

So, you want to plan a trip ...

Great! If you have never planned an overnight trip, this will be the short guideline for you. Note, however, that there is no right way to go about planning a trip and that this guideline is exactly that: A guideline that is supposed to ask some questions and give some idea of what to think about and does not provide an exhaustive instruction. Even though each outdoor activity has its special requirements in terms of physical ability and equipment (I guess you're not surprised that canoeing in Minnesota is quite different from backpacking in the Rocky Mountains), the general procedure to plan for different outings does not depend greatly on what your activity of choice is. Let's get started ...

Information Gathering

Maybe you see a nice back-country picture in one of the many publications and resolve to see that part of the world first hand or a friend told you about a beautiful place and excited you enough to make you want to go. The best way to start is then to gather as much information as you can about the area you're interested in: Check the Internet, ask Rover friends about information, look at articles in outdoor magazines or check out the bookstores or public libraries for trail guides. In my short time in the outdoors, I have accumulated a vast amount of trail guides and outdoor books with detailed descriptions of trails and wilderness areas which came in very handy. Get as much information as you can from different sources. Questions you might ask yourself include:

1. What is the environment like (altitude, bugs, temperature),
2. drinking water availability (desert, lake country, mountain streams),
3. potentially dangerous animals (grizzly bears, snakes) or climate/weather (snow, precipitation, afternoon thunderstorms in mountains),
4. proximity to civilization.

This will give you a first indication of when would be a good time to go, what to prepare for and to figure out if you feel comfortable to take on an outing to that area. Reading up will also give you an idea how demanding a trip is physically. Other important questions you need to answer for yourself are:

5. What are the areas you want to see? The reasons are as varied as historical significance, natural beauty, geological interest or to just get away for the weekend — in the last case, it really doesn't matter,
6. How long of a trip is it to the points I want to see, how much mileage do I have to put in every day to get there?
7. Are there regulations or restrictions? Many (overly) popular or extremely fragile destinations have restrictions on the number of people allowed per day in a certain area, which is typically enforced by a permit system. As a rule of thumb, expect to have to secure a permit for overnight back-country trips in National Parks and heavily used wildernesses such as the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Requirements for

permits vary from free self-registration at the trail-head to highly regulated permits requiring fees. Also, the time line for securing a permit varies greatly between the different areas. Start planning early if you intend to go to very popular places!! However, because there are quite a few people that for whatever reason don't pick up their permits, you might get lucky and secure an overnight permit in the last minute by just showing up: A friend and I tried to get permits for the Grand Canyon once but were unsuccessful using the "normal procedure". Despite this set-back, we decided to wing it and ended up with a very enthusiastic Ranger who put together a fabulous 4-night route!!!

8. Do maintained trails exist or is it a cross-country (off-trail) trip? In other words: How good do your compass skills have to be?
9. Is camping permitted only in designated sites or is camping at large allowed
10. Is there a Ranger station you can call for specific questions about your trip? In my experience, for any trips involving potentially large elevation changes, it is essential to talk to somebody who has first-hand experience or maybe has hiked that part already to get a good picture of what awaits — This "someone" might be a friend, a fellow Rover or a Ranger, who will also be able to give you updates on trail conditions. Many descriptions in trail guides are necessarily biased by what the author believes to be the "average person", and depending on your physical condition or tolerance of complications, you might be overwhelmed by what seemed like a doable trip. Always take the descriptions in guide books with a grain of salt.

At this point, a few words about evacuation routes and emergencies: When deciding on a route, it is prudent to consider probable evacuation routes, to get an idea which way to go for help in case something unforeseen happens on your trip. However, unless you stay close to civilization, evacuation or sending a person for help in case of an emergency will take a long time, during which the injured will have to be taken care of. Venturing into the back-country bears a certain risk of injury that everybody accepts, assumes responsibility for and tries to minimize by their behavior. To avoid the prospect of evacuation, the best prevention is to make sure that the participants on your trip know and understand what to expect and, more importantly, that you have an idea of the capabilities of the people on your trip. Don't be afraid to say "*No*" to somebody that you feel might not be ready for the trip you are planning!! Also, if you get more and more active in the outdoors, it is a good idea to take a Wilderness First Aid Course, which is specifically tailored to back-country settings.

Once you have an idea of what to expect, it's time for the most exciting part: Figure out the route to string all your sights/ destinations together. This is the time to get a map of the area, sit down with a good cup of tea and figure out how many days you need, where to camp and how far to travel each day. For most National Parks and the more popular Wilderness areas, there exists a wide variety of maps with different detail, shading and all kinds of additional information and phone numbers. Some trail guide books about a certain area also provide maps with marked trails and are usable for on-trail trips. A popular series of maps is published by National Geographic (*Trails Illustrated* maps) for a large number of National Parks. It also pays to check out local map and outdoor stores to find a suitable map! I was surprised once to see a company that I knew to publish excellent road maps put out a very good map of the White Mountains, NH, including hiking trails and descriptions of the trails and directions to the trail-heads. Of course for the map geek, there is no alternative

to the very detailed USGS Topographic maps. Sometimes the detail of the USGS maps are essential, for example for off-trail trips. In any case, the map should be clear and give you an idea of the topography of the area in sufficient detail — Don't fall for the "beautiful" maps if they don't show sufficient detail! For the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA), there exist two series of maps published by McKenzie and Fisher companies which show portages between lakes and the designated campsites established by the Forest Service. Which map you choose is mostly a matter of personal preference, but these maps are essential for any trip into the BWCA, along with the knowledge of how to use them, of course.

You might want to consider to include layover days, to go and explore without having to haul around all your gear. If you can find an interesting area, layover days are generally a good idea, unless you have time constraints. Planning on layover days is also a good idea (necessity ?) for extended trips in unpredictable conditions, such as unknown trail conditions or high elevations in mountains, where inclement weather might delay you for a day. Especially if you plan on going to higher altitudes, an extra day might give you the additional time to acclimate to your environment and avoid potentially life threatening conditions such as High-Altitude Pulmonary Edemas.

Once you have figured out how far on average you want to go in a day, all that's left is to look at a map and determine where you can/want/should camp for the nights you will be out. Sometimes, it will be inevitable that one day requires a longer hike/paddle/whatever than you expect/want only to shorten up another day. This is in particular true for trips that require you to stay in designated campsites, which on some hiking trails are spaced very inconveniently.

An important consideration in choice of campsite is the availability of water for cooking, cleaning and drinking: Be aware that certain water sources run very low or are dry in the middle of the summer or even late spring. This is true for environments such as canyons as well as certain campsites on the Superior Hiking Trail in Minnesota. That's where thorough research at home pays big rewards on the trip¹ !!

It is also very important to *honestly* assess your capabilities and preferences, and if you already know who you're going with: The capabilities and requirements of your group. How far can you travel a day without being completely wasted, how long of a portage can you tolerate, are there preferences on campsites ... Take into account the time of available sunlight in a the day during your travel period, factors like elevation which requires acclimating and the climate (how warm/humid, for example). Other factors are whether the route is mostly flat, or if there are a lot of tiring ups and downs, the frequency of portages. The capabilities of you and your group and the amount of time available for the entire trip are the two most important factors in deciding on a route (or should be!). If you don't know who will join you on that trip, plan according to what you are willing to do and try to find people of equal level.

Some Final Comments

The only thing left at this point is to figure out how you get to the starting point of your adventure and back. For trips in Minnesota, this is usually easily solved by using two cars

¹A little anecdote: While establishing camp at one of the Kennedy Creek campsites (Superior Hiking Trail, Minnesota) in July, our group found the creek to be almost dry. The attempt to filter the muddy water through a bandana still left a lot of silt and mud in the "water", so that was a no-go. Luckily, there were two lakes nearby, so a short hike later, we had all the water we needed — plus the unforgettable experience of a concert of frogs at sunset.

and parking them at either end, in the case of a point to point trip. Loop trips, where you start and end at the same place are obviously even easier to plan. For out-of-state trips, transportation is usually a little trickier: The choices are to drive your own vehicle there and back, which can be time consuming for trips far away. On the other hand, flying restricts the type of objects you can take (canoes, for example) and since your airport of arrival is very rarely at your trail-head you still have to get to the starting point, which in the US is in many cases not close to public transportation. So on top of airfare, a car rental is required — and of course, after you get to the trail-head and set out on your adventure, the car is happily awaiting your return at the trail head until you come back from a week-long trip, unused. There is no simple, cost- and time-effective way of doing this part, and it depends again on what you are comfortable with. Note also that it is prohibited to take fuels on airplanes, so that you will have to organize your fuel and its disposal at your destination. Most National Parks have concession services that offer fuel, and so far I have had no problems with stores when I wanted to return unused fuel — you won't get money back, but at least you are not stuck with the fuel.

Finalize the trip

After all this planning, you can sit back and relax for a while!! Announce your trip to friends and the Minnesota Rovers and look forward to a great trip with friends. The only decisions you have to make is to finalize the travel dates, set a deposit and think about how big a group you want to go with. Personally, I find it helpful to set a deadline to sign up so that you have enough time to plan for food and car pooling. Once you have a list of people that are committed to go on your trip, it's time to figure out the food, what communal gear participants can contribute, what equipment you will need from the Minnesota Rovers Equipment cage and find out who is willing to help with various tasks at this stage. Even though you are the trip coordinator, once people are signed up, it is their trip as well, and it is only fair that people help to the best of their capabilities. At this stage, I typically consider it to be everybody's trip. To iron out all the details of the trip, it is very helpful, to meet with everybody and discuss the following issues. Regular Tuesday night Rovers meetings are a great place and time to hold such a meeting.

One very important issue to bring up before the trip is to find out about medical conditions of all your participants and what they plan to do/ bring to counteract/ treat that condition. This is not a topic that should be taken lightly, as an Asthma attack, a seizure or a systemic allergic reaction in the wilderness several hours or days from the closest hospital is life threatening without proper treatment. If someone on your trip has a serious condition, *make sure* that everybody on the trip knows about it to prevent people panicking: If everybody knows that someone has Asthma and where to find the inhaler, or where that packet of sugar or insulin can be found for a diabetic, people are more likely to keep their cool and take the right action. Conversely, if you have any serious condition, make absolutely certain that everybody on the trip knows what to do in case of an emergency: Your life might depend on it!!

Food

There is a wealth of information available on camping food, so I will limit this section to the options you have in planning food, which range from “full service” to “each his own” and everything in between. If your group consists of people who have been on back-country trips before, or if you’re very short on time, you can leave all the meal choices to the individual participants. When choosing this option, make sure to tell everybody that meals should be of the “just add water” variety, otherwise you end up with everybody trying to fix their own four-star, three-course meal on one burner with the rest of the group looking on, stomachs grumbling. On the other side of the spectrum is the “all-inclusive” approach, where someone organizes everything from breakfasts, over lunches and dinners to snack foods and drinks — this obviously puts a lot of demands on time. Alternatively, you can have every member plan one day worth of food, i.e. one breakfast, lunch and dinner. On many trips I’ve been on, the coordinator plans the dinners and everybody brings their own breakfasts, lunches and snacks. There are many variations, be creative.

Communal Gear and Transportation

See who can contribute communal gear such as pots, water filters, stoves, what sleeping arrangement is preferred, who brings the tents, who needs gear ... At this point it is also a good time to talk about car-pooling, who will be driving, what kind of compensation the drivers expect (on Rovers trips, typically 10¢ per mile + gas shared by all passengers in a vehicle, including the driver), where and when to meet.

All of the above probably seems to be a lot to think about, but as with so many things, practice makes a big difference. Start off with a few shorter, one night trips close to home to get some experience under your belt. Once you feel comfortable, advance to long-weekend trips, and before you know it, you will be planning 10-day trips into remote places. Also, all the comments on the previous few pages are written with planning such a 10-day trip into a wilderness in mind. On the following pages, there will be a step-by-step example for a three day trip to the Superior Hiking Trail, and you will see that many considerations described above can be safely skipped or are given, so you can’t change anything. It is also completely normal to feel a bit unsure at first. Try to find someone with more experience to help you plan and conduct your trip as a co-coordinator. The best way to learn is to learn from good examples!!

Happy Trails

Trip Planning Example

Assumption: July 4 is approaching, and you have the entire three-day weekend to spend in the woods. Because those three days are not enough to plan something big, you decide to stay in Minnesota for some backpacking. After a little research, you find that there are quite a few hiking trails available in Northern Minnesota: The Superior Hiking Trail, Border Route Trail, Kekekabic Trail, Anglemore Trail. . . You decide to go to the Superior Hiking Trail (SHT), and you are comfortable to hike about 8 miles in a full day of backpacking. You get your hands on a copy of the corresponding Trail Guide, and the fun begins ...

1 Information Gathering

The last three pages of this write-up and the information on the following pages are taken from the “Guide to the Superior Hiking Trail”², which is indispensable in planning a trip on that trail. The entire trail is divided into small sections with each having its own easily accessible trail-head. The first page for each section provides a summary of the specific trail section such as water availability, safety concerns, number of camp sites and a short description of what to expect. Browsing through the book, you decide to visit the area around Tettegouche State Park which features high cliffs overlooking lakes, pass by the Baptism River High Falls and have some really nice overlooks. Of course, you can also talk to friends and solicit their opinions what might be worthwhile destinations.

Once you have more or less decided which part to go to, a lot of variables discussed previously will fall into place: The SHT is a point-to-point trail, with very few exceptions, so you need to figure out how to get back to your car after your trip. In addition, there are established camp sites along the trail with fire rings and a latrine. These campsites are with a few exceptions close to water, so the detailed planning consists mainly of figuring out the distances between sites. Luckily, the Trail Guide also includes overview maps of the trail with the camp sites marked (see pages at the end for a few copies relevant for this example) which gives you a good enough idea of where the sites are. In addition, the mile-by-mile descriptions give the exact spacing of camp sites and their relative distance to the trail-head as well as noteworthy points along the trail. So let’s look at the length of trail sections in the general Tettegouche area given in the trail guide³.

Beaver Bay – Silver Bay	4.7 miles
Silver Bay – Highway 1	11.1 miles
Highway 1 – Country Road 6	6.8 miles
CR 6 – Finland Recreation Center	7.6 miles

Immediately you see that there is one fairly long stretch in that area from Silver Bay to Highway 1. With this trail layout, you have the choice of the following trips:

²“Guide to the Superior Hiking Trail: Linking people with nature by footpath along Lake Superior’s North Shore”, Superior Hiking Trail Association, 2001 edition, Ridgeline Press

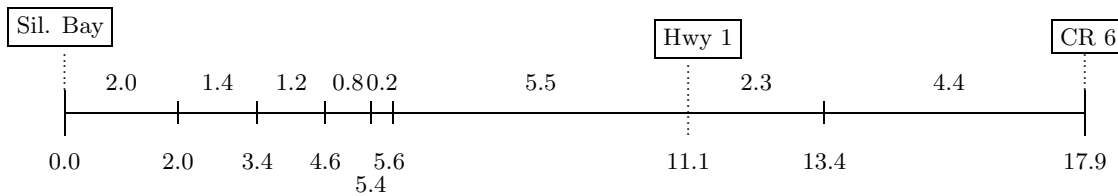
³Not all the pages of the trail guide for this section are reproduced here. The first few pages usually give you enough information to figure out the essentials of a trip

Highway 1 – Finland Recreation Center	14.4 miles
Beaver Bay – Highway 1	15.8 miles
Silver Bay – CR 6	17.9 miles
Beaver Bay – CR 6	22.6 miles
Silver Bay – Finland REC	25.5 miles

2 Route planning

To figure out what trip to take, consider that you need time on the first and last days to shuttle cars or if you go by yourself to allow time to get back to your car. Options for “soloists” include dropping a bike at the end of your hike and bike back to your car or use the Superior Shuttle (www.superiorshuttle.com), which is a shuttle bus that operates on a fixed schedule and stops at most trail-heads. So with your 8-mile per day guideline, you figure that the 17.8 miles would be a good trip to do — you can roughly split it into days of 5, 8 and 5 miles, respectively. All you need to figure out now is where to camp overnight and see if you can find camp-sites whose spacing can accommodate your preferred daily hiking distance.

For that purpose, I usually draw up a little diagram to visualize the distances between camp-sites and the total mileage from my assumed trail-head. Based on the mile-by-mile descriptions of the camp-sites in the guide, I would draw a diagram that looks something like this:



This diagram shows the trailheads with longer ticks (labeled on top) and the campsites with shorter ticks. Above the horizontal line, the mileages between the campsites, and below, the cumulative mileage is shown. Looking at this diagram, it is obvious that there is a fairly long stretch around Highway 1 with no camp-sites. This stretch needs to be hiked in one piece, which fixes the camp site for the second night to the Kennedy Creek camp-sites, 4.4 miles from the end of your trip. So going backward from that camp-site about eight miles, you see that there are two camp-sites, 7.8 and 8 miles away, respectively (East and West Palisade Creek campsites east of the Bean and Bear Lake overlooks). This coincides perfectly with your stated hiking goal. You don’t need to decide right now where you will stay, as those camp-sites are only 0.2 miles apart — In fact, you might find that one camp-site is already occupied by the time you get to it, or you find that the camp-site does not satisfy your requirements of a “nice” campsite because of bugs, not enough flat ground for all the tents in your group etc. In this case, you might want to drop your gear and check out the other camp-site.

Except for planning food and organizing transportation, you are done now. Here’s a possible itinerary for this trip:

Day 1	Drop group at Silver Bay trail-head and shuttle one car to the end, the parking lot of the County Road 6 trail-head. Hike to your first night's campsite	5.4 mi
Day 2	First (and only) full day on the trail. Hike from your first campsite, cross Highway 1 and continue on to the Kennedy Creek camp-sites.	8.0 mi
Day 3	Hike out, get the car parked at the starting trail-head.	4.4 mi

3 Final Remarks

This very specific example is based solely on information contained in the trail guide. To better prepare, I strongly recommend getting and consulting a more detailed map than contained in the guide book: This will help you to figure out how many ups and downs you will have to endure, and while on the trail will give you better idea of how far it is to the next camp-site. McKenzie publishes maps with the SHT and crossing trails (snowmobile trails, for example) marked. Sometimes, the SHT follows these trails for a bit and then splits off. A map will tell you where to look for those junctions. If you don't want to spend the roughly \$9 per McKenzie map, you should at least take a copy of the trail guide or get the four-map set the Superior Hiking Trail Association publishes, which will cut down on your pack weight. Either way, bring along map and consult it often while on the trail!

This planning example also ignores where to stay the first night, before you head out on the trail. You could leave *very* early and time your driving so that you arrive at the trail-head in the morning, with the downside of course that you will be tired from the drive. A much better solution is to leave the night before and find a place to stay along the North Shore. Depending on how far in advance you plan, you can get camp-sites at State Parks, private Campgrounds or, a Rover favorite for trips near Grand Marais, a night at the Bay-Side Motel in Grand Marais. The rooms are inexpensive and you don't need to worry about packing everything up the next morning.

You also might have noticed that the example given here is very unproblematic in terms of hiking distance and location of camp-sites. This will not always be the case, and often times you need to adjust your hiking mileage or resort to a different area for your back-country adventure.

Above all, do not forget to have fun. Good luck...

The pages from the Superior Hiking Trail Guide on the following three pages have been scanned from the 2001 edition by permission. I thank the Superior Hiking Trail Association for allowing me to use their material in this example.