

Shakedown

A Scout is always prepared. And, one way to make sure is to have a pack shakedown. This is especially true for inexperienced backpackers, but is also useful for everyone, since what you leave behind can't be retrieved and whatever you take will burden you. Even those experienced Scouts who go to Philmont are subjected to dumping their pack contents onto their bunks and having a ranger comb through it with them. So, it is even more important for the novice. Bring your equipment checklist to the shakedown.

How do shakedowns work? The crew gets together a day or two before departure on a trek/tour and each spreads all equipment, clothing, and provisions on a table, bunk, floor or ground cloth. Each item is considered carefully. Is it necessary? If so, it is put in one pile. If not, it is put in a separate pile (to be left home). Each item on your list is checked off to be sure all the basics but nothing more is in the "keep" pile. It helps to pair off in "buddies", for one to call out each item on the list and for the other to hold that item up. The first then checks it off. Then they switch roles. Buddy newbies with experienced scouts, so they can offer advice. After going through everything once, go through it again. Finally, take one last look through the pile designated to stay home. If you aren't already at maximum pack weight, you may ask yourself if some of the items could make your trip more pleasant. The answer may be yes for a book, binoculars, or a camera, but remember that ounces add up quickly. An ounce in the morning feels like a pound at night. The more thorough your shakedown, the lighter your load will be. Another interesting concept is to do a shakedown after you get back from a trek to remove items that you didn't need and won't pack again. The more experience Scouts get, the lighter their pack is likely to become.

Total Pack Weight

How much your pack weighs depends on the length of the trek, the food and equipment you must carry, and your personal preferences for optional (luxury) items. Traveling with a crew allows tents, food, cooking gear, and other crew gear to be divided. *For longer treks, pack weight may start initially higher than desired because of the amount of food that needs to be carried.* Pack weight will decrease during the trip as food is eaten. The amount of weight that a Scout can carry depends on a lot of physical factors (size, physical condition, age, experience) and terrain. A former Philmont Ranger suggested that a pack weighing up to 20% of body weight usually could be carried pretty well. A useful rule is that MAXIMUM packing weight not exceed the greater of 20 lbs. or 25% of body weight [That is 20 lbs. up to 80 lbs.; 25 lbs. for 100 lbs.; 30 lbs for 120 lbs.; 35 lbs. for 140 lbs. 40 lbs. for 160 lbs.; above 40 lbs -- get real and repack; much higher and you should leave the kitchen sink at home.] Remember that these are maximums and many Scouts may struggle at these weights. Aim for 20% of the body weight. This weight includes food and full water bottles. A large hand-held fish scale can be used to measure a Scout's pack weight. In almost all excess weight cases, nonessential items can be found to be left behind or shared/troop gear can be redistributed to bigger, stronger, more experienced Scouts. Remember, excessive weight and the resultant fatigue from overexertion can lead to loss of fun, irritability, and injuries.