

Living with Your Pack

By Ed Talone

SO, YOU'RE STUFFING your backpack for a long hike, and in goes...everything! All the laws of physics are temporarily suspended; the pack weighs nothing until you pick it up.

This is a lesson learned by most backpackers the hard way. It is a necessary one, though, because otherwise you would have no way of figuring out what you need to carry versus what you want. Some items, frying pans for instance, practically decide for you by falling out of, or off of, your pack. Some hikers are tempted to help the process along after a few uphill stretches! Fortunately, a few "shake-down" hikes will eliminate this problem. What you are left with is what you need to carry, plus a few luxury items. For instance, I always carry a small radio on long hikes. Luxury items of a reasonable weight are what keep you going on those long hills. Anything that gets used a lot, though, is a good thing to carry.

With your gear pared down, the next question is where to center the weight you carry. Some people swear you should carry weight high, others low. Actually, there is no one right answer. This is really a function of how you are built and what type of pack you use. Comfort will be your guide.

Organizing Your Stuff

Like weight distribution, how you organize your gear is a personal choice. However, here are a few suggestions:

- ❖ Always keep raingear at, or near, the top of your pack. It is no fun unloading gear in a downpour.
- ❖ If rain is a sure thing and you're

wearing a jacket, try carrying high-energy snacks, or even a sandwich, in your pocket.

Not having to take the pack off will keep you warm, as will the readily available calculator. On an unfamiliar trail, carry a map or guide.

- ❖ Always make sure the readily available, and to drink even in cold
- ❖ Within your pack, remember that the two most crucial items are spare clothes and your sleeping bag. These must be kept dry.
- ❖ For all the other stuff in your pack, including food, zip-lock bags solve most problems. They allow you to shed the weight of food packages and compress your gear, allowing more in less space. Everything will seem more organized, and searching for things that are not loose is easier as well.

Your Pack at Night

When darkness falls, your gear can play tricks on you. All that stuff that you could locate before is now in hiding. Here are some suggestions:

- ❖ Try to keep a light and batteries in the same place on every trip so they can be found easily.
- ❖ Use different colored stuff sacks for easy identification.
- ❖ Put a strip of bright-colored tape on things like wallets and walking sticks. This can save you when leaves cover the ground.

The Pack Cover


Most hikers consider this a "must carry" item. It serves three main purposes. First, it keeps most of the moisture away from your pack (in a heavy




all-day rain, however, some moisture will get in; the best options are to spray on a water repellent or line your pack with a garbage bag). Second, the cover helps gear outside your pack stay put. Finally, if you are hiking in a lot of direct sun, the cover will keep your pack from being destroyed by UV rays.

Once you get into a good routine, the pack will seem like your home. There is no better feeling than walking down a trail knowing that you have everything you need right on your back.


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