

Regulars



Top 30 Scouting Skills

Just how do you cook an egg in an orange? What exactly is geocaching? And how do you find your bearings with only a wristwatch? This issue, Scouting goes back to basics with some essential Scouting skills. Here are 15 essential skills, followed by 10 readers' favourites and then five circus skills

1. How to start a campfire

To build a typical campfire, you need three types of fuel: tinder, kindling and logs. The first rule of fire-making is to always have twice as much of each as you think you'll need. Have these ready before you even strike a match. Adam Plowden

- Carefully remove the turf from an area about a metre square and push a twig in the ground in the middle. Store the turf out of the way and water regularly.
- Surround the central twig with kindling and tinder – lots of small dry twigs, pine needles and strips of bark.
- Using progressively thicker twigs, build a wigwam shape but leave a gap on the windward side so you can place a match right into the kindling.
- Light the kindling – blow very gently if the fire does not take hold on its own.
- Add more tiny twigs to each flame; as your fire begins to grow, use larger and larger twigs and then sticks.
- When firmly established, lay a log parallel with the wind direction on either side. Abandon the wigwam shape by adding sticks, split logs and so on. Place a fire grill across the logs and within a few minutes you will be ready to start cooking!

Always ask permission of the landowner first before building your fire or use a designated area if on a campsite.

2. How to find dry kindling in the rain

In wet weather if you have no dry kindling, go to the nearest hedge. You can always find dry dead wood for starting a fire in the thickest part of the hedge, but take care not to damage the hedge itself.

3. How to dry tinder

There are a multitude of mosses, grasses and other thin and fibre-like materials that can be easily ignited. The key to these is that they have to be dry. When walking in the woods, I collect wispy-looking material and put them in my shirt pocket (body heat quickly dries them out). Adam Plowden

4. Which wood burns best?



Create routecards online

This free software is designed to aid in the creation of routecards for hikers of any type, being in Scouting, Duke of Edinburgh's Award or general use. It allows you to calculate the fields that normally would take a long time to calculate by hand. You can create multiple routecards which can be saved and then edited in the future, as well as having printer-friendly versions for use on hikes. Escouts Route Hiker now incorporates features such as mobile phone browsing, which allows a user to edit their routecards while they are away from their computer on a hike. Register at www.routehiker.org.uk

It's always helpful to know which woods burn best – the following guide refers to dry, seasoned wood. All woods burn better when seasoned and some burn better when split rather than as whole logs.

5. How to use a magnifying glass to start a fire

If you want a foolproof way to light a fire with a magnifying glass, then you need the biggest one that you can get. You can buy large flat plastic ones in stationery stores, for help with reading maps and small print. Often they are flexible too – which makes carrying them easy. Where they score is in their size – an A4-sized magnifying glass concentrates so much sunlight that you can't fail to set your fire alight. David Raynor Assistant Scout Leader, 1st Langley Scout Group

6. How to keep mud off your shoes

If the floor of your marquee gets muddy, put down a layer of ferns to prevent people from getting muddy feet. 'A dry Scout is a happy Scout' as my dad used to say. Richard Irving

7. How to keep dry on camp

When camping in a rainstorm make sure your equipment never touches the sides of the tent – otherwise you'll cause a leak. Always camp at the top of a hill – never in a basin.

Finally, if you have an activity with shorts or trousers with pockets, make sure that the pocket flap is out – or your pockets will fill with water! Richard Irving

When we go camping in the UK we always expect that we will be camping in the rain. When the heavens open, I revert to wearing shorts and sandals, T-shirt and a thick cagoul. That means my top half keeps warm and dry. My bottom half can quickly dry off when it stops raining. I always have another set of identical clothes so if the rain persists and if I am outside I can look forward to a quick change act. Chris Foster District Commissioner, Southgate, Greater London North

8. How to dry out your boots or shoes

Put two sticks in the ground and hang your shoes on them with the toes facing downwards. Steve Irving

9. Know the safe way to go night hiking

It's easy to lose sight of each other, so it's vital that the group stays together and goes at the pace of the slowest member. Listen out for hazards and make regular voice contact with each other. Use the pavement if there is one or walk on the right-hand side of the road. Approach right-hand bends with caution and walk no more than two abreast – single file when there is an oncoming vehicle. Let the driver know you are there; your group should have two torches – one at the front and one at the back – but be careful not to aim the beam directly at the driver. Finally, wear light reflective clothing; ideally a jacket for the people at the front and back, with a reflective arm-band for each member of the party.

10. How to be a backwoods chef

Try your hand at this intriguing selection of culinary delights from Eddie Greenhalgh – all of which can be made without plates, cutlery, pots or pans.

Acorn coffee

You will need:

- About 40 acorns
- Salt

- Milk and sugar as required
- Water

Method:

1. Wash the acorns well and chop them roughly, using a sharp knife.
2. Place on three sheets of foil, on which you have pierced holes, and place over the hot embers for about five minutes, shaking regularly.
3. Remove from the fire and allow to cool before chopping the acorns up into smaller pieces and adding eight cupfuls of boiling water in a foil pan, adding a small pinch of salt to the water.
4. Simmer for three or four minutes and immediately prior to serving, add a small quantity of cold water to make the acorn grounds settle.
5. Serve with milk and sugar as required, and enjoy!

Egg in an orange**You will need:**

- 1 large orange per person
- 1 egg per person

Method: Cut the top third off the orange and carefully scoop out (and eat!) the flesh of the orange from the bottom section. Break the egg into the orange and place it among the hot embers until you can see that the egg is cooked.

Camper's quiche

You will need: (quantities are per person)

- 3 eggs
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of milk
- 1 tbsp chopped parsley
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup pastry
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup cream
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup grated cheese
- 1 onion
- 2 rashers bacon

Method:

1. Press the pastry in a small, greased foil tray.
2. Chop the onion and the bacon and mix with the other ingredients.
3. Pour the mixture over the pastry and place in your camp oven, cook for 30 minutes until the top of your quiche begins to brown.

11. How to wake up to a hot breakfast

Cook your porridge the night before, put it in an airtight container and then bury it in the ground. In the morning, dig it up and hey presto – instant hot porridge. Make sure you mark the spot with a stick or you may never find your breakfast!

12. How to pack a rucksack

There is of course an art to packing a rucksack. It's a skill that most people think they know – but few do it absolutely right. Here are five top tips from Peter Brooks:

1. Pack the side pockets first. That way, you'll get more in them.
2. Pack the first things you will need first and the last things you need last.
3. Place a dustbin bag into the rucksack first and pack into this; your kit should stay dry even in the wettest weather.
4. Keep your wet weather clothing easily accessible in case of a sudden shower.
5. If you always pack your gear in the same places in your rucksack you will always know where to find each item as you want it.

Top • Waterproof jacket • Warm sweater

Middle • Sleeping bag • Plates and mug • Stove and fuel • Plimsolls or training shoes

Bottom • Spare clothes • Clean underwear • Hankies • Socks • Swimwear

Side pocket 1 • Cutlery • Torch • Loo roll • Matches • Spare batteries
Side pocket 2 • Wash kit • Towel • First Aid kit

13. How to forecast the weather – without a TV or radio!

You don't need lots of hi-tech equipment or a PhD in meteorology to predict the weather. You just need to be aware of the things that are going on around you. The following words of wisdom may be of help:

- The higher the clouds the finer the weather
- When clouds appear like towers, the Earth is refreshed by frequent showers – cauliflower clouds? Then pack your raincoat
- A large gathering of clouds? Then expect rain or snow; a mixture of clouds means there's various weather fronts coming in from all directions – be prepared for rain or snow
- Ring around the moon, rain real soon – this means an advancing warm front leading to precipitation i.e. rain!
- Rain foretold, long last; short notice, soon pass. If it's expected then it could be a long heavy shower. If it catches you by surprise then it's likely to be a quick shower.

14. How to find your bearings without a compass

Of course the easy way to find north is to use a compass, or even better a Global Positioning System, but what happens when you find yourself stranded somewhere without either?

Using the sun and a watch with hands

1. Point the hour hand of your watch at the sun.
2. During Greenwich Mean Time, bisect the angle between 12 on your watch face and the hour hand.
3. During British Summer Time, bisect the angle between 1 on your watch face and the hour hand.
4. In both cases, the resulting line points north/south. True north is the end furthest from the sun.

Using the stars

To find north at night you must first locate the Pole Star (and if it's a cloudy night and no stars are visible, you are in trouble!) Polaris, as the North Star is more formally known, is situated over the Earth's North Pole; once you have found it, you should be able to estimate other directions from it.

Using shadows

This method relies on sunlight or moonlight if it is strong enough. Drive a fairly straight stick into the ground, keeping it as vertical as possible (a weighted string as a makeshift plumbline will help). Mark the top of the shadow it casts with a pebble or twig. After 15 minutes, mark the top of the shadow again. A line from the first mark through the second, will (in the northern hemisphere!) point roughly east. This method is most accurate in the middle of the day.

Geocaching – how to lay a hi-tech treasure hunt

Scouts love a challenge and here's one that combines the latest technology, the outdoors and the thrill of finding hidden treasure. Greg Vincent introduces geocaching – an addictive new sport for the twenty-first century.

In 2000, the US Department of Defence increased the accuracy of its Global Positioning System. Soon computer users started 'caching' – recording on a website where the cache was and inviting others to find it. There are now more than 250,000 caches in over 200 countries just waiting to be found. Two are close to Gilwell Park, another close by is where a German JU 88 crashed after being shot down while attempting to bomb London in 1940.

Here is how it works. I make a cache, usually a small waterproof container, place a logbook, pencil and small inexpensive 'treasures' such

as a badge or a whistle in my cache. I find a place to hide my cache, somewhere not particularly easy to find, record the position on my hand-held Global Positioning System receiver, my GPS, and head home. I then place that location on a geocaching website with its unique name, then wait for the cache to be found. Once someone finds my cache they open it, record the fact in the logbook, take something and leave something. When they get home they post a message that they have found my cache.

There are more than 16,000 cachers in the UK, many with multiple caches so there is no shortage to try and find. Many of these cachers have found places of scenic beauty or of historical significance and have written about the area. The website www.geocacheuk.com provides information on the location of these thousands of caches. You will need to create a geocache name and password to enter the site, but there is no cost.

Geocaching – essential equipment

- A hand held GPS receiver – this can be purchased for £100 and up, the more sophisticated have maps and compasses in them, which are useful but not essential
- A computer connection to the Internet
- A local topographical map is useful, as well as a compass
- A road atlas
- Transport to the distant caches; close to home a bicycle will work just as well
- Common sense – it is best to have a friend along, do not go geocaching on your own.



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