We pressed forward across the ridge in a cold, steady, October rain. The rocky and treeless ridge held promises of jaw-dropping vistas, but these promises were kept secret by the low-hanging clouds that wrapped around us. The heavy clouds seemed to weigh down our spirits and our packs, resulting in sore hips that evening. A gloomy day such as this makes the struggles of backpacking readily apparent -- exposure to the elements, tough terrain and the added challenges of living off what you can carry. Backpacking is about sacrifice and simplicity, things that make it rewarding, but foul weather makes the rewards hard to see.

The next day I watched a glorious sunset from a rocky outcropping and reflected on why I love the Dolly Sods, and why I love backpacking so much. A day of clear weather reminds me that I'm out here for the expansive views, the peace found only in nature, the company of friends and a break from everyday life. Watching the orange ball of light slip beneath a nearby ridge as the sky turns purple restores and renews me, leading me to contentment that was missing before.

I'm reminded that I love the feeling of reaching the top of a hard climb, of enduring all the pain and struggle just to feel the wind on my face and feast my eyes on natural beauty. When I hike, I can push my mind and body to their limits and find out who I am and what I'm capable of. I love the murmur of a mountain stream or the whisper of falling leaves, the tiny details holding the most wonder. Backpacking will always have a special meaning for me, a meaning I can't fully express in words but can only share through experience.

Will Babb is a student at Ohio State University. His interests include backpacking, rock climbing, birding, and cooking. He grew up in Milford, Ohio and has explored a variety of outdoor recreation areas, both near and far. He views outdoor adventure as a means of fostering environmental concern and is passionate about sharing adventure and new experiences outside with others.

The Dolly Sods is a federally protected wilderness area in Monongahela National Forest, West Virginia. During World War II, the bald ridges and summits that make the area famous were used for artillery testing and military training. Now, the "Sods" are renowned for expansive vistas, pristine streams, and a unique bog and heath ecosystem similar to parts of Canada.
TRAIN LOCALLY FOR BACKPACKING ADVENTURES

Visit these local destinations to challenge yourself in preparation for an upcoming backpacking trip.

BENDER MOUNTAIN NATURE PRESERVE
Maintained by Western Wildlife Corridor, Bender Mountain Preserve, on Cincinnati’s west side, offers a range of trails from easy to strenuous. Combine them to meet your training needs.

DEVOU PARK
Explore the Backcountry Trails of Devou Park in Covington. These trails, shared by hikers and mountain bikers, offer varying levels of difficulty. Take in an amazing view of downtown Cincinnati from Devou’s overlook.

SHAWNEE LOOKOUT
Located in North Bend, Ohio, Shawnee Lookout features moderate trails with spectacular river valley views. Great Parks of Hamilton County occasionally offers backpacking training sessions at this park.
PACKING, PERFECTED

Successfully preparing your pack for a long trek is primarily about positioning your gear thoughtfully. Here are a few pointers on how to pack your backpack for comfort and efficiency.

- **STUFF YOUR TOP LID WITH TOP-OF-MIND ESSENTIALS** such as your headlamp, first aid kit and water purification equipment. You don’t want to be digging through the depths for your map. Prioritize space at the top of your pack for this gear.

- **KEEP WARMTH CLOSE AT HAND** for when things turn chilly. Place an extra layer in the upper part of your pack so you can access it easily.

- **PLACING HEAVY GEAR IN THE MIDDLE** will help maintain comfort on the trail. Equally distribute weight between the shoulderblades and in the middle of the back.

- **ON-THE-GO ITEMS** such as lip balm, sunscreen and your phone are best kept in your hipbelt pocket -- that way, no stopping is required.

- **START WHERE YOU’LL END** the day. Load the bottom of your pack with your sleeping bag, pad and other nighttime gear. You won’t need these until you reach camp, so don’t waste easily accessible space on them. Your pack may even come with a designated compartment for these items.
Ohio's only National Water Trail

Find Your Way

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Adventure Crew is a 501(c)3 that regularly connects a roster of almost 1,000 city teens across 24 schools to the great outdoors. Adventures are offered monthly and at no cost to students. Through Adventure Crew, city youth are immersed in the physical, mental, and social benefits of time spent in nature.

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