



FOUR TRAILS CAMPER AND FAMILY HANDBOOK

MINIWANCA 2026



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Welcome to the Four Trails Program

Dear Four Trails Camper & Family,

We are so excited you have enrolled in the Four Trails program! This summer, 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 belief that when we explore and discover the wonder of the natural world, we also explore and venture inward to discover more about ourselves. When we pay attention to the astounding world around us, 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 preparation for the adventure ahead. The first section, Welcome to the Four Trails Program, covers many need-to-know topics for Four Trails campers, and the following sections offer a thorough explanation of what campers can expect on each trip.

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

Happy Trails,



Landon Schumacker

Four Trails Program Manager

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Miniwanca Contact Details

Please direct any questions regarding the information contained within this handbook or other questions about the Four Trails program to Four Trails Program Manager Landon Schumacker.

The best way to contact us throughout the year is to email, or call Miniwanca at 231-861-2262.

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Expect the Unexpected

The AYF makes every reasonable effort to ensure a fun, safe 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 and critical-thinking skills as they resolve low-level incidents during their turn as “leader of the day” under the supervision of their trip leader.

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 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 their comfort zones.

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



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. Participants will participate in “shakedowns,” practice trips on site or near camp where staff check in with each camper to make sure they are ready for their adventure.

Routine Safety Monitoring for All Trip Groups

Some 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, and 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

Trailblazers may consider a modified and less rigorous approach to the guidelines listed below. **Odyssey Campers should use the Odyssey training plan sent separately** (see the Odyssey section of this document for more details.)

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, but it is also 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 a back road course set with a car). Run and/or walk the distance as fast as you can. A desirable endurance level is less than 15 minutes to complete the course.

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 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 Four Trails campers. In general, campers are responsible for providing personal gear, including clothing, sleeping bags, and sleeping pads as listed on their [trip specific packing list](#). Miniwanca will provide all essential group gear (including cooking gear, tents, paddles, 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 in good condition.

While some equipment below may not seem to fit your idea of summer weather, it is **all** very important. Temperatures can range from 40 degrees F to 90-plus degrees F in the summer, and weather is always variable. **In feedback from campers, we often hear that they wished they had followed the packing list more closely by bringing the recommended warmer clothes.** If you are uncertain about the type of equipment required, consider the following recommendations, and reach out 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 on trail.

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

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 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 Internet-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.
- Pocketknives, 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 [2026 Health & Wellness Policies](#) for more information.

If campers bring these items, staff will collect them for the session 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 and Garmin inReach 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 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, trip leaders cannot provide regular, detailed, or real-time 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 [Photo Policy](#).

Meals on Trail

Leaders ensure 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” (fruits and vegetables).

Backpacking and paddling trip food is supplied by our Food Pack-Out System. Miniwanca plans and provides menus aligned with the values of the Miniwanca Food Program, while optimizing for backcountry and on-the-go environments. Meals are chosen for their nutritional value, as well as their practicality for packing and storing: lightweight, freeze-dried and otherwise dehydrated options are common on 4T trips.

Our goal is to ensure all campers eat 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

Trailblazers and Adventurers should not bring extra spending money. There are no opportunities to purchase souvenirs due to the remoteness of these trips.

Explorer, Voyageur and Odyssey campers may bring no more than \$100 cash to purchase souvenirs. Miniwanca will collect spending money on Opening Day and distribute it to campers for their trips. Campers are not permitted to bring credit/debit cards with them on trail.

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.

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 after every meal and sanitized throughout the trip. All food scraps will be disposed of responsibly.

Menstruation on Trail

If your camper will be menstruating on trail, please make sure they pack the following:

- period products (pads, tampons, etc.)
- brown paper bags
- moist towelettes (Wet Ones)
- additional Ziploc bags

Sanitation is incredibly important on trail, and these products will be handled, stored, and disposed of with care.

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 all campers are physically fit and come prepared with the correct equipment indicated on your [camper's trip-specific packing list](#).

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.

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 [2026 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 family with the hospital's contact information.

If a camper cannot continue the trip, Miniwanca will arrange transportation back to camp, and families should pick up their camper 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 [2026 Camper & Family Handbook](#).

Trip-Specific Information

[Jump to Trailblazer](#)

[Jump to Explorer](#)

[Jump to Adventurer](#)

[Jump to Voyageur](#)

[Jump to Odyssey](#)

Trailblazer

Rising 8th Grade Campers

Trailblazers experience the best of both worlds by taking on the challenge of adventure trips while still enjoying their favorite in-camp activities.

In their introduction to the Four Trails program, Trailblazers will explore the terrain of Michigan through a short multiday hike on the North Country Trail, the nation's longest scenic trail. After their hike, they'll canoe for several days down Michigan's Manistee River. All the while, they'll learn and practice valuable out-camping skills that will be useful throughout their Four Trails experience.

When not on trail, Trailblazers will learn out-camping skills, as well as choose from a variety of in-camp activities including arts and crafts, sports, performing arts, rock climbing, sailing, and more. They will discover new skills, experience friendly competition, and reflect on becoming their best selves. Campers choose new activities each week, giving them the opportunity to discover and explore new interests and strengths in a dynamic and supportive environment.

Each evening, our community gathers for all camp Night's Doings fun. Favorite events include the Leader Hunt, Wanca Kart, and the Talent Show, where campers perform and support their friends. Evening Reflections brings a quiet close to the day as we reflect, set goals, and learn more about one another.

Campers leave Miniwanca with lasting memories, newfound skills and friends, and newly gained confidence in themselves and their ability to make a positive difference in the world.

Trailblazer Canoeing Program

Miniwanca's Trailblazer paddling program is designed to introduce campers to the fundamentals of canoeing during short river trips. Camper gear is loaded in dry bags and then transported in canoes along with essential group gear and food items in water-tight containers. Groups stay at approved campsites along the Manistee River. **The trip will be 3 days and 2 nights long.**

What does an average day on the water look like for a Trailblazer paddler?

Groups will generally paddle between three and four hours a day depending on wind, group speed, and water level. They will stay at pre-determined campsites, so making camp is important to ensure there is an adequate place for the group to stay overnight. Wake up and mealtimes 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 to work towards logistical, personal, and group goals. Trip groups will also engage in some type of reflective activity to bring meaning to their individual and group experiences.

Where do Trailblazer paddlers canoe?

Trailblazers will experience the Manistee River, one of Michigan's most pristine rivers. Trailblazers will paddle the section of river starting in the Hopendyl Dam Pond and will cover approximately 20 miles over three days.

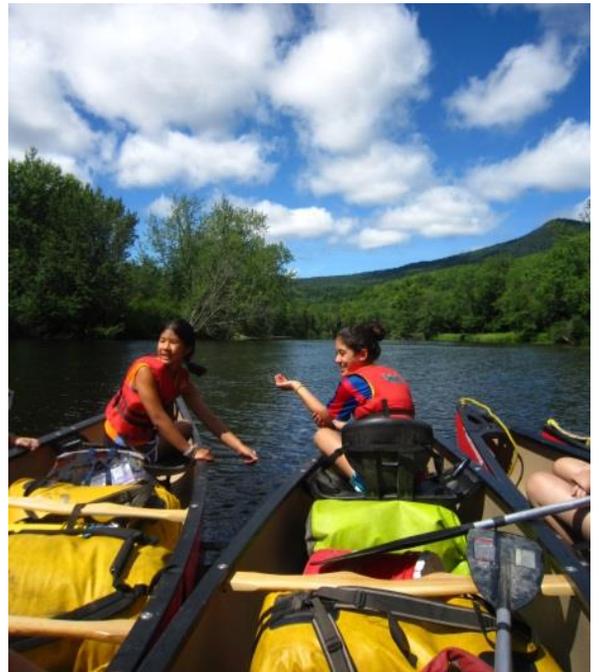
Weather Conditions on Paddling Trips

Weather on the water can change quickly and be severe. Wind 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.

Are there any special gear considerations for paddlers?

Please consult the [Trailblazer 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 securable shoes while swimming and closed-toed shoes while cooking. If you can see your toes, they are not considered closed toe. Securable sandals like Chacos, Keens, and Tevas are good options to wear while paddling. 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.
- **Sun Shirts:** UV-blocking clothing is required for all paddling trips and recommended for all Four Trails trips. When campers are out in the sun all day for multiple days,



UV-protective clothing can block both direct UV rays from the sun, as well as those reflecting off the water and help protect campers from sunburn. Sun-protective clothing has an Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF) that represents a fabrics level of UV rays that can be blocked. You can learn more about UPF fabrics and sun protective clothing here.

- **Sunglasses with Strap:** Sunglasses are important when on paddle trips where the water can reflect the sun back up to the paddler. Having a strap helps to prevent sunglasses from getting lost in the water.

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.

Trailblazer Backpacking Program

Miniwanca's backpacking program at the Trailblazer level is designed to introduce campers to short multiday hiking while living as a low-impact mobile community overnight in the backcountry. Hikes will 3 days and 2 nights long.



Campers will carry all 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 pounds, and leaders will be very intentional about each participant's pack-to-body weight ratio.

Groups will travel to approved campsites along the North Country Trail and Manistee River Trail. They will stay in group sites and will be expected to adhere to a leave-no-trace ethic and follow all camping procedures. Groups will travel long miles on a few of the trip days.

What is an average day like on trail?

Groups will generally hike between three and seven miles a day. During their time in the backcountry, campers will be hiking along the scenic and wild North Country Trail and Manistee River Trail in the Huron-Manistee National Forests. They will be staying at pre-determined campsites. Wake up and mealtimes will vary and will be dependent on the group's time management, efficiency, and other environmental factors. The leaders'

primary 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, Garmin inReach devices, and Wilderness First Responder training to manage illness or injury in the backcountry.

Throughout the day, campers and leaders will exercise all four folds to work toward logistical, personal, and group goals for the trip. Groups will also engage in a reflective activity to bring meaning to their individual and group experiences.

What kind of hiking boots should campers have?

A key part of preparing for Trailblazer backpacking is purchasing and breaking in boots. We recommend **high-cut, waterproof synthetic or leather hiking boots that provide ankle support. “Trail runner” style shoes that fall below the ankle are not recommended.**

[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 Trailblazer 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, Trailblazer 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 equipment including tents, stoves, fuel, emergency food, water containers, and sanitation items.
- **Safety:** Trip leaders carry an extensive first aid kit and are trained in high-level first aid. Leaders also have cell, satellite phones, or SPOT locators, and are in regular contact with Miniwanca. Finally, leaders also carry maps and resources to assist in route navigation and camping arrangements.

Explorers

Rising 9th Grade Campers

As an Explorer, your camper will embark on an adventure with their trip group where they will discover the fundamentals of outcamping trips.

Explorers will backpack and bicycle in some of the most beautiful wilderness settings of Michigan. As they hike through Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore on a 5-day hiking trip, they'll explore waterfalls and cliffs along the stunning Lake Superior shoreline. This self-supported adventure offer the additional challenges of carrying all the food and supplies they will need for the duration of their trip.

As they saddle their bikes, they will continue their journey along the western coast of Northern Michigan, taking in the incredible views of Lake Michigan and the unique area where the state's Upper and Lower Peninsulas meet.

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.

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. **Explorers will embark on a 5-day, 4-night trip hiking 3 to 7 miles a day along Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore.**

Campers will carry their personal gear and a portion of the group gear. Packs may weigh 30 to 50 pounds, and trip leaders are very intentional about each participant's pack-to-body weight ratio. Please consult the [Explorer Packing List](#) for a comprehensive list of gear

What is an average day like on trail?

Groups will hike 5 days, averaging 3 to 7 miles per day. 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. Weighted vests are available from many retailers for this purpose, or they can simply add weight to their school backpack and acclimate themselves to ascending with weight. We recommend going to a nearby location with elevation/stairs, or incline walking on a treadmill if available.



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. “Trail runner” style shoes that fall below the ankle are not recommended.** [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.
- **Safety:** 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 Biking Program

The Explorer cycling program introduces campers to multi-day bicycle touring, moving as a mobile community through both remote and front-country environments. **Explorers will embark on a 3-day, 4-night cycling trip in the Northern Lower Peninsula of Michigan, averaging around 20 miles of cycling per day.**

Campers will travel mostly on bike trails, traversing the Little Traverse Wheelway and the Northwestern State Trail through the coastal towns of Charlevoix and Petoskey before arriving on and exploring Michigan's historic – and car-less – Mackinaw Island. Campers will ride **unloaded**, and a Miniwanca staff member trained in bicycle maintenance will meet them at their campsite each night with their belongings to set up camp.

How should campers prepare for biking?

In addition to following the recommend Four Trails Fitness and Training Program, campers should be regularly spending time on a bike in the weeks and months leading up to their camp session. While stationary exercise bikes can be a great option for building muscle and physical endurance, we recommend riding a real bicycle whenever possible. In general, campers should arrive to camp feeling comfortable with riding 20+ miles in a single day, as well as sitting on a bike seat for 3+ hours in a single day.

What equipment does Miniwanca provide?

- **Bikes:** Miniwanca provides bikes for all Explorer campers. It is important that every camper be outfitted with a bicycle of optimal quality, well-tuned, and fitted; we do not recommend campers bringing their own bikes to camp.
- **Group Equipment:** While unloaded during the actual ride, groups will have a variety of equipment at their disposal at their campsites that will include tents, stoves, fuel, emergency food, water containers, and sanitation items.
- **Safety:** Campers will be well equipped to maintain their safety while on a bicycle. Miniwanca will provide every camper with a reflective safety vest and emergency whistle that must be worn at all times while biking, as well as a safety flag that will always remain attached to their bikes. **Campers must bring their own bicycle helmet (details below).** Both on trail and at camp, 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.

Are there any special gear considerations for biking?

Please consult the Explorer Packing List for a comprehensive list of gear. The following are recommendations specifically for cycling trips:

- **Bike Helmet (required):** All Explorer campers and staff are required to wear an approved cycling helmet any time they ride a bike. [REI has an excellent guide](#) to learn more about bike helmets. Miniwanca staff will inspect all helmets before the trip to ensure they adhere to the following guidelines:
 - **A helmet must be CPSC- or ASTM-certified.** Research the helmet online or look for a sticker inside the helmet.
 - **A helmets cannot be older than 5 years, regardless of visible condition.** Manufacturers recommend replacing a helmet every 5 years, as deterioration of the materials occurs.
 - **A helmet must fit correctly.** It should be worn squarely on the head. The rider should be able to see the helmet when they look up. The space between the top of the rider's brow line and the helmet should be no wider than two fingers. The helmet should not move more than an inch in any direction while fastened.
- **Padded Bike Shorts (strongly recommended):** Cycling shorts are a good investment. They are designed with a padded seat and smooth seams to reduce abrasion and chances of chafing from riding. Many styles and brands are available. We recommend buying two pairs to maintain hygiene during the bike trip.
- **Fingerless Cycling Gloves:** Cycling gloves are recommended, as they help reduce pressure on palms and wrists after long hours holding handlebars. They also reduce skin exposed to sun and to potential road rash.
- **Bike Jersey: All riders must wear sleeved shirts while riding; rolled-up shirt sleeves or sleeveless shirts are not allowed.** Sleeveless shirts increase sun exposure and the possibility of road rash if a camper falls off their bicycle. Some campers may wish to purchase a cycling jersey for the cycling trip, but any sleeved shirt made from moisture-wicking synthetic materials is adequate.

Adventurer

Rising 10th Grade Campers

As an Adventurer, campers will experience the scenic wilderness of the Au Sable River on this 10-day, 9-night expedition through Michigan. They'll adventure east, traveling towards Lake Huron where they will end their journey. They'll camp out each night in tents and wake each morning to the sunrise.

It's not only about the beauty of the natural world. It's also about challenging Adventurers to live the values of best self and balanced life out loud. With the help of their leaders, they will help plan and facilitate Evening Reflections, cook meals for their group, and help lead the group each day as they plan their next destination. Along the way, Adventurers will empower themselves and others through the support of the mobile community they create together on their adventure.

Campers leave Miniwanca with lasting memories, newfound skills and friends, and newly gained confidence in themselves and their ability to make a positive difference in the world.

Adventurer Canoeing Program

Miniwanca's Adventurer paddling program is designed to build on the foundational paddling skills campers have learned prior to departure. **Campers will experience the scenic wilderness of the Au Sable River on this 9-day, 8-night expedition through Michigan, heading east to Lake Huron.**

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

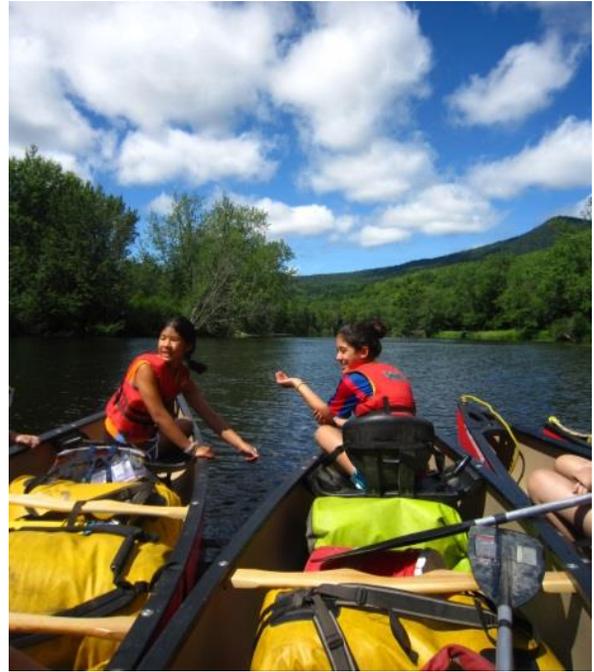
Groups will generally paddle between 4 and 7 hours a day depending on wind, group speed, and water level. Camper gear is loaded in dry bags and water-tight containers and then transported in canoes along with essential group gear and food items.

Groups stay at approved campsites along the Au Sable River. They will be staying at pre-determined campsites, so making camp is important to ensure there is an adequate place for the group to stay overnight. Wake up and mealtimes 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 to work toward 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 Adventurer paddlers canoe?

Adventurers will experience the beauty of the upper Midwest while paddling down the Au Sable River. Their put-in point is in Grayling, Michigan, and they will travel downriver to Oscoda over the next 8 days before returning to Miniwanca. They will paddle between 5 and 15 miles a day and will make camp at islands on the river and banks of state parks and national forests along the way. The groups will pass through 6 dams where they will portage their canoes around the dams before continuing on down the river.



Weather Conditions on Paddling Trips

Weather on the water can change quickly and be severe. Wind 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.

Are there any special gear considerations for paddlers?

Please consult the [Adventurer 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, 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.
- **Sun Shirts:** UV-blocking clothing is required for all paddling trips and recommended for all Four Trails trips. When campers are out in the sun all day for

multiple days, UV-protective clothing can block both direct UV rays from the sun as well as those reflecting off the water and help protect campers from sun burns. Sun protective clothing has an Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF) that represents a fabrics level of UV rays that can be blocked. [You can learn more about UPF fabrics and sun protective clothing here.](#)

- **Sunglasses with Strap:** Sunglasses are important when on paddle trips where the water can reflect the sun back up to the paddler. Having a [strap](#) helps to prevent sunglasses from getting lost in the water. Straps are also recommended for prescription glasses.

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.



Voyageur

Rising 11th Grade Campers

As a Voyageur, you will experience the pristine wilderness of Lake Huron's Georgian Bay on this five-week kayaking expedition in Ontario, Canada. On our most remote trip, you'll adventure into the open water and islands of the bay, kayaking each day to a new island. When the weather is right, you'll watch the sunset over the water. You'll camp out each night in tents and wake each morning to the sunrise.

All Voyageurs must have a valid passport to enter Canada. If your camper already has a passport, make sure it is valid through August 2026. If not, you will need to renew their passport before summer 2026.

It can take 8 to 11 weeks for new and renewed passports to be processed and mailed, so we recommend starting this process as soon as possible. You can find more information on obtaining or renewing a passport on the [U.S. Department of State's website](#).

Voyageur is not only about the beauty of the natural world. It's also about challenging yourself to live the values of best self and balanced life out loud. With the help of your leaders, you will help plan and facilitate Evening Reflections, cook meals together, and help lead the group each day as you plan your next destination. Along the way, you'll empower yourself and others through the support of the mobile community you're creating on your adventure.

Campers leave Miniwanca with lasting memories, newfound skills and friends, and newly gained confidence in themselves and their ability to make a positive difference in the world.

Voyageur Kayaking Program

The Voyageur trip is the only kayaking trip Miniwanca offers. **This 23-day, 22-night trip sees campers paddling eastward through the Georgian Bay along the northern shoreline of Lake Huron.**

It is a five-week session that starts during week two of Session A. The first week of camp is dedicated to skill building and kayaking practice on Stony Lake and Lake Michigan. The group reviews basic paddle strokes, rescue techniques, wet exits, navigation skills and many other components necessary for an extended kayaking trip. The groups will also complete a "shakedown" trip to our Well Site. Campers will need to demonstrate kayaking proficiency and safety skills including wet exits before heading out on trail.

Campers take one day bus ride to their put-in point at Killarney, Canada, where they begin their three-week expedition. During this experience, campers work on their kayak-touring skills which require a solid foundation in safety, stamina, and resiliency. This trip is **self-supported**, meaning camper boats will be loaded with their personal and group

gear. Loaded kayaks offer unique challenges, so it is essential that campers come to Miniwanca with an adequate level of physical fitness.

Campers will return to camp and participate in Nostos, a Miniwanca-wide celebration of our Voyageur and Odyssey campers and will get to share their voyage with the other campers and Miniwanca staff.



What does an average day on the water look like for a Voyageur paddler?

Groups will generally paddle between three and four hours a day depending on wind, group speed, and water level. They will stay at pre-determined campsites, so making camp is important to ensure there is an adequate place for the group to stay overnight. Wake up and mealtimes 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 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 Voyageur paddlers kayak?

The groups paddle through the Fox Islands, French River Provincial Park, Bustards Islands, Bayfield Inlet, Big McCoy area, Franklin Island, and many other places along the way. A Miniwanca staff member will meet the group at the halfway point for re-ration with fresh food and supplies. At the end of the voyage, the group paddles into Snug Harbor in Parry Sound where they are picked up to travel back to Miniwanca.

Weather Conditions on Paddling Trips

Weather on the water can change quickly and be severe. Wind 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.

Are there any special gear considerations for paddlers?

Please consult the [Voyageur 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 and Camp Shoes:** All paddlers must wear securable shoes while swimming and closed-toed shoes while cooking in camp. If you can see your toes, they are not considered closed toe. Securable sandals like Chacos, Keens, and Texas are good options to wear while paddling. 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.
- **Extra Swimsuits:** It is important to maintain proper hygiene while on-trail, so it is important for Voyageurs to have a fresh swimsuit at re-ration.
- **Sun Shirts:** UV-blocking clothing is required for all paddling trips and recommended for all Four Trails trips. When campers are out in the sun all day for multiple days, UV-protective clothing can block both direct UV rays from the sun as well as those reflecting off the water and help protect campers from sun burns. Sun protective clothing has an Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF) that represents a fabrics level of UV rays that can be blocked. [You can learn more about UPF fabrics and sun protective clothing here.](#)
- **Sunglasses with Strap:** Sunglasses are important when on paddle trips where the water can reflect the sun back up to the paddler. Having a [strap](#) helps to prevent sunglasses from getting lost in the water.

What equipment does Miniwanca provide?

In addition to a kayak, 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, satellite phones, and/or SPOT locators and are in regular contact with Miniwanca. Finally, leaders also carry maps and resources to assist in route navigation and camping arrangements.

Resupply

Voyageur campers will have a resupply around the midpoint of their trip. At this point, we provide the group with all the food, gear, and clean clothing (set aside prior to leaving camp) necessary to complete their journey. Additionally, we will bring them fresh food for celebratory meals that day. They will have the opportunity for a rest day at that time.

An important part of resupply for campers is hearing from camp and from home. We're happy to deliver letters of support from family, friends, and loved ones. **However, due to the added weight from new food and supplies and international postage laws, we will not bring packages to resupply.** Campers will receive packages when they return to camp after their triumphant return.

If you or someone you know wants to have a letter delivered to your child, **please ensure it arrives at Miniwanca on or before Monday, July 20.** Letters received by that time will be delivered with the resupply.

Four Trails Traditions

Nostos

Nostos is our celebration of our Voyageur and Odyssey Campers return to Miniwanca. Voyageur and Odyssey families are invited to attend to celebrate their camper. **Nostos will take place on Wednesday, August 5.** More information will be sent to Odyssey and Voyageur camper families closer to the event.

Voyageur Morning Stretch

Voyageur campers will have the opportunity to further celebrate their trip with a Voyageur Morning Stretch, a reflective event where the group will have the opportunity to share a bit about their trip with the rest of the camp community.

Rugbies

Voyageurs receive a rugby jacket at the end of summer fire circle to celebrate their journey. The rugbies are a tradition dating back to the beginning of Four Trails. The stripes of the rugbies represent the connection of this year's Voyageurs to former Voyageurs from both Miniwanca and Merrowvista. Campers will have an opportunity to request a mentor or staff member to give them their rugby and we will do our best to honor these requests. Rugby givers who are not Miniwanca staff will need to be a registered volunteer for closing week. Register here.

Odyssey

Rising 12th Grade Campers

As an Odyssean, you will be traveling the last 120 northbound miles of the Appalachian Trail. Over your five-week program, you will live and move through the 100 Mile Wilderness and experience the beauty of the highest peak in Maine.

The trip is not only about the beauty of the natural world. It's also about challenging yourself to live the values of best self and balanced life out loud. With the help of your leaders, you will help plan and facilitate Evening Reflections, cook meals together, and help lead the group each day as you plan your next destination. Along the way, you'll empower yourself and others through the support of the mobile community you're creating together on your adventure.

In your final trip as a camper, you will spend time reflecting on your experience with your fellow campers and leaders. Your journey will challenge all four folds – physical, mental, spiritual/religious, and social as your mobile community eats together, moves together, and grows together. Along the way, you will empower yourself to take your experiences and what you have learned back home to the wider world.



Odyssey Backpacking Program

Odyssey is the culminating backpacking trip offered at Miniwanca. During this trip, campers will have the opportunity to work on their low-impact camping and hiking skills, as well as build bonds within their mobile community. This trip is self-supported, so campers will carry loaded backpacks containing personal and group gear. They will also carry and prepare their meals daily. Odyssey will receive a resupply during the trip when the group obtains new food rations, supplemental gear, and a change of clothes they have set aside prior to their departure. They will also have the opportunity for a rest day during the trip.

Toward the end of the experience, Odyssey campers will enter Baxter State Park, where they will camp at the base of Mt. Katahdin and have one or more opportunities to summit, depending on weather.

What is an average day like for Odyssey backpacker?

Odyssey campers will hike the most remote and rugged portion of the Appalachian Trail. It is crucial for groups to arrive at their campsite with enough time to set up camp, prepare

dinner, share in a reflective activity, and get the sleep they need for the next day. Therefore, days will start early to account for weather, varying physical demands of terrain, etc.

Throughout the day, campers and leaders will exercise all Four Folds to work toward logistical, personal, and group goals for the trip. Villages will also engage daily in a reflective activity to round out growth and understanding of the group experience.

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

Where do Odyssey backpackers hike?

Odyssey campers will start their trip near Monson, Maine. The following day, they will begin hiking the Appalachian Trail (AT) until they reach the northern terminus and highest summit in Maine, Mt. Katahdin – an overall itinerary of roughly 125 miles. This stretch of trail is known as The Hundred Mile Wilderness, for its remote access and undeveloped beauty.

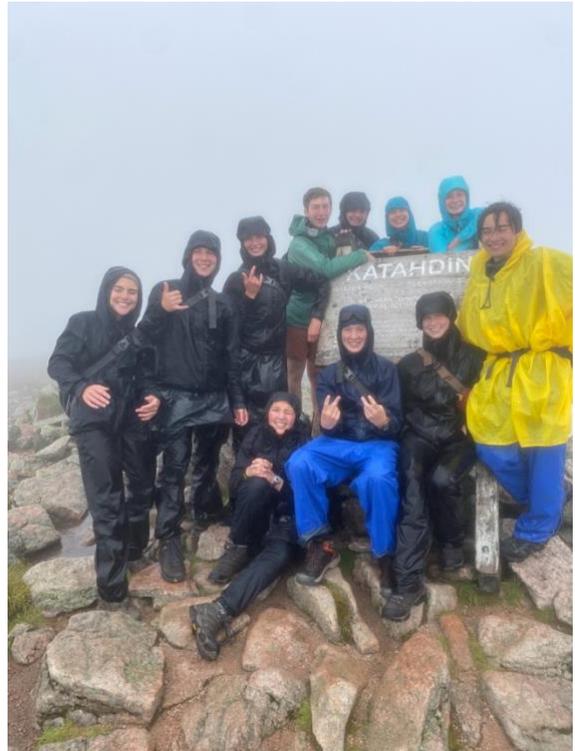
Odyssey campers hike between 3 and 13 miles a day, depending on terrain. Along the trail, groups will encounter river crossings, diverse flora and fauna, boulder fields, and steep ascents and descents, which contribute to some of the most breathtaking scenery in New England.

Resupply

Odyssey campers will have a resupply around the midpoint of their trip. At this point, we provide the group with all the food, gear, and clean clothing (set aside prior to leaving camp) necessary to complete their journey. Additionally, we will bring them fresh food for celebratory meals that day. They will have the opportunity for a rest day at that time.

An important part of resupply for campers is hearing from camp and from home. We're happy to deliver letters of support from family, friends, and loved ones. **Due to the added weight from new food, we will not bring packages to resupply.** Campers will receive packages when they return to camp after their triumphant return.

If you or someone you know wants to have a letter delivered to your child, **please ensure it arrives at Miniwanca on or before Monday, July 20.** Letters received by that time will be delivered with the resupply.



How should campers prepare for backpacking?

It should be noted that as the capstone experience of the Four Trails Program, Odyssey presents a significant physical challenge. Hiking long miles on the uneven terrain of the Appalachian Trail with a loaded pack puts a significant amount of strain on the body.

Training prior to Odyssey is absolutely necessary to have a safe and successful trip.

Recognizing this, we have created an Odyssey-specific training regimen separate from the Four Trails Fitness and Training Program. The Odyssey training focuses on:

- **Building endurance** for long, back-to-back hiking days
- Improving **leg and core strength** for steep ascents/descents
- Increasing **pack-carrying capacity** safely
- Enhancing **balance, stability, and injury-prevention mobility**
- Developing **mental resilience** and group cohesion

[Click here to access the 12-week Odyssey Training Program](#)

In conjunction with this new program, we will be forming a virtual Odyssey training group hosted on Strava Clubs. Campers will be able to check in with each other, keep track of their hikes, and participate in virtual hikes together in the weeks leading up to camp.

[Click here to join the 2026 Odyssey Training Strava Club](#)

Upon arriving at Miniwanca, Odyssey campers will be assessed for their physical readiness for trail while preparing for their trip.

What kind of hiking boots should campers have?

A key part of preparing for Odyssey backpacking is purchasing and breaking in boots. We recommend **high-cut, waterproof synthetic or leather hiking boots that provide ankle support. “Trail runner” style shoes that fall below the ankle are not recommended.**

[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.
- **Safety:** 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.

Are there any special gear considerations for Odyssey?

Please consult the [Odyssey packing list](#) for a comprehensive list of gear. The following are recommendations specifically for the Odyssey trip:

- **Trekking Poles:** due to the rugged and challenging terrain of the Appalachian Trail, **trekking poles will be required for Odyssey campers in 2026**. Poles provide extra stability on uneven hiking surfaces, as well as redistribute a significant amount of weight to lessen the pack's weight on the body.
- **Liner Socks:** Due to the length and distance of many days on trail, campers may want to consider bringing liner socks on their trip. Liner socks are thin, lightweight socks designed to be worn underneath your regular socks. Typically made from technical materials like Merino wool or synthetic fibers, they act as a barrier between the skin and primary sock, reducing friction and adding an extra layer of protection against blistering.

Four Trails Traditions

Nostos

Nostos is our celebration of our Voyageur and Odyssey Campers' triumphant return to Miniwanca. Voyageur and Odyssey families are invited to attend to celebrate their camper. **Nostos will take place Wednesday, August 5.** More information will be sent to Odyssey and Voyageur camper families closer to the event.

Odyssey Vespers

Odyssey campers round out their time as a Miniwanca camper with Odyssey Vespers, a reverent event where they are able to share reflections on their trip and on their Miniwanca journey with the entire camp community. Campers are typically given the space to share a personal speech, as well as join their group in providing other reflections and music inspired by their journey.

Jackets

Odysseans receive a jacket at the end of summer fire circle to celebrate their journey. The jackets are a tradition dating back to the beginning of Four Trails and have changed overtime as the trip has evolved. Campers will have an opportunity to request a mentor or staff member to give them their jacket, and we will do our best to honor these requests. Jacket givers who are not Miniwanca staff will need to be a registered volunteer for closing week. [You can find out more about our summer volunteer program online.](#)