

Bear Bags

Every campsite will have at least one bear cable nearby. A bear cable is a metal cable run between two trees and will be at least 15 feet off the ground. It could be as much as 30+ feet high.

Philmont will issue you two 75-foot bear ropes and several bear bags. The bear bags are plastic mesh seed bags. Make sure you get at least 4 bear bags (5 or 6 is better). The bags supplied by Philmont are on the smallish side.

You should bring a carabineer and 75 feet of 3 mm nylon rope for the “Oops” Bag. My crews bring their own Oops Bag, larger than normal and specifically marked as such with a big red first aid symbol.

Tip: If you encounter a bear cable too high off the ground to get the rope over, tie the “Oops” rope to one end of the carabineer and throw it over instead then use it to haul the bear rope.

When does the bear bag get raised? The first two things that happen when you get into camp is put up the crew fly and raise the bear bags. The bear bags stay raised unless there’s someone actively working with them.

What goes in the bear bag? Smellables are anything that COULD have a smell. Philmont’s list of smellables varies from year to year but will be something like this list:

- Blood* - like a bloody handkerchief from a nose bleed if the total volume is a spot greater than 2”
- Vomit* - you MUST clean it up
- Water bottles that have had bug juice or Gatorade* in them. You can’t get the smell out.
- Food
- Trash
- First Aid Kit
- Spare bear bags
- Camp Suds or any other soap
- Sump Frisbee, spatula and scrubbies
- Duct tape (don’t wrap it around water bottles, may make it a smellable)
- Clothing with food residue or vomit on them
- Sunscreen, chap stick, bug repellent, etc
- Tooth Brush/Tooth Paste/Comb
- Foot Powder
- Spare batteries, Spare Film and Disposable Cameras
- Medicine
- Anything in question – its better to be safe than sorry
- And so much more

*These are “Super” smellables. They *must* be cleaned up.

Should someone have something that they have to keep with them at all times, like an inhaler, wrap a used sock around it and stick it inside a boot.

Tip: Some crews have everyone bring a sturdy wide mouthed bottle (such as a Gatorade bottle) and use it exclusively for bug juice. They ALL go up in the bear bag.

The weight of all of this stuff is considerable. It could much as 150 lbs so it takes everyone to hoist the bags.

Hoisting the bags:

- Fold one of the ropes in half, tie a loop in the middle and clip the carabineer onto the loop.
- Coil the rope, hold on to the two ends and heave it over the bear wire.
- Tie the bags to the rope using a larks head knot. Keep all of the bags very close to the loop of rope in the middle. Hold one bag back to use as the Oops Bag.
- Run the rope for the Oops Bag through the carabineer.
- Hoist the bags and tie the ends off to separate trees using Wilderness Pledge (WP) knots.
- Be careful when taking the rope down. If you pull too hard it can wrap around the cable several times and the rope is lost.

What's the Oops Bag for?

- It's for last minute forgotten things. It's light enough for a single scout to raise and lower by himself.
- You may want to put the crew first aid kit in the Oops Bag so it's easy to find.
- Some crews put their personal smellables in the Oops Bag so that they can find it for tooth brushing, etc.
- Some crews put that evening's dinner in the Oops Bag so they don't have to dig through all of the bags looking for it.

Tip: I use a "personal bear bag". A small nylon bag that I routinely keep everything that I would put into the bear bag so I don't have to dig around in my pack for it.