

Cutting the Pounds



From your Pack

A guide to dropping pounds from your pack

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Venture Crew 797

Part I. Why go Lightweight?



Mt. Baldy-12,441 Feet-Philmont Scout Ranch-2004

There are many benefits to a lightweight pack.

They Include

- ❖ Faster Hiking
- ❖ Less Stress on Body
- ❖ Enjoy the Trip more
- ❖ Allowing for a longer trip because of the lighter pack
- ❖ So you won't be as sore when you reach your camp for the day
- ❖ Because you can happily and safely

Lightweight backpacking does not require tons of money or time. It just requires self control, some gear modifications, and a new state of mind (How you think about backpacking) . Your first trip with a lighter backpack will feel much better and make the trip more fun. Who would have thought 15 to 20 pounds would change an activity so drastically. You can stop worrying about pain of a heavy pack and enjoy your surroundings. Give it a try!

Part II. Backpacks and Boots-The Important Stuff

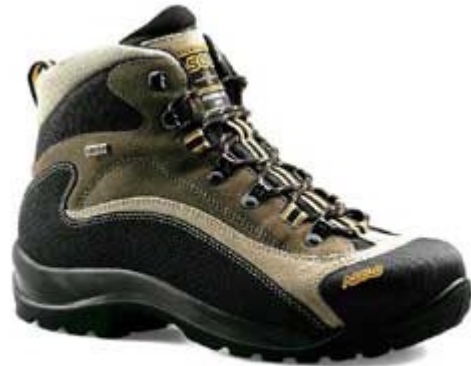


Your backpack is one of the most important pieces of equipment you have for a few simple reasons. The backpack is where you carry all of your weight. The lighter the backpack the lighter your total load. With backpacks you will have to make a decision between features and weight. There are some really nice packs with many cool features, but they are very heavy. One example is a backpack with the Snap off top which turns into a hip pack. Extra weight comes from the extra straps and buckles. This may seem like a small amount of weight, but if your backpack has many of these “Luxury” Features it will add up.

Another key point for choosing a backpack is the amount of space. You will have to decide what the right amount of Cubic inches for your pack (Cubic inches is the measure of space in your pack). If you plan on just doing weekend trips, a small pack will suit you fine. If you want to go on extended expeditions or hike the Appalachian Trail you will need a larger pack.

Also, there is the choice of an Internal or External frame pack. An internal frame has the frame built in. In an internal, the frame is not as rigid as an external frame. The Advantages to an internal frame include more space, easier to carry heavier loads, and also better fit on wearer. Internal frames also have their disadvantages such as lack of cooling in the back area, no area to strap on gear, hard access to gear, and many straps to deal with. The External frame pack has their advantages also, for example the weight is distributed evenly, allows cooling in the back area, the ability to strap gear to the top and bottom, and they usually cost less. Of course, they have disadvantages, including the fact that many people hit their head on the pack frame, and less balance when hiking rough terrain. The choice of Internal or External is yours and yours alone! Compare the pros and cons and try a few out.

Boots



When choosing boots you have many options. I will not list or explain them all. I will try to guide you in the decision making process. One key point to remember is that one pound in a boot is equal to about four pounds on your back. Also, don't get too much boot. If you plan to only hike well maintained trails in summer, you will not need a heavy mountaineering boot.

There are two types of boots we will talk about mainly Light Weight Boots (Including Trail Runners) and Mid-Weight Boots. There are also heavy weight boots but I will not be discussing these, because these are meant for off-trail hiking.

The Lightweight boot is a very good boot for short hikes with good trail. They usually cost less than heavier boots, but be sure to get good features such as breathable and a gusseted tongue (A gusset is extra material on the tongue that keeps moisture out. They are usually a synthetic/leather material and also another feature of lightweight boots is a short break in period. There are also disadvantages too, such as they get wet very quickly, and don't provide the ankle support heavier boots have. Also, lightweight boots usually will wear out faster.

Another Light-Weight option is trail runners. In the past few years many people have switched from Boots to trail runners. Think of trail runners as running shoes with a sturdy sole. Most trail runners resemble an athletic shoe. There are many varieties in trail runners; some have Gore-Tex (Waterproof Breathable Membrane) others are just synthetic materials. Generally trail runners are better for well compacted trails, and are not good for rough trails or rock trails. Trail runners, usually aren't as expensive as regular boots, but they will wear out faster. The Advantages to trail runners are; they are

comfortable, inexpensive, light weight and short break in time. The disadvantages to trail runners are; most are not waterproof, little or no ankle support, and not good for rocky areas. Trail runners are a very good option to consider when selecting boots.

The Medium weight boot is a very versatile boot. It is good for both technical sections and performs well over a long distance. The usual Medium weight boot is leather, with a gusseted tongue. The advantages to a medium weight boot are that they offer much ankle support, and they take a long time to get wet. The main disadvantages of a medium weight boot are that they take a long time to dry when wet, and there is a long break in period. Medium weight boots are the norm for backpacking today. A good pair of medium weight boots should last you a very long time, and will not cost you a fortune.

When trying on boots it is best to do it at the end of the day because your feet swell over the day. Also, bring the socks from home that you plan to wear with the boots. It also helps to try on the boot and take a walk around the store, and be sure that you get the right size boot. If you not sure if the boot is the right size, Ask!

Part III -Tents, Sleeping bags, and Sleeping Pads



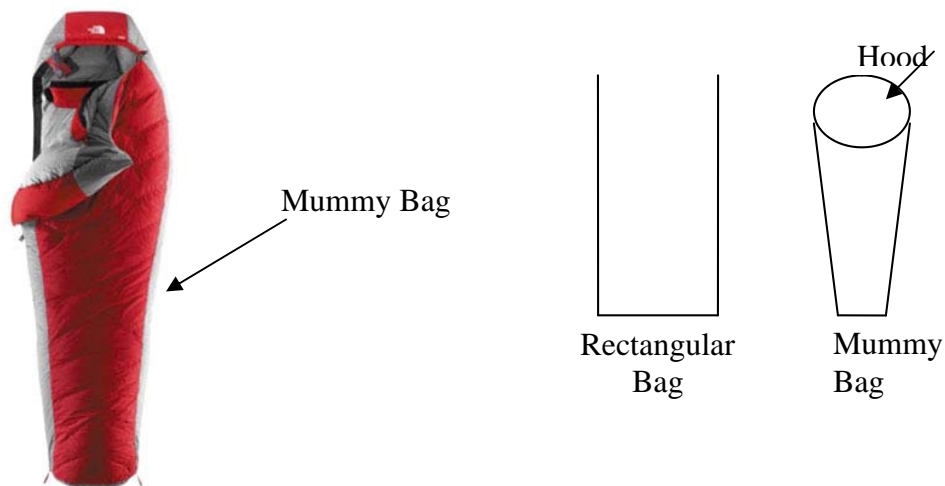
Tents and sleeping bags are very important part of you gear because they will protect you from the elements, but a large amount of weight can be added to your pack if you make the wrong decision. Also sleeping pads can add many temperature degrees to your sleeping comfort, and protect you from the cold hard ground. These can also be really expensive, but with some searching you can find many good low cost items.

Your tent is a very important item, because the tent can protect you from the elements. The tent is usually the heaviest item in your pack, but there are

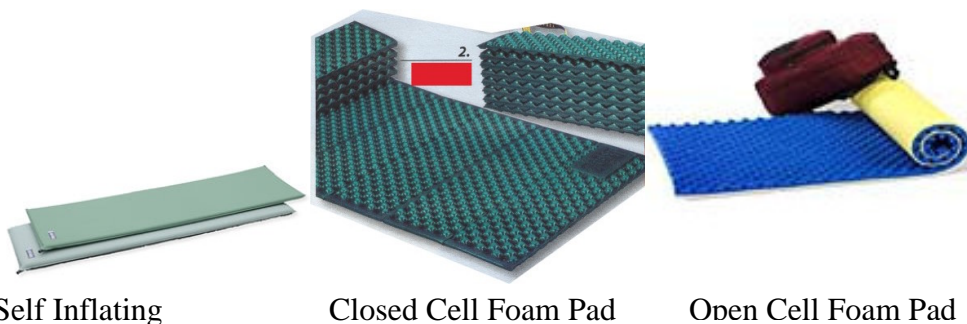
lightweight choices. In tents you can have a 3 season (summer, fall and spring) and 4 seasons (All 4 Seasons). I will only be discussing 3 Season tents. A 3 season tent usually includes one more doors, a vestibule, and a rain fly. The rain fly is usually a waterproof material and in single wall tents it usually a Gor-Tex Material. There are also varying capacity.

Some things to look for in a good light weight tent are tent shape; a dome shape is usually the light option for 2 people, material (Synthetic's such as nylon or Gor-Tex), and weight. Also, some things to consider are tent color, usually a bright pink tent is not a good idea, (at philmont you are required to have natural colors tent), Vestibules, gear lofts are also options to consider when buying a tent. Set-up and tear down time are also important factors as you do not want to waste valuable hiking time taking the tent down. The main thing though when looking for a tent is quality workmanship, waterproof, and light weight.

With Sleeping bags you have many choices. There are many designs; I will focus on the lightest weight one. The mummy bag is widest at the top with a hood and decreases in width towards the feet area. The two main materials are synthetic and down. Synthetic materials such as hollofil and polarguard are a very good for sleeping bags. The main advantages of a synthetic bag, are that they dry quickly and will not get ruined when wet. They are usually cheaper than down bags, but usually heavier. In the past years though there have been many improvements to synthetic bags making them lighter and more compressible. Down or goose down is a popular sleeping bag filler, but come with many bag will suffice but heavier. disadvantages. If the bag gets wet the coating on the goose feathers, become very heavy with slight moisture, and they are very expensive. Let's not forget the advantages Goose down bags are very light, very compressible, and good all around. The best cut for a light weight sleeping bag is Mummy, but if you find that cut uncomfortable a rectangular bag will suffice, but is heavier.



Sleeping pads are very important part of you camping gear because they add many degrees to your sleeping bag and in the case of intense rain will keep you off the wet ground. There are 3 types we will compare. Closed Cell Pads, Open Cell Pads, and self Inflating Pads. Each has its advantages and disadvantages. The closed cell foam pad is your Z-rest type pads which have tiny bubbles put together. The advantages of the closed cell foam are its light weight and durability, and the disadvantages are it must be very thick to be comfortable. The open cell foam pad is like your blue egg carton foam pad you get at Wal-Mart. The only real advantage is the cheap price, and these things become rags when they get wet. I recommend spending \$10 more and buying a Z-rest type pad if you want to spend little money. Now, the Self Inflating Pad, which comes in many versions. A popular and reliable brand is Therm-A-Rest. Some versions are extra thick meant for dump camping and other are very light. They come in 2 Lengths Full and 3/4th. Some people will buy 3/4th to save weight, but personally I would rather carry .5 more pounds and have a full length. The advantages to the Self Inflating pad are; Comfort, different lengths, and good protection from the ground. The main disadvantages are weight, and they can be punctured easily. If you want to be comfortable sleeping go for the Self Inflating pad, if you are looking for a value go for the closed cell foam pad.



Part IV-Food and Other Personals

Food is one of the most important items in my pack, but before you go throwing food into your pack you need to read this. Plan out your meals before you go shopping, and don't plan when you are hungry. Generally, if you are on a short trip you will eat less for your main meals and more snacks. Some people love the freeze dried food greatly, but they can be costly. The soup in a cup where you add boiling water, also the Lipton noodles are very good. These are both lightweight options for food. For snacks, Granola bars are very good, I recommend the nature valley granola bars. They are actual granola bars and not candy bars like other brands.

A stove is a very important tool for cooking. Look for a lightweight stove with a small gas canister. Usually a mixed Butane blend is the best choice fuel, but for long treks especially in Europe kerosene or other liquid fuel is the way to go. When choosing a stove look for a stove that is easy to clean and folds up very small. When choosing cookware think about what you will be cooking. If your meal only requires boiling water a metal cup is a very good low weight alternative.

A first aid kit and water purification are two very important things to always carry. With a first aid kit, it is always better to carry a heavier kit than you want because you do not want to be missing something you need when you have a medical emergency. Adventure Medical sells very good lightweight first aid kits. The best ones are the ones without the *Weiss Advice* Book. As the book is extra weight. For water purification, you have two choices an iodine substance or a pump (Filter). I personally prefer Iodine, I have found with personal experience that polar pure works very well, and it is very cheap and light. It will last you for many years. There is also a pump; a pump is a good idea if you will be getting water from a small creek or small spring. The pump will allow you not to stir up silt. The choice on water purification is a personal preference but Iodine is the lighter alternative.

Part V-Conclusion

The world of lightweight or ultra light backpacking is a dynamic scene. Packs are getting lighter and lighter with the invention of new synthetics. The main thing to remember with Ultra light backpacking that it is more of a state

of mind than just purchasing gear. With less weight on your back you can enjoy the trip more.



VENTURING-BSA

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