

Binoculars

Get up close with nature and wildlife!

The Basics about Binoculars

One of the reasons we hike is to view and enjoy nature. But since nobody wants to get too close to a mother bear and her cub or disturb wildlife in general, binoculars provide a great way of getting up close to nature while still keeping your distance.

When considering purchasing binoculars, the first thing you'll probably notice is that they all bear a magnification rating such as 7x35 or 10x42. The first number is the level of magnification. So a distant moose viewed through 7x35 binoculars will appear 7 times larger, but viewed through 10x42 binoculars it would appear 10 times larger. However, a higher number doesn't necessarily mean "better." As the magnification gets larger the field of view becomes smaller, sort of like cropping a photo. Because of the increased magnification the image can also be shakier if the binoculars aren't held steady.

The second number is the size of the objective lens (the lens furthest from your eyes). Basically, the larger the number the more light it lets in and the brighter and clearer the image will be.

For hiking you'll also want to consider weight. If you plan on using them mostly on day hikes, then a larger pair might be just the thing. However, if you're backpacking or trying to keep your pack weight down, you'd probably be better off with a compact pair of binoculars.

You may also want to consider whether the binoculars are waterproof and/or fogproof. Waterproof binoculars will not allow water to enter the binoculars while fogproofing prevents the lenses from fogging up in humid weather.

Using your binoculars

When using binoculars, note the hinge between the two barrels. This hinge allows you to adjust the distance between the eyepieces so that they match the distance between your eyes. You should see one clear image without any dark spots or without seeing two of the same object.

Most binoculars also include an adjustable eyepiece on one barrel. This feature allows a person to adjust for differences in vision for each eye. To adjust the eyepiece, first, using the focus wheel usually found on top and between the barrels, focus on an object and view it only through the barrel without the adjustable eyepiece. Clear? OK, now view it through both eyepieces. Is the image fuzzy? Turn the eyepiece adjustment ring until the object is clear and crisp. Note the number it is on and set it to this number each time you're using these binoculars. This is especially handy when sharing the binoculars with another person.

