

Your complete guide to  
fun in the great outdoors

# Camping

FOR  
DUMMIES®



**Michael Hodgson**

Founder and President,  
[AdventureNetwork.com](http://AdventureNetwork.com)

***A Reference for the Rest of Us!™***

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# ***Camping For Dummies<sup>®</sup>***

**by Michael Hodgson**



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## Camping For Dummies®

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# About the Author

Recognized nationally for his poignant writing style, humor, and knowledge of the outdoors, award-winning journalist and author **Michael Hodgson** constantly seeks the wilder side in search of a good story or rip-roaring adventure, like when he captained Team Media in the inaugural Eco-Challenge 360-mile adventure race in Utah.

Michael currently works as a content editor for Planet Outdoors and is a founding partner in GearTrends LLC — [www.GearTrends.com](http://www.GearTrends.com) — the premier information Web site for new products and trends in the outdoor sport, snow sport, fitness, paddling, and bicycle markets. His other Web site — [www.adventurenetwork.com](http://www.adventurenetwork.com) — was recognized in 1999 as a USA Today Hot Site, a Featured Expert award winner, and a Golden Globe award winner.

Michael served as the gear editor for *Men's Health* magazine from 1997 to 1999 and during that time was also the on-air talent covering gear and trends for the nationally syndicated weekly program *Outside Radio Network*.

Michael's articles have appeared in *Backpacker*, *Outside*, *Men's Journal*, *Adventure Journal*, *Field and Stream*, *Outdoor Life*, and *The Christian Science Monitor*, among other periodicals. He has published 18 books on the outdoors. Prior to becoming a fulltime writer in 1988, Michael worked as mountain guide, outdoor education instructor, and Nordic ski instructor; as general manager of Western Mountaineering, an outdoor specialty store and sleeping bag manufacturer; and as a store manager for Adventure 16, a highly successful chain of outdoor specialty stores in Southern California.

When not behind a computer working on his Web sites, books, or magazine articles, Michael can be found paddling oceans, running trails, climbing mountains, or wandering the backcountry by himself or with his daughter Nikki and wife Therese. In other words, he gets paid to play — it doesn't get much better than that, does it?

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# Dedication

For my mother, who encouraged my first steps outdoors; my father, who guided my feet on wild trails as I was growing up; my daughter, Nikki, who inspires me by seeing everything through fresh eyes; and my wife, Therese, whose loving smile and sparkle are my favorite hiking companions.

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# Author's Acknowledgments

With any camping trip, there must be a beginning, and so it was with this book. I must thank Mark Reiter, my agent with the International Management Group, who saw in me the perfect *dummy* for this book. I'm grateful to Stacy Collins at Wiley who agreed with Mark that I was the right one for a project she had wanted to see completed for over a year before my assignment.

My friend Kristin Hostetter, equipment editor of *Backpacker* magazine, deserves more thanks than I can possibly offer here for taking on the challenge of technical editing. Because of her, this book is more accurate, more useful, more practical, and simply much better than I could ever have hoped for had I done it alone.

This book never would have been possible had it not been for many folks who over the years had enough faith in me to be my friends and my advisors. I can only name a few and apologize now to the hundreds who I count as friends and hope that a collective thank you — and you know who you are — will suffice. There are a number of individuals whom I need to single out for special thanks, though. Tim Rowell, who helped me guide many trips in the mountains with paying clients — imagine that — and stood at my side as best man — twice. Mark Jenkins, with whom I still hope to complete a trip worthy of our friendship and mutual sense of adventure, for being a fellow traveler in the field of words. Marcus Woolf, for being there through thick and thin and for helping me learn, by trial and error, the better ways to camp — no, I will never forget a stove repair kit again. Jim Ward, my first editor at a small, free paper — *Footprints* — distributed all over Southern California to Adventure 16 patrons. Tom Shealy, editor of *Backpacker* magazine, who, upon reading my first submission to a “big name” publication, returned with thoughtful editing and suggestions on improving the piece. Thanks for having enough belief in me that you published that article the second time around and, in effect, gave me the confidence to continue. Mic and John Mead for giving me a chance to find my wings in the outdoors at Adventure 16. Joan Alvarez for taking a chance with me and helping me become a better outdoor writer while I was at Outdoor Retailer. Wendy Geister, who showed me that editing is an art form worth appreciating. Tom Stienstra, who embodies the ideal outdoor writer — from the beard and hat right down to his boots. And Bob Woodward, who has become my friend and partner in the business of fun.

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# Introduction

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We all need to go camping more. Life becomes simplified and pure in the wild places of our earth. Among the mountains, rivers, woods, and open spaces, city-bound inhibition, dot-commonisms, and lifestyle complications slip away like excess baggage. The outdoors plucks at the fiber of instinct and rekindles a familial longing to breathe deeply, the fresh pine-scented air and smile at the simple sound of wind whispering through trees.

But too often we head outdoors practically insulated from the natural world by a barrier of technology that was intended only to make our time outdoors safer and more pleasurable. Taken at face value, there is nothing wrong with breathable fabrics, portable ovens and pizza makers, full meals that reconstitute from nothing, backpackable espresso makers, and two-pound tents the size of a small house. Still, amid all the technology available, we must be careful not to lose sight of why we head outside in the first place.

By constantly fighting to protect ourselves from the elements and soften the edges of wilderness, are we in fact losing touch with the wildness we leave the city to find? This book helps you stay in touch with a wilder side and slow down your need-for-speed mentality so that you can find a personal listening point.

I hope that as you thumb through these pages, you find the time to seek the lessons and gifts the wild places of our earth have to offer. I pray that you get to enjoy, as I frequently do, the feel of a spring shower on your face, the sensation of a snowflake on your tongue, and the playful tug of a mountain wind through your hair. After you discover your personal sense of wildness, you will be able to draw inspiration and meaning from it time and again, whether you're standing on a city corner waiting for the traffic light to change or hunching over a campfire watching a sunset's warm rays trace wistful lines up a canyon wall.

## Why You Need This Book

Going camping has never been so easy — or more confusing — than it is now. The product choices available to you are mind-boggling, to say the least. There are literally hundreds of stoves, tents, jackets, shoes, lights, packs, sleeping bags, and more, all made from space-age materials that claim to do marvelous things — short of actually setting up



camp for you and serving dinner on a platter.

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If you're a novice who's just starting to put together a camping kit, then you can depend on *Camping For Dummies* to cut through all the techno-garble you're likely to hear in stores and online and to point you to the right purchases for your needs and budget. And even if you're the kind of person who has trouble telling north from south (and perhaps left from right on occasion), I can help you to navigate the wilderness — and live to tell about it.

If you're a more experienced outdoor adventurer and already have all the gear you need, more power to you. In that case, you can depend on *Camping For Dummies* for tips and technique advice to help you become the star of any camping trip. No, I can't promise to turn you into a modern-day John Muir or Daniel Boone. I can, however, teach you how to prepare a delicious dinner over coals, anticipate weather changes before a storm hits, repair a broken tent pole, or start a fire with one match (just don't use this book as a fire starter). Throughout the book, I suggest resources that can help you find all the maps, new gear, repair information, guidebooks, and camping reservation assistance you can stomach.

## How to Use This Book

*Do not read this book in one sitting!* If you do, I'll be forced to smack you with a copy of the book, should I run into you at a campground or trailhead. *Camping For Dummies* is designed as a pick-and-choose resource for you. It is *not* the next great American novel. I trust that you will skim, poke, and probe the pages, seeking out the information that interests you and leaving the rest to remain as ink stains on bound paper — at least for now. Thumb through the pages, letting the catchy icons — explained in a bit — garner your interest or the section titles grab your attention. The Table of Contents is very detailed to help you decide what is of the greatest importance to your experience, plans, and needs. A very comprehensive index at the back of the book helps you search for topics by keyword.

# How This Book Is Organized

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Here's a part-by-part synopsis of what you can find in each section of the book:

# Part I: Planning Your Escape

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Every trip has to start somewhere, and this section is all about beginnings. Here I share resources for finding maps, making camping reservations, and deciding where to go and what to do anywhere in the United States or Canada. I also include information about what you need to pack for almost any kind of camping adventure and how to dress for your outing to make sure that you maximize comfort and minimize suffering. The bonus in Part I, “Wintering, Paddling, Biking,” is designed to stretch the imagination of more experienced campers.

## **Part II: Getting There Is Half the Fun**

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Too many trips end as soon as they begin simply because one essential factor is not anticipated and planned for: the trip to the destination. I smooth the path with advice on how to prepare your vehicle so that it gets you where you want to go, how to properly pack all your gear so that Grandma doesn't have to hold the camp stove and straddle the kayak all the way there, and even how to keep the kids (or people who just act like kids) amused while journeying to the campsite. I also include tips for picking a campsite and selecting the best spots for tents, kitchens, and more.

## **Part III: Camping Skills, Food, and Fun**

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Camping is *not* about eating burnt food. In this part, I show you how to plan a menu, prepare a meal, and even clean and serve fresh fish, whether you are cooking over a camp stove or open flames. Not sure of your camping skills? No worries, mate. From coping with wildlife to repairing gear and tying knots, I teach you enough campcraft skills to have you dreaming of living off the land — almost. I also explain how to enjoy a walk through nature without wrecking the wilderness and how to entertain the troops with fun and games that can make every outing a memorable one.

## **Part IV: Staying Safe, Staying Found**

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Going camping isn't much fun if you don't stay safe. In this part, you learn enough navigation skills to see you into the wild and back again — safely. I also show you how to predict weather patterns, which is eminently useful if you're planning a hike or a climb from base camp. And no part on safety would be complete without a first-aid chapter that helps you deal with minor scrapes, bumps, blisters, and bites — as well as more serious injuries.

# Part V: The Part of Tens

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Lists are great because they're so easy to scan and glean information from. In this part, you can find lists for my ten favorite camping recipes, ten camping essentials, ten great camping destinations in North America, ten top camping resources, ten low-impact camping rules to live by, and a ten-times-two bonus: Hodgson's 20 Laws of Camping.

# Part VI: Appendixes

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Understanding outdoor-speak can be a challenge sometimes, so I compiled a list of camping and outdoor terminology often heard and sometimes used in this book. In this part, you also enter checklist nirvana. Checklists for planning a trip, taking a trip, planning a menu, preparing your vehicle — the only thing I might have forgotten is a checklist of checklists.

## Icons Used in This Book



This icon highlights special suggestions that can help you protect the land and its resources for all to enjoy.



This icon marks words to the wise from my years of experience in the outdoors — sometimes philosophical, sometimes practical, but always useful.



This icon points to routine camping matters to file away for everyday reference.



This icon points out handy tips and tricks that can make your life outdoors more fun — and certainly more comfortable.



This icon draws your attention to health and safety advice — such as “Don’t run with sharp sticks, or you’ll put someone’s eye out.”



This icon zeroes in on advice that caters to kids’ special interests and needs to help families get the most out of their camping experiences.



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