

WILDERNESS PREPARATION GUIDE:

How to Get Ready for The Wilderness Experience Trip ∞ Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Preparations

Three areas warrant close inspection as we make preparations for the upcoming wilderness trip. The areas are the physical, mental, and spiritual preparations that we think a person might want to go through in order to be ready to leave fully prepared for the trip. Here are a few ideas that seem to have some relevance to those of us who want to be in shape before we leave. The intention is to show you how to make the leaps necessary to accomplish some type of mastery over the three areas listed above. Entire books are written on each subject so this will attempt to get directly to the point and cut through to the core of how to get ready.

THE PHYSICAL PART:

We can tell you how important it is to be in shape *before* the trip begins, but unless you want to do something about this, all words are useless. It is really up to you to feel your body and to know what is best for you to do about getting into physical shape in the next three months. When we say “Be in shape,” we mean really tuning into your body. What are its present strengths? Weaknesses? What substances find their way into your blood stream? How do they affect the way you feel? Your stamina? Your well-being? Naturally, the physical is, on many levels, spiritual and mental, but let here are a few words about just the body part of getting ready.

We believe that too many people think they will shine on the physical part of preparation for a long hike in the woods, saying in effect, “Aw, I’ll be okay. I’ll just try harder to keep up and so what if I hurt a little for a few days. It’s my body.” This is a common attitude for many of us desk-oriented folks, and we’ve seen it cause a tremendous amount of pain and stress not only to individuals with this “I’ll pay later” position, but for the whole group who have to pay the price of being slowed down by someone else’s blisters, sore back, tired legs, and exhaustion. So, in all fairness, it is true to say that in a group like this, what one person does (or doesn’t do) effects every other person in the group in a direct way.

If previous trips are a guide to what will happen on this trip, we are going to do a fair amount of strenuous hiking through some very steep and rugged (and in many ways the most beautiful) territory in Northern California. It is possible for us to hike ten to fifteen miles (or more)

in a day. With a heavy pack the trails can seem monumentally steep. Be prepared. As soon as possible, begin carrying your pack filled with bricks or books up steep hills. We guarantee this physical preparation will not be done in vain.

There is no way to tell you how difficult this kind of packing can be if you haven't done it. So we won't. Most of you know what kind of pressure is applied to shoulder muscles, lower backs, legs, and feet. No one will be left behind, but doing this kind of work for someone who shines on the physical part may leave this person wishing he or she had never volunteered for this type of self-torture.

We say this with no reservations, in capital letters, in red, underlined about twelve times:
BEGIN A VIGOROUS DAILY EXERCISE PLAN TODAY.

Get your heartbeat up to 120+ beats a minute and keep it there for at least 30 seconds longer each day. You can do this in a number of ways. At home you can jog in place or do aerobic exercises. Outside you can fast-walk, jog, run, bicycle, swim, or some other aerobic form of exercise. Remember to breathe, breathe, breathe.

Please believe us when we say that you won't regret every minute you put into your physical preparation for the trip. Remember to watch your body move through the various pains and strains of toning up the muscles. Hopefully, at some point on the way to the trailhead, your body will actually like what you have been doing to it and you will begin to enjoy the physical workout.

As we mentioned above, awareness of food and substances are part of getting physically ready. Because we will be eating a whole grain, vegetarian diet consisting mainly of rice, beans, nuts, and fruits, it is essential that we begin cutting out usage of the following foods and substances: processed and/or packaged foods, sugar and all soft drinks, meat and meat products, cigarettes, pot, alcohol, coffee and all dependencies that might find their way into our systems. *We will not be taking any of these things with us into the wilderness.* We are going to take a very short break from our civilized habits. It is best to begin letting go of these things well before the departure date.

Begin to be aware of what you consume (and what consumes you). Many people have already become very aware of this factor in their lives, but we can tune in even more by actively restricting negative substances in our diet. Many of us eat far too much anyway. Many people have found that on wilderness trips one and a half to two cups of good, high energy food is more than enough to keep the body alive and healthy. If this sounds rather austere, be assured that if you

begin limiting the amount you consume now, that your stomach will be more prepared for the smaller portions that are consumed on the trail.

THE TRIPS ARE NOT FOOD TRIPS. We eat good wholesome food, but it is not intended to be gourmet. We pack it in and what we don't eat (seldom very much is left over) we pack out. Breakfasts and lunches and snacks are your own meals; the community dinners are supplied from the group food everyone brings.

Finally, on the physical level, tune in to all your sensations. Become more aware of your physical self. There are a number of exercises we have included with this guide to help you do this. We hope you can find the time to try some of these, as they will enhance your stay in the woods both before and during the wilderness trip.

Another aspect of the physical is getting your gear together. Again, at a later time, we will have a complete list of articles that you will need to bring. Today you can help yourself get ready by locating the following items: a sturdy, comfortable, fairly large backpack; a warm down or fiber-fill sleeping bag (no cotton bags); an insulate sleeping pad or Therma-Rest; a good pair of broken-in hiking shoes; all-weather pants, shirt, socks, and hat; a rain poncho or rain gear. If you can get these things together early you will save sweating out having your equipment together just before we leave. In the mountains, it snows anytime it feels like it, even in the summer months, so be prepared and have a pair of all-weather pants, wool or smart-wool shirt, wool socks, and wool hat with you. You will not be able to hike back to civilization to get things you did not think you would need.

When a pack is located, we suggest piling books or bricks into it, put this on your back and begin getting used to the strain on shoulders and back muscles by hiking around with it on. Our friend Mason did this for a month before one trip and still he had some adjustment time on the trail because as he said, "It's just different out there." So what if you look weird. In the wilderness no one cares. Also begin breaking in boots now. Out there new boots hurt tender feet. No matter how high-tech and comfortable they seem to be back at home, after eight hours under a heavy pack, your feet are going to burn if they are not adjusted to your boots.

So, if you are to be ready physically you should get these things under control: what you consume, your exercise plan, and your equipment. Good luck with the physical.

MENTAL PREPARATIONS:

Mental preparations are those brain gymnastics that help clear the path into this experience. What we mean by this is that we will achieve a higher level of appreciation for the natural world that we are entering—and for the process of leaving addictions behind—if we read and think about what this trip and preparing for it really mean.

Several steps toward mental preparations include 1.) Analyzing your need to go on this trip; 2.) Examining your fears, if any, about spending time in the woods (both with a group and alone); 3.) Deciding that you are definitely going and that you will follow the “rules” set forth by the entire circle; and 4.) Opening up to sources of information and inspiration that will help you integrate with the group and the experience. We will go further into each of these steps so that you can think them through. That’s the goal of the mental preparations: Thinking—hopefully at a deep level.

1. Why do I want to go to the wilderness? Is it enough to just say, “I heard from so and so that it was a fun thing to do.” Or is there a better way to put it? What underlines our need to return to the wild and natural? Think of ancestors. What were they like as people? Are we that far removed from them and their habits as survivors in the wilderness? Read about prehistory to get an idea who our people were then. Find out about how the Indians of North America (or other native people) survived in their environments. Become an expert in some field by reading and exploring. Learn the names and uses of flowers, or trees, or birds, or animals, or weather patterns. One of the really great things to do on trips is to see how the roles evolve as the trip progresses. Who is the medicine person? The shaman? The trickster? The water spirit? The moon child? The path finder? How do these roles relate to who we are in our regular lives?

2.) One of the other ways to get mentally prepared is to anticipate leaving behind all (nearly all) your possessions, such as watches, keys, books, PEDs, cameras, showers, names, if the group has decided in pre-trip circles to do this. How does this make you feel? Are you fearful of losing yourself if you lose your “things?” The classic example is this question: “How will I know when to eat if I don’t have a watch?” Can you live without reading for a week? Are you able to conceive that you will have a chance to spend two days and nights alone? Think about your fears? Of the dark? Sounds in the dark? Eyes in the dark? Alone time? Animals? Other people? These things are very real. Think about how they make you feel right now. Begin a journal that records your feelings about these things. The feelings tell many things that can help you become aware of the nature of the inner self. Don’t wait, and don’t be afraid to express in your journal or in our pre-trip

circles what is going on inside you. These fears, insights, impressions can be very helpful to review as we get closer to leaving for the trip.

3. As you know we work in a circle. This is our form of government. Whatever we decide in the circle we follow as rules or guides into cooperation. These guides are consensus decisions that help the entire group become a cohesive unit. While the trips are very individual on one hand, they are group centered on the other. You can't have a group without individuals. What each member of the circle does affects every other member. This goes out in huge waves throughout the universe if you really think about it . . . and we hope you do. We do. Everything connects. That is why we ask each member of the group to make a special pledge not to get hurt or to hurt anyone else during our trip. This brings up the idea of you making a clear decision to stay healthy and injury free. Are you accident prone? Tell the group in the circle and we'll help you become more aware of your physical needs. We'll watch for ways to keep you grounded. The group process through the circle is a way to get closer to both ourselves and others, so begin making the mental commitment to open yourself up to yourself and the circle.

4. Our shelves are full of special books on how to go deeper into the wilderness experience. But reading is, at best, half experience. One can read about fasting, for instance, but will the reader ever know what the experience is like without doing a fast? Speaking of fasting, one of the best ways to get out of our regular bodies is to stop eating for a short while. Try it, but be careful not to also continue doing everything you normally do. This can cause tremendous stress on the body. Do a fast on a weekend when there's time to stop and relax into the fast. Alone time in the wilderness is an excellent time to fast. Try shutting down the digestive system for a few hours (or days) in anticipation of our time away from the supermarket.

Begin seeing. That means taking the time to mentally scope out our present surroundings. What is happening right now outside? Are there birds nearby? What are they doing? Where is the wind coming from? How would it feel to be swimming in the ocean right now? Where is the closest source of fresh spring water? What's good to eat in the woods right now? Then, when you have asked questions, turn off the answers and just observe. The plants and animals are all around us and they can tell us so much. Shut down the talking machine running in the head and **JUST BE**. Open up. Set the mind free.

Another exercise that opens the mind is reading. Read everything you can get your hands on about the following topics: plants, animals, Indians, survival skills, map reading, weather patterns, stories of survival, and all related subjects. Ask about resources if you can't find what

you need. Read about the future of the planet. Think about what you read. Then for contrast, don't think about you have read.

THE SPIRIT MOVES:

The body and the mind come together through preparation and awareness, and finally, add to them the spirit that leads us to a higher dimension. This is the most difficult aspect of preparation to write about because its description defies words.

Spiritual preparations are purely individualistic. Whatever works for you in terms of ritual, song, medicine, power, prayer, magic, meditation, communication, writing, and the like, should come out now. This is a chance to play with the power of the higher realm, to join with the Life Force, and to experience a plane away from reality—whatever that is. Find forms that work for you.

Chants, meditation, ceremonies, sweats, games, alone time are all part of this preparation. Develop your own way. Of major importance is quiet time. We believe that one of the most valuable lessons that can be gained from this trip is spending time alone BEFORE we leave, preparing, in whatever way you choose, to be spiritually alive at the beginning of the trip.

Find a special place where you can seek power. This may be indoors or outdoors; it may be inside or outside yourself. Try to find a quiet place that you can return to over the course of the next few months and go there on a regular basis. Embrace the energy here. Seek the spirits that exist and called you to this place. Communicate with them if you can. Ask for guidance as you begin this trip. Sing them a song and listen for their reply.

We like to begin each day in the wilderness in a quiet meditation around the campfire. We like to sit silently in meditation to enjoy feeling this time of day, to let the dream world melt into the real world. If you would like to join this meditation circle you are welcome. Practice sitting before we leave. Extend your sit by a few minutes each day until you can sit comfortably for a long time. We also have a traditional greeting for the Sun each morning after our meditation. Think of a song to sing to the Sun as it comes to warm us each morning. Let your spirit soar to the top of the mountain and greet Grandfather Sun there.

Have fun in your spiritual preparations and be unafraid to play with the unknown.

A FEW FINAL THOUGHTS:

Here we go! We are as excited as we've ever been about this trip. One thing is for sure. For many of us, there will be very little transition time between our regular lives and the

wilderness. Yeah! It's planned this way. But we ask that you don't get caught trying to put yourself into shape physically, mentally, and spiritually during the last few days.

BEGIN NOW TO PREPARE!

Happy Trails!

The Daylight Ducks Wilderness Guides

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