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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.

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.

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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!

Chuck Fitzgerald is the President of Arizona based BackCountry Toys, an online store providing backcountry specialty gear and educational information for outdoor enthusiasts. Visit www.BackCountryToys.com to receive the free newsletter "FreshAir" or call (800) 316-9055

5 Ways to Get the Most Out of Your BackCountry Gear

By Chuck Fitzgerald

Time out of doors is a precious commodity to the outdoor enthusiast – but are we getting the most out of this time. One way to ensure maximum backcountry enjoyment is to get the most possible value from the gear you acquire and use. Here are 5 ways to get the most out of your backcountry gear - and your backcountry experience.

– Purchase the best gear you can possibly afford. If you are going to spend a year planning your next excursion on the continental divide, spend three months getting into great shape, take three weeks vacation when it's time for the hike, purchase an airline ticket, and so on - then why are you using the cheapest backpack you can find? A good backpack will make all the difference in the world. This applies to all of your backcountry gear. Whether its your GPS unit, sleeping bag, rain gear or dual-fuel portable stove, be sure to carry good equipment in order to get the most value for your money. Don't buy cheap!

– Learn how to use all of your gear correctly and practice using it. When you are completely lost, it's not the time to learn how to navigate with a compass and map. When you and your firewood are wet, it's not the time to learn how to start a fire with the flare you've been carrying for 5 years in your pack. Take time to learn all of the features of your gear. You might be surprised to learn just how useful your GPS really is when you understand how to use the backtrack feature. You'll be mighty thankful when you learn the proper weight distribution for your backpack. Take time to learn - practice around your home before you venture into the backcountry.

– Keep your gear with you and use it as much as possible. Your backcountry gear isn't just for the backcountry. It has unlimited uses in everyday life. Never go on a road trip without your pack. You'll almost always find an opportunity to use your binoculars or GPS unit. If you don't have your gear with you, you'll need it - never fails.

– Take great care of your gear. Hopefully you've learned this from your parents and not necessarily from experience. Your gear will only take good care of you if you take good care of it. Conversely, your gear will let you down if you don't take good care of it. That's a bad situation to be in. Inspect everything before you embark on your adventure. Clean and properly store all of your gear upon your

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return. Have you check your gear's straps, fuel, waterproofing, batteries and overall condition lately? Taking good care of your gear is an important part of enjoying your backcountry trip.

– When you're done with it, donate it - and some of your time – to a local scout troop. They are always looking for assistance from outdoor enthusiasts. You'll feel great getting this last piece of benefit out of your old trusty gear!

Optimize your time in the backcountry. The easiest way ensure maximum outdoor enjoyment is to get the most possible value from your gear. Let these 5 ways guide you in getting the most out of your backcountry gear - and your backcountry experience. Use this information and you'll Get It Right The First Time.

Get Outdoors!

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Keeping Your New Year's Resolutions

Seven Tips to Keep up Your New Year Resolutions

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