



American Youth Foundation
Miniwanca

2022 Miniwanca Explorer Camper & Family Handbook





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Welcome to Four Trails

Dear Explorer Camper & Family,

Whether this is your first time in Four Trails or you're returning for another summer of adventure, we are so excited to welcome you to the Explorer program. Your participation in this program is the start of an experience where you will connect, play, and reflect in the outdoors, and we are thrilled to invite you on this adventure.

The foundation of Four Trails is the believe that, when we explore and discover the wonder of the natural world, we also explore and venture inward. When we pay to the astounding outdoors, we also pay attention to our equally astounding inner selves. We then use that self-knowledge 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 need-to-know topics for Explorer campers, and the following sections offer a thorough explanation of Explorer campers can expect to do on trail.

If you have any additional questions after reviewing this information, please email or call us. Get outside, listen, play, feel, connect, and happy trails!

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Welcome to the Explorer Program

As an Explorer, your camper will embark on multiple adventures as they discover the fundamentals of outdoor trips in their introduction to Miniwanca's adventure programs. They will travel through the beautiful wilderness of Western Michigan and experience a variety of landscapes while canoeing and backpacking.

These self-supported adventures challenge campers to carry all food and supplies they'll need for the duration of their trip. They'll reflect on how they can best support each other as they build friendships, gain confidence, and thrive in the mobile communities they create on trail.

Families should also carefully review the [2022 Camper & Family Handbook](#), which outlines Opening and Closing Day information, 2022 health policies and protocols, and other important AYF policies and information.



Expect the Unexpected

The AYF makes every reasonable effort to ensure a fun, safe camp experience where campers are encouraged to achieve their personal best. However, we cannot foresee or control every circumstance. Group dynamics, failure to follow instruction, missing a turn, interactions with people not affiliated with the AYF, inclement weather, and other environmental hazards can create unexpected challenges on trail. Our staff is trained for unexpected situations, and as a result our unplanned programmatic elements often serve as the greatest catalyst for teaching our participants life skills. Campers gain problem-solving skills as they resolve low-level incidents during their turn as “leader of the day” under the supervision of their trip leader.

Unforeseen circumstances can provide campers a valuable opportunity for critical thinking and problem-solving. Should an incident occur, our priority is camper safety and quality of the overall group experience. Our course of action may include but is not limited to: addressing the incident with individuals involved or the entire trip group, facilitating group collaboration to determine the next best steps, and/or intentionally adjusting the itinerary.

For a positive group and individual experience, it is important campers come to Miniwanca physically fit, mentally prepared, and with the correct equipment. Be sure to follow the specific training and equipment recommendations included in the following sections.



Four Trails Fitness and Trip Preparation

It is important campers arrive with a base level of fitness that allows them to participate in physical activity up to several hours at a time. We have created Four Trails Fitness and Training Program and strongly recommend campers complete it to ensure their safety and enjoyment and that of their trail group.

Suggested activities to prepare for a Four Trails trip include:

- Cycling on a bike or exercise machine.
- Swimming, running, or another cardio-intensive activity.
- Yoga or other activity that increases flexibility and 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) and run and/or walk the course as fast as you can. Ideally, a Four trails camper should be able to complete this 1.5-mile course in less than 15 minutes.

Suggested Training Program

Week	Cardiovascular		Strength	
	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 boost a camper's physical and mental readiness and minimize the stress related to these physically demanding trip experiences.

Equipment and Clothing Recommendations

Miniwanca provides as much group gear and equipment as possible, such as canoes, tents, dry bags, and backpacks. In general, campers are responsible for personal gear including clothing, sleeping bags, and sleeping pads. Please carefully review the [Explorer Packing List](#) to ensure your camper has all the items necessary for a safe, fun experience. We encourage campers to consider cost-effective and environmentally sustainable gear options like borrowing from friends and family or purchasing secondhand items in good condition.

Campers must bring all required layers of clothing, including insulating and synthetic layers for warmth. Temperatures on trail can range from 40 degrees F to 90-plus degrees F, and the weather is variable. Review the following information and recommendations and contact us if you have questions.

Fabrics

Synthetic fabrics such as polyester or wool are excellent insulators, and we indicate which clothing and gear items should be made of these materials on [the packing list](#). Cotton loses its insulating properties when wet and won't keep campers warm, comfortable, and happy on trail.

Conversely, many campers prefer cotton, nylon, or quick-drying fabrics that keep them cool during long, hot days of hiking and canoeing. Campers should have both options available to adapt to fluctuating temperatures. [Learn more about outdoor clothing basics.](#)

Layers

Layering trip clothing is the best way for campers to adjust to changing environments. We recommend three layers, starting with a thin base layer (long underwear, tops and bottoms), a second layer (long-sleeve shirt, pants), and a heavier fleece outer-layer. The camper's raincoat should be able to fit these three layers underneath without feeling too tight or restrictive. [Learn more about layering basics.](#)

Rain Gear

Waterproof rain gear is necessary to keep campers dry and comfortable. Campers should test their raincoat in the shower before arrival. Families can purchase re-waterproofing sprays if the raincoat is several years old. [Learn more about rain gear basics.](#)

Sleeping Bags

There are two important factors to consider about your sleeping bag for this trip: warmth and compressibility. Sleeping bags must have a **synthetic fill**. Like polyester and wool, synthetic fill sleeping bags maintain their insulating properties when wet. This is especially important for canoe = trips, when so much time is spent on the water. Sleeping bags must also have a temperature rating of at least 30 degrees F. Warmer ratings (10 to 20 degrees F) are also

adequate. Sleeping bags must also have a **compression stuff sack** with straps on the exterior that can be tightened to compress the bag. [Learn more about sleeping bags.](#)

Sleeping Pads

Sleeping pads help campers 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 the ground, such as the Therm-a-Rest [Ridge Rest](#) or [Z-Lite](#) sleeping pads. [Learn more about 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:

- **Electronics such as smartphones, tablets, smartwatches, fitness trackers, e-readers, or other connected devices.** Digital cameras are OK. Any smartphone or connected device will be checked into safekeeping for the duration of the session.
- Snacks, sodas, or sports drinks. Because we have campers with severe food allergies, outside food, candy, and gum are not allowed.
- Pocket knives, hunting knives, hatchets, axes, lighters, matches, candles, or fireworks
- Aerosol cans for bug spray, sunscreen, or other products
- All medications, **including over-the-counter and vitamins**, must be turned into the Health Team at check in. Please review our [2022 Health Policies](#) for more information.

If campers bring these items, staff will store them in safekeeping and return them at the end of camp.

Communication and Photography on Trail

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

Campers will can receive and send mail at camp before, between, and/or after their trips. All camper mail and care packages received while they are on trail will be stored until they return. Please review our care package and mail guidance in our [Miniwanca Camper & Family Handbook](#).

Due to the remote settings of these experiences, groups cannot provide regular detailed real-time updates or photographs. Photos from Four Trails trips will be available online when groups have returned to camp. Families will receive SmugMug login information via email once their camper's session begins. Learn more about our [revised Photo Policy](#).

Meals on Trail

Backpacking and paddling trip food is supplied by our Food Pack-Out System. Leaders plan and provide menus aligned 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 campers receive food that helps them power through the day (complex carbohydrates and sugars, healthy fats), food that helps them grow (nourishing proteins such as nuts, beans, grains, dairy, and meat when available), and food that gives them a healthy glow (fresh fruits and vegetables).

Our goal is to ensure all campers are eating healthy meals in sufficient quantities. 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. Campers cannot bring these items to camp or on trail.

Camper Money on Trail

Campers are allowed spending money for souvenirs. **Miniwanca aims to minimize inequities in pocket money between campers.** We ask camp families provide pocket money **that does not exceed** the following amounts:

- \$30 for **Explorer** campers
- \$50 for **Adventurer** campers
- \$50 for **Voyageur** campers

Miniwanca will collect spending money on Opening Day and distribute it to campers for their trips. Families must provide cash. Miniwanca does not use camp store accounts, and we cannot charge credit cards to provide a cash advance on-trail spending.

Weather Conditions on Trail

Weather on the roads, rivers, lakes, and trails can change quickly and be severe, affecting the plans of a trip group. Rain can cause less than adequate conditions, including slippery terrain, increased workload for the paddler or hiker, and loss of body heat on cool days.

All these conditions are manageable, and Miniwanca has policies in place to respond to various weather conditions. It is important that all campers are physically fit and come prepared with the correct equipment. Please follow the equipment recommendations in this handbook.

Each trip group will carry a weather radio that provides a forecast including direction and strength of wind, visibility, and general weather for the next 24 hours. These radios help trip leaders make informed decisions about how the group travels.

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 decide a camper should be dismissed, and we know it is a difficult thing for families 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.** AYF staff must balance what is best for the group and community with the needs of an individual camper. If a camper's actions, statements, or attitude negatively affect their cabin 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. Please review Miniwanca's full Behavior and Dismissal Policies in the [2022 Camper & Family Handbook](#). If a camper is removed from a trip, AYF staff will return the camper to Miniwanca or a local airport. Families are responsible for picking up their camper as soon as possible.

If a camper is injured or becomes ill on trail, staff will arrange for the camper to be transported to the nearest hospital, and a Miniwanca staff member will contact the parent or guardian with the hospital's contact information.

If a camper cannot continue 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. Please review Miniwanca's full Withdrawal and Dismissal Policy in the [2022 Camper & Family Handbook](#).

Explorer Canoeing Program

Miniwanca's Explorer paddling program introduces campers to the fundamentals of canoeing during extended river trips. Explorers will experience the Manistee River, one of Michigan's most pristine rivers, paddling a 15-mile section below Hodenpyl Dam. All gear is loaded in dry bags and water-tight containers and transported in canoes to the next approved campsite along the Manistee.

What is an average day like on the river?

Groups will generally paddle between 3 and 7 hours a day, depending on wind, group speed, and water level. They will stay at pre-determined campsites, so it's important they make it to camp in plenty of time to find an adequate place to stay overnight.

Wake up times and mealtimes will vary and will depend 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 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.

Are there any special gear considerations for paddlers?

Please consult the [Explorer Packing List](#) for a comprehensive list of gear. The following are recommendations specifically for paddling trips:

- **Extra Clothing:** Campers should have a "wet set" of clothing to wear while paddling and a "dry set" to wear once they make camp. Both sets should follow the Four Trails guidelines for clothing fabric.
- **Water Shoes:** All paddlers must wear closed-toe shoes while swimming and cooking. **Crocs, Tevas, and other hybrid sandal-shoes are not closed toe.** If you can see your toes, they are not considered closed toe. While some shoes may overlap in purpose, but 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 they can secure to themselves in windy conditions. Campers must also 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, personal flotation devices, and dry bags. Miniwanca also provides camping equipment including tents, stoves, fuel, food, water containers, and sanitation items.

Trip 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 also carry maps and resources to assist in route navigation and camping arrangements.



Explorer Backpacking Program

Miniwanca's Explorer backpacking program introduces campers to extended multiday hiking in the backcountry, while living as a low-impact mobile community. Campers will hike 3 to 7 miles a day on the Manistee River Trail.

Campers will carry their personal gear and a portion of the group gear. Packs may weigh between 30 and 50 pounds, and trip leaders are very intentional about each participant's pack-to-body weight ratio.

What is an average day like on trail?

Groups will hike 4 days, averaging 4 to 6 miles per day with some low mileage days (0-3 miles) to recharge. They will adhere to a leave-no-trace ethic and follow all backpacking and camping procedures. They will stay at pre-determined campsites, so it's important they make it to camp in plenty of time to find an adequate place to stay overnight.

Wake up times and mealtimes will vary and will depend 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 to work towards logistical, personal, and group goals. Trip groups will also engage in a reflective activity that adds meaning to their individual and group experiences.



How should campers prepare for backpacking?

In addition to following the recommend Four Trails Fitness and Training Program, campers should practice hiking or walking with weight on their backs to aid them in this challenge. They can add weight to their school backpack and acclimate themselves to ascending with weight to make it easier to do so for long stretches.

What kind of hiking boots should campers have?

A key part of preparing for Explorer backpacking is purchasing and breaking in boots. We recommend **high-cut, waterproof synthetic or leather hiking boots that provide ankle support**. [REI has an excellent guide](#) to choosing the right hiking boots.

Comfort, especially in the toe box, is the most important quality in hiking boots. While tightly laced up, knock the toe of the boots against the ground. If your camper's toe touches the front of the boot, they should buy a larger pair to avoid bruising toes on long down hills. They should also try on the boots late in the day when their 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 camp.

What equipment does Miniwanca provide?

- **Backpacks:** It is important to have a well-fitting pack of the appropriate size and quality. Miniwanca provides backpacks for all Explorer backpackers. If campers want to bring their own backpack, make sure it is a rugged backpack intended for trips up to a week. In general, Explorer campers will need 4,500 to 6,000 cubic inches for internal frame packs, less for external frame packs. Please avoid travel backpacks.
- **Group Equipment:** Groups will carry a variety of equipment that will include tents, stoves, fuel, emergency food, water containers, and sanitation items.
- Trip 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 also carry maps and resources to assist in route navigation and camping arrangements.

As you prepare for your trip, please reach out to us with any questions. The best way to contact us throughout the year is to call Miniwanca at (231) 861-2262 or to email miniwancacamps@ayf.com.