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**5 Easy Steps to Giving the Perfect BackCountry Gift**

**By Chuck Fitzgerald**

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Does the thought of buying a gift for a friend or relative make you smile or does it stress you out? Is there a hiker or camper on your gift giving list? What can you give to the someone who already has everything? The secret of gift giving is not always the "what." Many times the "why, when and how" make an ordinary gift the Perfect Gift. Continue reading to discover 5 sure-fire steps to giving the perfect gift to the outdoor enthusiasts in your life.

Step 1: Do Your Homework. This is the toughest of the 5 steps. Doing your homework means thinking about your outdoor enthusiast and what he or she likes about being in the backcountry. Are there any current or past outdoor interests? Perhaps he likes to fish or she likes to climb. Maybe you overheard the comment "I remember when I used to go camping every long weekend. I miss those days." Our personal shopper service receives hints like this all the time. Chances are you already know their interests, so take a few minutes to think prior to shopping. There are loads of great outdoor gifts available.

Another part of your homework is to understand the relationship between you and your gift recipient's outdoor hobbies. Last year I was camping with a dear friend who got mildly lost. After about an hour, he showed up in camp a little embarrassed - but safe. So the perfect gift for him before our next trip was a GPS unit. I also included a hand written coupon good for one free lesson and an extra set of batteries. The relationship we had allowed me to have a little fun with the gift giving. I did provide him with a quality gift and he uses it all the time.

Step 2: Speaking of High Quality. The best way to get the most enjoyment out of our backcountry experiences is to have good gear. When giving a backcountry gift, be sure it's high quality. There are two gear buying rules to live by. First, only give gear you would use. And secondly, buy the best gear you can afford. Nothing derails good times in the great outdoors like bad gear.

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Step 3: The Right Way to Give Certificates. Gift certificates can be an excellent choice for a gift. Here's a great use of a gift certificate – I was fortunate enough to be on the receiving end of this story. A friend living across the country knew I loved to hike. He also knew from his own experience that you can't just buy a backpack for someone else. Backpacks are a very subjective purchase. Instead of buying a me a pack and giving me the task of returning it in order to get the right one, he sent me a gift certificate AND he told me what to buy with it. So now I get the backpack I want and my friend has proven once again how well he knows me. I loved the gift. When giving gift certificates, tell the recipient what to buy with it.

Step 4: Seek Out Customer Friendly Retailers. This is especially important when purchasing a gift on–line. Make sure you are purchasing from a store with visible customer satisfaction and return policies. If your gift recipient needs to exchange or return a piece of gear, the process needs to be hassle–free. If the return procedure is clunky, the perfect gift just became imperfect.

Step 5: Timing is Everything. The best time to get "the birding binoculars I always wanted," is not on your birthday or at Christmas time. The best time to get them is just before you go birding. The new backpack is a more thoughtful gift just prior to hiking the Grand Canyon than it is for graduation. The value of a gift is greatly increased when given at the right time. Surprise someone with a perfectly timed present.

Giving the Perfect BackCountry Gift is easy to do. Determining "what" to give is important, but so is knowing "why, when and how" to give. Make your next gift giving experience a good one. The outdoor enthusiast in your life is counting on it. Use this information and you'll Get It Right The First Time.

Get Outdoors!

Chuck Fitzgerald is the President of Arizona based BackCountry Toys, an online store providing backcountry specialty gear and educational information for outdoor enthusiasts. Visit

to receive the free newsletter "FreshAir" or call (800) 316–9055.

### **New Year's Resolutions for the BackCountry**

**By Chuck Fitzgerald**

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The New Year has begun and you probably have a few New Year's Resolutions under way. You'll lose weight, lose a bad habit, add a good habit or even mend an old fence. But do you have any resolutions for the backcountry? Are you ready to make this year your best backcountry year? I'm ready. Here are a few of my backcountry New Year's Resolutions; please adopt a couple of these for yourself. If you do, 2005 will be your best outdoor year yet.

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First off, I resolve to spend more time in the backcountry. No matter how much time I spend hiking or camping, it never seems to be enough. So this year I will try to get my fill of the outdoors. Of course, I said this last year too but failed to get enough.

Next I resolve to upgrade my critical gear. Some things are more comfortable the longer you own them, but this isn't good practice for critical backcountry gear. For example, it's been a few years since I upgraded my first-aid kit or my hiking boots or my sunglasses. These items become a liability if they are not properly maintained. I've let that slip. I'll also take a long look at my binoculars and my camping kitchen, especially my stove. Taking care of your gear will ensure its ability to take care of you when you need it most.

While we're discussing gear, let's keep going with another resolution. I resolve to learn how to use all of my gear. I've been carrying a magnesium stick for fire starting for about 5 years. I don't think I know how to use it. I'm going to learn. I need to understand more about my GPS receiver (Garmin eTrex Vista). I use about five percent of its capabilities and this is only because I haven't taken the time to learn. That changes this year.

I also resolve to learn a new backcountry skill. I haven't decide what skill to learn but it will be something I've never done before. I've never taken the time to learn how to rock climb. Perhaps that's the one, or maybe kayaking. I've never collected water using a solar still. That sounds interesting too. Maybe you need to learn CPR or how to read a map or tie a variety of knots. This is the year to fill in the knowledge gaps.

Finally, I resolve to bring someone new into the backcountry this year. When I see the perfect sunset or a herd of antelope, the next thought I have is "I wish so-and-so was here to see this!" So this year, I'm going to share the awe of our backcountry with someone brand new to the outdoors. By sticking to these New Year's Resolutions, I will have a great year in our backcountry. I hope to see you there!

Use this information and you'll Get It Right The First Time. Get Outdoors!

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