



## Where Can I Backpack? *Practical Backpacking Advice*

by: Glenn Roberts



There actually are a number of good places to hike within a few hours of Dayton. Yes, most of them include long hikes through the woods. But, in those woods, there are magical places: unexpectedly beautiful ravines, pine groves, arches and rock shelters, relics from pioneer days (and even ancient Native American cultures), and old growth forests.

The best source of backpacking information on Ohio trails is at [www.backpackohio.com](http://www.backpackohio.com). It includes a downloadable PDF about hiking in Ohio, including weather, wildlife, and such. It also includes links to trail-specific websites and maps. Among them are the Zaleski Backpacking Trail in southeastern Ohio, the Twin Valley Trail near Dayton, and Vesuvius Backpack Trail near Ironton.

A similar website for hiking in Indiana is: <http://www.hoosierhikerscouncil.org/>. It also includes maps and links for such places as the Knobstone Trail and the Deam Wilderness in Hoosier National Forest. However, it's missing one of the prettiest state parks, Shades State Park; in addition to the trail system, the park has a backpack campground that is reached only by foot. You can learn more and download maps at <https://secure.in.gov/dnr/parklake/2970.htm>.

Moving on to Kentucky, you'll find great hiking and backpacking at:

Red River Gorge: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/dbnf/recarea/?recid=39458>

Sheltowee Trace: <http://www.sheltoweetrace.org/> , <http://sheltoweetrace.com/#close>

(Two popular sections of this length-of-Kentucky trail are the Rockcastle Narrows and Cumberland Falls segments.)

Cumberland Gap National Historical Park): <https://www.nps.gov/cuga/index.htm>

Big South Fork National River & Recreational Area: <https://www.nps.gov/biso/index.htm>

Mammoth Cave National Park (Cave City, KY): <https://www.nps.gov/macac/index.htm>

(There's actually a very pretty backcountry area on the ground above the cave system.)

The Appalachian Trail (<http://appalachiantrail.org/>) abounds in shorter segment hikes for those who don't want to hike the full 2,200 length. Among these are:

Shenandoah National Park: <https://www.nps.gov/shen/index.htm>

Great Smoky Mountains National Park: <https://www.nps.gov/grsm/index.htm>

Roan Highlands:

<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/northcarolina/placesweprotect/roan-mountain-highlands.xml>

Grayson Highlands: [http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/grayson-highlands#general\\_information](http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/grayson-highlands#general_information)

There are a number of other places, throughout the eastern U.S. Among our favorites are:

Dolly Sods Wilderness (West Virginia):

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/mnf/recreation/hiking/recarea/?recid=12366&actid=51>

Isle Royale National Park (Lake Superior): <https://www.nps.gov/isro/index.htm>

Laurel Highlands (Pennsylvania): <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks/lhht/>

That barely scratches the surface – and we won't even attempt to list anything west of the Mississippi!

Don't forget that you can simulate a backpacking trip at just about any state park that has a few miles of trail. This is a good way to try new skills (like winter camping) or new equipment; you'll be camping in the public campground, so your car will be at the campsite. (Just because it's there doesn't mean you have to get into it.) If anything goes wrong, you just break camp and drive home. It's also a nice quick getaway when the overwhelming urge to sleep outside for a night or two overwhelms you.

I do this at least once a year, as a springtime shakedown trip to see what kind of shape my gear is in after not being used all winter. I also do this in colder weather, when the park is off-season and there won't be many (if any) other campers. I simply park my car at a campsite, lock it, put on my loaded pack, and go hike for a while. If it's an all-day hike, I'll stop to eat lunch on the trail and filter water as I go. I can practice map and compass skills and off-trail hiking, I can pick out a campsite and set up my tent (just for practice), and generally enjoy myself. When I end up back at the campground, I ignore my car and camp using just what is in my pack. (If I'm trying a new piece of gear, I might have the old piece in the car, just in case the new thing doesn't work.) If I'm staying more than one night, I'll pack everything up the next morning and take another hike, returning to the campground and setting up camp at the end of the day.

Two of the most scenic places for this type of trip are Old Man's Cave (Logan, Ohio) and Shades State Park (Crawfordsville, Indiana.) It's not "real" backpacking, but it's better than sitting at home, wishing I were backpacking.

Glenn Roberts is a Guide for Outdoor Adventure Connection. He is a recreational backpacker; He goes out there to have fun, not to prove anything to anyone. Glenn has led youth trips, was a Scoutmaster and a volunteer for a troubled teens program. Glenn is a gearhead, so don't be afraid to ask him about gear and equipment. Glenn, who is in his mid-60s, provides insight and perspective for older hikers, whether they are just taking up backpacking or looking for ways to continue to participate.