

## Outdoor Ethics Corner: Bear Bags – Not only for Bear Country.



Storing smellables in a bag in a tree out of the reach of animals aka “A bear bag” has been a tradition for a long time. Keeping food away from animals (mice, raccoons, possums, chipmunks, birds and bears) is important for the scouts, they still have food to eat, as well as the animals who are not impacted by human food. Bear bags are covered in the handbook on page 309 and in the 2014 edition of the Fieldbook on pages 73 and 74.

These descriptions are a good start but they overlook some important issues. The smellables for a group of 8 scouts for a weekend trip can be quite heavy, possibly 20 pounds. Trying to pull this load with a rope over a limb cut into the limb and stress the rope. These problems can be eliminated attaching a carabineer to the rope after it is passed over the limb then click in one or two ropes into the carabineer. Pull the rope with the carabineer up to the limb and then attach the bag of smellables to one of the other ropes. You can now pull the bag much easier and with no damage to the limb. For the bag use a stuff sack that has a strap sewn into the bottom end. When the sack is loaded pull the draw string tight and tie an overhand bite to keep the draw string from slipping. Attach the bag to the rope using the bottom strap. This will keep any rain from going down the rope and into the bag. Since getting the rope over the limb can be tricky, it is a good game for the scouts, do not use the carabineer as the weight for the rope, it could get caught in the trees. The second rope can be used for late night smellables in a smaller bag.

In bear country it is important to secure all food not being used for the current meal BEFORE any cooking is started. The cooking smell will be a diner bell for habituated bears that may not chase easily. You may lose your diner but you will still have the other meals. And of course the food is stored hundreds of feet away from cooking and sleeping areas.



If you are using the two tree method get the rope over limbs on both trees and attach the carabineer to the middle of the rope with a larks head or clove hitch. This is tying a knot in the middle of a rope without using the ends. After tying the carabineer click in the other ropes and pull the unloaded rope up into position. The carabineer is tied to the rope so it does not slide next to the tree.