

OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Dear Parents,

Hello! My name is Amy McCann and I am the Director of Outdoor Education at Besant Hill School. With an academic background in education and a passion for the outdoors, I have spent the past five years leading and teaching students in outdoor, wilderness and school settings in the United States and abroad. I am currently pursuing my Master of Arts in Adventure Education, and I am excited to share my experiences and love of the outdoors with your children. As this is my third year at Besant Hill, I know a number of you and your sons or daughters in one way or another and look forward in meeting all the new students. I wanted to touch base to acquaint you with 1) the importance of the Outdoor Education Program to the school, and 2) how to best equip your son or daughter for the up-coming backpacking trip in Kings Canyon National Park in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California.

Program and Purpose

For over 30 years, BHS has challenged, inspired and taught its students through the use of intensive wilderness trips. The Outdoor Education Program has one big trip in the fall and several weekend trips each school year in which all students and faculty participate. The **Fall Trip** is a 7-day backpacking adventure in Kings Canyon National Park. The entire school splits up into small teams of eight to ten students, each led by two or three faculty members. These teams travel separately in different remote parts in the park, coming back together as one school for the final night's campfire, stories and festivities. The reasons we do this trip are threefold: wilderness education, personal challenge and community building. We have found these experiences to be an exceptional way to kick off a successful school year. They allow us to start building strong, memorable relationships with the students; relationships that only grow deeper and richer as the year goes on.

This year the Outdoor Education Program is excited to offer a new opportunity for students as part of our weekend trips program. The program will consist of both outdoor adventure education and service-learning activities. Besant Hill School will partner with an organization in the community that is working to preserve our local beaches and oceans. Students will have the opportunity to work with the organization on different volunteer projects, in addition to participating in a variety of outdoor activities that center around our local beaches and oceans such as ocean kayaking, surfing, and snorkeling. This will be an ongoing program that all students will participate in at some point during the school year. Specific information about these trips will be announced in September.

Equipment

Since our primary goal is to keep your child as safe and as comfortable as possible, we want to make sure that everyone has the appropriate equipment. Hopefully, returning students still have all of the gear from the previous year. Regardless, all students must have \$450 deposited into their sundry accounts to cover the cost of potential purchases. Please familiarize yourself with the enclosed equipment checklist. Take note that all items are organized in two categories: 1) REQUIRED and available for purchase through the school through the \$450 deposit; 2) REQUIRED and supplied by the student. **Parents should make sure that their son or daughter comes to school the first day with all of the items in the 2nd category, and any backpacking equipment they currently own.** The gear inspection occurs during the first few days of school and all equipment will need to be bought at school if not brought the first day. **Please ensure that you buy hiking boots that fit your child before coming to school, and have them wear them around for a while to break them in.**

Rentals vs. Purchases. Three of the items on the first REQUIRED list (**backpack, sleeping bag, sleeping pad**) can be rented or purchased from the school. The decision to rent or purchase should be made on how often the student might use the item in the future and how much comfort they want. Your own equipment could last a lifetime and fit more comfortably. A freshman entering BHS can anticipate using the backpack four or more times during the four years of high school; sleeping bags and pads will be used ten or more times.

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Backpack rentals are \$35 per trip; backpack purchases are around \$125-150. Sleeping bag rentals are \$35 per trip; sleeping bag purchases are around \$65-\$125. Sleeping pad rentals are \$17.50 per trip; sleeping pad purchases are around \$20-\$65. So if your child is entering as a freshman or sophomore, it makes economic sense to purchase these items instead of rent. We sell these items at school, but you may wish to buy your own gear, as it will be something you picked out and potentially more comfortable. **Remember you will also need to bring boots that are sufficient for a 7-day backpacking trip in Kings Canyon National Park in California.** Please refer to the detailed **guide to outdoor gear** and the equipment lists accompanying this package. Also you can get more information on our website at <http://www.besanthill.org/outdoors/>.

Regardless which option you choose, once your child brings the gear to school we will inspect it to see if it meets our criteria. If we feel a particular item is not appropriate for our purposes, or if the student fails to arrive with the equipment, we will purchase it for them. For this reason we ask you to deposit the \$450, even if you plan to send your child to school with equipment. You will receive a receipt for any purchase we make, and any unused funds will stay in your child's sundry account.

Finally, if you do have any additional questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to email me at amccann@besanthill.org. I will be out of town until August 19, so please email me or direct all your questions to the Admissions Office during that time.

Sincerely,

Amy McCann
Director of Outdoor Education

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Backpacking Equipment List

1. REQUIRED: Purchase on your own or it can be Supplied by the school through the \$450 deposit			
√?	Qty.	Item	Description
—	1	Backpack (rental fee = \$35)	Should be a backpack of at least 4000 cubic inches with a well padded hip belt.
—	1	sleeping bag & stuff sack (rental fee \$35)	Light weight mummy-style bag (0-20° F rating is good), filled with synthetic or down material (big, bulky cotton bags are NOT good)
—	1	sleeping pad (rental fee \$17.50)	Keeps you warm and comfortable when sleeping on cold, hard ground. Ridgerest & Therm-a-rest® are good brands.
—	2-3 pairs	Hiking socks	Wool /poly (synthetic) blend (Smartwool, etc)
—	1	long underwear tops	Light to medium weight synthetic material like capilene or polypropylene (NO COTTON!)
—	1	long underwear bottoms	Light to medium weight synthetic material like capilene or polypropylene (NO COTTON!)
—	1	fleece jacket	Medium to heavy weight fleece jacket (NO COTTON SWEATSHIRTS!!).
—	1	rain jacket with a hood	Should be made from a coated nylon material. Must be waterproof and breathable.
—	1	rain pants	Should be made from a coated nylon material also. Side zippers on the sides of the legs are nice.
—	1	wool or fleece cap	For cold conditions and for staying warm while sleeping.
—	1	fleece pants	These are nice to wear around camp at night and when the weather becomes cold
—	1	wool/fleece gloves	For cold conditions and possibly snow.
—	2	water bottle	Should be a sturdy wide mouthed bottle, best with a capacity of 1 litre. NO canteens
—	1	eating gear	Should have a bowl, mug (12-20 oz.) and spoon. (That is it)
—	1	lip balm	Should be SPF 15
—	1-2	Bandanas	Many uses! (Handkerchief, sweat band, washcloth, etc.)
—	1	Headlamp with batteries	Headlamps are the most handy in camp at night or early days on the trail

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2. REQUIRED: Student must buy, not supplied at school			
√?	Qty.	Item	Description
___	1 pair	Hiking boots (best to show up wearing them)	Should be a medium weight leather boot made for hiking. Make sure they are well broken in before the trip (this will make a big difference!).
___	1 pair	Socks	That will stay dry for sleeping in
___	1 pair	Sneakers/sandals	For wearing around the campsite. Old sneakers or Teva-type sandals work well. (not flip flops)
___	1	Shorts	Quick dry, nylon material
___	1	Pants	Better if quick drying, nylon material
___	3	Underwear	Enough for one week. Bring what you think you need, but try to go light!
___	1	T-Shirt	Synthetic best, but cotton OK
___	1	Sun hat	Baseball caps are OK, but hats with full brims are better
___	1	Sunglasses (important)	Should have good UV protection (we go high)
___	1	Toothpaste & toothbrush	Bring a very small tube of toothpaste
___	1	Extra eyeglasses or contact lens supplies	Please bring a very small bottle of contact lens solution if you wear contacts.

OPTIONAL: Not necessary, but nice to have.

- ___ Book (small)
- ___ Personal journal or notebook with pens and/or pencils.
- ___ Camera

DO NOT BRING (These items will not be permitted on the backpacking trip)

- X** personal electronic items - walkmans, Discmans, video games, radios, etc.
- X** firearms or fireworks
- X** machetes, swords, throwing stars or other large sharp weapons
- X** makeup or elaborate jewelry

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BHS Guide to Outdoor Gear

Living and traveling in the wilderness can be challenging in many ways. One of the ways you can get the most out of this experience is to select the appropriate gear ahead of time and know how to use it correctly. This sheet summarizes some important tips on those preparations.

Fitting and Breaking in Your Hiking Boots

Boots are your most important piece of equipment. If you have trouble with your boots, the result is often a great deal of discomfort. Therefore, there are two crucial things to understand and do regarding your boots: First, make sure that the boots you have or buy fit you well, with extra room for thick socks. Second, make sure you have broken them in well *before* arriving for our expedition.

We require a **medium weight leather-hiking boot** with a Vibram or similar type sole. Be sure to tell your salesperson that you will be carrying moderately heavy loads on a wide variety of terrains and that good ankle support is a priority. When you go shopping, wear the same hiking socks you will be using during the trip. If your heel lifts or slips more than quarter inch in any direction, the boot is too big, and you may develop blisters on your heels. If your feet are different sizes, fit the larger one and wear an extra sock on the other. Stand on your toes, if your toes crunch up against the front of your boots, you will develop blisters when hiking downhill. You are better off buying boots that are slightly too big than too small. Some good brands of boots are REI, La Sportiva, Merrell, Montrail, Lowa, and Hi-Tec. In order to break your boots in, the directions are simple. Walk everyday with your boots on, up and down hills!

Choosing and Sizing Your Backpack

Your backpack will be your home while in the backcountry, so you should choose it very carefully. Internal frame packs meet our needs, easy to pack everything inside and comfortable.

Your backpack must have a padded hip belt, and padded shoulder straps. A single compartment pack will suffice. Packs come in various sizes adjusting for back length and waist size. Make sure yours fits so you can draw it tightly around your hips, since the majority of the weight of the pack should fall on your hips, not on your shoulders. When you try it on, have someone put weight in it, and then walk around. The pack should not slip down or weigh on your shoulders. If it does, you need a different size pack. The hip belt should rest on your hipbones, **not below them**. In order to hold all the gear you carry, the pack must have a minimum 4000 cubic inch storage capacity. Other features that you may appreciate are accessible water bottle pockets and a detachable lid that can turn into a daypack. Some good brands of backpacks include Arc'teryx, Gregory, Marmot and REI.

Sleeping Bag

You will need a good three-season, mummy style bag that will keep you warm to at least 15 degrees Fahrenheit. If you are someone who gets cold easily, you might consider buying a bag that has a rating of 10 degrees Fahrenheit. Your bag should also have a draft tube running the entire length of the zipper, since this is where most of the heat in a bag is lost. Be sure your bag is long enough so you can stretch out in it with the hood on. Draft collars also prevent heat loss through the top.

There are two types of bags currently available on the market, polyester and down bags. Polyester sleeping bags retain loft (hence warmth) when wet, are easy to clean, and are considerably less expensive than a comparable down bag. On the other hand, down bags are often lighter and warmer, as long as you don't get them wet. Do not buy a bag with sewn-through construction, as it will not keep the user warm enough. The

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total weight of your sleeping bag should be between 2 and 3.75 pounds. It should also be able to be compressed into a small nylon stuff sack.

Some good brands of sleeping bags include North Face, Mountain Hardware, Sierra Designs, Marmot, and REI.

Rain Gear

The best way to stay dry is to wear a two-piece suit consisting of a jacket and pants. The standard nylon coated waterproof/breathable variety is great for our purposes. It is lightweight and durable. Gore-tex is similar, but a bit heavier and costs a lot more. Be careful not to buy plastic raingear that was not designed for hiking and camping. Such raingear often tears and traps moisture inside, often keeping you more wet than dry while hiking. Perhaps just as important as fabric in rain gear is construction, be sure that the seams of your gear are factory sealed.

Some good brands of rain jackets and pants include North Face, Columbia, Moonstone, Marmot, Mountain Hardware and REI.