

**Some Thoughts on Hiking Gear**  
**for a week-long hike at moderate temperatures**  
**Bill Menke, February 2020**

**Backpack.** I've never been able to make do with a backpack with a capacity less than about 80-liters on multi-day trips, when I need to carry a tent, sleeping bag, cooking kit and food, water and spare clothes. This is true, even though I try to economize on weight in a variety of ways. I prefer backpacks without too many frills. A pack with just one main compartment with an opening at the top, a zippered pocket one on the top flap and two opened pockets on the side for water bottles is fine. Too many pockets and I have trouble keeping track of things.

**Tent.** I've tried all sorts of single-person tents. I find ones that are long, narrow and high work best for me – long, because I'm a tall guy; high, so I can sit up-right when I need to, and narrow, to save on weight. I've used both single-walled tents and ones with flies. My experiences with both types are mostly good, but I had both types suddenly begin to leak on a rainy night (which is really unpleasant). The ones that failed were old tents; I suppose that I should have replaced them sooner. I don't use the stuff sack that comes with the tent, but instead just crudely fold the tent and put it at the bottom of my pack. That really speeds up deploying it in the evening and packing it back up in the morning. Furthermore, it puts less stress on the tent fabric. I do use the smaller sacks that come with the poles and stakes, but put them in the backpack separately, standing the poles up against the side wall of the pack. I usually make do with only five stakes; if my campsite is windy, I weight the tent down with rocks. I usually pack a "footprint" for the tent (a tarp a little smaller than the floor of the tent that prevents the bottom from getting damp).

**Sleeping Pad.** I've used both ultralight-inflatable sleeping pads and fan-folding foam pads. I find the inflatable type more comfortable but the foam type easier to deploy and pack up – and more reliable. I've had inflatable pads spring leaks, and though the leak can usually be patched, dealing with such a problem in the middle of the night really is tedious. A disadvantage of a foam pad is that it is so big that it needs to be tied to the outside of the pack, rather than kept inside it. That position, however, can be used to advantage during the day, because the pad then can quickly be removed during the course of the day and used for sitting.

**Sleeping Bag.** I rarely use the stuff sack that comes with the sleeping bag, because it is neither waterproof nor easy to stuff, but instead prefer a large dry bag that really seals and can hold both sleeping bag and dry clothes. The trick to quick packing-up is to put the empty bag in the pack and then stuff it full, rather than vice versa. I always err on the side of caution and take a bag that might be too warm, not one that might be too cold. Extremes of temperature are pretty normal to encounter while hiking, especially in dry climates and at high altitudes. On many of my hikes, toasty-warm days have faded into cold nights followed by morning frost! You can always sleep under, as contrasted to in, your sleeping bag when the weather is hotter than you anticipated. When its colder, you must resort to putting on every layer of your clothes and, sometimes, spreading your raincoat, plastic garbage bags, etc. on top of the bag. Usually, I use a sleeping bag with a synthetic fiber filling, because they don't lose their insulating qualities when wet

nearly as much as does down. I reserve my down bag for trips where the chances of rain are very low, like in deserts and or when the weather is well-below freezing. I use a dry bag stuffed with clothes as a pillow.

**Dry Bags.** In addition to the big dry bag for my tent, I carry several smaller ones: one for small clothing items like socks; one for small accessories like headlamp and batteries; and one for food. They help me stay organized and avoid losing gear, and they keep everything dry. For that reason, I rarely bother to pack a waterproof cover for the backpack.

**Hats.** In the summer, I always bring a wide-brim hat to keep the sun off of my head and out of my eyes. A chin-strap is a must, for a hat is easily blown away by a gust of wind. Fabric hats are especially handy in hot dry weather, for dousing them with water (if it's available) produces a cooling effect. In the winter, I use a tight-fitting pull-over woolen cap and wear sunglasses. In both summer and winter, I also carry a lightweight balaclava, for they keep the head, face and neck warm even in very cold and windy conditions.

**Gloves.** A light pair of gloves comes in handy even in the summer, and can prevent sunburn on the tops of the hands during the day, and keep your hands warm on cold nights.

**Raincoat.** No matter how I try to time my hikes, studying weather reports, I always encounter some wet weather and need some kind of raincoat. While one can make do with a small tarp or even a plastic garbage bag, a light raincoat is preferable. In windy weather you must wear the rain coat (in which case your pack will get wet), but during a calm rain you can put the hood over your head but sling the unzipped coat over your shoulders and the park. I don't usually wear rain pants, especially in light rain, preferring just to let my legs get wet. But I usually take them, anyway, just in case I really encounter an extended downpour.

**Water.** I need to have at least three liters of water, and preferably four, when I arrive at a campsite, in order to make dinner, have a little to drink during the night, and make the next morning's breakfast. Consequently, unless I'm camped near a stream or lake where I can get water as needed, I need to have the capacity to carry that amount of water to my campsite. I pack two one-liter camping bottles – the hard-shelled, wide-mouth kind – and also an ordinary two-liter plastic soda bottle. During the day, as long as water isn't scarce, I just fill one of the camping bottles and tie the empty soda bottle to the back of the pack. But I fill everything at the last watering spot before reaching camp. I filter all the water with a hiker's pump-action water purifier (an operation that requires at least one wide-mouth bottle, for the purifier is designed to work with it).

**Kitchen.** Hot food and drink really invigorate me, especially when the weather is cool. I almost always take a camping stove, usually the kind that can be attached to a isobutane cannister and lit up in a few seconds with a fire-starter. (I always take two fire-starters and store them separately, since the ability to make fire is so important). In order to save weight, I make do with a very minimalist kitchen: two one-liter titanium pots with lids, one of which seconds as a cup, a small titanium plate, a small square of stiff plastic that I can use as a cutting board, a metal spoon and a camping knife. I drink hot tea and carry individually-wrapped tea bags for that purpose. My kitchen also includes small bottles of salt, pepper, dishwashing detergent and cooking oil. In

cold weather, I will sometimes heat water, put it in one of my camping bottles, and use it to warm my sleeping bag at night, or my shoes in the morning.

**Headlamp.** A headlamp is much easier to use than a traditional flashlight. I always wear one slung around my neck at night, but I don't turn it on very much. When it's dark, I prefer to be sleeping (or at least lying in my sleeping bag, relaxing). I usually pack an extra set of batteries – just in case.

**Boots and Gaiters.** I only buy waterproof boots and pay careful attention to the soles, which need to be made of a tough material like Vibram and have wide treads. I have worn both high and low hiking boots over the years and find that I like the low type best. However, I usually pack ankle gaiters and wear them when the trail proves soggy. However, in really wet conditions, and especially when I am constantly fording small streams, *nothing* will keep my feet dry. I just reconcile myself to their being wet. Water-soaked hiking boots take about ten miles of hiking to dry out on a sunny day. In the winter, when the temperature is consistently below freezing, I prefer snow boots with removable felt liners to hiking boots. The great advantage of the liners is that they can be kept inside the sleeping bag at night, to warm up and dry out.

**Hiking Poles.** I don't always use poles, but I do take them on long hikes, because they reduce the strain on one's legs by allowing the arms to assist in locomotion. They also are effective in steep terrain, helping one to maintain one's balance – which is especially important when carrying a heavy pack.

**Layered Clothing.** I practice the layered approach to staying warm. The idea is to put on layers when one is cold and take the off when one is hot. Even in cold weather, I will wear only a fleece jacket, and not a coat, but under it I will wear several fleece hiking shirts, sometimes as many as four if the temperature is well-below freezing. In really cold weather, I will also wear one or two pairs of long johns.

**One Change of Clothing.** An easy way to save weight is to cut down on changes of clothing. I take only one change of pants – I figure that's the minimum for safety, since the one I'm wearing might tear. I take as many long-sleeved shirts as I think I will need layers, so the least-worn shirts count as spares. I take only one short-sleeved hiking shirt, the quick-dry type that easily can be rinsed out. I take one change of underwear and two changes of socks and wash the dirty ones whenever the opportunity arises.

**Food.** Food choices can be more varied in cool weather than in hot, because of the natural refrigeration! I don't use specialized camping foods, just food from supermarkets. Here are some foods that are very reliable: fresh vegetables like onions, bell peppers, celery and carrots; sun-dried tomatoes, hard cheese, preferably vacuum-packed in plastic; Hard salami, also preferably vacuum-packed; Beef jerky; eggs in a plastic carton, pre-packaged mac & cheese (but you will need to add cooking oil or butter, carried in a small plastic bottle); couscous, grits, macaroni, rice (but instead of boiling them, add boiling water and let sit in pot for a half hour, covered with a spare shirt); tuna fish and salmon in plastic pouches, granola, instant oatmeal, raisins and other dried fruit nuts, chocolate bars. Don't stint on calories when you're hiking; your burning through two or three times the number as when you're at home. And remember

that even small bits of vegetables or salami to a pasta can really improve its flavor – and make it healthier, too!

**Beverages.** Tea bags, packets of hot chocolate and Gatorade powder in packets work for me. Real coffee is too heavy and too hard to make, and I find the instant kind insipid.

**Map and Magnetic Compass.** Sure, cell phones and handheld GPS devices can aid in navigation, but its much easier to plan – and follow – a route using a paper map. And a compass is still the most fool-proof way of keeping track of which way you're going.

**Power.** Keeping rechargeable devices powered during a hike is a challenge. I've tried bringing rechargeable power packs, but find that they do not have enough capacity to justify their weight. I've tried solar panels, but though they can be useful during an extended stay at a campsite, orienting them so that they get enough sun exposure during a hike is really challenging. So, insofar as I can, I use devices that run off of alkaline AA batteries, which (in contrast to lithium batteries) are cheap and transportable by plane. While cameras, GPS units and headlamps that use AA's are readily available, the same is not true for cell phones. However, AA-powered cell phone power packs *are* widely available and work passably well, giving about one recharge per set of batteries. One recharge, together with using the lowest power setting of the phone, usually gets me through a week.

**Small Handy Things:** I don't take them all on any one trip, but duct tape, Leatherman tool, magnifying glass, notebook and pencil, small tarp, twenty-five feet of paracord.

**Personal.** I usually pack a half-used roll of toilet paper in its own Ziplock plastic bag. Women should consider whether they may need tampons and other sanitary supplies. I take meds, so I carefully count out the pills, to ensure that I don't run out, and keep them in one of the little waterproof metal pill boxes that a widely available at pharmacies. I take a toothbrush and a small tube of toothpaste and a comb for my hair. I just use the detergent from my kitchen when I need to wash and don't take hand soap or shampoo. I don't bother to shave; in fact, I view the bristle as a form of natural insect netting (though if bugs are likely to be a problem, I recommend taking a bug net that goes over one's head and face).

## Checklist

### Carrying:

- Backpack (internal frame, 80-liters)
- Dry Bags (1 20-to-30-liters, 3 10-14 liters)
- Bottles (2 one-liter, hard-shelled, wide-mouth)
- Bottle (two-liter plastic soda bottle)

### Sleeping:

- Tent (with poles and at least five stakes)
- Tent Footprint (optional)
- Sleeping Pad (Foam fan-fold type)
- Sleeping Bag (synthetic insulation)

### Clothes

- Fleece jacket
- Raincoat Coat
- Rain Pants (optional)
- Pants (2, including the one you're wearing)
- Shirts (long-sleeved hiking, 2, including the one you're wearing)
- Shirts (short-sleeved hiking, 1)
- Fleece shirts or light sweaters (2, including the one you're wearing)
- Underwear (quick-dry, 2, including the one you're wearing)
- Long johns (optional)
- Wide-brimmed Hat (with chin strap)
- Wool Hat
- Balaclava
- Gloves (light, optional)
- Hiking boots
- Socks (3 pair)

Ankle gaiters (optional)

## Kitchen

Camping stove (that uses isobutane cannister fuel)

Fuel cannisters (1 or 2 450-gm cannisters)

Fire-starter (2, and keep them separate so not to lose both!)

pump-action water purifier

two one-liter titanium pots with lids

titanium plate

cutting board (or just a small square of stiff plastic)

metal spoon

camping knife (folding, with 3.9-inch blade)

Dishwashing detergent, in 4-oz bottle

Salt, in 1-oz bottle

Pepper, in 1-oz bottle

Butter, in 4-oz bottle

Cooking oil, in 8-oz bottle

Plastic garbage bags (2)

## Gear

Duct tape (50 feet)

paracord (25 feet)

Headlamp (with one set of spare batteries)

Hiking Pole (one or two, optional)

Map (waterproof, if possible) and Magnetic Compass

Sunglasses (optional)

Camera (powered by AA's, optional)

Cell Phone (optional)

Cell-phone charger (powered by AA's, optional)

Handheld GPS (powered by AA's, optional)

AA batteries (at least 8, optional)

Leatherman tool (optional)

magnifying glass (optional)

notebook and pencil (optional)

Food (count your number of meals carefully; don't stint on calories)

Meats: Hard salami (preferably vacuum-packed), beef jerky

Vegetables: Onions, bell peppers, celery and carrots, sun-dried tomatoes

Cheese: (preferably vacuum-packed, hard cheeses work best)

Eggs (in a plastic carton, and in a plastic bag, just in case)

Fish: tuna and salmon (in plastic pouches)

Pasta: couscous, grits, macaroni, rice

Prepared packets: Mac & cheese, mashed potatoes, flavored oatmeal

Snacks: raisins and other dried fruit, nuts, chocolate bars.

Beverages: Tea bags, hot chocolate packets, Gatorade powder, instant coffee

Personal

Toilet paper (1 roll, in a plastic bag)

Tampons and sanitary supplies

Toothbrush and toothpaste

Sunscreen

Insect Repellant

Bug net for head

Meds (in waterproof pill box)

Comb or hairbrush (optional)