

Bear Habitat

Required adventure • Outdoors

If you read nothing else

Nine requirements — the biggest adventure in the Bear year. Three meetings: two indoors to prepare, then the one-mile walk itself.

Requirements 3 through 8 are each named for one of the Leave No Trace Principles for Kids. That is not decoration, it is the teaching structure — keep the principle names on the board and say them out loud, because on the walk you will be calling them by name.

Two things need booking early: the guest who knows your path (requirement 3) and the walk date itself. Invite the path expert three to four weeks out and pick your route before meeting 1, because the route is what every other requirement hangs on.

The walk does not need a mountain. A mile in a city park, a greenway, a neighborhood loop, or around the block from your meeting place all count. Pick something you can reach without a caravan.

If your walk starts from your regular meeting place, meetings 2 and 3 can be run as one longer outdoor session — teach the four principles, then walk. Split them if you have to drive somewhere.

The requirements

Official requirement text. Tick each one off as your Scouts complete it — the meeting plans below cover all of them.

- ☐ 1. Prepare for a one-mile walk by gathering the Cub Scout Six Essentials and weather-appropriate clothing and shoes.
- ☐ 2. Know Before You Go — Identify the location of your walk on a map and confirm your 1-mile route.
- ☐ 3. Choose the Right Path — Learn about the path and surrounding area you will be walking on.
- ☐ 4. Trash Your Trash — Make a plan for what you will do with your personal trash or trash you find along the trail.
- ☐ 5. Leave What You Find — Take pictures along your walk or bring a sketchbook to draw five things that you want to remember on your walk.
- ☐ 6. Be Careful with Fire — Determine the fire danger rating along your path.
- ☐ 7. Respect Wildlife — From a safe distance, identify as you look up, down, and around you, six signs of any mammals, birds, insects, or reptiles.
- ☐ 8. Be Kind to Other Visitors — Identify what you need to do to be kind to others on the path.
- ☐ 9. With your den, pack, or family, go on your 1-mile walk while practicing your Leave No Trace Principles for Kids.

Requirements 5, 7 and 8 are taught at meeting 2 and completed on the walk. Requirement 6 is taught at meeting 2 and checked again against the real conditions on walk day.

Meeting 1: Pack it, map it, know the path

Goal: Every Scout can name and show the Six Essentials, the den picks its actual one-mile route on a map, hears from someone who knows the path, and makes a trash plan.

Covers requirements 1, 2, 3 and 4

Before the meeting

- Pick the area for the walk before this meeting. The Scouts choose the route within it — you choose the area, because you are the one vetoing the highway crossing.
- Identify who owns and maintains your path, then invite someone from that organization to speak. Parks department staff, a trail association volunteer, a county naturalist, or the person who mows it all work. Three to four weeks of notice, and tell them you want fifteen minutes on the path, its history, its surface, and who takes care of it.
- Watch the four-minute Cub Scout Six Essentials video at vimeo.com/498051015 and review the Six Essentials in the front of the Bear handbook, so you can explain each item rather than read a list.
- Pack your own day bag with the Six Essentials and bring it. You are the worked example.
- Tell families a week ahead: bring a day bag with your Six Essentials, and wear the shoes and clothes you plan to wear on the walk. This meeting does not work if they come empty-handed.
- Print the Paths for Everyone worksheet from the Bear Habitat adventure resources on filestore.scouting.org, one per Scout.
- Print and cut two sets of the Trash Timeline and Trash Timeline Cards from the Bear Habitat resources, on cardstock. Keep the Trash Timeline Key for yourself.
- Round up mapping devices — one per pair of Scouts. Apple Maps, Google Maps, Footpath Route Planner, Komoot, and Plotaroute all do what you need. If devices are a problem, run Paper Paths instead: scouting.org/cub-scout-activities/paper-paths/

Supplies

- A day bag packed with a complete set of Cub Scout Six Essentials: filled water bottle, whistle, flashlight, sun protection (sunscreen, hat, sunglasses), trail food, small first aid kit
- Clothing for the current weather to show and discuss: jacket, rain jacket, hat, gloves, sunglasses, closed-toe shoes, socks
- Bear handbooks
- Smart device with a mapping app, one per two Scouts
- Paths for Everyone worksheets, one per Scout
- A printed map of the walk area
- Two sets of Trash Timeline cards and timeline strips on cardstock, plus the answer key
- Timer
- Outdoor Code and Leave No Trace Principles for Kids emoji worksheets, one each per Scout
- Thank you card for the guest speaker

Run of show

Time	What happens
10 min	Gathering: Outdoor Code and Leave No Trace emoji sheets
5 min	Opening: Pledge of Allegiance, Scout Oath, Scout Law; announcements
15 min	Activity 1: Backpack Packing Challenge — the Six Essentials
15 min	Activity 2: Digital Path Finding — Know Before You Go
15 min	Activity 3: Ask the Path Expert — Choose the Right Path
10 min	Activity 4: Trash Timeline Game — Trash Your Trash
5 min	Closing

Gathering — Outdoor Code and Leave No Trace emoji (10 min)

Outdoor Code and Leave No Trace Emoji — scouting.org/cub-scout-activities/outdoor-code-and-leave-no-trace-emoji/

Hand out both emoji sheets as Scouts arrive and let them write next to each emoji what they think it stands for. Handbooks open on the table — the Outdoor Code and the Leave No Trace Principles for Kids are in the front and they are allowed to look.

When most of the den is in, go through them one at a time and let Scouts share their guesses. Correct the ones that landed wrong, then read the Outdoor Code and the seven principles together as a den with the sheets in front of them.

Do this properly, because the next six requirements are literally named after those seven principles. Ten minutes here saves you explaining “Trash Your Trash” twice later.

Activity 1 — Backpack Packing Challenge (15 min)

Backpack Packing Challenge — scouting.org/cub-scout-activities/backpack-packing-challenge/

Scouts line up with their day bags and lay the contents out on the floor in front of them. Then work the Six Essentials one item at a time: everyone picks up their water bottle, you talk about why it matters, they put it back. Whistle, flashlight, sun protection, trail food, first aid kit — same pattern.

A Scout who is missing something is not in trouble. Note it, and either lend them one for the walk or tell the parent tonight what to buy. Better now than at the trailhead.

Then clothing for the weather you will actually have:

- Sun — hat, light-colored clothing, sunglasses.
- Rain — rain jacket with a hood, or a hat.
- Cold — warm jacket, hat, gloves, scarf.

Then shoes, and spend real time here, because footwear is the single most common reason a walk with third graders goes badly. Closed-toe always, for every Scouting activity. Sneakers or walking shoes are fine on pavement; a rugged path wants a harder sole and more ankle support. Shoes fit snug and laces get tied properly.

Socks are not optional. Good socks keep feet dry and pull moisture away, which is what stops the itching and the smell. If feet get wet on the walk, shoes and socks come off afterward and feet get dried out.

That is requirement 1, and it is “gather,” so every Scout leaves knowing exactly what is going in the bag on walk day.

Activity 2 — Digital Path Finding (15 min)

Digital Path Finding — scouting.org/cub-scout-activities/digital-path-finding/

Assign buddies and give each pair a device with the mapping app already open on your walk area. Show them the scale bar — usually bottom right, and it changes as they zoom. A mile has to mean something on the screen before they can plan a mile.

Each pair works out a one-mile route, then shares it. Look at all of them as a den and pick the one the den will actually walk. Let them do the choosing; your job is to veto the unsafe one and say why.

Then have them mark the route up: highlight the start, find the end, and pin the things that matter on the way — bathrooms, water fountains, a scenic spot, a shelter.

Now hand out the Paths for Everyone worksheet and sit them around a table. Work these questions as a den, out loud:

- Which of these paths is most appropriate for our den?
- Is there anyone in our den who might have a hard time on any of these paths?
- What are the safety concerns for each type of path?
- Does the route we picked contain any of these paths?
- What kind of terrain should our route have — and does ours have terrain that is too advanced for us?

That second question is the one worth sitting with. A den that plans around the Scout who cannot do stairs has learned something the requirement does not say out loud.

That is requirement 2 — Know Before You Go. Save the map. You are distributing it to families before the walk.

Alternative: Paper Paths — scouting.org/cub-scout-activities/paper-paths/

Activity 3 — Ask the Path Expert (15 min)

Ask the Path Expert — scouting.org/cub-scout-activities/ask-the-path-expert/

Before the guest starts, remind the den how to host a speaker: hands up for questions, stay seated, listen. Thirty seconds, and it changes the next fifteen minutes.

Ask the guest to cover the path itself, its surface, its history, and who maintains it. Have Scouts ask questions — seed a few in advance if your den goes quiet in front of strangers: Who takes care of this path? What is it made of? What was here before? What is the hardest part of your job?

This is requirement 3, Choose the Right Path, and hearing it from the person who maintains it is worth more than anything you could tell them. A Scout who knows someone mows that trail edge treats it differently.

If no one can come, take the den to the path and walk a short section with the map, or run No Two Trails Alike instead — scouting.org/cub-scout-activities/no-two-trails-alike/

Have the denner thank the speaker, sign a card as a den, and send it this week.

Activity 4 — Trash Timeline Game (10 min)

Trash Timeline Game — scouting.org/cub-scout-activities/trash-timeline-game/

Clear space to move. Two teams, one set of Trash Timeline cards each, five minutes on the timer — the timer is half of this block, so set it and mean it. Each team places their cards on the timeline where they think that item finishes decomposing.

When time is up, walk the timeline with the key, call each one right or wrong, and put every item in its actual place. Most correct wins. Ask whether anything surprised them — it will. Third graders reliably guess an aluminum can at a few years, and the real number lands.

Now get to the requirement, which is a plan and not a fact: what are we going to do with our own trash on the walk, and what do we do with trash we find? Pin it down concretely — who carries the bag, where the wrappers go, whether we pick up what other people left, and what we do not touch (anything sharp, anything with liquid in it, anything gross — you tell an adult instead).

Write the plan on the board and keep it. That is requirement 4, and the walk is where they execute it.

Closing (5 min)

Announce the walk date, the meeting-2 date, and remind them that the map is coming home this week.

Say something like

A great adventure starts long before your first step on the trail. Tonight you packed the Six Essentials, learned your route, met the person who takes care of the path, and made a plan for your trash. That is what being prepared actually looks like.

After the meeting, record attendance and advancement, and send the guest speaker the thank you card.

Send home with families

Check that your Scout owns and can find all six of the Cub Scout Six Essentials before walk day. Tell the den leader now if something is missing.

Break in the shoes your Scout will wear on the walk. Walk a mile in them this week.

Make sure the Scouting America Annual Health and Medical Record parts A and B are on file with the den leader — needed before the walk.

Meeting 2: Four principles for the trail

Goal: Scouts learn the fire danger rating scale, know what wildlife signs to look for, agree how the den will treat other people on the path, and know what they are taking pictures or drawings of.

Covers requirements 5, 6, 7 and 8

Before the meeting

- Print and cut the Fire Danger Matching Game cards from the Bear Habitat adventure resources on filestore.scouting.org. Shuffle them and keep the answer sheet for yourself.

- Research the animals actually common along your route — mammals, birds, insects, reptiles, and the domesticated ones too — and the signs each leaves behind. Ten minutes on a county parks or state wildlife page is enough, and it makes you credible on the walk.
- Look up the current fire danger rating for your area so you can compare their card sorting against the real number. Most state forestry and county fire sites post it daily.
- Remind families to bring a camera or a phone, or a sketchbook and pencils, to this meeting and to the walk.
- Confirm health forms are in for every Scout and every adult coming on the walk, and review them for anything that affects participation. Do this now, not on the morning of.
- Distribute the route map from meeting 1 to every family, along with the walk date, start time and expected finish time.

Supplies

- Fire Danger Matching Game cards, cut and shuffled, plus the answer sheet
- Sketchbooks and pencils, or cameras and smart devices — one per Scout
- Crayons or markers
- Printed pictures of local animal tracks, scat, nests and burrows
- The route map from meeting 1
- Board or easel paper for the be-kind list
- Bear handbooks

Run of show

Time	What happens
5 min	Gathering: name the seven Leave No Trace principles
5 min	Opening and announcements
15 min	Activity 1: Fire Danger Matching — Be Careful with Fire
15 min	Activity 2: Wildlife Snapshot — Respect Wildlife
15 min	Activity 3: Consider Others — Be Kind to Other Visitors
10 min	Activity 4: Take Only Memories — what you will record
5 min	Closing: walk logistics

Activity 1 — Fire Danger Matching (15 min)

Fire Danger Matching — scouting.org/cub-scout-activities/fire-danger-matching/

Lay the five level cards out in order, face up: Low, Moderate, High, Very High, Extremely High. Everything else goes face down in a deck.

Explain the rating system first — what each level means in terms of how easily a fire starts and how fast it spreads. Then go around the den: draw a card, read it out, place it in the pile you think it belongs to. Play until the deck is gone, then correct the piles together.

Finish with the question that makes it matter: at what fire danger level should we not do this walk at all? Let them argue and then give them the real answer for your area.

Then show them where the number comes from — the state forestry site, the county fire page, the sign at the park entrance. That is what requirement 6 is really asking: not that they memorize a scale, but that they know how to find the rating for their own path.

On walk day they check it again for real. That is when the requirement completes.

Activity 2 — Wildlife Snapshot (15 min)

Wildlife Snapshot — scouting.org/cub-scout-activities/wildlife-snapshot/

Tell them what lives along your route, and be specific — the actual birds, the actual mammals, the actual insects, the neighbor's dog. Then ask what you left out. They will know things you do not.

The requirement is signs, not animals, and that is the part to teach. Six signs is easy once they know what counts:

- Sounds — not just the call, but the sound of something moving through leaves.
- Where they live — a nest, a burrow, a hole in a tree, a web.
- What they eat — bite marks on a leaf, chewed nuts, a raided trash can.
- Scat. Different animals leave different scat, and third graders will pay closer attention to this than to anything else you say tonight.
- Tracks — especially in mud after rain.

Then the safe-distance part, which is the actual point of "Respect Wildlife." We look, we do not approach, we do not feed, we do not touch, and we do not chase for a photo. Ask them why, and let them get there themselves.

Every Scout is looking for six signs on the walk, up, down, and around. Say that number out loud now so nobody spends the walk counting squirrels.

Activity 3 — Consider Others (15 min)

Consider Others — scouting.org/cub-scout-activities/consider-others/

Ask the den how they can be kind and considerate to other people on the path, and write what they say. Then fill the gaps from the Bear handbook list until you have all of this on the board:

- Know your right of way. Walk on the right, not the left, and read the signs on the path.
- On a path only wide enough for one, step aside for anyone coming uphill. On the flat, be the first to step aside and let others pass.
- Bicyclists yield to walkers — but do not count on it.
- If you must step off the path, watch what you are stepping on.
- Make yourself known. A friendly hello to people you meet. Coming up behind someone, say so calmly before you pass.
- Stay on the path. Going off it damages plants and the systems around the trail.
- Leave rocks, plants, and anything you find where they are, for the next person.
- Do not disturb wildlife. They need their space and so do you.
- Watch the conditions. Too wet, muddy or slippery means turn back or pick another day — that is a real decision the den is allowed to make.
- Take time to listen. Devices off, noise down.

- Be aware of what is around you. Know the rules for your path.

Now turn the list into the den's plan for walk day: single file where, hello to whom, who calls out a bike. That is what requirement 8 asks — identify what you need to do — and you are going to hold them to it in two days.

Activity 4 — Take Only Memories (10 min)

Take Only Memories — scouting.org/cub-scout-activities/take-only-memories/

Every Scout picks their method now: camera or phone, or sketchbook and pencils. Have them label the sketchbook or make a folder on the phone so the five things do not get lost among four hundred other pictures.

The rule is the requirement: we leave what we find. The rock stays, the flower stays, the feather stays. What comes home is five pictures or five drawings of things they want to remember.

Ask them to name one thing they expect to want to record. Then tell them it will probably be something else entirely, which is the point.

They complete requirement 5 on the walk and share their five afterward.

Closing — walk logistics (5 min)

Confirm the date, the start time, the finish time, and where families park. Repeat the packing list: Six Essentials, closed-toe shoes, weather-appropriate clothes, camera or sketchbook.

Tell them what happens if the weather turns. You check the forecast three days out, and severe weather means you reschedule rather than push through it.

After the meeting, confirm you have a health form for every person coming, youth and adult.

Send home with families

Charge the camera or pack the sketchbook and pencils in the day bag now, not on walk morning.

Look up the fire danger rating for your area together this week and find where it is published. Your Scout has to be able to find it, not just be told it.

Walk the route on a map with your Scout so they arrive knowing where they are going.

Meeting 3: The one-mile walk

Goal: The den walks its planned mile practicing all seven Leave No Trace Principles for Kids, and completes the wildlife signs, the memories, the kindness plan, and the fire danger check on the trail.

Covers requirement 9, and completes 5, 7 and 8

Before the meeting

- Distribute the route to every Scout, parent and legal guardian ahead of time, based on the map the den made at meeting 1.
- Give a copy of the route to one adult who is not coming, along with your start time and expected finish time. Do this every time you take a den off site.

- Check the weather three days out. Severe weather in the forecast means you reschedule — a miserable first outdoor experience costs you Scouts for years.
- Carry health forms for every participant, youth and adult, if the walk is away from your regular meeting place, and review them beforehand for anything affecting participation.
- Walk the route yourself in the last week if you can. Paths close, get flooded, and get resurfaced.
- Remind families the day before: date, time, location, Six Essentials, closed-toe shoes, camera or sketchbook.
- Confirm your adult coverage. Two registered adults with current SYT is the floor; you want more if the route crosses a road.

Supplies

- Every Scout's Cub Scout Six Essentials: filled water bottle, whistle, flashlight, sun protection, trail food, small first aid kit
- Den first aid kit, including an elastic bandage and moleskin
- Health forms for every participant, youth and adult
- Roster with parent phone numbers
- Trash bag and a pair of gloves for whoever carries it
- The marked route map, carried by the denner
- Cameras or sketchbooks and pencils
- Extra water and extra snacks — somebody will forget
- Charged phone

Run of show

Time	What happens
10 min	Gathering: gear check, buddies, health forms
5 min	Opening: Outdoor Code and the seven principles
40 min	The one-mile walk, with three teaching stops
15 min	Debrief: five memories, six signs, how we did
5 min	Closing

Gathering — Gear check (10 min)

Every Scout opens their bag and shows the Six Essentials. Fix what is wrong now: fill the empty bottles, hand out spare sunscreen, swap a Scout out of the wrong shoes if you brought a spare pair. This is requirement 1 verified, not assumed.

Assign buddies. Nobody walks alone and buddies check on each other at every stop.

Say the route out loud, name the hazards on it and how you are avoiding them, and tell them where the bathrooms and the water are — they marked those on the map themselves, so ask them instead of telling them.

Opening (5 min)

Leave No Trace Walk — scouting.org/cub-scout-activities/leave-no-trace-walk/

Read the Outdoor Code together, then the seven Leave No Trace Principles for Kids in their own words: know before you go, choose the right path, trash your trash, leave what you find, be careful with fire, respect wildlife, be kind to other visitors.

Point out that they have now done six of the seven in a meeting, and the last hour is where they do all seven at once.

Say something like

Everything we carry in, we carry out. If we do this right, the next family that walks here will not be able to tell we came through.

The walk (about 40 min)

A mile is roughly thirty to forty minutes at a third grader's pace with stops. Denner leads at the front with an adult and the map; an adult sweeps at the back. Nobody passes the front, nobody drops behind the back.

Three stops, water and buddy check at each, one principle at each:

- Stop one — Be Careful with Fire. Find the fire danger rating for today, at the sign, on a phone, or from what you looked up. Ask what level it is and what it would take for the answer to change the plan. That completes requirement 6 against real conditions.
- Stop two — Respect Wildlife. Everyone counts what they have got so far toward six signs, up, down, and around. Somebody will be at two, which is why you stop halfway rather than asking at the end.
- Stop three — Choose the Right Path and Trash Your Trash. Point out where the trail is widening because people walked around a puddle, and walk through the middle of it. Check the trash bag and ask what has gone in it.

Be Kind to Other Visitors is not a stop — it is the whole walk. Every time you meet someone, the plan from meeting 2 is in force: step aside, say hello, announce yourself before passing. Say “that is Be Kind to Other Visitors” out loud the first two times, then stop and let them run it.

Leave What You Find is also running throughout. Scouts take their five pictures or drawings as they go. When someone picks something up — and someone will — use it. Ask why that rock is worth more where it is.

If you pass litter, pick it up. The bag makes the principle real in a way the timeline game did not.

Debrief (15 min)

Sit down at the end, before anyone gets in a car. This is where three requirements actually close.

Go around the circle. Each Scout shows or describes their five memories and says why those five. Do not rush this — the reasons are more interesting than the pictures.

Then wildlife: each Scout names their six signs. If someone has four, the den helps them count back through the walk. Nobody is failed for being at four; they are helped to six.

Then the kindness plan: how did we do? Who did we meet, what did we do, what would we change? That closes requirement 8 with evidence rather than intention.

Last question, and it is worth the two minutes: what did we leave behind, and what did we take?

Say something like

Today you showed what it really means to care for the outdoors — noticing what is beautiful without disturbing it, watching the fire danger, respecting wildlife from a safe distance, and being kind to everyone who shares the trail. On your one-mile walk you proved that Scouts leave only memories and take responsibility for the world around them. Keep carrying those Leave No Trace principles wherever you go, because every step you take can help protect the places we love.

Record attendance and advancement the same night. This adventure has nine requirements and they will blur together by Thursday.

Send home with families

Ask your Scout to show you their five memories and tell you about each one.

Ask what six wildlife signs they found. The answer is usually better than you expect.

If your Scout enjoyed this, the Bear elective adventures Champions for Nature and A Bear Goes Fishing build straight off it.

Leader notes

- One mile is the requirement. Do not stretch it to three to make it feel like a real hike — you will lose the Scouts who are not outdoor kids yet, and this adventure exists partly to recruit them.
- Requirements 5, 7, 8 and 9 all happen on the same walk. That is by design and it is why the walk gets its own meeting.
- The Leave No Trace principle names are the teaching structure. Say them by name every time, at both meetings and on the trail, and the den will be using them without you by the third stop.
- The path expert is worth chasing. A den that has met the person who maintains their trail behaves differently on it, and the conversation costs you one email.
- If your route is away from your normal meeting place, health forms and your council's activity notification requirements both apply. Check before you go, not after.
- This adventure can be combined with a pack campout or a pack hike, but the route has to be the den's own planned route and the debrief has to be the den's own.

Safety

Before this adventure

Two registered adults, both with current Safeguarding Youth Training, at every meeting and on the walk. More adults if the route crosses a road.

Scouting America Annual Health and Medical Record parts A and B on file for every participant, youth and adult, and reviewed for anything that affects participation before you leave.

Check the weather three days before the walk and again that morning. Severe weather means reschedule.

Give the route, the start time, and the expected finish time to one adult who is not coming.

Buddy system throughout, adult at the front and an adult sweeping the back. Know where the nearest hospital is and whether you have cell signal on the route — say so out loud to the other adults before you start.

Closed-toe shoes, always. Turn back rather than walk a path that is too wet, muddy, or slippery.

Scouts do not pick up sharps, broken glass, containers with liquid in them, or anything they are unsure about. They tell an adult.

Wildlife is observed from a distance. No approaching, no feeding, no touching.

Tracking

Write each Scout in and tick the requirement number as it is completed. Report to your advancement chair once the row is full.

Scout	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9