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What's In Your Hiking Pack?

By Chuck Fitzgerald

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by: **Chuck Fitzgerald**

Every time I leave the pavement, I take along my trusty hiking pack - even if I have no intention of hiking. Doing this has become a habit rather than a conscious decision. My pack goes with me when a hike, camp, hunt, fish, bird watch and even when I drive out of town. I've been a boy scout and a United States Marine so I suppose I have learned to be prepared for almost anything. My pack is full of items I hope I will never need.

What's in Your Hiking Pack? As an outdoor enthusiast, you have complete control over what you carry or what stays in the car - such as a cell phone, do you carry one? I wouldn't dare go in the backcountry without all of the items listed below as "Highly Recommend." What's in My Hiking Pack? Here is my list split into two categories with the weight of each item in ounces:

Highly Recommend: Cell Phone (5 ounces), First-Aid Kit (9), Flashlight (4), Food – Beef Jerky (4), Insect Repellent (3), Map & Compass (4), Multi-Tool (9), Pack (24), Signal Mirror (1), Spare Vehicle Key (1), Sunglasses & Sunscreen (2), Water, Waterproof matches (1), Waterproof windbreaker (24), Whistle (1). Total weight: 5 pounds 12 ounces, not including water.

Nice to Have: Bandana (1), Binoculars (12), Cash & ID (1), Disposable Camera (4), Emergency Blanket (1), Extra Batteries (4), GPS Unit (10), Hand warmers (1), Hunting knife (8), Lighter (1), Lip Balm (1), Mini-Umbrella (10), Paper & Pen (1), Rangefinder (8), Road Flare (4), 12 feet of rope (2), Saw (7), Toilet Paper (1), Two-Way Radio (7), Work Gloves (2). Total weight: 5 pounds 2 ounces.

The total weight of my hiking pack not counting water, is 10 pounds 14 ounces. My pack has a shoulder harness system that takes the weight off of my lower back and distributes it evenly across my shoulders and upper back. I hardly notice my pack when I'm wearing it. One last point, if you carry something - make sure you know how to use it.

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We've all heard quotes about being prepared, such as "Chance favors the prepared mind." - Louis Pasteur and "The will to win is important, but the will to prepare is vital." - Joe Paterno and "Chance fights ever on the side of the prudent." - Euripides. I suggest carrying a well thought out pack is a good habit and a good outdoor life-skill. One day it may save a family member, an outdoor companion or even you.

Plan ahead before you venture into our backcountry, even if you plan to be gone only an hour or two. It makes good sense. With just this small amount of planning you'll get the most out of your backcountry experiences. Use this information and you'll Get It Right The First Time.

Get Outdoors!

Chuck Fitzgerald is the President of Arizona based BackCountry Toys, an online store providing backcountry specialty gear and educational information for outdoor enthusiasts. Visit

to receive the free newsletter "FreshAir" or call (800) 316-9055.

Get Set For That Hiking Vacation

By Eve Sands

When it comes to adventure, fun and holidays, people usually get excited about hiking, trekking and similar activities. Hiking vacations will give you a break from your regular mundane schedules. Hiking is a perfect stress-buster activity, and the options of adventurous to serene settings are more than enough to refresh you.

It is important to plan ahead and decide on a schedule for your hiking vacation before you embark on one. Seasonal aspects play a vital role in choosing your hiking trip. Different regions have different weather conditions, and desirable destinations may be closed or otherwise not desirable at certain times of year. So check if the destination that you have chosen has suitable conditions for hiking and what specific hiking gear and supplies are appropriate. You'll also want to note the most popular times for your hiking destination in order to ensure reservations well ahead of time.

Hiking vacations and trekking are not recommended as impromptu adventures. If you wait until the last minute then you are likely to have mishaps during your hiking vacation due to poor preparation. If it is a family hiking trip then it is even more important to ensure all hikers are properly outfitted, accommodations, gear, provisions and proper clothing such as hiking boots are appropriate for all. For a hiking vacation, you can't pack the same way you pack for general vacations. Proper hiking equipment, basic first aid and maps/GPS is a must. The most common equipment needed for your hiking vacation is hiking boots or good hiking shoes, a backpack and camping gear.

You can select your hiking boots from:

§ Day hiking (light-weight boots) § Backpacking/hiking (mid-weight boots), and § Extended

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backpacking (mountaineering boots)

Waterproofing of boots is preferable during a trekking trip where there are ongoing possibilities of water exposure. There are hiking gear and trekking equipment packages available in the market in which you will not miss any of them. Remember that all hiking trails are not created equal, so ensure that hiking routes and trails are appropriate for the hiking experience and fitness of the hikers. Make sure that appropriate foods and water are supplied while hiking. Maps are an important element used in hiking trips that many people over-look. Maps or GPS devices offer a directional guideline for your trip that will provide a degree of safety and security.

A few backpacking tips will make your trip safe yet adventurous. Keep lighter weight items at the bottom and the heavier ones at the top during backpacking. It is a method to balance your centre of gravity. You can adjust the weight according to height and inclination. Keep a checklist of the items that you pack. Small flashlight, compass and earplugs should be included with other equipments. Buy a good quality backpack that should be able to endure heavy weights and general wear and tear. Ballistic nylon backpacks that have padded and adjustable hip belts are better. The other items will include fuel and cooking utensils for over-night hikes and other personal items (filter, sunscreen, mosquito repellent and camera).

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