



QUARTERMASTER

Lesson Six: Specialist Equipment

As Quartermaster, you need to know more than just how many boxes and cooking pans you have in store... this week, we are dealing with how to look after specialist equipment

Uniform

Uniform isn't specialist equipment, is it? Actually, you should think of it as such – after all, if not kept clean and tidy you don't look smart – and the uniform, the badges on it and the scarf all stand for the Scout Movement, The District, The Group, The Troop and your Patrol. If you don't look after this, you are not showing proper respect to all it stands for.

So – when at camp and when at home (and you can think of your bedroom as “your” store room) either neatly fold the uniform or hang it up. Of course, in a tent you shouldn't just hang the uniform over the centre pole... but you could string a line from upright to upright (like an indoor washing line) and hang it from that.

Hiking kit

Whilst much of this equipment is personal, there may still be some items of equipment that you will keep in stores that others could use.

Hiking Boots

To protect and lengthen the life of a pair of boots, you should make sure that they dry properly if they get wet. Drying them over a fire will dry them too quickly and will deteriorate (or melt!) the material. By far the easiest way is to stuff them full of newspaper – and just let them dry slowly.

Making sure that all the mud has been brushed / chipped off will also help maintain the boots (plus make them look clean) – this will also help when you actually come to clean them. Check that the soles aren't worn through – you may need the grip on the next hike!

For hike boots, you can make use of a wax type product called “Dubbin” (NikWax is another make) and you just generously rub this into the leather. It is important that the boots are clean before you do this – any small pieces of grit and stone will wear at the stitching and eventually cut through.

Compasses

Fairly robust items of kit – but there are still one or two checks you can make. Where the needles are is often filled with water or oil – this makes the needle move about slowly allowing a more accurate reading. Check that there aren't any air bubbles in there – a lodged bubble can stop the needle from moving freely, giving an inaccurate reading.

Additionally, don't store them near magnets – and check that the compass still works (i.e. points north) when you issue it.

Maps

Two things to check on any map – the date of issue and any previous route markings.

An old map can cause great problems on a hike. Suddenly finding a motorway that doesn't exist on the map - or expecting to find a road, a police station or feature can create map-reading nightmares.

Similarly, using a map to find an old route still marked on it could lead the party on a very long diversion.

you need to make sure that there are no air bubbles in the sealed area (the area that the needles

Climbing Kit

You obviously need to look after climbing kit – lives depend upon it.

Ropes

We've covered storage of ropes before, but it's worth restating – climbing ropes should NEVER be stored on the ground, should not have anything other than ropes stored on them (or if possible hung up carefully). They should not be stored wet – and should be replaced at regular intervals. If you do decide to replace a climbing rope, you should prepare the old rope in such a way that makes it unusable as a safety rope going forward – cutting it into 5 metre lengths is one way.

Crash Hats

You need to check for cracks and that the straps do up properly, are not torn and are properly fixed to the helmet. If you know that a hat has been dropped from a height then you should destroy it – most hats are designed to protect the wearer from a single fall, the impact being taken in the plastic.

Karabiners and metalwork

As well as the ropes, you need to make sure that the metal work isn't rusting, stiff or broken. Check for any stress marks and make sure that you oil key parts (the image below is of a "screw-gate" karabiner – you should oil the screw gate and the hinge part)



Canoeing kit

Canoeing equipment should also be looked after carefully. For use on rivers, lakes etc, you should always let the equipment dry out – wet kit rots and falls apart. Additionally – if the equipment has been anywhere muddy you may also want to wash the kit down – the mud and grit will work at any stitching. Also, if the equipment has been used in the sea you should wash it down with fresh water – the salt will corrode equipment (and the sand will be also damaging)

Buoyancy aids

A buoyancy aid should enable someone to float. It does so by means of two or more blocks of closed cell foam. You should not stand anything on a buoyancy aid as it will break down these blocks, making the jacket less useful.

Testing a buoyancy aid is a simple affair – after checking the blocks to ensure that the foam is still reasonably solid you tie a weight to it and see if it floats!



Spraydecks

These prevent (not always stop) water from getting into the kayak. As well as checking for rips and tears in the material, you should always make sure that the release tab (the loop on the one below) is properly fixed to the rest of the deck – on very well fitting decks it is the ONLY way to release these from the boat.



Throwlines

A throwline is effectively a floating rope in a bag. If it is used, you should take the rope out of the bag to allow it to dry (turn the bag inside out sometimes helps) before repacking. Wherever possible, throwlines should be stored (dry) in the bag – in that way they can be used immediately.



Crash hats

See the notes on climbing crash hats.

Canoes and Kayaks

Most canoes and kayaks are now made of plastic, but older boats (and some very specialist boats) are still made from glass fibre or Kevlar fibre as it makes them lighter. The check list for canoes and kayks are:

- Cracks and holes – apart from the one for you to sit in!
- The seat is properly fixed to the boat
- There is buoyancy front AND back
- The Foot rests are properly fitted – and in the case of foot bars can be quick released
- The carry / grab handles are properly fitted (note: when carrying a boat you should try to not use the toggles – they are designed to hang on to in the water, not for load bearing).



When you have finished using the canoe, you should try and store it cockpit downwards – this allows the water to run out and if stored outside prevents the leaves from getting in – which makes the boats smell really bad!

Digital equipment

It is becoming more common for Scout Groups to make use of mobile phones, GPS units and other items of digital and electronic equipment at camp.

These need to be stored somewhere safe and secure (as typically they are expensive) – and dry (electronic equipment quite often does not work if damp from areas of high humidity).

It is sometimes easier to get a leader to look after this equipment separately than in the unheated confines of a store room

Exercise

A bit of a “fun” one for you. Have a look around your bedroom – where do you keep your Scout Uniform, is it hung up or scrunched in the corner? How have you stored your computer equipment, games and other items?

Could you organise your “store room” better?