

Let Children Help with Preparations



Planning: When our boys were young, I would gather information about an area we planned to visit (AAA books were marvelous). I'd show them their choices and have them give me their top three to five picks of what or where they wanted to visit. Then we would begin our negotiations between map, money, time, and wants. When the boys were in grade school, we followed this idea as we planned a trip to New Mexico. Both insisted their first choice was to visit the Gila Cliff Dwellings in the Gila Wilderness. I thought it was too far off the route, and difficult because of time constraints. I even regretted allowing them that choice. However, my husband decided to honor their first choice despite our misgivings about all the extra driving it would entail. It proved to be one of our best trips. The days spent camping in the wilderness had many pleasurable surprises—one unexpected one was watching territorial hummingbirds battling around their feeders.

Preparations: We tried to cut the costs of trips—especially long trips—in a number of ways so we could spend money on other things. The boys and I would mix our own trail mix made of nuts, seeds, dried fruit, and whatever else they wanted. Each small daily portion was sealed in a plastic bag, and we packed enough for each person to have one or two allotments per day. These were individualized according to each person's particular taste. Each

person got to choose when he or she ate their individualized snack. It came in handy when someone got hungry with no place to eat.

We also measured each person's individual dry breakfast cereal into a bag we sealed. A cooler kept milk and sandwich fixings fresh, so breakfast was quick and easy. When traveling, we fixed two meals and purchased our third.

When to camp? We camped any time we could get off and since my husband and I were both university teachers, we could go in summer, had about a month at Christmas and then there were spring and fall breaks when they coincided with the boys' school breaks. While the boys were infants and toddlers, we used a small trailer that was basically a bed, a stove and a bathroom. Then we went to tents in combination with our truck camper shell. Still later, as they were about to finish high school, we bought a large travel trailer from my parents. However, once the grandchildren came along, Monty and I got softer and used motels with them. However, with our own sons we camped in all sorts of weather, even when there was ice on everything the next morning. But, we tried to avoid the rain. Probably the worst weather was the snowstorm at the Grand Canyon the night before we were due to backpack to the bottom to camp. The boys were in grade school, so my husband and I carried almost everything. But that was a wonderful and unforgettable trip, especially when we reached the top three days later with the heady feeling that we could conquer anything. Nothing can take away that sense of fulfillment and success.