

Ideas for Hiking with Cub Scouts

The world around us is full of fascination. Hikes can help open the eyes of a child to the beauty and mystery of nature, and create a sense of awe and appreciation for God's handiwork!

A Cub Scout is not yet fully grown, so his eyes and other senses are closer to the ground. Take the time to get down on their level, and remember what it was like to see the world for the first time. Some of the things that we as adults take for granted are fresh discoveries to a child, and it's important to engage their sense of wonder.

Remember also to add a sense of adventure to your activities. Tell the boys a story as you go along. You might be Native Americans stalking an elk, explorers discovering a hidden jungle, astronauts walking on Mars, or pirates following a map to buried treasure.

While some of the hike ideas presented here are built around a theme or activity, you should never be afraid to "break form" to examine or discuss something you encounter, especially if it catches the interest of the boys. Feel free to look at the way a leaf or pinecone is built. Ask the boys how they think it might have grown, or why it looks the way it does. Marvel at the complexity of a spider's web, or the similarities between the veins in a leaf and those in your hand and arm. Watch the way in which insects go about their routine. Notice the differences in the texture of bark on different trees. Explore the layers of soil on the forest floor.

Theme Hikes are those that contain a running thread or concept that will help keep the boys focused on the task at hand. These are good educational experiences for groups of nearly any size and age group. An adult, den chief or the boys themselves can run them.

Competitive Hikes pit one or more groups of boys against one another. This may be den against den, but remember to keep things fair. Tiger aged boys will not be as capable in this sort of activity as Webelos. Sometimes it is best to have groups with a representative from each den in your pack, and even include age-appropriate tasks for each rank of boys to accomplish as part of the team effort. This way, a younger boy can and must contribute just as much as the older boys.

Conservation Hikes emphasize the importance of caring for nature and our environment, and can be part of a service project.

Station Hikes move from one prepared station to another. Each station includes an activity, observation or instruction that the boys must complete before moving on to the next.

ABC Hike – Find or observe a natural item for each letter of the alphabet. As a competitive hike, the group that finds items for the most letters in the alphabet wins. *(Theme, Competitive)*

Blindfold Hike – Lead blindfolded Scouts along the trail hand in hand, or using a string. Ask them to share their experiences about what they sensed while blindfolded. Let them discover how their other senses become heightened when blindfolded. To make this type of hike into a competitive hike, let the boys touch and identify the things they find. The keeper should write down answers, but not speak to the boy. The boy with the longest correct list wins. *(Theme, Station)*

Baby Hike – During the springtime, make a list of all the babies you see, such as birds, leaves, plants, insects, etc. *(Theme, Competitive, Conservation)*

Breakfast Hike – Start early in order to reach a destination in time to watch the sunrise, and then cook breakfast on the trail. *(Theme, Conservation)*

Bring ‘em Back Alive Hike – The purpose of this hike is to find a critter—frogs, lizards, bugs, etc.—and bring them back to the starting point. There, a large circle is drawn and the critters are placed in the center. The first critter to leave the circle is the winner. After the race, the critters should be returned to their habitat. *(Theme, Competitive)*

Camera Hike – Hikers take snapshots along the way. The photos can later be put into a photo album or scrapbook as a memento of the outing. *(Theme, Conservation)*

Collection Hike – Collect rocks, leaves, shells, insects, or oddly shaped twigs. *(Theme)*

Color Chart Hike – Give one or more color strips from a paint store to each hiker. Let them find objects on their hike that match their colors as closely as possible. *(Theme)*

Craft Hike – Gather items to be used to make a craft. *(Theme)*

Crayon Hike – Have each hiker select five to ten crayons and use each to color a section of a piece of paper. Then each should record how many things in nature match each color. This is especially good in spring and fall when natural colors are more vibrant and varied. *(Theme)*

Detective Hike – Look for evidence that man has been there before. Spot and pick up litter. Look for footprints, construction, cleared or cut areas, and signs of human interference in nature. *(Theme, Conservation, Station)*

Exploring Hike/Heads or Tails Hike – At the first crossroad on the trail, turn left. At the next, turn right. Or, at each split in the trail, flip a coin to decide which way to go. *(Theme)*

Get Together Hike – Two or more dens hike to a special location to participate in a game or activity. *(Theme, Station)*

Historical Hike – Hike to a historical landmark, or along a historic trail. Discuss the conditions and hardships that people might have faced at the time the original journey was made, and how different the landscape might have appeared to them. *(Theme, Conservation, Station)*

Homes Hike – Look for animal homes, such as burrows, nests, spider webs and so forth. Don't disturb the animal homes! *(Theme, Conservation)*

Inch Hike – Find as many objects and creatures as possible that are one inch or less long, high, wide, or around. Take rulers if necessary. *(Theme, Station)*

Monogram Hike – Each boy should look for one or more objects that start with the same first letters as his first, middle and last names. *(Theme, Competitive)*

Nature Trail – Prepare a list of items for the boys to look for and allow them to explore the area in teams, searching for the biggest tree, an animal track, the biggest or hairiest leaf, the smoothest or roughest rock, a twig in the shape of a letter or number, or an insect nest. *(Theme, Competitive, Station)*

Night Hike – Using flashlights, explore what nature is like after the sun goes down. See how different things look, sound and smell after dark. *(Theme)*

Number One Hike – With the boys walking in single file, the leader asks the lead boy about something they encounter on the trail. If the boy can give some correct information about it, he retains his place in line. If not, he moves to the back of the line. The new “number one” must tell something about the item, or he, too, goes to the back, and so on. *(Theme, Competitive, Conservation, Station)*

Obstacle Hike – Pick a trail that has obstacles for the boys to overcome, such as climbing a tree, walking along a log, doing chin-ups on a tree branch, or ducking under a fallen tree trunk. *(Theme, Competitive, Station)*

Pioneer Hike – Carry no equipment (besides water) and make or locate all the materials you need along the way. As a station hike, have certain tasks that the boys must complete at each station before continuing. *(Theme, Competitive)*

Polaroid Scavenger Hunt – Each group has a camera and instructions to get photos of certain things, like a certain rock, vista, bird, tree, wildflower, mushroom, nest, tired feet, and so on. *(Theme, Conservation)*

Rain Hike – Dress in raincoats or carry umbrellas and hike in the rain to see how different nature appears. *(Theme)*

Riddle Hike – While hiking single file, the lead Cub locates a certain specific item but does not tell anyone else what it is. He then gives a clue about it, and the other boys must guess what it is. If they can't guess, he gives another clue. Give each boy a turn at the front. *(Theme, Competitive)*

Roadside Cribbage – Each boy picks up ten small stones at the beginning of the hike and puts them in his pocket. Each time the leader points to a natural object like a tree, bird or insect, the first Cub to correctly identify the item gets to drop one of his stones. The boy dropping all of his stones first is the winner. *(Theme, Competitive)*

Scavenger Hike – One or more teams hunt for items on a list such as a particular type of leaf or seed, a feather, an item of a particular color, litter, etc. Teams may need to bring the item back, or simply locate the object in nature. Other items might be:

A leaf that's bigger than your hand

Two rocks that fit together like puzzle pieces

Something that makes noise

Four kinds of insects or flowers

A triangular object

A circular object

Something that smells good or bad

An anthill

(Theme, Competitive, Station)

Sealed Note Hike – Prepare notes for stations along the way, which direct boys to perform some activity such as identify a certain tree, do an action, look for animal tracks, etc. Notes could also guide the boys to the next station. *(Theme, Competitive, Station)*

Sense of Touch Hike – Identify things in nature that feel a certain way: sharp, smooth, soft, furry, rough or bumpy, cold, warm, wet, dry, brittle, spongy, hard, flaky, etc. *(Theme, Competitive, Station)*

Snoop Hike – Hike with the focus on looking under, behind and inside things, and noting what you see. *(Theme, Conservation, Station)*

Sounds of Nature Hike – Each Cub Scout sits quietly for one to five minutes, then writes down all the noises he heard in that time. *(Theme, Conservation)*

Surprise Hike – Hikers are greeted with surprises along the way. These might be inexpensive toys, an unusual sight, or a bucket of cold lemonade or drinks. At the conclusion of the hike the boys might find entertainment, games, decorations or food. *(Theme, Station)*

Texture Collecting Hike – Using a crayon and large piece of paper or newsprint, fill the page with rubbings found on the hike. For example, place the paper on a tree trunk, a large rock, sand or grass. *(Theme, Conservation, Station)*

Tracking Hike – One den sets off and is followed by another den. The object may be either to mark the trail so the other den can follow where the first went, or to conceal any tracks or clues so that the other den must hunt them. (If marking a trail, remember to use environmentally friendly materials, or to clean up after yourselves!) *(Theme, Competitive)*

Trail Building Hike – Boys work to clear overgrowth, litter, loose stones or dead branches from an already established trail, which makes it safer or easier to use. *(Theme, Conservation)*

Treasure Trail – Divide into two teams and have each group make up a nature hunt list for the other team, keeping the items secret until the game begins. The groups trade lists and begin hunting for objects, which could include certain leaves, bugs, colored stones, and flowers. *(Theme, Competitive)*

Treasure Trail Hike – Boys follow clues to reach a treasure of snacks, treats or prize. *(Theme, Station)*

Tree Tag – Play in a large, wooded place. The leader touches a certain type of tree or object and tells the Cubs to run and find another of the same kind before the “it” player tags them. *(Theme, Competitive)*

Un-nature Trail Hike – Test the boy’s skills for observation by placing ten to fifteen man-made objects in visible places. Some should stand out brightly, like a colorful balloon or a shiny coin, while others should blend in to the surroundings. Don’t be afraid to place items at different levels, such as on the ground, on low bushes, and hanging from higher branches. Keep the number of hidden items a secret, and have each boy try to find as many as possible. If they don’t find them all, send them back through with clues or hints, repeating until all of the hidden objects are found. *(Theme, Competitive, Conservation, Station)*

Where Is It? – Give each group a pencil and paper, and a special marker, and have them find a “secret place” somewhere in the area. They should hide the marker among some stones, in a pile of leaves, or next to a tree, so that it’s visible but not easily found. Each member describes something unique about or that describes the location—something that can be seen when standing there, what direction or distance it is from a landmark, etc. When the teams return to the meeting place, they exchange their lists and look for the other team’s marker. *(Theme, Competitive)*