

In 1990, my son turned 33 and moved into a garage.



He didn't have a regular job-job. Oh sure, he had time to race his bike. And rock climb. And play that trumpet in jazz bars until who knows when. And you can be sure nothing got in the way of those countless treks. Places I'd never heard of. We've had our moments through the years. But all this (pause) really gets a father wondering.

Then he names Clif Bar after me.

I worry too much.

— Clifford Erickson / father of owner

For more of the Clif Bar story, visit www.clifbar.com (608) CLIF BAR



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OUTDOOR SKILLS

Lightweight Techniques: Facts and Fictions

By Seth Levy

THE TOPIC OF lightweight hiking and backpacking techniques has become a contentious and confusing issue. Here, *American Hiker* sorts through the facts and fictions of this important outdoor skill.

1. Bringing less means I will be less comfortable.

FICTION. Beyond a certain weight, “comfort items” can detract from the hiking experience. The weight of too many creature comforts can reduce the length of time you can hike comfortably, increase the risk of injury, and turn camp into recovery rather than relaxation.

2. Light packs are for day hikes. When I spend the whole weekend in the woods, I have to carry at least 50 pounds.

FICTION. With modern equipment, a two-person tent, a 35-degree sleeping bag, and a moderately sized pack can weigh less than ten pounds combined, and it can be extremely affordable. With good equipment, attention to detail, and some discipline, a weekend load can be less than 30 pounds, while still providing ample comfort and safety. Your local outfitter should be able to answer all your questions about modern, lightweight equipment.

3. Lightweight techniques can have health benefits.

FACT. Hiking is a weight-bearing

activity. Hiking can be an important part of your whole family's health. Unfortunately, the more unnecessary weight you carry, the more you increase the possibility of injury, because you are lifting superfluous weight every time you take a step. A measly ounce, multiplied by thousands of steps, can equal a ton or more by the end of a moderate hike. That extra ton increases the risk of damaging your knees, back, hips, and feet.



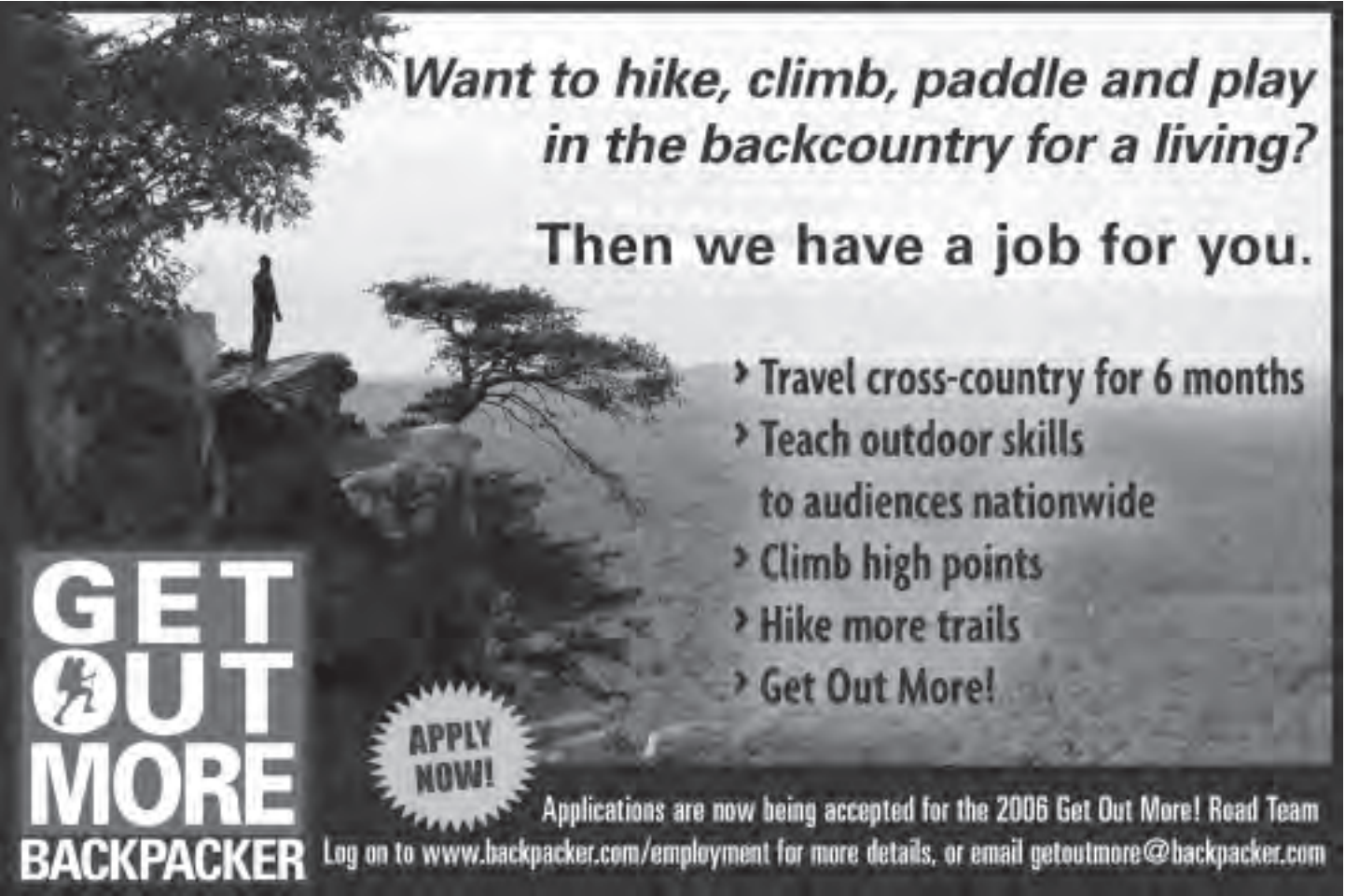
4. Hiking light is dangerous. I have to be prepared for every contingency.

FICTION, with a caveat. While packing light, do not eliminate items essential for safety. Use common sense. If you lighten your pack, eliminate the Dutch oven before you ditch the first-aid supplies. Bring less, but bring the right equipment. Look realistically at the expected contingencies. If it is 80 degrees and you are hiking in Florida, do you need frost-bite remedies and high-altitude medication? Hiking with less means you can avoid the fatigue that causes bad decisions. Hiking light means you can leave an exposed peak fast in a storm, or cover more ground in the event of an emergency.

5. Hiking light is for beginners. I'm a serious mountain hiker. I can handle my 60-pound pack.

FACT AND FICTION. The fact is that many experienced hikers can heft 60

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pounds. The fiction is that one could do so safely and enjoyably. When it comes down to it, hiking is about an enriching and enjoyable experience, not about what you can “endure.”

6. Lightweight gear isn't durable. My old, heavy gear can withstand a thermonuclear bomb, so it's safer.

FICTION. The belief that equipment should be able to survive worst-case scenarios is misleading. Truly durable gear would be made from materials that become prohibitively heavy. Everything breaks someday; as a hiker, you have to figure out your ideal strength-to-weight ratio. Is there a point where an item becomes so heavy that it isn't worth the additional durability? Even this argument is becoming a moot point, as materials such as Dyneema™ are light and stronger than an equal weight of steel.

7. Lightweight equipment is just a fad. Soon, lightweight techniques will fade from popularity.

FICTION. Earl Shaffer, an early Appalachian Trail thru-hiker, carried approximately 20 pounds in 1948. John Muir, a pioneering naturalist, famously exclaimed that he would “throw a loaf of bread and a pound of tea in an old sack and jump over the back fence” sometime in the late 1800s. Since people have explored the glory of nature, they have sought to do so in safety and comfort, which has often meant reducing superfluous weight through lightweight techniques.

We hope these facts and fictions have shown that reducing the amount of weight you carry can make your hike safer and more enjoyable. For more advice on how to hike lighter and safer, contact your local outfitter or SLevy@AmericanHiking.org.

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