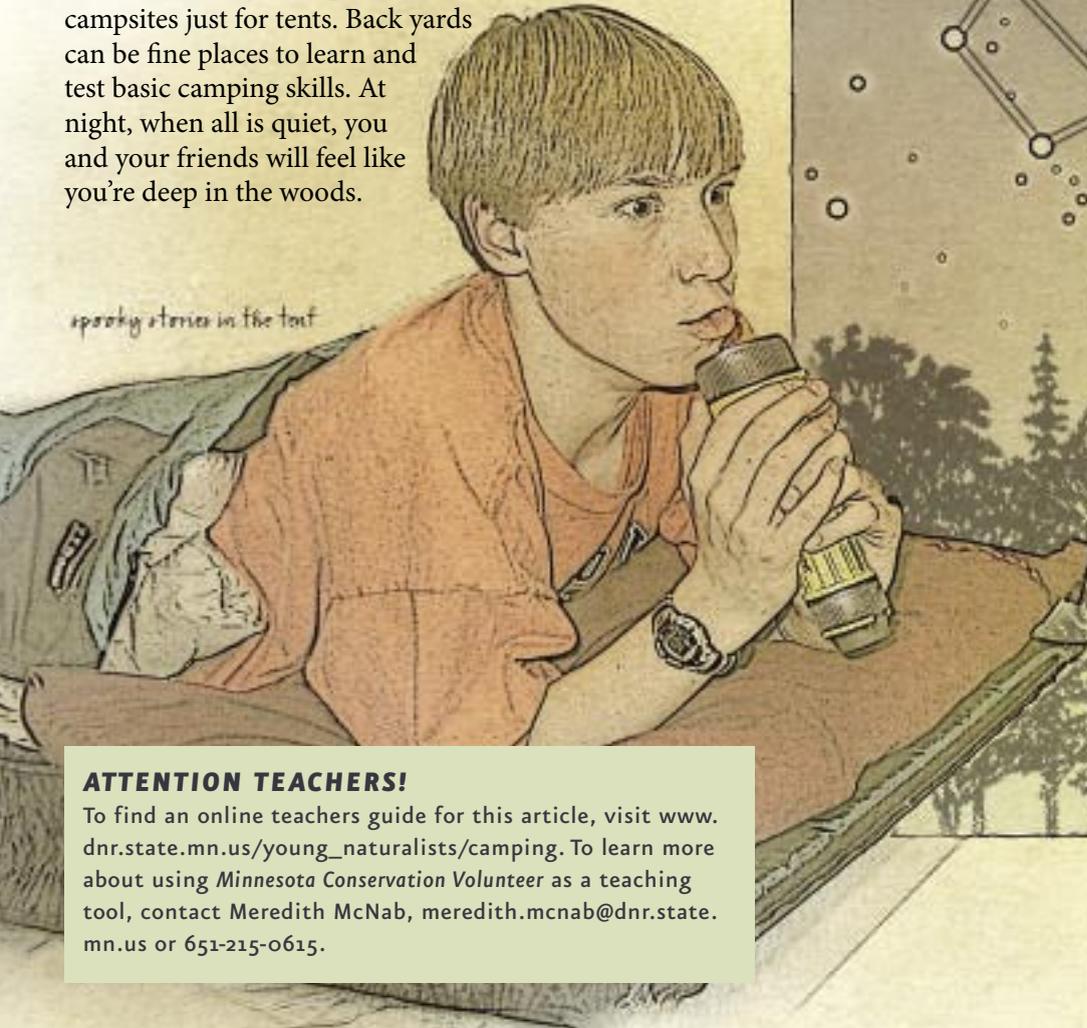
State parks and other places with developed campsites have sources of safe, fresh water. All you need is a cook pot. At undeveloped campsites along rivers and in wilderness, you must purify your drinking water. The easiest way is by boiling for 1 to 3 minutes. Or use a mechanical purifier (pump filter).

Where to Camp

My favorite Minnesota spots are in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and along the upper St. Croix River—places you can reach only by foot or canoe. Look for a campsite on a hill with spectacular views, a flat spot for the tent, and a breeze to blow away bugs.

National forests offer great tent sites. Riversides have some public shores and sandbars where you may camp. Some Minnesota state parks and state forests have hike-in campsites just for tents. Back yards can be fine places to learn and test basic camping skills. At night, when all is quiet, you and your friends will feel like you're deep in the woods.

spooky stories in the tent



ATTENTION TEACHERS!

To find an online teachers guide for this article, visit www.dnr.state.mn.us/young_naturalists/camping. To learn more about using *Minnesota Conservation Volunteer* as a teaching tool, contact Meredith McNab, meredith.mcnab@dnr.state.mn.us or 651-215-0615.

Camp With Friends

Boy Scouts of America and Camp Fire USA offer terrific outdoor programs for boys and girls. Girls also may join Girl Scouts. Many schools and churches offer camping experiences. YMCA camps Widjiwagan and Menogyn offer wilderness camping trips for boys and girls.



the night sky



Leave Only Footprints

Environmentally friendly campers have a popular saying: "Leave only footprints, take only pictures." This means we keep the campsite looking natural. We pick up and pack out our trash—and any left by other campers. Before leaving, we drown campfires with water and stir the ashes until no smoke remains. Then we pick out every can and scrap of aluminum foil. The only human signs left behind are footprints.

We take only photographs of the wilderness to remind us of the good times we had. ●