

## **Chapter 9 – Commuter Crew: Recreational Trips (optional)**

Recreational Trips are an end of the Crew option for some Commuter Crew programs. Check with your SCA Regional Coordinator to see if this is part of your Commuter Crew schedule. Recreational trips for Commuter Crews can either be planned in advance by the SCA staff (sometimes necessary due to reservations during the high summer season) or can be planned by the Crew Leader. Communicate with your Regional Coordinator about what arrangements need to be made. For most programs, your recreational trip should be two to three days long and may involve several hours by van to reach your destination.

### **Trip Reservations**

It is important to determine if your Rec. trip will involve making reservations for overnight campsites or obtain permits ahead of time. Check if there are group size limitations that will affect where you go. Exemptions from these limitations may be granted under certain circumstances, but we encourage you to respect the regulations and choose another route.

Do not feel obliged to stick to your plans, however. Prior to the planned recreation trip take note of the Crew's mood, energy level and keenness for hiking may make you change your mind about that perfect hike or activity that had been planned. That is OK. Crew Leaders should work with their Regional Coordinators to make suggestions and present several different options and if possible let the Crew decide. The Regional Coordinator should be kept in the loop at all stages of this decision making. In some cases, due to summer busy season for recreational spots as well as logistics, it may not be possible to have your group change plans.

### **Guidelines for a Good Camp**

Good campsites come in all shapes and sizes, but the best share some key elements. You should look around to assess the following:

#### *Terrain*

Is it suitable to camp on?

#### *Sufficient Space*

Is there enough room to pitch all of your tents on dry flat ground? Room to play games or to go to for some quiet time?

#### *Water*

What will your water source be? Is it close enough to be convenient? Is there anything upstream that could contaminate water (if applicable)?

#### *Location*

Is the campsite inconspicuous or right along a main road?

#### *Impact*

Can you minimize impact by camping on hard surfaces such as established camp areas, gravel bars, sedge meadows, or mineral soil?

#### *Fire*

Is it appropriate to have fires there? (Consider elevation, surrounding vegetation, etc.) If so where would be a good place? Fire areas typically get the hardest wear.

#### *Food Storage*

Will any special food storage systems be necessary? How will you keep food dry and unspoiled? Are there any possibilities for refrigeration? What kinds of critters are likely to give you trouble: bears, mice, raccoons?

#### *Insects*

How buggy will it be? Are you camped near a mosquito-breeding swamp? If you anticipate bug problems, plan to bring a large screen tent to hang out in.

#### *Hazards*

What potential dangers exist here? Look for dead standing or leaning trees, steep slopes, cliffs or exposure to prevailing foul weather. Consider other forces of nature such as flash floods, lightning, avalanches, or rock fall.

#### *Safety from People*

Are you in an area where your camp of teenagers will be readily noticed and draw unwanted attention? Will you have a vehicle at camp? Can you safely leave your camp unattended all day long?

#### *Civilized Amenities*

Are there conveniences like showers, laundry, or mini-marts nearby? If so, will you monitor or curtail students from using them? How will their presence affect group dynamics?

### **Find Out Area Camping Regulations**

Most national parks and forests have specific camping regulations. Learn these and locate your camp to comply. Regulations most often concern fires, horses, party size limit, and the distance camp must be from a water source.

You will talk about it, complain about it, dream about it, and eat vast quantities of it.

**Food!!** No single aspect of an SCA program will occupy so much of your time and energy as food. Good food can miraculously cheer up a gloomy crew; on the other hand, poor food can damage the morale of the most vibrant group.

Everyone has a philosophy about food, and a way to tackle the problem of figuring out how much a group of people will eat. We offer here some suggestions, tactics that have worked for others, and general guidelines for "guestimating" quantities. But the best teacher in this matter is time and experience. If you carefully document what you buy this year, what gets eaten, what doesn't, it will all be a lot easier the next time around. This chapter provides information about planning food for your crew program.

### **FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN PLANNING MENUS**

The foods you choose to provide will be determined by several factors discussed below:

#### **Individual Preferences—Pre-Program Communications**

This is a very important step that must happen in your pre-program communications! Find out before you do all your shopping what your crew members do and do not eat for personal or medical reasons. Ask very specifically if any of them are vegetarians or vegans. If they say yes, follow-up to find out what exactly this means in their diet. These buzz words have more connotations and subtle variations than you might imagine (See the sample food preference sheet for ideas about how to query them). Your crew members may also have dietary restrictions for health reasons, so be certain to know food allergies and needs beforehand to better help you plan. Also, follow up thoroughly with any food allergies that are identified.

### **Familiarity**

For many students, SCA programs present a huge challenge: being away from home in a group of strangers, and working hard at unfamiliar tasks in foreign surroundings. When so many of the aspects of the crew experience are new, familiar food can be immensely reassuring.

Remember that the food you are accustomed to may be totally unfamiliar to your group. Do not impose your own food values or diet on your crew. This is not the place to convert students' eating habits by planning on total vegetarianism, sugar abstinence or a subsistence diet of beans and rice. This does not meet SCA's goals of providing an emotionally safe environment for your participants. You will have ample opportunity to introduce your crew to issues of commercial meat production or other issues of diet and nutrition while still meeting some of their basic needs for comfort food. Aim to keep everyone's morale high by having a variety of good, nutritious and occasionally indulgent food on hand.

### **Balanced Nutrition**

Hard working people need balanced, healthy diets composed of a variety of whole grains, complete proteins, vegetables and fruits, and fats. If, for storage or preference reasons, you will be bringing only a small amount of meat, plan to combine vegetable proteins in balanced combinations. If you are new to the beans-and-rice, pasta-and-cheese game, see the following list of cookbooks for recipe ideas.

### **Cookbooks**

Great recipes can be found in all kinds of places. Good, easy to use, cookbooks make supervising easier. First time chefs gain confidence (and need less help) when they can refer to a written guide. You may have some favorite books of your own. If not, some references that may help you balance proteins include *A Diet for A Small Planet*, *NOLS Cookery*, and *Laurel's Kitchen*. General books for new cooks, traditional as they may sound, include the *Joy of Cooking* or *Betty Crocker*.

### **Meat**

Whether or not you are a vegetarian, bring some meat on your program (unless of course your entire crew is vegetarian). Meat constitutes an important part of many participants' diets and the lack of meat on their program can precipitate strong discontent. While you need not plan every meal around a meat entree, bring enough to make the carnivores feel at home.

### **Climate, Weather, and Altitude**

If it is likely to be cold or you are working at elevations above 7,000', you will need more calories to keep your engines running. That means sweet drinks, hot breakfasts, more fats and complex carbohydrates, hot drinks at night, high-calorie snacks, etc. In a hot

climate, appetites drop considerably as does the urge to cook complicated meals; in this environment plan quick and light foods for the crew to prepare.

### **Cultural Preferences**

For any crew that has students who come from ethnic backgrounds where food traditions are different than standard fare, respecting and providing for these cultural preferences are important. Be sensitive to your participants' heritages and develop your food plan accordingly. Often, having students share some of their recipes from home is a highlight for the crew. Also, little touches can go a long ways toward making students feel comfortable. A pair of long cooking chopsticks amongst your other kitchen utensils may go a long with showing respect to Asian students.

### **Weight**

How your food will be transported to your camp will influence what kinds of foods you can bring. If you need to keep total weight down, look into dehydrated vegetables instead of bringing canned ones, for instance. Also, whole and unprocessed foods are actually lighter per nutritious meal than processed or packaged food. Always reduce packaging to the absolute minimum; this will also help minimize waste during the program.

### **Camp Location**

Front country camps have an advantage over backcountry camps when it comes to food. Weight is rarely a concern, and good refrigeration with coolers and ice is often possible. You may have the option of re-supplying often. If so, DO IT! Take advantage of your camping situation by serving lots of fresh, heavy (in weight) food. Fresh, perishable food is cheaper, healthier and more nutritious than dried or packaged foods. It is unnecessary to deprive your crew of this luxury to maintain a "purist" camp. You may even want to indulge them in an occasional ice cream cone or soda. However, if you have this luxury, maintain your budget in the face of temptation!

### **Cooking Options**

How you will prepare your meals also has bearing on what you bring. If you know you will be cooking over a fire or using a Dutch oven for some meals, plan things you can cook with these tools. For solar oven meals, bring easy all-day cooking foods. Altitude also effects cooking options: you cannot prepare dried beans above 5,000' unless you have a pressure cooker - they will never get soft enough. Also, pasta cooked above 10,000' usually turns to glop before it cooks because the water does not boil hot enough.

### **Cost**

While your food budget is adequate, crew leaders will still need to be budget minded. Save money by buying mostly whole and bulk foods, and splurge on a few processed items. Pre-packaged "camping" food and freeze-dried food is outrageously expensive and not very tasty. Dehydrated food, though, can be quite reasonable to reduce weight and bulk for the hiking trip.

### **What you are Comfortable Cooking**

Don't get overly ambitious, or try to impress anyone. Stick to meals you know how to cook or a few simple recipes if you are a novice (or ambivalent) in the cooking department. Similarly, while baking is an important part of some SCA programs, it also takes additional time and planning and may be completely inappropriate for some situations.

Some crew leaders pride themselves on rarely repeating a dinner, while others prefer to have five or six basic recipes that will be repeated four or five times giving students the opportunity to master them. Let your leadership style guide you here, and anticipate creativity and experience among your crew.

### **The Recreation Trip**

In contrast to your time in base camp, you may be carrying everything you eat on your back (if you choose a backpacking trip for your recreation time). Depending on your trip, you may need to plan this food a bit differently to keep pack weights down. In this case it is reasonable to bring some dehydrated or freeze dried foods.

### **Teaching Goals**

Bringing limited amounts of a few choice items can make discussions about non-renewable resources, consumption in America or world hunger very immediate. Provided there is plenty of generic food to fuel them through the last days, it really does not matter if the crew eats all 10 pounds of M&M's in the first week. Also remember this may be the first time that your participants have given any thought to issues like nutrition, or the amount of water and energy required to convert eight pounds of grain to one pound of beef. And finally, consider how successful you will be if the kids on your crew actually go home with the new found ability to cook and/or bake!

## **PLANNING AMOUNTS**

Once you have determined what kind of food to take based on all the variables discussed above, you must figure out how much of it you will need. This is both an art and a science and remains a thoroughly mysterious process to even the most experienced crew leaders. Common sense and organized planning seasoned with a healthy dose of intuition and luck and you will be close on most things. A basic rule of thumb is to err on the side of estimating generously; teenagers can eat a lot and you do not want your crew to be hungry. .

### **Meal Planning Strategies**

Crew leaders typically employ one of two basic strategies:

1. Meal Planning method: write out the ingredients for each meal; estimate amounts; compile this list into a master food list with bulk amounts needed.
2. Bulk Foods method: shop for general supplies and bulk amounts of staple foods.

Either method seem to work equally well when applied diligently and with adequate forethought. One method that does not work well is winging it, unless you have a vehicle and can re-supply easily.

### **Food Estimates**

You can use the following figures to "guestimate" your overall needs for grains and pastas. Appetites grow over the course of the month. It may take a few weeks to work into some of these amounts, so cook a little shy the first nights until you get a sense of what your crew eats.

Here are some rough estimates to get you started thinking about quantities. For one dinner, a group of seven typically needs about:

- \* 2 ½ - 3 pounds uncooked pasta (healthy appetites), or
- \* 4-5 cups short grain brown rice (uncooked), or
- \* 2 cups dried kidney beans, or
- \* 2-3 cups dried lentils

Appendix III contains a sample food list as well as an expanded guide for estimating food quantities per person per meal and recipes. Remember that the provided food list was developed to meet specific program conditions. Even if you choose to use this list, make sure you alter it to fit the number of people, the climate, your personal food philosophy, etc.

### ***SOURCES FOR PURCHASING FOOD***

Place a bulk order at your local food coop or natural food warehouse for whole foods, bulk items and organic foods. Discount warehouses and restaurant supply stores offer good bargains on quantities of some foods, but items in stock can vary greatly from week to week. Go there first to pick up whatever you can and then move on. Beware of trying to save on packaging or cost by buying large containers of perishables. Family size containers are usually fine but think twice about commercial size.

A grocery store will likely have many of the remaining food items you need, especially brand name goods like Oreos and M&M's. Whereas, camping stores like REI have packaged dehydrated or freeze-dried camping foods (although very expensive).

If you have experience drying food or making jerky, you might want to buy fresh foods and dry them ahead of time. Due to the effort involved, though, you will probably find that you only have time to prepare enough for an occasional treat or special meal.

### **FOOD STORAGE IN THE FIELD**

Storing the food supplies of an eight person crew for a month in the field is no small task. It nearly amounts to the volume of food you may consume in a year if you live alone! Food will need to be stored to protect it from spoilage by sun, rain and critters. Prior to your pre-program visit, begin to think about the best way to store your food.

#### **Storage Container Options**

In the section above on packing, we mentioned using square buckets, panniers and cardboard boxes. If you have a front country camp, you have other storage containers you can choose from as well:

- \* Plastic or metal garbage cans with lids - preferably new or thoroughly cleaned, scrubbed, disinfected, and lined with food-safe plastic.
- \* Aluminum toolboxes - some agencies have metal boxes 6' x 2' x 1' in their fire caches.
- \* Coolers.
- \* 5 or 10-gallon plastic buckets. For bulk foods get ones that contained food previously. For packaged or canned foods you can use scrubbed paint buckets.

\* For crews in bear country, you may be given bear boxes or plastic bear containers depending upon your location. Proper food storage is very important for the safety of your crew.

Protecting food from sun and rain is easy: bring a big tarp and create a separate "pantry" for your supplies.

### **Refrigeration Options**

Refrigeration is straightforward, too. Either you have it or you do not. If you are in bear country most of the following is problematic, but good ways to keep food cold include:

- \* Electric refrigerator, sometimes available in front country campgrounds.
- \* Cooler with ice or dry ice. Reduce the number of ice re-supply runs you have to make by opening the cooler only once or twice a day.
- \* Snow.

### **Critter Control in Camp**

Your biggest problem is going to be critter-control. Unless you are in bear country, you can probably store your food on the ground, but you must have containers capable of repelling the advances of hungry raccoons, eager mice, gnawing chipmunks, persistent skunks and other opportunistic creatures. Ask your agency coordinator what critters you're likely to encounter and how they typically deal with this challenge.

For programs in black bear or grizzly bear country, you will need to take more precautions by having bear proof containers.

### **What Not To Do**

***No food should be stored in personal packs, sleeping tents or daypacks.*** Food should never be eaten in tents. While you may not be in grizzly bear country this summer, your equipment may be used in Denali National Park next year - an area where you would not want food smells anywhere near your sleeping quarters. Besides, far more tents are destroyed by mice (eating holes in the fabric to get at a granola bar saved for a midnight snack) than by bears!

### **Critter Control on the Recreation Trip**

If you head in to the backcountry for your recreation trip, critters are just as likely to find your food stash while on your hike as they are at your base camp. **Ask your agency coordinator how they typically store food while in the backcountry.** One option may be hanging your food. You may be accustomed to slinging up your food when you go backpacking. Just remember that now you are traveling in a group of eight to ten and the amount of food to hang will be much greater than you usually contend with when hiking alone.

If you must hang your food a good system that works well with large groups: counterbalanced hang. Make sure you have enough supplies for multiple hangs (depending on weight, you will probably need more than one hang).

### **Counterbalance System**

This system works best for "light" loads less than 60 pounds. Food bags hang from one line running over a branch, balancing each other's weight. No line runs to the ground.

Toss a small rock tied to a line over a sturdy branch. Tie half the bags to the end of the line and pull them all the way up to the branch. Now tie on the remaining bags as high on the rope coming down from the branch as you can. Coil the extra line and loop it gently over the bags. Push the bags upward, perhaps using a stick to get them high enough to hang even with the first lot. In the morning, take a stick to knock down the coiled line and pull your food down.

## THE FIELD KITCHEN

Your field kitchen will be a compact affair with everything you need to eat well. For backcountry camps keep it all to a minimum.

Please see Chapter 3 in *Lightly on the Land* for a complete list of kitchen gear for your SCA camp.

### Stoves and Fuel

Currently SCA supplies Coleman two-burner propane stoves in all of the equipment caches. Propane stoves give clean, well-regulated heat and are easy to use. Their only disadvantage is the weight of the propane storage bottle.

For the eight person backcountry crew, one two-burner stove is adequate. Larger crews and front country crews will probably need more burner space. Bring two, two-burner propane stoves or augment the capability of your field kitchen with one of your backpacking stoves.

### Amounts of Fuel Necessary

A wide range of fuel consumption exists among different crews and crew leaders. Great care has to be taken in instructing crew members to completely turn off the valves on both the stove and tank when cooking is completed, or your entire tank can empty into the atmosphere over one night or create a very hazardous condition! Other factors that can affect how much fuel you use will include:

- Complexity of menus and amount of whole grain foods cooked (three-hour bean dishes obviously use more fuel than three-minute ramen dinners).
- How much "extracurricular" baking your crew does.
- How much you use a fire or Dutch oven with coals from the fire to cook.
- Weather - when it's cold you need more hot food and lots of hot drinks.
- Condition of your stove - old or leaking stoves will not be as efficient as new, well-tuned ones.
- Whether your stove has a pressure regulator. If it does, the stove will be more efficient.

- Altitude - it takes longer to cook food at higher elevations.
- The length of your program.

You may use anywhere from 20 to 40 pounds of propane in base camp. This does not include the weight of any of the bottles. Running out of fuel can range from being inconvenient to dangerous, so plan carefully, and consider having a small (disposable) reserve tank in your cache. Also, a hint for monitoring fuel consumption on tanks without a gauge – check for condensation on the tank early in the morning. The condensation will only form where there is fuel.

### **Stoves and Fuel on the Recreation Trip**

If you go backpacking, you will cook on small backpacking stoves. Currently SCA employs *MSR Whisperlite* or *Simmerlite* stoves. Lightweight stoves work well when cooking for smaller groups, so you may want to break your crew up into cook groups of three or four students, each with its own stove. Teach your participants to use these (occasionally temperamental) stoves **safely**. You should plan on using about half a quart of white gas per person per week during the hike.

## **PREPARING FOOD**

The following advice is a smattering of wisdom collected over the years by many crew leaders. For the most part, we encourage you to rely on good cookbooks.

### **Who Will Cook**

Part of the SCA experience for your crew is having the crew members cook. Crew Leaders should not do all the cooking. A common way of assigning who will cook is by creating a chore wheel with your group; this will facilitate every member of the group having an opportunity to cook for the crew a number of times. Students will come to the crew with a varied level of cooking experience and competency. One strategy to help students become comfortable with cooking is to be heavily involved early on, and then back off your involvement in the kitchen the second week. Regularly hanging out in earshot of the kitchen is another time tested strategy for both developing independence and cooking competency in your participants.

### **Baking**

It will take between three and four hours to make two loaves of bread in a field camp. If you bring enough flour to bake every day, you had better do it. Packers usually grumble bringing 30 pounds of flour in, but they get **really** bent out of shape if they have to pack it out! Instead of trying to bake bread each day, consider baking a few times a week as a treat and pack in crackers for other meals.

### **Treats**

Have a few stowed away to pull out at unexpected moments. They are great morale boosters. Hide your stash of chocolate at the bottom of the lentil bucket where your crew will never think to look for it.

### **General Cooking Tips**

- To depressurize your pressure cooker, instead of removing the valve on the top and spraying gooey rice steam all over, take the pot off the stove and pour cold water over it until the safety gasket goes down!

- Bring several mesh bags to hang clean eating utensils in to dry. It helps keep them out of the dirt.
- Make your collapsible Coleman oven bake more evenly and save fuel by making an insulating cover out of a used fire blanket. Most agencies have lots of opened (no longer useable) "shake and bake" body bags that fire-fighters use. Cut one up to cover the top and sides of your oven. Also, place rocks (not river rocks which could explode) in the bottom of the oven to hold the heat and distribute it more evenly.
- To prevent the midnight clean-up, put dish water on to heat as soon as dinner comes off the stove.

## WASHING UP

Maintain the health of your crew by establishing exemplary kitchen sanitation. Anyone working with food must wash their hands with soap (and completely rinse the soap off) before beginning to cook. Leftovers should be kept cool. Wash and rinse your dishes well to ward off unpleasant stomach problems.

### The Four Bin Method

This is the washing system we require SCA crews to employ. Have four large basins used exclusively for washing. After each meal, run all used utensils and pots through the set-up.

1. The first bucket has plain cold water. Rinse dishes here to remove big food scraps, grease and other "uglies". This water should be changed as often as it gets dirty.
2. The second bucket has hot soapy water for washing.
3. The third bucket has cold water with a splash of bleach in it. The bleach helps cut the soap and sanitizes.
4. The last bucket has almost boiling water for a final sterilizing rinse. Remember that getting all soap off of dishes, cutting boards and utensils is as important as washing them for preventing stomach problems.

### Leftovers and Food Waste

Extra food waste attracts animals and creates disposal problems. Here are some tips reduce or eliminate it:

- \* Make less food
- \* Take it to work the next day for lunch. Have enough containers to hold leftovers.
- \* Take advantage of appetites to combat cleanup.

If you must dispose of it (like when a meal goes spectacularly "wrong"), store it where critters cannot get into it. If you are in bear country you must hang it with your food supplies or if you can burn, completely burn it in a very hot fire. In the backcountry, anything you cannot burn should be packed out. Composting in the backcountry is unacceptable, **do not do it**. It habituates animals to humans and food scraps and violates Leave No Trace and agency policy.

## WATER PURIFICATION

When SCA started running programs over fifty years ago, no one thought of needing to purify water for trail crews. Mountain streams were clear and clean. In the past decade however, the parasitic amoebae Giardia and others has colonized many of our most remote rivers, lakes and streams. Very few places remain in the continental United States where you can assume that the water is safe to drink without purification.

Several purification options are available for ensuring safe drinking water for SCA crews. All of them are time consuming and require diligence in making sure that water is purified before it is needed.

### **Boiling**

Bringing questionable water to a boil for about a minute to 10 minutes (according to varied opinions on this point) kills the giardia cyst. Water that will be used for cooking, hot drinks or washing does not need to be treated except by boiling. Boiling is not the ideal method for treating your other drinking water as it consumes too much fuel. Additionally, the water tastes flat. Some circumstances may require this however.

### **Encouraging Water Consumption**

Consider some of these hints garnered during years of running SCA crews:

- Make common water breaks a regular part of your day – whether at work or recreating – and have the whole group drink at the same time. Teach participants to drink before they become thirsty – maintain rather than work to catch up. Play games if that is what it takes to get your gang to drink enough.
- Sharing water bottles is **a bad idea**. Do not let this become a practice on your crew. Sharing bottles facilitates an easy transfer of illness through the entire crew; also, it is difficult to judge how much water someone was drunk when people are sharing bottles. Large jugs of water at the work site to supplement personal water bottles is a great idea; insist that it is used to refill personal bottles rather than allowing any one to drink directly from it.
- Talk about urination – that it needs to be clear (not yellow) and copious (pee often). Early in the program, participants (particularly young women) may not want to drink simply because it forces them to go to the “bathroom” in uncomfortable and still unfamiliar circumstances.
- Model your expectations of your crew and drink enough yourself!
- However you purify your water supply, make sure you stay ahead of the game. Do not allow yourself to get in the situation of returning from a hot, hard day at work with empty water bottles, only to have empty containers at camp as well.
- Flavoring water also helps encourage consumption, but be cautious about adding sugar, which acts as a diuretic. The same cautions apply to coffee and caffeinated teas, which actually require a person to drink a cup and a half of water for every cup of tea or coffee consumed just to stay even!