



# American Youth Foundation Miniwanca

## Camper and Family Handbook: Explorer Program



My own self, At my very best, All the time

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# Welcome to Four Trails

Dear Explorer Camper & Family,

Whether this is your first year in Four Trails or you're returning for another year of adventure, we are so excited that you have enrolled in the Explorer program this summer. Your decision to participate in this program is just the start of an experience where you will be asked to connect, play, and reflect in the outdoors, and we couldn't be more excited to invite you on this adventure.

At the core of Four Trails is the belief that when we are invited to explore and discover the wonder of the natural world, we are also inviting ourselves to explore and venture inward. In paying attention to what is astounding about the outdoors, we also pay attention to our equally astounding inner selves. We then use what we learn about ourselves to be better, more engaged community members.

This handbook is a good place to begin your preparations for the adventure ahead. The first section, "Welcome to the Explorer Program" covers many of the need-to-know topics for Explorer campers, and the sections that follow offer in-depth descriptions of what you can expect Explorer campers to do while on trail.

Take the time to read through this document, and if you have questions or concerns about any of the items in this handbook or packet, please feel free to contact me. I'll be more than happy to help.

*Get outside, listen, play, feel, connect, and happy trails,*



**Andrew McIver**

Four Trails Program Manager

American Youth Foundation – Miniwanca

# Welcome to the Explorer Program

As an Explorer, you will embark on multiple adventures as you discover the fundamentals of outdoor adventure trips.

Explorers will also take on canoeing and backpacking in some of the most beautiful wilderness settings of Michigan. As they backpack through Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore on a 7-day hiking trip, they'll explore waterfalls and cliffs along the stunning Lake Superior Shoreline. Soon after, they'll swap their backpacks for canoes and take on a 6-day paddling trip down the Manistee River through winding forests and pristine Michigan wilderness.

These self-supported adventures offer the additional challenges of carrying all of the food and supplies campers will need for the duration of their trip. Through everything, they'll continue to reflect on how they can best support each other as they build friendships, gain confidence, and thrive in the mobile communities they create while on trail.



## Expect the Unexpected

The AYF makes every reasonable effort to ensure a fun, safe trip experience in which campers are encouraged to achieve their personal best. However, it is neither possible to foresee or control every circumstance. Group dynamics, failure to follow instruction, missing a turn on road or trail, interactions with people not affiliated with the AYF, inclement weather and other environmental hazards can create unexpected challenges on-trail. Our staff is trained to problem solve when the unexpected arises and as a result our unplanned programmatic elements often serve as the greatest catalyst for teaching our participants life skills.

Unforeseen circumstances can provide a valuable learning opportunity for campers in the way of critical thinking and problem solving. Should an incident occur, our first priority is the safety of our campers as well as the quality of the group experience. To this end our course of action may include, but is not limited to addressing the incident with an individual(s) or the entire trip group, facilitating the group to collaboratively determine next best steps and/or intentionally adjusting the itinerary. When campers are in the “leader of the day” role it is expected that low level incidents will arise and from those much learning is gained with camper led problem solving.

In order to maximize the potential for a positive group and individual experience, it is of the utmost importance that campers come to Miniwanca physically fit, mentally prepared and possessing the correct equipment. Please be sure to follow the specific training and equipment recommendations included in the next sections.



## **Four Trails Safety**

Just as our in-camp programs encourage campers to take social, emotional, and physical risks in healthy and safe ways, our adventure programs are designed to challenge campers to take healthy risks in an environment where they can feel safe, supported, and valued. We encourage campers to try new things, to ask questions, and to explore what it means to be their own self in settings outside of their comfort zones.

We are additionally committed to remaining in constant dialogue within and outside of the camp community to help us continually refine the safety of the Four Trails program. Though specific safety protocols vary based on trip type, most can be categorized in 3 distinct areas, summarized below:

### **Pre-Trip Preparation and Assessment Protocols**

All campers and leaders must arrive with a base level of physical and mental readiness that will allow them to participate for several hours in physically and mentally rigorous activities. Cycling trip participants have additional pre-trip requirements that ensure campers are familiar with basic cycling skills as well as the rules of the road.

### **Routine Safety Monitoring for All Trip Groups**

Some of our protocols for monitoring trip safety include: daily group check-ins with camp coordinators, group safety and first aid briefings, cell phone and satellite phone support, in addition to van and transportation support when applicable.

### **Post-Trip Debrief and Route Evaluation**

Our post-trip safety protocols include facilitated trip debriefs between coordinators, trip leaders, and campers, ongoing route evaluations including contact with local and state officials, and annual route review conducted by camp directors and coordinators.

## Four Trails Fitness and Trip Preparation

It is important that campers arrive with a base level of fitness that will allow them to participate in physical activity for up to several hours at a time. Please take note of the following Four Trails Fitness and Training Program below. Not only are these guidelines important for your personal safety and enjoyment, it is necessary for the safety and enjoyment of others who will be a part of your mobile community.

Activities that could be undertaken to specifically prepare for camp include:

- Cycling on a bike or exercise machine.
- Swimming, running, or any other cardio-intensive sport.
- Yoga or any activity that works on flexibility and building core strength.
- Strength training exercises including push-ups, sit-ups, chin-ups, pull-ups and supervised weight training.
- Practicing healthy levels of hydration, diet, and rest.

**Cardiovascular Endurance Assessment:** Find a 1.5 mile course (local running track or set a back road course with a car.) Run and/or walk the distance as fast as you can. A desirable level of endurance for the Four Trails program is an elapsed time of less than 15 minutes.

### Suggested Training Program:

	Cardiovascular		Strength	
Week	days per week	minutes per day	days per week	minutes per day
1	3	30	2	15
2	4	30	2	15
3	4	30	3	20
4	4	30	3	30
5	4	40	3	30
6	4	50	3	30
7	4	30	3	45
8	4	60	3	45

These activities will not only boost physical and mental readiness for Four Trails campers, but will also minimize the stress related to these physically demanding trip experiences.

## Equipment and Clothing Recommendations

Miniwanca provides as much gear and equipment as possible for campers of the Four Trails program. In general, campers are responsible for providing personal gear including personal clothing, sleeping bags, and sleeping pads and Miniwanca will provide all essential group gear (including bikes, tents, panniers, etc). We encourage everyone to consider cost-effective and environmentally sustainable options for acquiring gear including borrowing from friends and family or purchasing secondhand items that are in good condition.

While some of the equipment listed below may not seem to fit your idea of summer weather, it is *all* very important. Temperatures can range from 40°F to 90+°F in the summer, and weather is always variable. If you are uncertain about the type of equipment required, consider the following recommendations and feel free to call if you have questions.

### Fabrics

When indicated on the packing list, please only bring synthetic fabrics (polyester) or wool when possible. Cotton loses its insulating properties when wet and therefore cannot ensure that campers stay comfortable, warm, and happy while on trail.

With this in mind, when weather permits, many campers prefer cotton, nylon, or quick-drying fabrics which keep your body cool. Having a few of these items is a good idea for long, hot days of hiking, biking, canoeing, or kayaking.

### Layers

Make sure that your trip clothing allows ample room for layering fabric on top of one another. Your rain coat should be able to fit 3 layers underneath it without feeling too tight or restrictive. Your three layers should include a thin “base-layer” (long underwear, tops and bottoms), a second layer (long sleeve shirt, pants), and a heavier fleece outer-layer.

### Raingear

Your raingear is one of the most important pieces of clothing for keeping you dry and comfortable. It must be waterproof, so please test your rain coat in the shower before coming to camp. There are re-waterproofing sprays that you can purchase if your raincoat is several years old.

### Sleeping Bags

There are two important factors to consider about your sleeping bag for this trip: warmth and compressibility. Bags need to have a *synthetic fill*. Similar to polyester and wool, synthetic fill sleeping bags maintain their insulating properties when wet. This is especially important for canoe and kayak trips, when so much time is spent on the water. As packing space on trail is limited, it is helpful for sleeping

bags to have a *compression stuff sack*, with straps on the exterior which can be cinched down to compress the bag.

In addition, Sleeping bags must be rated to at least 30°F. Warmer (10-20°F) are also adequate.

### **Sleeping Pads**

Sleeping pads are an important factor in being able to sleep comfortably in a wilderness setting. There are many different kinds, but the main considerations are weight/size, insulating ability, and comfort. The most basic requirement for a sleeping pad is that it keeps your camper off of the ground, such as the Therm-a-Rest Ridge Rest or Z-Lite sleeping pads.

### **What Not to Bring**

We believe that the following items detract from the campers' experience or create a safety hazard. In respect of the community, please make sure not to bring these items:

- Snacks, soda, gum, or candy
- Any kind of knife, axe, or hatchet
- Lighters, candles
- Aerosol cans
- Electronics including cell phones, radios, gaming systems, and e-readers
- Cash (Parents or campers can turn cash in to safekeeping on registration day.)
- All medications including over-the-counter and vitamins

If campers bring these items, staff will collect them for the session and return them at the end of camp.

### **Communication and Photographs on Trail**

All Four Trails leaders carry a cell phone while on-trail, as well as a satellite phone for more remote adventures. We have regularly scheduled check-ins with leaders while groups are on-trail. When possible, trip leaders will notify the Four Trails Coordinators at Miniwanca when the group arrives at its daily destination.

Campers will be able to receive and send mail in-camp before, between and/or after their trips. All mail received for campers while they are out on-trail will be stored for them until they return.

Due to the remote settings of these experiences, groups cannot provide regular detailed real-time updates or photographs. We will update our website and blog between trips or as often as information is received.

## Meals on Trail

Backpacking and paddling trip food is supplied by our Food Pack-Out System. Leaders are trained to plan and provide menus that are in line with the values of the Miniwanca Food Program. Where possible, we offer premium fuel options, including whole grains, fresh fruit and vegetables, and alternative proteins.

Leaders ensure that campers receive food that helps them “go” throughout the day (complex carbohydrates and sugars, healthy fats), the food that helps them “grow” (nourishing proteins such as nuts, beans, grains, dairy, and meat when available), and the food that helps them have a healthy “glow” (fresh fruits and vegetables). Some meals and snacks include: Oatmeal with Granola and Dried Fruit, Bagel Thins with Hummus and Summer Sausage, Soy Butter and Jelly Tortillas, Southwestern Chili, Chicken & Rice Curry, Trail Pad Thai, Clif Bars, various Granola Bars, and Fruit Leather.

Our goal is to ensure that all campers are eating sufficient meals in terms of quantity and healthfulness. Junk food, candy, and soda do not provide the same level of nutrition as other food options, and in some cases may harm a physically active body, and we ask that campers do not bring these items to camp.



## Camper Money on Trail

Campers are allowed spending money for souvenirs. Miniwanca suggests parents provide pocket money not exceeding:

- \$20 for **Explorer** campers
- \$50 for **Adventurer** campers
- \$50 for **Voyageur** campers
- \$120 for **Odyssey** campers

Miniwanca does not use camp store accounts and we are unable to charge credit cards for the purpose of providing a cash advance for on trail spending, so we will collect camper spending money on opening day and distribute it to campers before the start of their trip.

**We aim to minimize inequities in pocket money between campers. As such, we ask that you do not provide any money in any form to your camper that exceeds the recommended amount.**

## Weather Conditions on Trail

Weather on the roads, rivers, lakes, and trails can change very quickly and be quite severe. Wind, rain, and extreme temperatures in particular can affect the plans of a trip group. Additionally, rain can cause less than adequate conditions including slippery terrain, increased workload for the cyclist, paddler, or hiker, and loss of body heat on cool days.

While all these conditions are manageable and we have specific policies in place to respond to various weather conditions, it's important that all campers are physically fit and come prepared with the correct equipment. Please follow the equipment recommendations included in the clothing section..

Each group will carry with them a weather radio that can help leaders make informed decisions around when and how the group travels. Weather radios usually give a forecast for the next 24 hours of direction and strength of wind, visibility and general weather.



## Sanitation and Hygiene on Trail

Sanitation and hygiene are just as important on-trail as they are in camp. For the health and safety of all group members, we encourage the following:

- Hand washing/sanitation is mandatory before all meals and after going to the bathroom.
- Groups use public facilities when available and practice Leave No Trace ethics.
- Personal and group dishes will be washed and sanitized after every meal. All food scraps will be disposed of responsibly.

## Removal from Trips

It is never easy to reach the decision that a camper should be dismissed, and we know it is a difficult thing for parents to hear. Behaviors that result in immediate dismissal include but are not limited to - threat to harm self or others, possession or use of drugs or alcohol, or possession of a weapon. If a camper's actions, statements, or attitude negatively impact the group or the wider AYF community, or if a camper is physically, mentally, socially, or emotionally unable to participate in camp activities, they may be dismissed. AYF staff must balance what is best for the group and community with the needs of an individual camper.

If it is necessary for a camper to be removed from a trip for any reason AYF staff will return the camper to Miniwanca or a local airport. Parents/Guardians are responsible for picking up their camper as soon as possible. If a camper is seriously injured or becomes ill on-trail, staff will contact camp and make arrangements for the camper to be transported to the nearest hospital. A Miniwanca staff person will contact parents/guardians, and share the contact information for the hospital. If a camper is unable to continue on the trip, Miniwanca will arrange transportation back to camp, and parents should pick up their child as soon as possible. Parents are responsible for all medical and associated evacuation costs. Families may be eligible for a prorated tuition medical refund.

# Explorer Backpacking Program (Session B)

## What does the overall experience for an Explorer backpacker entail?

Miniwanca's backpacking program at the Explorer level is designed to introduce campers to extended multi-day hiking while living as a low-impact mobile community overnight in the backcountry. Campers will carry all of their personal gear as well as the necessary distributed group gear items (stoves, pots, pans, utensils, tents, tools and food rations). Packs may weigh between 30 and 50 lbs; however, leaders will be very intentional about each participant's pack to body weight ratio.



Groups will be traveling to approved campsites along the trail. They will stay in group sites and will be expected to adhere to a leave-no-trace ethic and follow all camping procedures. It should be noted that the groups will be traveling long miles on a few of the trip days. Before coming to camp, any opportunity campers have to hike with weight on their back will aid them in their summer challenge.

## What does an average day on-trail look like for an Explorer backpacker?

Groups will generally hike between 3 and 7 miles a day. During their time in the backcountry, campers will be hiking along the pristine lakeshore of Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore. They will be staying at pre-determined campsites that our permits require groups to stay at, so making camp is important to ensure that there is an adequate place for the group to stay overnight. Wake up and meal times will vary and will be dependent on the group's time management, efficiency and other environmental factors. A primary goal of the leaders is to reach camp safely with time to make dinner, enjoy the evening and rest for another challenging day.

Leaders will be equipped with first-aid kits, satellite phones, and Wilderness First Responder training, in order to manage illness or injury in the backcountry.

Throughout the day, campers and leaders will be exercising all four folds in order to work towards logistical, personal, and group goals for the trip. Groups will also engage daily in some type of reflective activity in hopes of bringing meaning to their individual and group experiences.

## Where do Explorer backpackers hike?

Our itineraries are designed to introduce the fundamentals of backcountry travel and low-impact camping, while still challenging individuals in their four folds. Depending on popularity and availability of campsites, our Explorer Backpackers will challenge themselves in various locations along the North Country Trail within the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The groups will hike for 7 days, averaging 6 to 8 miles per day with some low mileage days (0-3 miles) to recharge.

## What should I do to prepare for my backpacking trip?

The best way to train for a backpacking trip is to go backpacking. Take your school backpack or another large pack and put some weight in it. Just getting use to ascending with weight will make doing so for long stretches easier. For backpacking specifically, it is important to be thinking about your feet as they are your vehicle.

### Hiking Boots

A key part of preparing for Explorer backpacking is purchasing and breaking in your boots. We recommend high-cut, waterproof synthetic or leather hiking boots that provide ankle support. Comfort is the most important quality, remembering to provide ample room for toes. While tightly laced up, knock the toe of your boots against the ground behind you. If your toe touches the front of your boot, you should buy a larger pair to avoid bruising toes on long down hills. Try on the boots late in the day when your feet have swelled to see if they still fit. Finally, break them in. There is no such thing as breaking your boots in too much. Three days per week of daily wear plus a few practice hikes over the course of a couple months should provide appropriate wear before the start of your camp session.



## What equipment does Miniwanca provide?

### Backpacks

When backpacking, campers will carry all of their personal gear as well as a portion of the group camping equipment and food. It is important to have a well-fitting pack of the appropriate size and quality. Miniwanca is happy to provide backpacks for all Explorer backpackers. If you are bringing your own backpack, please make sure it is a rugged backpack intended for trips up to 7 days in length. Please avoid

travel backpacks. In general, you will need about 4500-6000 cubic inches for internal frame packs, less for external frame packs.

### **Group Equipment**

Groups will carry a variety of equipment that will include tents, stoves, fuel, emergency food, water containers and sanitation items.

### **Leader Equipment**

While on-trail, leaders carry an extensive first aid kit and are trained in high-level first-aid. Leaders also have cell or satellite phones and are in regular contact with Miniwanca. Finally, leaders carry a complete set of maps and resources to assist in route navigation and camping arrangements.



# Explorer Canoeing Program (Session A only)

## What does the overall experience for an Explorer paddler entail?

Minwanca's paddling program at the Explorer level is designed to introduce campers to the fundamentals of canoeing during extended river trips. Camper gear is loaded in dry bags and water-tight containers and then transported in canoes along with essential group gear and food items in water-tight containers. Groups will stay at approved campsites along the Manistee River.



## What does an average day on the water look like for an Explorer paddler?

Groups will generally paddle between 3 and 7 hours a day depending on wind, group speed, and water level. They will be staying at pre-determined campsites, so making camp is important to ensure that there is an adequate place for the group to stay overnight. Wake up and meal times will vary and will be dependent on the group's time management, efficiency and other environmental factors, keeping in mind the importance of getting into camp with time to make dinner and enjoy the evening.

Throughout the day, campers and leaders will exercise all four folds in order to work towards logistical, personal, and group goals. Trip groups will also engage in some type of reflective activity in hopes of bringing meaning to their individual and group experiences.

## Where do Explorer paddlers canoe?

Explorers will experience the Manistee River, one of Michigan's most pristine rivers. Explorers will paddle the section of river above Hopendyl Dam Pond and will cover approximately 70 – 80 miles over 6 days.

## Weather Conditions on Paddling Trips

Weather on the water can change very quickly and be quite severe. Wind in particular can affect the plans of paddling groups. It can cause spray off the water, increase the workload of the paddler and cause loss of body heat on cool days. Rain and storms are not uncommon during the summer and while all these conditions are manageable, they make it important that all campers are physically fit and come prepared with the correct equipment.

## What special clothing should Explorer paddlers wear?

Please consult the Four Trails packing list for a comprehensive list of what Explorer paddlers should bring to camp. The following are recommendations specifically for paddling trips.

### Extra Clothing

If possible, it is important that campers will have a 'wet set' of clothing in which they will paddle and a 'dry set' to wear once they make camp. Both sets should follow the Four Trails recommendations and guidelines for clothing fabrics.



### Water Shoes

All paddlers must wear closed toe shoes while swimming and cooking. *Crocs, Tevas and other similar hybrid sandal-shoes are not considered 'closed toe'.* When choosing footwear for your trip, keep in mind some shoes may overlap in purpose; however, it is preferable to have a dry pair of closed toe shoes for the evenings.

### Hats

All campers are required to have a hat for sun protection, preferably a wide brim hat that can be secured to them in windy conditions. It is also important for campers to have a fleece or woolen hat to wear at night, as the temperatures can vary greatly.

## What equipment does Miniwanca provide?

In addition to a canoe, Miniwanca will provide paddles, PFDs, and dry bags.

### Group Equipment

Campers will be provided with camping equipment which will include tents, stoves, fuel, emergency food, water containers and sanitation items.

### Leader Equipment

While on-trail, leaders carry an extensive first aid kit and are trained in high-level first-aid. Leaders also have cell or satellite phones and are in regular contact with Miniwanca. Finally, leaders carry a complete set of maps and resources to assist in route navigation and camping arrangements.





# Miniwanca Contact Details

In your preparation for the summer, please direct any questions regarding the information contained within this handbook or other questions about the Four Trails program to our Four Trails Coordinator, Andrew McIver (contact details listed below).

The best way to contact us throughout the year is to call Miniwanca at (231) 861-2262.

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# American Youth Foundation

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