Backpacking – Level 2

Backpacking – The Equipment

What equipment do I need to start backpacking?

You don't need too much money and you don't need 95% of what is offered on line—most of the stuff offered online and in outfitters stores is sold to people who like to collect backpacking stuff and think about trips they seldom take—not to real backpackers.

The central value: P-A-C-K L-I-G-H-T. Take less. The lighter the load the happier the trip. Buy the minimum. Borrow stuff until you really get serious about backpacking. Many novices get all excited about a trip and buy too much stuff then have to replace it later. When you are ready to buy, there are three things that will cost you bigger money. These three may even become "lifetime" investments. They are

1. A sleeping bag (the most expensive thing you'll buy—from $150-$600)
2. A pack ($75-$150)
3. A shelter (about $100 for the lightest/best, far more for a whole tent)

Everything else is cheap and easy—a sleeping bag, pack and shelter are the only three you need to borrow or buy for your first trip.

The Big Three

1. Sleeping bag.

Your single greatest expense is a mummy bag. Borrow one for starting and save the following information for buying one later. Buy a good one from the start, this is much smarter and is less costly in the long run. Most people get a 30-40 degree bag. Goose down is the best fill. The higher the number, the better the down (e.g. 900 fill down is the gold standard…600 fill down is cheapest/heaviest). Goose down sleeping bags are a lifetime investment. Polarguard 3D is the next best after down, cheaper but wears out over time, giving less warmth though still weighs the same. **Polarguard II** is acceptable but will wear out quicker and you will get cold as it does not retain the heat. Avoid sleeping bags sold to places like by Dick's Sporting Goods, The Sports Authority and Wal-mart made of **Polarguard** (classic) and ***Holofil***. Down is best to buy, but the most recent generations of synthetics are fine, and only a pound or two more, which for newbees doesn't seem too bad.

The Marmot Lithium® bag is the highest rated by serious backpackers. This bag goes down to zero. It weighs 2# 8oz and is 900-fill down. But that bag is costly and it is beyond the scope of a student purchase. I say buy a good down bag with a high number and you'll be set for life, until then borrow sleeping bags from other people.

SUMMARY: buy goose down and the higher the number the better and borrow until then. (Spend the money here when you are ready. You'll probably spend at least $200 for your bag and as much as $600 or more if you buy the very best.)

2. Pack.

Forget fancy expensive packs—all they do is make it easier for you to carry too-heavy loads. Some packs weigh 8 pounds empty, a good pack weighs about 8 pounds full. Some packs weigh as little as 15 ounces. They cost about $75 to $100. What you want is a small pack that will force you not to take stuff. Look for a pack that has a waist strap as it make it more comfortable to carry and you can pack in up to 20 pounds if needed.

Buy something cheap at about a pound or two. Better yet, use that old frame pack from your parents or friend that weighs 4 pounds then after you've slept out 20 nights and walks 300 miles you'll know for sure what you want. Nothing is worse than buying new equipment and discovering on your hike that you made the wrong choice. Even if your borrowed pack is lousy at least you didn't spend money on it!

ALL packs are uncomfortable. There is no pack in the world that makes carrying 10 pounds 20 miles "comfortable." If you go hiking and complain, "my pack hurts your shoulders" there is probably nothing wrong with your pack at all. Carrying 10 pounds 20 miles will always hurt! All we hope for is a "pack that hurts less."

Summary: Borrow a pack until you can buy a light one.

3. Shelter.

There are two ways to go here. The first is to purchase a small light tent. The tent needs to be around 2 pounds and large enough for you and your gear. Sometimes you can get 2 person tents for backpacking that allow you and your buddy to sleep in. The dual entry tents are best bt sometimes you cannot find them for backpacking.

The second option is a tarp. Yes, a tarp. This is cheap, versatile and in many cases can be dual purpose. Some of the cheapest tarps are available at Farm and Fleet and Fleet Farm. If they get damaged on the trip, just through them away as you did not spend much money on them. The tarp can be placed under you and over, with end ventilation and possibly side ventilation if you do not secure the side where the two ends meet. Check back to Level 1 and the 50' of nylon rope, get the hint now.

The Basics Revisited

On the basics list you are probably wondering about a few of those things and I will go into more detail about those items now.

Flashlight. A tiny little key-chain LED light works fine. In the woods, once your eyes adjust, one of these little ½ ounce lights is all anyone needs

Wallet A little snack-size Zip-loc "wallet" with license a credit card & a cash advance card, some cash. Leave fat leather wallets at home.

Camera A cheap digital camera with maybe a second memory card. Just use the cheapest digital camera offered by Wal-Mart that you can afford to lose.

Bandana Multi-purpose use-for-everything item. Towel, washcloth, sunshade, pot-holder, sweatband, toothbrush.

Toilet paper Carry 1/2 of a roll per week

Plastic Spade To dig a 'cat hole." The point is to get any bowel movements deep enough into the soil than when the downpour of rain comes it does not wash over it and into the nearby creek for future hikers to drink—so use a spade, rock turnover, or your heal to care for this business.

Mosquito repellant 1-2 oz bottle with at least 50% DEET in it—better yet 100%. (Sometimes also a face net @ 1/2 oz.).

Sunscreen & Lip Balm Carry both

Ear plugs (If I have a snoring roommate.)

Bleach 1-2 Oz household bleach to treat water (I use a little Visine® bottle to carry it). Use 2 drops per liter…up to 4 drops if you're really nervous about the water. After treatment let it sit for about a half hour (20 min. minimum). Chlorine is used by cities to purify water. If you wait a half hour to let the chlorine kill the invisible creatures then you can drink it. If you are a fearful person then a filter is the best bet—but not as important as sanitizing your hands often—the research shows filter-users get sick just as much as bleach users (and even as much as the I-don't-use-anything hikers… mostly because of their hands carrying bacteria and viruses—not due to the water they drink.

Water Filter There are a few different brands on the market. You will need to look into how many gallons can the filter filter before it needs to be changed, what does the filter connect to, how fast does the filter work and how easy is it to use.

Knife Carry a small utility knife.

Lighter The tiny mini-lighter is best and lightest option.

Baby Powder **S**tart a long hike with 2-3 oz. baby powder for the first week to powder your feet every hour to prevent blisters. Stop every hour, take off your shoes and air out your feet and changing your socks, letting the other pair hang out to dry on your pack the next hour is what really does it not the powder. Baby powdering is the excuse to do all that.

Tape Take a few feet of Duct tape or adhesive tape per week to tape up my "hot spots" where a blister is developing. A bit of prevention before blisters develop is worth pounds of curing after. As soon as you feel tenderness STOP and tape the hot spot. Always. Never fail!

CLOTHES FOR WEARING

Tee shirt Wear a non-cotton Starter® soccer shirt. Just don't wear cotton unless you are hiking in the desert or like a clammy damp feeling. You could also wear a simple short sleeved regular (non-cotton) shirt.

Shorts/pants Wear a cheap pair of nylon running shorts. Running shorts with pockets work the best. Wearing a lightweight pair of full-length "cargo pants" is always an option and some of them come in at 6 oz. Forget cotton or jeans.

Hat Baseball hat or floppy hat in the woods, Stocking cap in the cold. When above the timberline or in the desert where the sun is a problem, wear a wide floppy hat (sometimes straw, sometimes cloth) that protects the ears from the sun.

Socks Wear <u>two</u> pairs of thin socks on each foot. Two pair of thin socks dry out faster on the pack between changes than one thick pair. Use non-cotton liners. In the cold or in rainy territory Smartwool® socks or equivalent work out the best. They are expensive.

Sneakers Any sneakers you feel comfortable in is fine. Find comfortable sneakers and break them in with 100 miles before your big hike. <u>Here's the rule</u>: use a sneaker that makes your foot feel good and one that has some lugs on the sole. If you're hiking less than 300 miles just go in your old sneakers and buy nothing new as far as shoes go. If you carry a gigantic pack or have really weak ankles you might need heavier "boots" like hunters wear but you'll find few of them on serious backpackers now. If you don't sprain your ankles often, and you will be carrying a light pack, sneakers are the best bet for backpacking. Bottom line: for a short hike use comfortable sneakers you already own. For a longer hike buy sneaks ½ or a full size larger and break them in with 100 miles. (your feet swell ½ size or more after 100 miles—hence the larger size for longer hikes)

Eating:

No-cook Food Why cook food while hiking. Go no-cook and love it. For a short hike of a week or less I just gather together as much "junk food" as I'll need and pack it away for a delightful week of munching, crunching (and trading with others.) Backpacking is mostly walking not keeping house. On long hikes carry "Power Shakes" as a primary staple. Drink 2-3 a day.

The "PowerShakes" recipe is:

a) enough dry milk to make 1 Qt;
b) a scoop of Whey protein powder (sometimes two);
c)a few tablespoons of Nesquik for flavoring—that's it!

This recipe makes one liter of cold delicious drink, just put the mixture in cold water & shake up then drink it.

Three PowerShakes a day are about 1500 calories more than half the diet—the rest of my diet I get from munching at every break on the other stuff: dry cereal, Fritos, candy bars, breakfast bars, nuts, raisins, coconut, pop tarts, tortillas, peanut butter, , jelly, cheese, and pepperoni.

If you want to cook start cooking on your tenth backpacking trip. If you're starting out go simple at first. No-cook saves time, fuss, and all kinds of weight in your pack.

Water containers You need 2 one-liter Gatorade® bottles or wide mouth coke bottles, maybe three at the most. Nalgene containers are expensive but have their palce as you can put boiling water in them.

Spoon Cook or no-cook, take a spoon and a second one for when you break the first. Stick a box of crackers in a plastic bag and crush them before carrying them on the trail—they get crushed anyway so you just beat the pack to it and crush them yourself. Then for snacks you get out several of these bags and eat them with the spoon—discovering what they are by taste if not sight. Using your fingers invites the transfer of virus and bacteria to your food and mouth.

Food Take about 1 pound of food per day, no more. Younger people sometimes take 1 ½ pounds a day and if the hiker has absolutely zero "stored fat" something two pounds per day. It all depends on how much "spare food" you already carry around your waist. The primary thing to remember about food and backpacking is "*food is fuel*."

Total Weight

The pack including all the above (excluding food/water) weighs about 5-6 pounds. That sounds light—but consider this. If you have seven days to make it to the next town/re-supply point I've got to add seven pounds of food to that—now I'm 14 pounds and if I'm starting out in the morning and the first water is a half-day away I'll be adding 2 liters of water (4 pounds) to that and presto, now my pack weighs 15 pounds. A pack should never weigh more than 20 pounds.

The pack is a self-correctly weight load. The more days in to the hike, the lighter it gets!

Other stuff some take

Underwear You'll want some that wicks away moisture. There is running underwear that wicks moisture away that works real well.

Flip-Flops / Sandals Many hikers carry them, especially those who wear heavier hiking shoes—to give their feet a chance to rest at night or for a quick trip to the bathroom. Another advantage of sandals is for river crossings--otherwise you get wet feet and have to "walk them dry" the rest of the day.

Walking Sticks Get a pair of lightweight adjustable walking sticks. You don't need them as much if you go light enough. However, if you carry more than 20 pounds, have weak ankles, or bad knees, or are walking in the treeless desert and need them for tent poles they are a wonderful addition. Some folk swear by them.

Backpacking Level 2 Requirements

1 – What do you look for in a sleeping bag?
2 – What do you look for in a backpack?
3 – What do you look for in a shelter?
4 – Why would you bring sandals?
5 – How do you take care of your feet while backpacking?
6 – Why would you use a spoon to eat dry snack while backpacking?