



KNIGHT OWLS

Field Guide & Operating Manual

A Covenant father–daughter tradition

Non Nobis

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Not an official program of The Covenant School.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Knight Owls

Knight Owls is not, at its heart, a camping program. It is a **father–daughter formation program** — camping, climbing, fishing, and leading are simply the vehicles. The aim is to strengthen the bond between a dad and his daughter, cultivate Christian character, build lifelong friendships among Covenant families, and create memories that last, all in the wild and beautiful corners of God's creation.

The outdoors gives us something a living room can't: distractions fall away, conversations deepen, real challenge builds courage and resilience, and creation itself points us back to its Maker. Knight Owls begins in 4th grade and culminates after a girl's junior year, with seniors returning as mentors for the younger classes.

“Our prayer is that God would use these adventures to deepen relationships between dads and the precious daughters He has entrusted to our care — and that our girls would delight in the beauty of His creation.”

— From the founding welcome

Mission

To equip girls with outdoor, leadership, and life skills through father-led adventures that strengthen families, cultivate Christian character, build lifelong friendships, and create meaningful shared experiences.

What Makes a Weekend Distinctly “Knight Owls”

These distinctives matter as much as the destination. A weekend is genuinely Knight Owls when it has all of them.

- A theme — every campout teaches a real skill or lesson.
- One-on-one time — protected, and kept truly 1:1.
- Shared meals — handled so it's easy for everyone to come.
- Campfire worship — songs, a devotional, and prayer.
- Joy — games, stories, laughter, and s'mores.
- Christ named — creation read back to its Maker.
- An open door — the whole grade invited, no one priced or skilled out.
- The walking stick — a growing record of the journey.

Our Story

Knight Owls grew out of something simple: dads who didn't want the campouts to end. In the grammar-school years, many Covenant families treasured the YMCA Adventure Princess program — fall and spring campouts, tents under the stars, campfire devotionals, shared meals, and one-on-one time with their daughters.

When the girls aged out after third grade, those dads wanted more. Some tried other programs that had good bones but felt over-structured and lacked Christian discipleship. So, in God's providence, a group of dads from the Class of 2025 took the best of what they'd seen and made it distinctly Covenant. In April 2024, dads gathered to codify what made it work — a playbook for future grades to use, refine, and hand on. This guide is the next step in that purpose.

A Liturgy for Those Who Sleep in Tents

“How fitting, O Lord, that we who were born into journey and exile should sometimes venture from our homes and beds, pitching tents and making camp in wild places... Here let us feel ourselves more vulnerable and in awe, silhouetted against the backdrop of your beauty and holiness, small beneath towering trees and wide skies, small but known.”

— Douglas McKelvey, *Every Moment Holy*, read at Knight Owls campfires.

Traditions Worth Keeping

- The Walking Stick — given the first campout, etched and medallioned over eight years; a record of the whole journey.
- The Campfire — songs, a devotional, stories, and s'mores; where the culture actually lives.
- The Senior Return — 12th graders serving at younger campouts; the moment a girl who received everything begins to give it.
- Non Nobis — “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory” (Psalm 115:1).

How to Contribute

This is a living document, built in editions with contributors credited. Every grade that adds a campout, a park, a song, or a story makes it better for the grades that follow. Guard the center fiercely — the mission, the faith, the father–daughter focus, the core traditions — and hold the rest loosely.

The Journey

Knight Owls is designed as a progression. Each stage builds on the last, and a dad's role shifts a little each year — from protector, toward companion and fellow believer.

Discovery (4th–5th) — “I belong here.”

Wonder and welcome. First hiking stick, first pocket knife, fire, knots, canoes. The real work is excitement and belonging.

Skill Building (6th–8th) — “I'm capable.”

Competence and responsibility. First aid, navigation, climbing, fly fishing, and the first taste of the backcountry.

Formation (9th–11th) — “I can lead the way.”

Leadership, independence, and carrying weight — on the trail and in the family, building to the capstone expedition.

Legacy (12th) — “I get to give back.”

Seniors return to younger campouts to teach, mentor, and pass it on — the year that makes Knight Owls a fifty-year story.

The Full Itinerary

Grade	Fall	Spring
4th	Hiking Sticks & Knife Safety	Basic Knots & Fire Building
5th	Canoeing & Texas History	Rochelle's Canoe the Brazos
6th	God's Creation at Dinosaur Valley	Rock Climbing & Rappelling
7th	Wilderness First Aid	Fly Fishing on the Lampasas
8th	Orienteering	“Knight Skies” at Big Bend
9th	Knight Owl Olympics	Tubing & Two-Stepping
10th	Palo Duro Canyon	Caprock Canyon
11th	Intro to Backpacking at Eagle Rock	Trek Prep & Celebration
Summer	Guadalupe Peak — Roof of Texas (the capstone)	
12th	Senior Legacy & Graduation	

Running a Campout

The nuts and bolts, written down so the next dad doesn't start from scratch.

Build a Steering Team

Pull together at least four committed dads who'll share the load. Core roles:

- Lead Coordinator — drives dates, books campsites, coordinates activities, leads communication, settles expenses.
- Food Lead — fully manages the meals so no other dad has to plan food (the biggest driver of easy participation).
- Devotional Lead (rotating) — a short campfire devotional and 1:1 conversation starters.
- Music Lead (rotating) — leads campfire singing; recruits other musical dads.
- Activity Leads (rotating) — tap the gifts across your dads for each campout's signature skill.

The Planning Timeline

- 5 months out — align on the date and book campsites (Texas State Parks open ~5 months ahead; large group sites up to a year ahead).
- ~2 months out — send the “Save the Date” email to the whole grade.
- 4–6 weeks out — “Remind & Confirm”; lock any activity reservations.
- 2 weeks out — send the final details (agenda, meals, packing, logistics); start a group text the week of.
- Week after — one dad fronts shared costs and collects an even split from each family.

A Typical Weekend

Friday: Arrive and set up camp; group dinner at a local spot; campfire — songs, a devotional, s'mores.

Saturday: Group breakfast; brief dad huddle; protected 1:1 dad–daughter time; group lunch; the main activity; dinner and a second campfire.

Sunday: Pack up and head home on your own; dads who stay grab breakfast together.

Protect the 1:1 time — don't pair up with another pair, or it becomes a group hangout and the focused time evaporates.

Meals Build the Culture

Sharing four meals as a group does as much for community as any activity — and fully-managed meals make it easy for busy dads to say yes. Keep it simple: a breakfast-taco or cereal bar with good coffee, deli or grilled-cheese lunches, and crowd-pleaser dinners like a fajita bar, chili, or a shrimp boil. Assign dad/daughter pairs to help at each meal.

Communication Templates

“Save the Date” email

To: Entire grade (dads + moms)

Subject: {Xth} Grade Knight Owls (Class of 20XX) -- {Fall/Spring} Campout

Dads,

Save the date for our {fall/spring} campout! We have {campground} reserved at {state park} for {dates}. This one will be memorable -- we'll be {theme/activity}. Please let me know directly if you plan to attend. More details to follow.
{Name}

“Final Details” email

Reply-all to the prior thread, ~2 weeks out.

ATTENDEES: {list}. AGENDA: Fri arrive + dinner + campfire; Sat breakfast, 1:1 time (9:30-11), {activity}, dinner + campfire; Sun depart.

MEALS: all handled -- bring a non-disposable plate, utensils, cup, and 2 gal water/person.

WHAT TO PACK: {activity notes + pack-list link}. {Name}

Settle-up text

Such a great campout! Total per family came to \${total}:

 \${a} food/coffee \${b} Friday dinner \${c} group activity

 \${d} campsites & entry \${e} firewood

Venmo {handle} or Zelle {email}. Thanks!

The Campout Guides

Every classic Knight Owls campout, with the why, the logistics, what to pack, and the contacts you'll need. Listed in journey order — one per page, so you can print just the ones you need.

Hiking Sticks & Knife Safety

4th Grade · Fall · Tyler State Park · 101 mi · Difficulty: Easy

Why this campout. This is where a Knight Owl's journey begins. The hiking stick becomes a fixture of every future campout, and receiving a first pocket knife signifies a real degree of responsibility and trust.

Hiking Sticks

One long-standing Knight Owls tradition is the Hiking Stick. The girls are given their stick the morning of their first campout, and add etchings and medallions to it throughout their years in the program — a physical record of every memory made with their dad and their friends.

Dads help their daughter etch initials or memories into the stick with a woodburning kit (close parental supervision required — it gets hot). Many state and national parks sell hiking-stick medallions that can be added over time. Remember to buy a stick for any girls who join in later semesters.

Knife Safety

It's a big deal for the girls to get their first pocket knife. The Opinel Junior is ideal — a rounded tip, a safety lock, and an easy-to-grip handle.

One dad volunteers to lead. Gather finger-width sticks ahead of time. Keep the emphasis on safety rather than advanced whittling, and focus on a few memorable principles: keep a clear blood circle, always cut away from yourself, and never walk with an open blade.

Reservations: Book the Red Oak tent-only sites about 5 months ahead when they open.

Timing: A relaxed first campout — plenty of free time at camp.

Group: Whole grade welcome; sites hold ~4 pairs each.

Contacts: Texas State Parks reservations — (512) 389-8900.

Estimated cost (per pair): Campsites ~\$20 · Meals ~\$60 · **Weekend ~\$80** (Gear, one-time: Opinel Junior knife ~\$24, hiking stick ~\$24)

Packing: Tent & sleeping gear · Camp chair · Headlamp · Hiking stick (provided) · Opinel Junior knife (provided) · Layers for the evening · 2 gallons of water per person

Food: An easy first weekend for the food lead — cereal/breakfast-taco bar, deli lunches, and a fajita or chili dinner work great.

Links: BSA — [Pocket Knife Safety \(video\)](#) · [Hiking stick \(Amazon\)](#) · [Woodburning kit \(Amazon\)](#) · [Hiking-stick medallions \(Amazon\)](#) · [Opinel Junior knife \(Amazon\)](#)

Basic Knots & Fire Building

4th Grade · Spring · Eisenhower State Park · 68 mi · Difficulty: Easy

Why this campout. Learning to make fire is an essential outdoor skill, and knowing how to do it safely is crucial. The knot activity is something the girls happily practice all weekend.

What to Cover

Teach two or three basic knots with a strand of paracord (buy in bulk, cut to size, and burn the ends); the girls can even wrap a paracord grip onto their hiking stick.

For fire, teach the three ingredients — fuel, oxygen, heat — and a couple of starting techniques (fire steel, 9V battery & steel wool). Give each girl a small firemaking kit, then break into 1:1 time to practice safely. Don't be surprised to look up and see a dozen tiny campfires around camp.

Reservations: Fossil Ridge tent-only sites; good last-minute option if needed.

Timing: Skills in the morning, free time and practice in the afternoon.

Group: Whole grade.

Contacts: Texas State Parks — (512) 389-8900.

Estimated cost (per pair): Campsites ~\$20 · Meals ~\$60 · **Weekend ~\$80** (Gear, one-time: Firemaking kit & paracord ~\$15)

Packing: Tent & sleeping gear · Paracord (provided) · Firemaking kit (provided) · Work gloves · 2 gallons of water per person

Food: Standard group meals — a great campout for a Dutch-oven dessert contest.

Links: [7 Essential Knots You Need To Know \(video\)](#) · [Paracord Walking Stick Wrap \(video\)](#) · [How To Light a Campfire with Kids \(video\)](#) · [Outdoor knots guide \(Amazon\)](#) · [Fire steel \(Amazon\)](#)

Canoeing & Texas History

5th Grade · Fall · Fort Parker State Park · 101 mi · Difficulty: Easy

Why this campout. Fort Parker offers a rare combination: a beginner-friendly river paddle and a window into some of the most fascinating history of the early Texas frontier and the Comanche.

Old Fort Parker Historic Site

About ten minutes from the state park, the reconstructed Old Fort Parker pays tribute to the Parker family and other early pioneers and settlers. Spend an hour exploring it, and call ahead — it is sometimes rented for private events. Bring cash for entry.

The story behind this place is told vividly in *Empire of the Summer Moon* by S.C. Gwynne — a great read for dads, though note it's written for adults, not for kids.

The Limestone Bluffs Paddling Trail

The Limestone Bluffs Paddling Trail covers about 5.3 miles of quiet water on the Navasota River, running past hardwood bottomlands and limestone bluffs, with beavers, waterfowl, and white-tailed deer commonly seen along the way. A kayak launch sits right next to the large group campsite.

Reserve canoes from the park headquarters and ask them to shuttle the canoes to the launch next to camp — far easier than ferrying them yourself. Plan about half as many canoes as girls so the group can split and take turns.

Important: the large group campsite must be reserved by phone — call the Texas State Parks group-reservations line. Good news on timing: large group sites across the state park system can now be reserved up to a year in advance (versus about five months for the normal individual sites), so lock in popular dates early.

Reservations: Call the Texas State Parks group-reservations line (512-389-8900) to reserve the large group site — bookable up to a year in advance. Reserve canoes through the park and ask for a shuttle to the launch.

Timing: A 5.3-mile paddle; split the group and rotate.

Group: About one canoe per two girls.

Contacts: Texas State Parks group reservations — 512-389-8900.

Estimated cost (per pair): Campsites ~\$20 · Meals ~\$60 · Canoe rental ~\$30 · **Weekend ~\$110**

Packing: Water shoes (close-toed) · Sun shirt, hat & sunglasses · Sunscreen · Dry bag · Towel & change of clothes · Lots of drinking water

Food: Standard group meals; a local spot makes a great Friday dinner.

Links: [Old Fort Parker Historic Site](#) · [Empire of the Summer Moon](#) — S.C. Gwynne (a dads' read) · [Limestone Bluffs Paddling Trail](#) · [Reserve the Fort Parker group campsite](#) · [Youth Group Compliance form \(PDF\)](#) · [Parental Consent form \(PDF\)](#)

Rochelle's Canoe the Brazos

5th Grade · Spring · Mineral Wells State Park · 88 mi · Difficulty: Moderate

Why this campout. A genuine river adventure that's perfect for slightly older girls. Everyone returns to camp worn out, accomplished, and full of memories.

Reserving the Trip

Aim for early May (no earlier than late April). In late April the water can be cold, the rain unpredictable, and a strong south wind can turn the paddle into a slog. May brings better weather and warmer water — but you'll need to navigate a busy school calendar, and Mother's Day.

Call as early as you can; May is Rochelle's busiest month, and they resume taking reservations in February after the off-season. Reach Buddy Rochelle at (940) 659-3341 or (940) 659-2581, reserve one canoe per dad/daughter pair (\$50 each), and tell him you're with the Knight Owls from Covenant. He'll ask for a check deposit (\$20 per canoe); you can call a couple of weeks out with your final canoe count.

The Route

You'll likely want the one-day, 10-mile trip. It launches from Rochelle's Canoe Rental off Highway 4, and the take-out is downriver at Hart Bend. Get an early start — arrive at Rochelle's by 8:30am to be on the river by 9:00am.

When water levels are too low to run the full route, a good alternative is to paddle out, stop for lunch, and then paddle back upriver to take out at the parking area.

Tips Along the Way

There's a fun rope swing just a short paddle past the put-in. A little past the halfway point, a wide bank makes the perfect lunch spot — rumor has it the Class of 2030 enjoyed Pecan Lodge brisket grilled-cheese sandwiches there, cooked on a Coleman 2-burner with a griddle.

Depending on the water level, there's often a gentle current the girls can float like a lazy river. It gets toasty out there, so bring plenty of water, a sun shirt and hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen.

Two Ways to Camp

Option 1 — Camp on the river. Paddle the full 10 miles and get shuttled back to Rochelle's parking area, spending the night along the river. It's a real adventure, but be ready for little shade, and it can be tougher to manage with a larger group.

Option 2 (recommended) — Base camp at Mineral Wells State Park. Camp Friday night at nearby Mineral Wells, paddle Saturday morning, and return for a second night at the park. This keeps the on-river logistics simple — you bring only water and lunch fare instead of all your tents and gear — and gives you a comfortable, established base camp. If you go this route, reserve your Mineral Wells sites back in December for a May paddle.

Reservations: Reserve canoes through Rochelle's (\$50/pair, \$20/canoe deposit); if base-camping, reserve Mineral Wells sites in December for a May paddle.

Timing: Early May; arrive Rochelle's by 8:30am, on the river by 9am.

Group: One canoe per dad/daughter pair.

Contacts: Buddy Rochelle — (940) 659-3341 / (940) 659-2581.

Estimated cost (per pair): Campsites ~\$20 · Meals ~\$60 · Canoe rental ~\$50 · **Weekend ~\$130**

Packing: Water shoes (close-toed) · Swimsuit & sun shirt · Hat & sunglasses · Sunscreen · Dry bag · Lots of drinking water

Food: Standard group meals back at base camp, plus a memorable riverbank lunch — the Class of 2030's Pecan Lodge brisket grilled-cheese on a Coleman 2-burner is the gold standard.

Links: [Rochelle's Canoe & Kayak Rental](#) · [Rochelle's trips & rates](#) · [Put-in & route \(Google Maps\)](#) · [Lunch-spot bank \(Google Maps\)](#) · [Take-out at Hart Bend \(Google Maps\)](#)

God's Creation at Dinosaur Valley

6th Grade · Fall · Dinosaur Valley State Park · 91 mi · Difficulty: Easy

Why this campout. The Dinosaur Valley State Park / Fossil Rim duo makes for a great weekend to reflect on the majesty and diversity of God's creation. The state park sits along the Paluxy River, within which you can observe sauropod and theropod tracks. Fossil Rim Wildlife Center sits on 1,800 acres in the beautiful Texas Hill Country and is home to over 1,000 animals from 50 species.

Viewing Dinosaur Tracks

Dinosaur Valley State Park sits on the Paluxy River, known for the fossilized sauropod and theropod tracks you can observe right in the riverbed (viewing depends on water levels). Breaking out for 1:1 dad/daughter time is a great way to explore the five main track sites, each along a series of hiking trails. When the weather and water levels are favorable, it's also fun to swim in the river.

Beyond the tracks, the park has lovely hiking trails with modest elevation gains and scenic overlooks. The Rocky Ridge Trail on the east side leads to a nice overlook, and connects with other trails to make a hike as long as you'd like.

Camping at Sycamore Bend

The walk-in primitive sites in the Sycamore Bend camping area are a perfect basecamp for a large group — essentially a large field above the Paluxy River that sits on its own, away from the crowds. Try to reserve all eight sites (#61–68) so you have the area to yourselves.

One thing to plan for: these sites are about a half-mile walk from the parking area and restrooms, so tell dads to bring a wagon and pack accordingly.

Fossil Rim Wildlife Center

Reserve a private guided tour through Fossil Rim in one of their open-air safari vehicles. Each vehicle holds up to 20 people, and the private tour most recently ran about \$800 per vehicle (~\$80 per dad/daughter pair). Plan to bring a cash gratuity for your guide, and reserve your private tour well in advance.

Touring in the cooler morning tends to mean more animal activity; alternatively, touring after lunch leaves the morning free to explore Dinosaur Valley. The tour lasts about two hours, with a rest stop and gift shop midway at a scenic overlook.

Reservations: Reserve the 8 Sycamore Bend walk-in sites; email Fossil Rim well ahead for the private tour.

Timing: Tour in the morning, explore the park in the afternoon (or flip it).

Group: Each safari vehicle holds 20.

Contacts: Fossil Rim Wildlife Center; Texas State Parks.

Estimated cost (per pair): Campsites ~\$20 · Meals ~\$60 · Fossil Rim safari ~\$80 · **Weekend ~\$160**

Packing: Tent & sleeping gear · Wagon for hauling gear · Water shoes (river) · Cash gratuity for the safari guide · 2 gallons of water per person

Food: Loco Coyote Grill in Glen Rose is a great Friday-night dinner — call ahead for the group.

Links: [Dinosaur Valley — dinosaur tracks](#) · [Dinosaur Valley park map \(PDF\)](#) · [Reserve a Fossil Rim private tour](#) · [Loco Coyote Grill \(Google Maps\)](#) · [Reserve Sycamore Bend sites](#)

Rock Climbing & Rappelling

6th Grade · Spring · Mineral Wells State Park · 88 mi · Difficulty: Moderate

Why this campout. Few things build confidence like overcoming the initial fear of the first rappel, then working with your dad to climb increasingly difficult routes. One not to be missed.

Climbing with Rock-About

Rock-About is the approved guide service in the park. Reserve well in advance and confirm your final headcount the week prior (they're firm on numbers). They provide all harnesses, helmets, shoes, and guides, and set up the rappelling lines and top-rope routes.

Plan to arrive at Penitentiary Hollow around 9am (after group breakfast) and climb until mid-afternoon. Even dads who don't plan to climb should plan to try — and belaying your daughter is a huge part of the experience.

Setting Up Camp

Try to reserve the entire Post Oak campground so you have it to yourselves. Site #11 is the perfect group site for campfire time and meals.

DJ's Firewood nearby will deliver and stack a half cord of firewood right at your campsite — it's more than you'll need, but very convenient.

Reservations: Book Rock-About early; reserve all Post Oak campsites ~5 months ahead.

Timing: Full day of climbing, 9am–3pm.

Group: Confirmed headcount required the week prior.

Contacts: Rock-About (Adam, owner); DJ's Firewood for delivery.

Estimated cost (per pair): Campsites ~\$20 · Meals ~\$60 · Rock-About (dad + daughter) ~\$170 · **Weekend ~\$250**

Packing: Athletic clothes · Closed-toe shoes · Sack lunch (made after breakfast) · Gloves · Plenty of water

Food: Start with a group breakfast, then set up a sandwich-making station so each dad/daughter pair can build a sack lunch to take to the climb. The Mesquite Pit is a great Friday-night dinner, or grab pizza from the nearby Domino's.

Links: [Rock-About — Mineral Wells climbing](#) · [Rock-About — scouts & nonprofits](#) · [Email Adam at Rock-About](#) · [Reserve Post Oak campground](#) · [Mineral Wells park map \(PDF\)](#) · [The Mesquite Pit — Friday dinner \(Maps\)](#) · [DJ's Firewood — delivery \(Maps\)](#)

Wilderness First Aid

7th Grade · Fall · Private Land · Difficulty: Moderate

Why this campout. Safety underpins every adventure. Taught well, this becomes one of the most memorable (and fun) campouts of the whole program.

Stations & Applied Learning

Most grades have a dad or two in the medical field, and one or two willing to lead makes for a great experience — though medically trained or not, let the volunteer dads plan it however they see fit. A common approach is to break into a couple of stations: one dad on dressing wounds and burns, another on applying a splint. Buy supplies for each girl ahead of time — bandanas for splinting, gauze, and the makings of a small first-aid 'possibles pouch' they assemble and keep.

The highlight is the applied learning. Pick a good hiking trail near camp and tell the girls they'll get to use what they just learned. Then send three or four dads with a flair for the dramatic to hide along the trail with simulated injuries — the more gruesome the better. Impaled by a sharp stick (cue a bag of spaghetti), a wound bleeding profusely (cue a ketchup bottle), an eye that's come out of its socket... you get the idea.

Reservations: Often hosted on a Knight Owls family's private land.

Timing: Training in the morning, the trail scenario in the afternoon.

Group: Whole grade.

Contacts: Recruit medically-trained dads in your grade.

Estimated cost (per pair): Meals ~\$60 · **Weekend ~\$60** (Gear, one-time: First-aid pouch supplies ~\$10)

Packing: Tent & sleeping gear · Day pack · Bandana (for splinting) · Water

Food: Standard group meals.

Links: [10 Must-Haves for a Hiking First-Aid Kit — REI \(video\)](#) · [NOLS — Wilderness Medicine Overview \(video\)](#) · [Wilderness first-aid skills \(video\)](#) · [DIY Backpacking First-Aid Kit](#)

Fly Fishing on the Lampasas

7th Grade · Spring · Meridian State Park · 114 mi · Difficulty: Moderate

Why this campout. A beautiful, hands-on river day that takes some planning but rewards it. The girls learn simple roll casts and spend the day wading a gorgeous stretch of Texas river.

Basecamp at Meridian

Use Meridian State Park as your base camp — a beautiful, well-maintained park about two hours southwest of Dallas, due west of Hillsboro. The Shinnery Ridge West tent-only sites are secluded and ideal; try to reserve all eight (book ~5 months ahead), and grab Site #30, which makes the perfect group site for campfire and meals.

Getting to the River

Start with a group breakfast and a sandwich-making station so each dad/daughter pair can build a sack lunch, then drive about an hour further south to your drop-in point. There are at least six good drop-in points in the area, and we've found location #3 — where RR1690 crosses the river — to be a great spot. On the downstream side it merges with School Creek, which you can wade up to a lovely waterfall and swimming hole.

Finding a Guide

For the fishing itself, the best option is to leverage a dad in your group who's an avid fly fisherman. If you don't have one, ask dads in past grades for a recommendation — someone can usually help or point you to the right person. And if no suitable dad is available, contact Tailwaters or Living Waters to set you up with a guide.

Whoever guides should make sure every rod is rigged with leader, tippet, and a fly, then float between pairs through the day — there's plenty of room to spread out.

Gear, Casting & Conditions

Buy each girl a fishpond Fly Puck, nippers on a lanyard, and a handful of flies, and coordinate across the dads to borrow fly rods — aim for one rod per two girls, with dads paired up. Give basic casting instruction in small groups at Meridian during breakfast; the girls will mostly do simple roll casts, nothing requiring much of a back cast.

Late April or early May is best, when the water is warmer — you'll be wading and swimming in water up to chest deep. Before you go, check the water level for anything unusual in gage height or discharge (you can also call Living Waters for the latest conditions).

Reservations: Reserve all 8 Shinnery Ridge West sites ~5 months ahead; Site #30 is the group campfire/meal site. Meridian also has a reservable group dining hall.

Timing: Late April–early May; casting at breakfast, on the river mid-morning.

Group: One rod per two girls; dads pair up.

Contacts: An avid-fly-fisherman dad (or ask past grades); Tailwaters or Living Waters for a guide.

Estimated cost (per pair): Campsites ~\$20 · Meals ~\$60 · **Weekend ~\$80** (Gear, one-time: Fly puck, nippers & flies ~\$20)

Packing: Swimsuit & sun shirt · Closed-toed water shoes · Sunglasses & sunscreen · Fly puck & nippers (provided) · Lots of water

Food: Ay Jalisco does a great Friday fajita buffet; reserve Meridian's meal hall for Saturday.

Links: [ORVIS — The Basic Fly Cast \(video\)](#) · [The only 3 fly-fishing knots you need \(video\)](#) · [Tailwaters Fly Fishing — guides](#) · [Living Waters — guide service](#) · [Living Waters — Lampasas River conditions](#) · [All six drop-in points \(Google Maps list\)](#) · [Location #3 drop-in — RR1690 \(Maps\)](#) · [Lampasas River fishing info](#) · [Meridian State Park](#) · [Reserve Meridian sites](#) · [Meridian group facilities](#) · [Ay Jalisco — Friday fajita buffet \(Maps\)](#)

Orienteering

8th Grade · Fall · Private Land · Difficulty: Moderate

Why this campout. An 8th-grade campout that teaches a real, lasting skill — orienteering with map and compass — and doubles as the launchpad for the spring Big Bend expedition. Private land gives the room to set routes and hide a few surprises along the way.

The Orienteering Challenge

A dad or two volunteers to teach the basics: reading a map, taking and following a bearing, and pacing for distance. Each girl gets her own compass to keep and use for years to come.

Ahead of time, the dad leads walk off a few routes and assign one to each small group of girls. The routes lead to a hidden box — and inside, a letter from each girl's dad waiting at the end of her navigation. It's the moment that turns a skills lesson into a memory.

Afternoon: Big Bend Prep

Because the spring Big Bend trip carries a lot of logistical detail, the afternoon is dedicated to getting ready. Walk through the Big Bend itinerary in detail as a group, and have a dad lead a backpacking-gear session — a demonstration with example gear, what to bring, and time to answer questions.

Reservations: Hosted on private land with room to set orienteering routes. Coordinate with the host family ahead of time.

Timing: Orienteering in the morning; Big Bend prep in the afternoon.

Group: Whole grade; girls navigate in small groups.

Contacts: Recruit dad volunteers to teach orienteering and lead the Big Bend gear session.

Estimated cost (per pair): Meals ~\$60 · **Weekend ~\$60** (Gear, one-time: A compass for each girl (~\$15))

Packing: Tent & sleeping gear · Compass (provided) · Day pack · Layers · Closed-toe shoes · Water

Food: Standard group meals.

Links: [Compass for each girl \(Amazon\)](#) · [The Big Bend trip guide](#)

"Knight Skies" at Big Bend

8th Grade · Spring · Big Bend National Park · 543 mi · Difficulty: Challenging

Why this campout. Big Bend is one of the wildest corners of our state, with the least light pollution of any national park in the lower 48 — the perfect place to sit beneath the stars and meditate on Psalm 8. It's also the program's most ambitious trip: four days, two national parks, group backpacking in the Chisos, a star party at the McDonald Observatory, and a spring-fed swim at Balmorhea. A true expedition that takes real planning — and rewards every bit of it.

The Shape of the Trip

Day 1 — Travel & stars. Leave Dallas early, lunch at Rosa's Café in Midland, then a swim in the spring-fed pool at Balmorhea State Park (a constant 71°F). Check in at Prude Ranch near Fort Davis, and cap the evening with a star party at the McDonald Observatory under some of the darkest skies in the country.

Days 2–3 — Into the park. Drive into Big Bend and split into groups: the backpacking teams head up into the Chisos to camp near the South Rim, while the frontcountry group base-camps and day-hikes the Lost Mine and Window trails, drives the Ross Maxwell Scenic Drive, and explores Santa Elena Canyon, Boquillas, and the Hot Springs. Evenings are campfires under the stars.

Day 4 — Home, the scenic way. Break camp, grab a pre-ordered lunch in Marathon, and finish with a group dinner at Perini Ranch in Buffalo Gap before the drive home.

How the Group Works

A trip this size runs on a National Park Service Special Use Permit, which caps the group at 50 people in the park, 30 on any one trail, and 15 backpacking in the Chisos at a time. To work within that, the grade splits into about three groups — two backpacking and one frontcountry — each with a group leader responsible for the schedule, permits, and check-in. The fall Orienteering campout is the natural prep weekend for this trip.

Backpacking the Chisos

The backpacking teams climb into the Chisos Mountains — roughly 4.7 miles and 1,700 feet from the Pinnacles Trailhead toward the Boot Canyon area — to camp near the South Rim, one of the great views in Texas, with the whole southern half of Big Bend falling away below. February highs run in the low 60s and lows in the 40s, but conditions can swing from 80°F to below freezing, so pack for everything.

Key Planning Headlines

This is the most involved trip in the program — start early. The essentials: it requires a Special Use Permit submitted about six months ahead; frontcountry campsites release on a 6-month rolling basis and must be booked at 9:00am the morning they open; mid-February is the sweet spot for weather and dark skies; and you should plan for roughly \$500 per family all-in. Everything else — vendor contacts, reservation steps, meal kits, and pricing — lives in the Master Planning Guide.

Planning this trip? The full Master Planning Guide (permits, reservations, vendor contacts, meal kits) is linked on the website.

Reservations: Requires a National Park Service Special Use Permit (submit ~6 months out). Frontcountry campsites release on a 6-month rolling basis — book at 9:00am the day they open.

Timing: Four days; mid-February is ideal for weather and dark skies.

Group: Up to ~50 (Special Use Permit cap); split into about three groups.

Contacts: Big Bend NP Special Use Permits office. Vendor contacts are in the Master Planning Guide.

Estimated cost (per pair): Plan for roughly \$500 per family, all-in — lodging, park fees, activities, and group meals.

Packing: Backpack — dad ~50L, daughter ~40L · Backpacking tent · Sleeping bag (+ liner) & sleep pad · Camp pillow · Layers: hiking pants, tee, fleece, puffer, rain jacket, base layer, gloves, warm hat · Sun hat & sunglasses · Hiking boots or trail runners · Water capacity ~1.3 gal/person (6L bag + SmartWater bottles) · ~1 lb shared charcuterie + your own snacks, trail lunch & breakfast · Headlamp, knife/multi-tool, camp plate & utensils

Food: Travel-day meals are group restaurant stops (Rosa's in Midland, a Marathon pickup, and Perini Ranch). In the park, a no-cook charcuterie feast on the South Rim (Perini beef tenderloin, cured meats, cheeses — about 1 lb of shared food per dad) plus a group camp dinner. Families handle their own breakfasts, trail lunches, and snacks.

Links: [Big Bend National Park \(NPS\)](#) · [Big Bend Special Use Permits](#) · [Reserve Big Bend campsites \(recreation.gov\)](#) · [Balmorhea State Park](#) · [McDonald Observatory](#) · [Perini Ranch Steakhouse](#) · [The Gage Hotel / V6 \(Marathon\)](#) · [Backpacking gear list](#)

Knight Owl Olympics

9th Grade · Fall · Private Land (a ranch) · Difficulty: Easy

Why this campout. As the entry into the Rhetoric years (9th–12th grade), this campout sets the tone with team-building and the growing maturity that lets the group take on something like a rifle range. The skill focus is gun safety, wrapped in a fun, grade-wide “Knight Owl Olympics” theme on private land that opens up activities a state park never could.

A Ranch Kickoff to the Rhetoric Years

Hosting on private land is what makes this one work — it allows for a rifle range, sporting clays, and ranch activities you can't do at a state park. Look for a ranch within an easy drive of Dallas whose owners are open to hosting the grade for the weekend.

The skill focus is gun safety, but the real point is the team-building and camaraderie that kicks off the Rhetoric years together as a grade.

The Knight Owl Olympics

A master of ceremonies divides everyone into teams and leads the first event of the day. The girls rotate through dad-led stations: a rifle range with a proper gun-safety talk and instruction, sporting clays, fishing, archery, and yard games — plus signature ranch fun like a calf scramble and horseback riding.

The afternoon opens up for free time across the property — horseback riding, roping, exploring on a side-by-side, and more — for everyone sticking around.

A Sample Weekend

Friday: arrive from carpool, set up camp, and explore the property; take a late-afternoon hayride out for sunset; share a Lowcountry boil dinner (with hot dogs for the non-seafood eaters); and gather around the campfire.

Saturday: a biscuit-bar breakfast with good coffee, then the Knight Owl Olympics through the morning, a sandwich-station lunch, and an afternoon of continued events and free time across the property. Cap the day with another sunset hayride and a group dinner — grill-your-own steaks or a nearby drive-in movie have both been hits.

Making It Happen

Line up a food/kitchen lead to run the meals and a master of ceremonies to organize the Olympics and recruit a few dads to lead activity stations. Get a headcount early so meals and teams can be planned.

Reservations: Hosted on private land — a ranch whose owners are willing to host. Coordinate directly with the host family well in advance.

Timing: A full Friday–Saturday weekend of stations, games, and ranch activities.

Group: Whole grade.

Contacts: Host ranch; recruit dad station-leads, an MC, and a food lead.

Estimated cost (per pair): Meals ~\$60 · **Weekend ~\$60** (Gear, one-time: Ammo & sporting clays for the range (varies))

Packing: Tent & sleeping gear · Camp chair · Eye & ear protection (for the range) · Closed-toe shoes · Layers · Fishing & sun gear · Water

Food: Meals are part of the fun: a Friday Lowcountry boil (with hot dogs for non-seafood eaters), a Saturday biscuit bar with good coffee, and a sandwich-station lunch. Saturday dinner depends on who's staying — grill-your-own steaks or a nearby drive-in have both been hits.

Tubing & Two-Stepping

9th Grade · Spring · Comal River & Gruene Hall · 280 mi · Difficulty: Easy

Why this campout. A different kind of Knight Owls weekend in the heart of the Hill Country — cabins instead of tents, a lazy float down the Comal, and a night of live music and two-stepping at the historic Gruene Hall. Pure fun, and a memory-maker with the girls.

Cabins on the Comal

We trade tents for cabins on this one. We've stayed at Petit Cowboy in New Braunfels, right at the head of the Comal — two-bedroom cabins that sleep two families each, plus a river-fed swimming pool, a pool house/game room, and pickleball courts. Pair families up and sort out room assignments ahead of time.

Arrive Friday evening (grab dinner on the road), then settle in for a campfire and s'mores, swimming, and two-stepping lessons from one of the dads so everyone's ready for Gruene Hall.

Floating the Comal

Saturday morning, drive a few minutes to Texas Tubes to rent tubes (~\$25 each) and float the Comal through the heart of the Hill Country. When water levels are low the float runs about 3.5–4 hours with some paddling. The afternoon is free for a second float (~\$15), the pool, or just hanging at the cabins.

Dinner & Dancing at Gruene Hall

Dinner is at the famous Gristmill River Restaurant & Bar — they don't take reservations, but a large group can be accommodated if you call ahead (plan to split across a few tables). Then it's on to Gruene Hall, Texas' oldest dance hall, for live music and two-stepping. Whoever happens to be playing, the point is simply being there with your daughter — so plan for a late, fun night.

Reservations: Reserve cabins (e.g., Petit Cowboy in New Braunfels) — two families per cabin. Book well ahead for an April weekend; grab Gruene Hall show tickets early.

Timing: Friday-evening arrival; Saturday float, then a night at Gruene Hall.

Group: Whole grade; two families per cabin.

Contacts: Cabin property; Texas Tubes for the float; Gruene Hall for tickets.

Estimated cost (per pair): Roughly \$212/family for cabins (two families share a cabin), \$50/family for Gruene Hall tickets (two tickets), and ~\$25 per tube for the Comal float — plus meals out.

Packing: Swimsuit & towel · Water shoes (for tubing) · Sunscreen & sunglasses · Boots or comfortable shoes for Gruene Hall · A change of clothes · Cash for tubes & dinner

Food: Grab dinner on the road Friday. Saturday: breakfast and coffee in the cabins' common area, lunch on the float or back at the cabins, and dinner at the Gristmill (call ahead for the group).

Links: [Petit Cowboy \(cabins\)](#) · [Texas Tubes \(Comal float\)](#) · [Gristmill River Restaurant & Bar](#) · [Gruene Hall — Texas' oldest dance hall](#)

Palo Duro Canyon

10th Grade · Fall · Palo Duro Canyon State Park · 374 mi · Difficulty: Moderate

Why this campout. Palo Duro is the second-largest canyon in the country, and a weekend here mixes a big canyon hike with an only-in-Amarillo art stop and a famous steak house on the drive home.

Hiking to the Lighthouse

Camp at the Youth Camp group area and hike the roughly eight-mile round-trip out to the iconic Lighthouse rock formation — the GSL Trail to the Lighthouse Trail to the PDR Trail. Start early; the canyon is hot and exposed, so carry plenty of water. Take time to explore this stunning corner of Texas, the second-largest canyon in the United States.

A Knight Owls Mark at Cadillac Ranch

On the way, stop at Cadillac Ranch outside Amarillo — the famous row of half-buried Cadillacs that visitors are invited to spray-paint. Bring a few cans and let the girls leave their own Knight Owls touch on the iconic installation. It'll be painted over by the next visitors, which is part of the fun.

The Big Texan on the Way Home

Cap the trip with a stop at the Big Texan Steak Ranch in Amarillo — home of the 72-oz steak challenge and an only-in-Texas send-off before the long drive back to Dallas.

Reservations: Reserve the Youth Camp large group area as early as you can — call the Texas State Parks line at 512-389-8900. Large group sites can now be booked up to a year in advance (vs. ~5 months for individual sites). If it's already taken, reserve a block of individual sites in the Fortress Cliff area as a backup.

Timing: Start the Lighthouse hike early — the canyon is hot and exposed.

Group: Large group camping area.

Contacts: Palo Duro Canyon SP / Texas State Parks.

Estimated cost (per pair): Campsites ~\$20 · Meals ~\$60 · **Weekend ~\$80** (Gear, one-time: Spray paint for Cadillac Ranch; the Big Texan dinner on the way home (out of pocket))

Packing: Day pack · Plenty of water (hot, exposed) · Sturdy hiking shoes · Sun protection · Spray paint (for Cadillac Ranch) · Camera

Food: Standard group meals at camp — plus a celebratory stop at the Big Texan Steak Ranch on the drive home.

Links: [Palo Duro Canyon State Park](#) · [The Big Texan Steak Ranch](#)

Horseback Riding & Backcountry at Caprock Canyon

10th Grade · Spring · Caprock Canyon State Park · 306 mi · Difficulty: Moderate

Why this campout. Caprock Canyon is a genuinely wild corner of Texas — steep escarpments, eroded red canyons, and the free-roaming Texas State Bison Herd. It takes a commitment to get there, and it is worth every mile.

Backcountry at the North Prong

The North Prong is a dispersed primitive camping area about a mile from the parking lot — a great introduction to backcountry camping, with a composting toilet near camp. Each permit covers four dad/daughter pairs.

There is no water at camp, so carry in all you need (about 2 gallons per person). Pack as though you were backpacking; it is good practice even though the car is close.

Riding & Trails

The headline activity is a trail ride: the Quitaque Riding Stables can provide horses and a guide along the park's many trails.

As an alternative to riding, you can hike the popular ~4-mile Haynes Ridge and Upper Canyon loop right by camp — scenic overlooks, hoodoos, natural springs, and a waterfall. Either way, keep an eye out for the bison that roam the park freely.

Reservations: Buy the needed number of North Prong permits; book trail rides with Quitaque Riding Stables well ahead.

Timing: About 5 hours from Dallas — leave early, or time it with an early school release.

Group: Each permit covers four dad/daughter pairs.

Contacts: Caprock Canyon State Park; Quitaque Riding Stables.

Estimated cost (per pair): Campsites ~\$20 · Meals ~\$60 · **Weekend ~\$80** (Gear, one-time: Trail-ride fees vary (Quitaque Stables))

Packing: Backpacking-style pack · All drinking water (~2 gal/person) · Closed-toe boots for riding · Warm layers · Headlamp · Sun protection

Food: Pack-in meals (no water at camp); Vernon is a good halfway stop for a bite.

Links: [Caprock Canyon State Park](#) · [Caprock Canyon brochure \(PDF\)](#) · [Caprock Canyon park map \(PDF\)](#) · [Quitaque Riding Stables](#)

Intro to Backpacking at Eagle Rock

11th Grade · Fall · Eagle Rock Loop (Ouachita NF, AR) · 240 mi · Difficulty: Challenging

Why this campout. A genuine backcountry trip that builds the skills, confidence, and endurance the girls will need for the Guadalupe Peak capstone. Beautiful any time of year, especially in fall.

Getting There & Checking Conditions

We'll park at the Little Missouri Falls trailhead and hike south along the Little Missouri Trail. The trailhead is about 4.5 hours from Dallas, with the last 30 minutes on gravel roads — carpool with another family and hit the road by 6:30am Saturday, aiming to reach the trailhead by 11:00am.

There are a few river crossings, shin- to knee-deep. Before we head out, we'll keep an eye on the river levels and the weather forecast. As long as the gauge reads 4.5 feet or less and there's no meaningful rain in the forecast, the crossings will be shallow. If the gauge is high or storms look likely, we'll pivot — the trip lead will share the backup plan.

The Hike

We'll eat lunch at the trailhead, load up our packs, and hit the trail — about four miles along the Little Missouri Trail, a beautiful section of the Eagle Rock Loop. Expect a couple of water crossings, so bring water shoes or Crocs.

Camp

There are no designated campsites, so we'll find a large spot along the river to set up. Campfires are TBD — the trip lead will check on any burn bans as it gets closer.

Gear

A recommended gear list is available from the trip lead. Don't feel like you need to go buy anything — you can borrow most of what you don't already own, so just reach out with questions.

Reservations: No reservation needed — dispersed camping. Check the river gauge (4.5 ft or less) and the forecast before you go.

Timing: Leave Dallas ~6:30am Saturday; trailhead by 11am; one night out, hike back Sunday.

Group: Scales well; spread out along the river.

Contacts: Trip lead; Ouachita National Forest ranger district.

Estimated cost (per pair): Minimal — fuel and shared food (the trip lead provides the group charcuterie dinner).

Packing: Backpacking pack · Water shoes or Crocs (river crossings) · Water filter & bottles · Lightweight tent, sleeping bag & pad · Layers & rain jacket · Headlamp · Your sack lunch, breakfast & ~1.5 lb shared dinner food · Small stove & fuel (a few dads will bring these)

Food: Bring your own sack lunch for the trailhead, plus something for breakfast (oatmeal, a breakfast bar). The trip lead provides instant coffee, and a few dads bring small stoves and fuel to boil water for coffee and oatmeal. Dinner is covered — the lead brings a charcuterie spread for everyone (Perini's beef tenderloin, cured meats, cheese, olives, hummus), divided up so each person carries about 1.5 pounds of shared food.

Links: [Little Missouri Falls trailhead \(Maps\)](#) · [USGS — Little Missouri River levels](#) · [Ouachita National Forest](#) · [Eagle Rock Loop \(Ouachita NF\)](#) · [Backpacking gear list](#)

Trek Prep & Celebration Dinner

11th Grade · Spring · Close to home · Difficulty: Easy

Why this campout. With the Guadalupe Peak trek on the horizon, this is the moment to make sure every dad and daughter is ready — and to mark how far this grade has come together.

Trek Prep

Run a gear shakedown — packs, boots, layers, footwear — and lay out a training-hike plan for the spring and early summer. Walk through the logistics for the Guadalupe Peak trip so there are no surprises.

Celebration Dinner

Gather to mark the journey: stories from the years of campouts, gratitude, and a look ahead to summiting Guadalupe Peak. A meaningful pause before the final push.

Reservations: Usually close to home — a training hike plus a dinner.

Timing: Spring of 11th grade, ahead of the summer trek.

Group: Whole grade.

Contacts: Steering team.

Estimated cost (per pair): Mostly the celebration dinner.

Packing: Your trek pack (for the shakedown) · Broken-in boots

Food: A special celebration dinner together.

Links: Backpacking gear checklist

Guadalupe Peak — Roof of Texas

11th Grade · Summer · Guadalupe Mountains NP · 560 mi · Difficulty: Challenging

Why this campout. After eight years, the journey ends on the roof of Texas. The capstone is a summit of Guadalupe Peak — the highest point in the state — paired with a visit to Carlsbad Caverns. You stand atop Texas and walk the depths of Carlsbad in a single trip, across two national parks: a fitting send-off to the whole Knight Owls journey.

Getting There & Camp

Drive about eight hours to Guadalupe Mountains National Park and camp at either the Pine Springs Campground or the Frijole Horse Corral Campground. This is a three-night trip, so plan the timing — Presidents' Day weekend works well, or right after school lets out / after graduation (though May can be hot).

Summiting Guadalupe Peak

The next day, summit Guadalupe Peak — at 8,751 feet, the highest point in Texas. It's a strenuous out-and-back with serious elevation gain and exposed switchbacks, and the reward is all of West Texas spread out below. Return to camp at Guadalupe for another night.

The Depths of Carlsbad

The following day, drive over to Carlsbad Caverns National Park and descend into one of the most stunning cave systems in the world. Spend a night in a hotel in Carlsbad before the drive home — a comfortable finish to a big trip.

Why It Matters

It's a fitting capstone: you stand on the highest point in Texas and walk the depths of Carlsbad, all in one trip, and you do it together — fathers and daughters closing out the Knight Owls journey across two national parks.

Reservations: Reserve sites at Pine Springs or the Frijole Horse Corral Campground at Guadalupe Mountains NP, and book a Carlsbad hotel for the final night. A three-night trip.

Timing: Three nights. Presidents' Day weekend, or right after school lets out / graduation (May can be hot).

Group: Works for the whole grade.

Contacts: Guadalupe Mountains NP; Carlsbad Caverns NP.

Estimated cost (per pair): Varies — campsites, a Carlsbad hotel night, park entries, fuel, and food.

Packing: Sturdy hiking boots · Trekking poles · Layers (cold & windy at elevation) · Sun protection · Plenty of water & electrolytes · Headlamp · Tent & sleeping gear · Day pack for the summit

Food: Group camp meals at Guadalupe; a hotel/restaurant night in Carlsbad on the way home.

Links: [Guadalupe Mountains National Park](#) · [Carlsbad Caverns National Park](#) · [Backpacking gear list](#)

Senior Legacy & Graduation

12th Grade · Legacy · Various · Difficulty: Easy

Why this campout. A fitting end to eight years of memories, adventures, and character formation. There's no single prescribed way to do it — seniors are busy, so keep it open-ended. At its heart, it's simply about giving back and furthering the traditions of Knight Owls for the girls coming up behind them.

A Way to Give Back

There's no one way this has to look. Seniors are stretched thin, so keep it flexible — even joining part of a younger grade's weekend counts. One natural option: drop in on a Discovery- or Skill-Building-stage campout to help lead an activity, share stories from your own years, and encourage the girls just starting out.

Furthering the Tradition

However it comes to life, the point is the same — giving back what you received and helping carry the traditions of Knight Owls forward. The walking stick that's marked eight years of memories comes full circle when its owner helps a younger girl begin her own.

Reservations: Flexible — coordinate with a younger grade's steering team if you'd like to join part of a campout.

Timing: Sometime senior year, however it best fits a busy schedule.

Group: Up to the seniors — on their own or paired up.

Contacts: Younger-grade steering teams.

Packing: Your own camp gear · Your walking stick — to share its story

Food: With the host grade.

Resources

State Park Recommendations

Park	From Dallas	Campsites	Notes
Tyler State Park	1h 36m	Red Oak tent-only sites; Shortleaf shelters 905–908.	Book ~5 months out. Canoe rentals, swimming beach.
Eisenhower State Park	1h 4m	Fossil Ridge tent-only sites 155–160.	Good last-minute option close to Dallas.
Ray Roberts — Isle du Bois	56m	Hawthorn tent-only sites, short walk in.	Reliable close-in destination.
Mineral Wells State Park	1h 25m	Post Oak tent-only; site 11 is a great group site.	Penitentiary Hollow climbing (Rock-About).
Dinosaur Valley State Park	1h 33m	Sycamore Bend walk-in (bring a wagon).	Dinosaur tracks; Fossil Rim safari nearby.
Meridian State Park	1h 55m	Shinnery Ridge West; sites 30 & 31 group site.	Reservable group dining hall.
Fort Parker State Park	1h 31m	Scout Camping Wilderness area (call to book).	Canoe shuttle; Old Fort Parker nearby.
Caprock Canyon State Park	4h 48m	North Prong primitive (0.5-mi hike in).	Texas State Bison Herd; canyon hiking.
Palo Duro Canyon State Park	5h 44m	The Youth Camp large group area.	Hike the 8-mile Lighthouse loop.
Big Bend National Park	7h 57m	South Rim backcountry; primitive roadside sites.	Darkest skies in the lower 48. Permit required.
Guadalupe Mountains NP	~8h	Pine Springs or Frijole Horse Corral.	The capstone — summit Guadalupe Peak; pair with Carlsbad.
Balmorhea State Park	~6h	A day stop, not a campsite.	Largest spring-fed pool (71°F); swim stop en route.
Eagle Rock Loop (Ouachita NF)	~4h 30m	Dispersed along the Little Missouri Trail.	Intro to backpacking; check river levels.

Car-Camping Pack List

For a primitive (no electricity, no water) car-camping trip.

Sleep. Tent · Sleeping bag (rated for the forecast) · Sleeping pad · Pillow · Headlamp

Kitchen & water. Non-disposable plate, cup & utensils · Water bottle · Camp towel · 2 gallons of water per person

Clothing. Boots or trail runners · Water shoes · Layers: tee, fleece, puffer, rain jacket · Hat · Sunglasses · Extra socks

Miscellaneous. Camp chair · Day pack · Pocket knife/multi-tool · Battery backup & cables · Sunscreen · Toiletries

Backpacking Gear List

For the backcountry trips (Eagle Rock, Big Bend, Guadalupe Peak). Pack for a range of conditions; borrow what you don't own.

Pack & sleep. Backpack (dad ~50L, daughter ~40L) · Backpacking tent · Sleeping bag (+ liner) & pad · Camp pillow

Clothing (layers). Hiking pants & tee · Boots/trail runners · Hiking socks + extras · Base layer · Fleece · Puffer · Rain jacket · Gloves · Warm + sun hats

Kitchen & misc. Plate, cup & utensils · Two 1L bottles each · Camp towel · Headlamp · Knife/multi-tool · Toiletries · (Optional: poles, chair)

Food & water. ~1.3 gal water per person (6L bag + bottles) · ~1 lb shared no-cook group meal per dad · your own snacks, trail lunch & breakfast

Songbook, Calendar & Gear

The campfire songbook, the cross-grade calendar, and the group cooking-gear list are living resources, linked on the website's Resources page and folded in over time by a Keeper.