

The BEARmuda Triangle and Smellables

At both the Watchu Mountain Adventure and Philmont you are going to hear much about the "BEARmuda Triangle" and "smellables." The BEARmuda Triangle refers to the space enclosed within the triangle defined by the location of your camp site's "fire ring" (cooking area), your site's liquid waste "sump," and your "bear bag cable" (shared with several other sites.) This space belongs to the bears. Activities that produce smells are all conducted within the BEARmuda Triangle - cooking at the fire ring, cleanup (both cooking and human, like brushing your teeth) at the sump, and all smellables in bear bags, hanging from the bear bag cable. Hence, no tents should be pitched within the triangle and where possible, it is best to pitch the tents 50 feet or so outside of the triangle. Pitch your tents in small groups but not forming a closed group which could trap and confuse a visiting bear. Your crew tarp (dining fly) will be pitched inside the BEARmuda triangle, usually near the fire ring.

A smellable is anything which has an odor that might attract a visiting bear to investigate further as a possible snack. Items such as food, toothpaste, film, etc., all go into the bear bags to be hung from the bear bag cables - note that these items do not need to smell good, just smell with anything other than a human scent (bears know what that is!) The equipment lists in your *Guidebook to Adventure* denote such item with a "BB" for "bear bag". It is a good idea for crew members to keep all their smellables in a zip lock plastic bag for easy storage in the crew's bear bags. The *No Smellables* rule states that campers WILL NOT bring anything into their tent that might attract bears. Uncontaminated clothing and personal equipment will stay well outside your tent in your rain-covered backpack. Sleeping gear, including sleeping bag, pad and sleeping clothes are the only items in the tent with you. Your sleeping clothes are only worn in the tent and never used as evening clothing in your camp.

When you are ready to turn in for the night, put all your non-smellables and uncontaminated belongings into your backpack, including all but the last few items of clothing you are wearing. Backpacks are kept away from the tents (usually inside the BEARmuda Triangle), with rain covers on to protect them from an overnight shower. Change into your sleeping clothes while standing on a plastic trash bag just outside your tent. Place the last few items of uncontaminated clothing you were wearing, including your footwear, into the trash bag. You might even put your rain suit in the trash bag. Seal it with rubber band and "goose neck". Toss the bag of uncontaminated clothing a few yards or so from the tent, not so far that it will be hard to retrieve in a tough morning rain. That's it; now you are ready for a deep and wonderful fresh air backcountry sleep.

Caution: The Philmont bear protection rules are ever changing. At Philmont, your Ranger will give you the latest bear protection and safety procedure information

developed by the Philmont bear researchers. Listen well! And let Chief Watchu know of any changes when you return home.

Bear Bags for the Watchu Mountain Adventure: You know that New Jersey, like Philmont, is bear country. At Philmont, for the most part the bear encounters are few and far between because the Philmont Staff vigorously promotes the bear protection rules. Likewise, at the Watchu Mountain Adventure we will review these procedures and you will get to practice them. Smellables will be hung in bear bags, which you must supply - old duffel bag or mesh sport equipment bags will work fine - along with two 100 foot lengths of 1/4" rope to hang them. During Watchu #8 we were fortunate to get a real chance to evaluate the quality of our bear protection. Eight bears stopped by during the evening, but found nothing that attracted their interest. They are being contacted regarding their availability for another live practice session this year.

Tip: Both at the Watchu Mountain Adventure and at Philmont, several crews will be sharing a single bear cable. Something tied to your ropes, like a bandana or a short piece of surveyor's flagging, will quickly identify which ropes are yours, and even more importantly, stop someone else from assuming the ropes for your bags are theirs.

Bonus Tip: Even though you have a rain cover for your backpack, it is a good idea to cover the backpack at night with a big lightweight plastic trash bag, which will protect all sides.

Phil Fact: Wyatt Earp, a gambler and lawman, and his brother Morgan stayed with their wives at the St. James Hotel in Cimarron for three days on their way to Tombstone, Arizona and the gunfight at the OK Corral several years later.

The eagles soar over Urraca Mesa,

Wyatt Earp

Tombstone, Arizona Territory