

April 4, 2022

Beginning Backpacking Class Offered in Kansas City Area



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Area Kansas and Missouri Sierra Club groups teach a biannual beginner backpacking class and maintain a gear-lending library for use by Sierra Club members taking the class. By helping bring people of all backgrounds outdoors, backpacking classes and gear lending libraries can foster a sense of connection and responsibility to the natural world. Outings leaders are volunteers who have training and experience in conducting outings. They are not compensated.

The beginner backpacking class provides a robust one-day classroom experience and a treasure-trove of curated online resources before progressing outdoors. Then, several developmental outdoor activities – a practice backpacking day and campout – culminate in the capstone experience — the guided student backpacking weekend.

Although beginner backpacking classes and gear libraries have made an impact around pockets of the country, they have been more prevalent in places like Oregon and Washington. And while even commercial outfitters sometimes have gear rental services, not so in this area.

The gear-lending library provides equitable access to high-quality outdoor gear for experiential outdoors education, by providing essential big ticket gear such as backpacks, tents, and sleeping bags at no direct cost. These mainstays are a huge hurdle for people to go out and buy, and what's the point in having sunk costs if you're not sure you'll use the gear more than once? Our mission is to get people outside. We want to make sure they're adequately equipped and price doesn't make it unattainable.

Individuals in the Midwest have limited access to comprehensive backpacking classes with experienced instructors. In addition, for those who don't have financial access to buy what can be quite expensive gear for backpacking, we offer the gear-lending library. People can truly benefit from this helpful springboard which helps level-set learning the sport of backpacking," says Eileen McManus, Kansas City, Missouri Outings Chair of the Thomas Hart Benton Group.

"Lending libraries are about providing access, to be sure, but they're also about sustainability, gear sharing, and keeping gear in good repair and rotation. We look for the highest-quality durable gear to stock our lending library," she explains. "Otherwise, it wouldn't stand up to frequent use."

Gear is purchased with donations from the Beginner Backpacking and Wilderness Navigation classes as well as weekend outings, and maintained through the effort of its custodian. Lending libraries provide an opportunity to reach people who otherwise wouldn't be able to afford their own gear. This is not a revenue program for us. It's a way of providing an opportunity for everyone to get outdoors.



Check out the Gear Lending Library for Sierra Club members