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Lightweight Backpacking 101

Backpacking and Hiking documents
Written by Paul "Mags" Magnanti
Monday, 20 February 2006

Sick of being a pack mule? Think you need 30 pounds of stuff for a weekend backpacking trip? Traditional backpacker who wants to lighten up? Then this doc is for you! Lightening up does not have to be expensive or painful!



Lightweight Backpacking 101

“Tis a gift to be simple. Tis a gift to be free.” --Shaker motto

My grandmother is a great cook. Though she is older now and does not cook nearly as much as used to, the Sunday dinners she cooked growing up will always live on in my mind. The equipment she used would make a Martha Stewart wannabe sneer. There were no finely crafted mahogany pepper crackers. No stainless steel garlic presses. No imported cheese tongs. Just few spoons, a good knife, some pots and pans. Yet the food Grandma cooked was delicious and would cost you \$20 a plate at those restaurants that specialize in “Rustic Style Italian Cooking”.

In the same way you don't need a lot to enjoy the wilderness. Backpacking is a past time that is about simplicity. Getting away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Breaking down life into the basic necessities. Not needing the latest equipment to enjoy the beauty around us.

Why is it then that a past time dedicated to simplicity has become increasingly more complex? Pick up an issue of Backpacker or Outside Magazine. What do you see? Ads saying we need this pack with these features to have an enjoyable wilderness experience. Without this jacket, we will get wet and die of hypothermia. If we do not use this stove, we will not be able to cook our dinner efficiently. As a friend of mine said **“Pack weight is a factor of fear”**. These ads try to make us scared of the outdoors and more gear is packed then needed because of fear. Gear has replaced knowledge and enjoyment of the outdoors.

In the backpacking world, there has been an underground revolution of sorts. Hikers have again realized that they do not need to have the latest and greatest gear to enjoy the wilderness. That gear that is burly enough for Everest is overkill for most of their needs. That a stove made from recycle bin material will boil water for Ramen just as well as a stove that weighs and costs much more.

Backpacking is about simplicity. With lightweight gear, backpacking can be simple again. And with that simplicity, backpacking is no longer a burden to endure but a way to enjoy the wilderness.

About Lightweight Backpacking 101

As the title of the document implies, it is for those who have done traditional backpacking and want to lighten up their weight. If you are new to backpacking, you may to look at the **beginners' backpacking primer**.

The way lightening up will be demonstrated is what I call the **“happy medium”**. A way to get base pack weight (your gear in the pack, minus food and water) to under 20 pounds. It is not the least expensive or the most expensive gear and it is the not lightest or the heaviest gear. It is not for the beginner backpacker and it is not for the person who wants to hike 20 miles (or more) a day in the back country. It is for the average backpacker who sticks mainly to trails and three-season backpacking. In short, it is a document that will let the Joe or Jane Average backpacker who is curious about lightweight backpacking examine their current way of backpacking and find a way that still lets them be comfortable – comfortable in camp, comfortable while hiking, comfortable in all kinds of different situations.

You can go lighter than what you are – if you are willing to pare down more gear, spend more money on gear, or learn to sew your own. But for now, better to do some pretty painless steps to get down to a more comfortable level.

This doc just touches upon some ways of lightening your load. As with most outdoor pursuits, there is no right way of doing things. This doc is not meant to say that my way is the best way, but rather to get you looking at your gear and thinking about what you really need. Not everyone thinks a tarp is the best shelter, but most everyone can agree that a four season mountaineering tent is overkill for the Indian Peaks in August. It should also be noted that this document covers lightweight backpacking techniques for three-season (late Spring to early Fall) use. Winter backpacking is another ball of wax completely!

Finally, the goal of lightweight backpacking is not to be an extremist but to take only gear that meets your own personal comfort and safety level. As you backpack more those levels may adjust. Or not. Don't have to be as extreme as some, but try to find some lighter weight methods that work for you. Above all else: Have fun!

Myths of Lightweight Backpacking

Myth #1: Lightweight backpacking is new. The old techniques seemed to work fine, why should I change?

Lightweight backpacking is not new to say the least. Consider the gear used in the 1970's. A Kelty External Frame pack weighed three pounds. Down bags were popular and weighed an average of 2 lbs. Thermarest? What's that? They used foam pads that weighed under a pound. Compare this "outdated" gear to a Dana Designs Terraplane that weigh 7 lbs, a Cat's Meow at 3 lbs and a standard Thermarest at 2 lbs 11 oz!

Myth #2: I will be cold, wet and uncomfortable!

Lightweight backpacking is not about sacrificing safety for weight. It is about paring down gear to what is needed for safety and comfort. No more. No less. The first step though is letting go of what you are supposed to need and taking what you really need!

Myth #3: Lightweight gear costs too much!

Though there has been a surge of mainstream manufacturers making lightweight and expensive (and not so lightweight and still expensive) gear in the past few years, most lightweight gear can be bought cheaply from small makers of gear, made by yourself or bought off the shelf from common "non-backpacking" items. Many people are finding a fifty-cent stove does the job of a \$60 stove.

Myth #4 But I don't mind carrying all that gear. I like to be comfortable in camp!

Being comfortable while hiking is a wonderful feeling. No achy back, knees or shoulders. You come into camp refreshed and have the energy to talk to your friends. Or you can hike longer if you want to because you are not so tired. I tend to be more comfortable in camp when I am not exhausted. But I am also lazy and a bit of wimp. I don't like carrying any more gear than I have to.

THE BIG THREE –Sleeping Bags, Shelter, Pack

The three items that can make a load heavy and burdensome or light and easy are the sleeping bag, the shelter and the backpack. A good rule of thumb for the "big three" is to have them weigh **LESS THAN TEN POUNDS TOTAL**. If you can save weight here, you are doing well!

SLEEPING BAGS

I am a big proponent of down bags. The warmth to weight ratio is incredible. Down bags compress small, weigh less and last longer than synthetics. In the dry climate we have such in Colorado, the issue of a sleeping bag becoming wet is less than back East or in the Pacific Northwest. It is always a good idea to place your sleeping bag in a stuff-sack lined with a garbage bag. A down bag typically will weigh a pound (or more) less than a synthetic bag.

A good sleeping bag is the one area where it really pays the best you can afford. A synthetic bag not only heavier and bulkier, but also does not last nearly as long as a down bag. Synthetics, despite the temperature rating, are usually colder than a down bag, too.

If you are on a budget, the Campmor 20F down bag weighs 2 lbs, 4 oz. Compare this bag to a Sierra Designs Adventure bag. With Polarguard filling, the bag weighs 3 lbs, 5 oz. An 18 oz weight difference. Ouch! If you have some extra funds, the REI Sub-kilo is one the best bags for the money. A hair over 2 lbs, water resistant shell, 775 fill power and I have seen it on sale for \$170 (normally \$220). A very good bag for the price.

SHELTER

Tarps are the most versatile and lightweight shelter. But someone new to lightweight backpacking is usually not quite ready to go that step. Luckily, many cottage gear manufacturers are “tarp-tents” that are modified tarps that set up tent-like. These tarp-tents weigh in at just over two pounds for a two-person tent. Compare these tarp tents to a “lightweight” tent, the North Face Slickrock at 4 lbs 9 oz. Both shelters keep the rain and the insects out. Both are weatherproof. One weighs 25 oz more!

PACKS

Backpacks are an item that most hikers tend to have on the large side. Typically, stores sell packs that are too large for most hikers needs. A pack is like a vacuum, the larger it is, the more gear you tend to put in....the more your pack will weigh.

The simplest solution is purchase a smaller pack. For most weekenders, a 3500 Cubic Inch (CI) pack is sufficient. Enough for all the food and gear needed for the weekend journey. If you are packing light, packing food for up to ten days is possible as well. (Honest! :))

Another alternative is again the small manufacturers who make gear out of SilNylon or other material. SilNylon is very light material that is also highly water resistant. Most of these light packs make use of a foam pad acting as a stay. Not only do you cut down on weight on the pack because you are not using metal for stays, but also by using a foam pad, you are saving weight on your sleeping pad.

For a quick comparison, take the *Dana Designs Terra Plane X*. This pack is considered to be comfortable and the pinnacle of craftsmanship. It is also 5800 cubic inches (about the size most people think they need), \$470 and 110 oz (6lbs 14 oz!). Compare this pack to *ULA Catalyst*. This pack is 4600 CI, is \$225 and weighs only 46oz! Has much of the support of a traditional pack, too. That's 74 oz, or a little over 4 lbs 7 oz difference.

You can further cut down weight by using a trash bag instead of a backpacker cover. A mere .625 oz vs. 5 oz!

A good rule of thumb for packs is no more than ~1 lb per 1000 Cubic Inches (CI).

Just by using a few lightweight alternatives, we've knocked down the traditional pack load by a little over 7 lbsz. (115 oz.) Or almost five days of food! Without getting too radical, a lot of weight was saved. Ounces turn into pounds quickly!

SLEEPING PADS AND GROUND CLOTHS

The other two items that most hikers have is a ground cloth and a sleeping pad. Typically carry a Therma-rest. Even the “ultra-lite” three quarter length pads weigh 13 oz. Compare this to a foam pad that weighs 10 oz or less. As mentioned, you can use a foam pad to work as a stay with the ultra-lite packs, further saving weight. Foam pads are also much less expensive than a Therma-rest. Those blue foam pads found at XYZ Mart cost \$10 compared to a Prolite 3 Therma-rest (full length) at \$80. If you cut the pad to a ¾ length, you save 12oz. Yes, cut the pad down. Unless you are tall, you can get a “full length” pad by placing clothes under your head and a the pack at the foot of your pad. Volia! A full-length pad. If you want something a bit more comfortable than a blue foam pad, but does not weigh as much as a Thermarest, the Ridge Rest is a nice compromise.

Also, do you really want to backpack in the wilderness with something they sell a repair kit for?

If you are using one of the lightweight tents mentioned earlier, it will probably have a Tyvek floor. This very light and strong material can typically be found at construction sites for free as scraps. It can also be purchased at “*Into the Wind*” (located on Pearl St in Boulder.) by the yard. If you are using a tarp, Tyvek is strongly suggested. Modern tents do not need ground cloths. Another alternative is a lightweight painters’ drop cloth found in all hardware stores. Not as light as Tyvek, but very waterproof and durable.

The bottoms of tents are much stronger than before and all they do is collect rain anyway! More weight, more money and more water. No thanks!

COOKING SYSTEM

Boil water, make Ramen, eat. Boil Water, cook cous cous, add some dehydrated veggies, eat. Boil water, make cocoa, drink.

Look in a backpacking catalog. It is full of gear that is made for backpacking. Stainless steel pots with names like “CoolMountainCookSet”, enough utensils to impress Emeril (BAM!) and stoves great for melting water on Denali.

Is an expensive stove needed when all you want to do is boil your water and eat mashed potato buds?

A simple aluminum pot with a tin foil lid weighs much less than a stainless steel pot and still can boil water. Alternatively, you can splurge on titanium pots that are comparable to the cost of a stainless steel pot but

weigh much less.

The biggest revolution in lightweight hiking has been the homemade alcohol stove. Running on denatured alcohol or gas-line antifreeze, these stoves will boil two cups of water in five minutes, have been used as high as 13000 feet and in snowstorms.

The cost of these stoves? Free!. (Grab the soda cans from the office recycling bin). An MSR Whisperlite is great for melting snow on Denali. But to boil water...do you really need something that heavy and complicated? One ounce of fuel is all it takes to make your Lipton's Rice and Stovetop. Also, alcohol can be stored in a simple plastic bottle. You do not have to use a heavy steel bottle such as would be used for white gas. More weight savings.

If you are doing more than boiling water in the backcountry, out for more then ten days a time, or using the stove for two or more people something like the MSR PocketRocket stove may make more sense. But few people seem to backpack more than a few days at or time or do more than boil water. Still good to know of an alternative. A more thorough overview of the **advantages and disadvantages of different stoves** can be found in a doc I wrote.

For utensils, one large spoon does it all. A bandanna also makes a great pot grip. And just eat out of the pot! Try to make items do more than one task.

Compare the "traditional" system with a lightweight system:

TRADITIONAL ITEM	WEIGHT	LIGHT WEIGHT ITEM	WEIGHT
MSR Whisperlite	14.00 oz	Soda Can Stove	.50 oz
Fuel Bottle (22oz)	4.30 oz	Mountain Dew Bottle (fuel)	1.125 oz
MSR Alpine Cookset (2 1/2 lr pot, pot grip, lid)	19.00 oz	Two quart alum pot w/ tin foil lid	4.50 oz
Lexan One person tableware set (mug, bowl, dish, fork, knife, spoon)	13.00 oz	Windscreen and potstand	1.50 oz
Windscreen	1.00 oz	Lexan Spoon	.375 oz
		Bandanna for pot grip!	
		Water bottle for mug!	
Total Weight of Gear:	51.30 oz		8.00 oz

Egads! A 43 oz (2 lbs 11 oz) difference!

FOOD

Of course, a major part of backpacking is food. Food is fuel. Without enough food, the body will not get the calories it needs. You will "bonk". Becoming cranky, lethargic and not enjoying yourself. The idea is to carry food with enough calories per ounce. A good rule of thumb is to have food that contains 100 calories to an ounce. Olive oil is the champ at 240 calories per ounce. Naturally, a hiker cannot live on olive oil alone (Some would argue that some hikers try living on Snickers alone, though!) A hiker must have a mixture of fats, carbs and proteins. Gorp (AKA trail mix) is an excellent source for achieving this balance. Dried fruit, nuts and candy provide much of the energy needs required by a hiker. Summer sausage and peanut butter, though heavy, have a high caloric ratio and contain lots of fats and proteins. Of course, with a lighter load, you need less food and therefore will carry less weight.

For more info and a detailed spreadsheet of this ratio with some common backpacking food go to:

<http://www.oc.edu/staff/phil.heffington/FoodCalories.htm>

HYDRATION AND WATER TREATMENT

Water Containers. Another item where we have been convinced we need specialized containers to carry water in the backcountry. A Nalgene bottle is heavy duty. But it also weighs a lot! Compare it to a 1-liter soda bottle. Much heavier! Yet they perform the same function. If you are concerned about durability, try a Gatorade bottle. Very durable and still lighter than a Nalgene bottle. Again, both a Nalgene and a Gatorade bottle perform the EXACT same function...yet marketing has told us we NEED a special bottle to carry water. A Lexan Nalgene weighs about 6 oz. A Gatorade bottle is lighter (1 oz), less expensive (\$1 or so) and comes with a drink! If you are carrying two bottles, you are saving 10 oz.

Remember: “Ounces add up to pounds”!

And what about water treatment? A Kataydn HikerPro filter is \$70, weighs 15 oz and clogs! Aqua Mira is about \$15, weighs 1 oz and will treat Crypto and Giardia. While your friend is furiously pumping away on his clogging filter, you can wait fifteen minutes while the water is being treated and enjoy the view. 14 oz saved!

CLOTHING

Simplify. Simplify. Simplify.

Carry enough clothes to be warm and dry. Not enough so you can swap clothes when they smell! Do you really need five pairs of socks? Are two pairs of shorts necessary? Look at your clothing..take enough to be warm and comfortable. No more.

So what to take? For a typical outing, let's look at some options:

Clothing worn:

Keeping with the theme of items doing double duty, clothes can take the place of bug and sun protection. With a large hat and a long sleeve shirt, the need to carry sunscreen is lessened or eliminated. If you are prone to burning, long pants may be advisable. If carrying sun screen, don't take a whole tube! Just take a small prescription sized bottle full of sunscreen. Typical clothing worn for Colorado three season hiking would be:

- Wide Brimmed Hat (I use an \$8 Army-Navy store boonie hat. Stylish and tax payer funded. Woo hoo!)
- Sun glasses – even the dime store sunglasses have UVA and UVB protection. Never leave home without them!
- Long Sleeve Synthetic shirt (A lovely polyester dress shirt from Savers. Very chic!)
- Shorts or long pants
- Synthetic socks

Clothing Packed

Try to take enough clothing to be warm while moving and taking breaks. If you are cold in camp, you have a sleeping bag. Get into it!

Long Underwear: A little known secret of backpacking clothing: The generic polypro is slightly warmer, lighter and less expensive than the brand name stuff. Why pay more for something that is heavier? The more expensive stuff allegedly does not smell as bad. But after a few days in the backcountry, I doubt it matters! I've seen the generic “polypu” in the Army-Navy store and in XYZMart.

Socks: Take ONE pair of extra hiking socks. Swap out every day and have the pair you used the day before drying on your pack. I like to have a “sacred stash” of socks I only wear in camp and are always dry. If you are using a light shoe you can use a light running sock. I have become a big fan of **Ingenius Rebel socks** . Two pairs lasted me from Helena, MT to Grants, NM! Other socks may work best for you. Some people find that the Coolmax socks at Target work well for them, for example.

Cold weather head wear: Bring the ever, versatile balaclava. (Not to be confused with the delicious pastry. Mmmm..baklava!) Roll it up for a hat, roll it down for a neck warmer. Wear it normal for increased warmth. A thick polypro balaclava is less than \$10.

Jacket to wear: A fleece jacket has replaced a wool sweater as the “go to” clothing item for all around use in the past twenty years. But fleeces can be very bulky in addition to being heavy. With a small, lighter weight pack, bulk matters almost as much as weight. Since basic fleece is not wind resistant, many people opt for the Windblock fleece. A Mountain Hardware fleece is 20 oz for a men's medium. For less money, a person can buy a lined wind shirt. Surprisingly warm, windproof, water resistant, breathable and versatile. Many active outdoors people no longer wear a fleece except around town. I use a Mont Bell Windshirt myself. At 10 oz for a men's large, it is my favorite piece

of outdoor clothing. The one item I wear in every season. At \$90 it is less money (and lighter) the Marmot DriClima windshirt I used to wear. The DriClima was the pioneer of this type of shirt. But after 3000+ miles of long distance backpacking (and everything else I do) on it, the jacket finally wore out. Too many duct tape patches and tears. Sad day when that happened! :)

If you spend more time in camp, something along the lines of **Primaloft jacket** is suggested. Basically it is a thin layer of synthetic down that is lighter, less bulky and as warm (or warmer than) fleece. My own personal prediction is that Primaloft jackets will eventually replace fleece for general outdoor use.

If you are on a budget, many military surplus stores will sell what is called a **field jacket liner**. It will block the wind, is about as warm as the windshirt. A little heavier and bulkier than a wind shirt, but still better than a fleece. I've seen the liners for less than \$15 and as low as \$5!

Rain wear: I don't like to call these items rain wear, but rather "wind wear". So called "waterproof/breathable" membranes end up being neither for most backpackers. Seems you end up getting wet in your own sweat. Since you are moving and wearing quick drying synthetics, you stay dry. If you are in camp, you can get into your shelter during miserable weather. A nice compromise between a nylon windbreaker and a full on bomber mountaineering jacket (that weighs in at least two pounds. My old one weighs 38 oz!), is something like the Red Ledge series. For about 14 oz, you can get a rain jacket that is fairly light and inexpensive (\$30). Red Ledge also makes similar rain pants that are about 11 oz vs. the 18 oz for heavier rain pants. Or 26 oz vs. 40 oz.. It is also much less expensive!

Gloves/Mittens: I'm a big fan of a liner glove/shell mitten combo. I've seen various forms of shell mittens. Get something light and unlined. The liner gloves I like to use are wool, military surplus ones. At less than \$5 a pair and a little less than 2 oz, they are a bargain. The liner gloves keep my hands warm in all but the coldest weather. With a shell mitten, I have wind/rain protection and little more warmth. If it is really cold out, put the liner gloves inside your extra pair of hiking socks and put THAT pair into the shell mitten. Remember, try to have items do double duty if you can. I find the "one glove does all" theory not too work so well as you are having one item doing everything. Layering is the key to being comfortable in the outdoors. The "one glove" system is also usually heavier, bulkier and (sometimes) more expensive.

FOOTWEAR

If you can't tell already, one of the great aspects of going lightweight is that as you lighten up with one item, you need less weight on other items. Don't use a heavy white gas stove? You don't need a heavy fuel container! Lighter and less bulky clothing? Lighter pack that works with a light sleeping pad! Less weight in your gear overall? You can use less heavy footwear! And by using less heavy footwear, you can wear less heavy socks!

Somehow it became a given that you **MUST** wear heavy leather boots when hiking; on trails no less. But with a lighter pack, and especially on trails, the need for footwear that will support a heavy load is gone. If your pack is light, then all you need is light footwear! Hiking in low-cut running shoes (or sneakers to a Northeast transplant like me!) is very doable. If you aren't quite ready to make the leap to running shoes, try using trail shoes. Basically "sneakers on steroids". Sturdier and a stiffer sole than running shoes, but much lighter than leather or even fabric boots. Remember, you are lifting your feet all day. The lighter the shoe on your foot, the less tired you will be. I'm lazy..I don't want to carry any more weight than I needed!

Still doubtful? Consider the fact every year about one hundred people walk the entire length of the 2700 mile Pacific Crest Trail in trailshoes or even sneakers. The trail goes from desert to alpine snow fields. Hardly any of these "thru-hikers" wear boots.

MISC.

First Aid: As with clothing: Simplify! Carry enough to get you to a road. Some 4x4 gauze pads, duct tape, bandanas, band-aides and your iodine treatment (or alcohol from the fuel) will keep you stable in most emergencies until you can seek professional medical treatment. You don't need what I call "Kitchen Sink" first aid kits that are typically sold in outdoor stores. Make your own and take just what is needed!

Knives: The Swiss Army Classic will cut rope, cut cheese and other common camp activities. Why get a heavier and more expensive knife? Costs \$10. Weight? Less than an ounce. Or .625 oz to be precise. The MacGyver special? \$70 and about 8.5 oz. I think you can use it to repair a downed plane, though.

Headlamps: One area where the mainstream is now along the lines of lightweight backpacking. LED Headlamps are light and last seemingly forever. The original Petzl Tikka is a workhorse for only \$20 and 2.5 oz.

Compass: Those compasses with a mirror on them (and about a two hundred page manual) work great for adventure races and orienteering meets. However, most hikers, backpackers and general outdoor users seem to do fine with the basic, one-ounce compass for \$10.

Stuff Sacks: Try using a SilNylon stuff sack instead of a traditional nylon stuff sack. Nylon stuff sacks are about twice the weight of SilNylon sacks. Small plastic grocery bags, Ziplock bags of varying sizes and even Tyvek priority mail envelopes all work too. They are lighter than the traditional stuff sacks. All but the SilNylon bags are less expensive.

Duct Tape: Never leave home without this multiuse item! Some people like to wrap some duct tape around their lighter, water bottle or hiking poles.

Try to have items do two uses: Duct tape functions as medical tape, a repair kit, etc. further paring down your weight. Hiking poles can be used to set up your tarp as well. Be creative!

Ounces add up to pounds: “An ounce here or an ounce there doesn’t matter”. Add up all those ounces that don’t matter and you have a lot of extra weight!

I can not stress enough....have fun! Remember, there is no right way to do backpack. Evaluate your gear, see what you really need and adjust accordingly.

THE NEW AND IMPROVED LIGHTER YOU!

So the gear has been discussed, thought about and weighed. Let’s put it all together and see what happens!



	Traditional Backpacker				The New and Lighter You!		
CATEGORY	ITEM	WEIGHT	PRICE	ITEM	WEIGHT	PRICE	
Pack and accessories:	Dana Desings Terra Plane X			ULA Cotakyst	46 oz	\$225	
	Campmor Ultralight Pack Cover	5.00 oz	\$23	Hefty Bag	625 oz	Free!	
Shelter:	Sierra Designs Hyperlight AST	81.00 oz	\$230	Henry Shires Squel (with filter)+202.375	35 oz	\$235	
	Fitted ground cloth	10.00 oz	\$41				
Sleeping:	Sierra Designs Adventure bag 20F	53.00 oz	\$90	Campmor Down Bag 20F	36.00 oz	\$110	
	ProLite 3 Thermarest (regular)	20.00 oz	\$80	Blue Foam Pad, cut down	8.00	\$10	
Cooking:	MSR Whisperlite	14.00 oz	\$70	Soda Can Stove	.50 oz	Free!	
	Fuel Bottle (22oz)	4.30 oz	\$11	Mountain Dew Bottle (fuel)	1.125 oz	\$1	
	MSR Alpine Cookset (2 hr pot, pot grip, lid)	19.00 oz	\$34	Two quart alun pot w/lin tent lid	4.50 oz	\$4	

Lexen One person tableware set (four bowl, dish	13.00	\$14	Woolstean	1.50 gr	Fred
[REDACTED]					

	REI MTS Lightweight tops			Lt. Wt. Polypro Long Sleeve Top	4.500 oz	\$10
	Smartwool Expedition Trekking Socks	4.500 oz	\$18	Coolmax Running Socks	1.750 oz	\$5
	Fleece Socks	1.750 oz	\$10	Fleece Socks	1.750 oz	\$10
	North Face Cable Fish Beanie (cool looking hat)	3.500 oz	\$20	Exp. Wt. Polypro Balaclava (dorky looking)	1.750 oz	\$8
	Fleece Gloves, windproof and water resistant	4.500 oz	\$15	Military Surplus Wool Glove Liners	1.625 oz	\$3
	Nylon Stuff Sack	1.5 oz	\$5	SiNylon MTens	.625 oz	\$15
	Garbage Bag	.375 oz	Free!	SiNylon Stuff Sack	.750	\$11
				Garbage Bag	.375 oz	Free!
First Aid Kit	Ultralight .5	3.5 oz	\$15	In ziplock: Vitamin I, band-aids, gauze pads, Duct Tape, alcohol, bandanas, etc. double as first aid items	1.375 oz	Free!
Misc	Headnet	.625 oz	\$5	Headnet	.625 oz	\$5
	40' Parachute Cord	2.375 oz	\$7	40' Parachute Cord	2.375 oz	\$7
	Petzl Tika Headlamp	2.5 oz	\$20	Petzl Tika Headlamp	2.5 oz	\$20

	Bandanna	.375 oz	\$1	Bandanna	.375 oz	\$1
	Ziplock Bag	.125 oz	Free!	Ziplock Bag	.125 oz	Free!
TOTAL		479.225 oz / 29+ lbs!	\$1668		90.125 oz / 11 lbs 14.125 oz	\$881
EQUIPMENT "ON SELF"	Trekstor Travel Shirt	9 oz	\$30	Thrift Store Polyester Dress Shirt-Long Sleeve	6.125 oz	\$4
	Hiking Shorts (fancy pockets! Woo hoo!)	10.5 oz	\$20	Target running shorts	3.750 oz	\$10
	Smartwool Expedition Trekking Socks	4.500 oz	\$18	Coolmax Running Socks	1.750 oz	\$5
	OR Hat			Army Surplus "Boonie Hat"	3.625 oz	\$8
	Leatherman Wave (the best seller according to their promo)	8.5 oz	\$70	Swiss Army Classic	.625 oz	\$10
	Silva Ranger S15CL Compass	2.30 oz	\$46	Silva Starter 1-2-3 Compass	1.0	\$9
	Apple Va. Governor Caskin O. Fox (with 1-501st)	54 oz	\$466	White Pic. Pigs (with 1-501st)	30 x 25 oz	\$50
	goggles	1.00	\$10	Sunglasses	1.00	\$10
		80 oz	\$427		48 oz	\$126
						760.44

Notes:

1. I purposely put the less expensive option when available in the lighter category (e.g. a fancy compass vs. a basic compass). Illustrates that you don't need expensive gear to get lighter and/or do the same function as more expensive gear. The traditional backpackers tends to buy the "better" gear it seems anyway

2. Most of these weights came from the Campmor catalog, manufacturer websites and my being obsessive about the weighing my gear to closest .125 of an ounce! :)

3. The "Free!" designation usually means something easily obtained in a typical home or office. Most people can get access to soda or beer cans easily. A toothbrush is usually found in the home (At least, I hope so!). Alas, my Mont Bell windshirt was not lying around one day when I needed one.

4. Some things on this chart are missing: toiletries, camera, journal, maps, etc. Some of these items depend on the trip, others depend on personal preference and needs. I don't wear contacts, so I don't need cleaning solution (for example). I also like keeping a journal. The weight really varies from person to person with these items.

5. This list is not definitive.. It is just a comparison between popular options. Always be sure to check out gear that works for you before paying attention to some loony on the Internet. :)

So with the traditional list, you are lugging almost 30 lbs of gear (and over 5 lbs of "stuff" on you). With the lightweight you, you are down to a little over 10 lbs and half the money!

Or to put it another way, the 20 lbs you saved is about 10 days worth of food. If you are going on a weekend trips (two days of food) you are carrying less than 15 lbs!

Not too shabby..eh? Traditional gear is good for making you tired, achy and lighter in the wallet!

RESOURCES

You've seen the presentation, you have some ideas you want to try, but you can't remember half of what I said (don't worry, I don't remember half of what I did myself). Here are some more web-based resources to help you in your quest to lighten up!

Places to shop:

- **Thrift stores:** These stores will have lightweight (and cheap!) cook pots, synthetic clothing, windpants and other goodies great for lightening up. Why spend \$60 for a cookpot?
- **Army/Navy stores:** Where everyone's Dad bought their first backpacking gear; still works for quite a few things. Most of the stores sell less well known brands for the basics (hats, gloves, underwear, socks) in addition to military surplus. Many times I find that the less well known brands are lighter than their more well known counterparts.

Warm Stuff Distributing (formerly known as the Underwear Guys)

<http://www.theunderwearguys.com> Excellent resource for long underwear, hats, socks, hats, mittens etc. All the basics at excellent prices. The items tend to be off-brand, surplus and/or factory irregulars. However, I personally think the off-brand, surplus or irregular is as good (and sometimes better than) the Patagucci clothing. Sometimes warmer, sometimes lighter weight... always **cheaper!**

- **Campmor:** <http://www.campmor.com> Has a basic, no frills catalog that lists weights for most items. Have many items for sale. Great bathroom material!
- **Sierra Trading Post:** <http://sierratradingpost.com> Often has closeouts on trail shoes and sneakers. Good deals on GoLite equipment as well. Usually has some good deals on long underwear, hats, gloves and other basics too.
- **REI:** www.rei.com As mentioned earlier, their Sub-Kilo is a great bag for the money
- **Your local outfitter:** Support them if you can. More "mom and pop" stores are starting to stock true lightweight goodies. You also can't beat the service found at these places
- **Into the Wind:** http://www.intothewind.com/shop/Repair_and_Kitemaking/Fabric/Tyvek If you can't find a construction site with scraps of Tyvek, has kite grade Tyvek for sale.

- **Outdoor Wilderness Fabrics:** <http://www.owfinc.com/> For those who want to try making their own gear, this site offers fleece, SilNylon and other materials suitable for outdoor clothing and gear

Gear Manufacturers – The Well Known Guys

- **GoLite:** www.golite.com The most well known lite-weight gear manufacturer among the general public.
- **MontBell:** www.montbell.com I really like a lot of their gear. Expensive, but beautifully made and light. Simple but very functional designs.
- **Feathered Friends:** www.featheredfriends.com They make the down bag I've used since 1997. Light and well made down bags
- **Western Mountaineering:** <http://www.westernmountainerring.com> Like Feathered Friends, they make some wonderful down bags.

Gear Makers – The Little Guys

I think some of the best gear being made right now is by the cottage gear makers. Excellent attention to detail, great customer service, good products. You know it is a small community when you know the people who make the gear! This is not a comprehensive list by any means, but does have people I dealt with in the past. There are others as well.

Lynn Wheldon Gear: <http://www.lwgear.htm> One of the first makes of light weight gear

Henry Shires: <http://www.tarptent.com> Makes some very popular tarp tents

Antigravity Gear: <http://www.antigravitygear.com/> Provides some lightweight cooking systems and other goodies

ULA: <http://www.ula-equipment.com/> - Ultra Light Adventure equipment. Their packs are a little more beefy if you want something with more support but still lighter than a traditional pack

Six Moon Designs: <http://www.sixmoondesigns.com> Some great lightweight gear; tent, packs, etc. I am a big fan of their lightweight, one person shelters like the Gatewood Cape or the Wild Oasis.

Gossamer Gear: <http://www.gossamergear.com/> - Another great maker of lightweight gear

Cedar Tree Gear: http://www.thepacka.com/index_files/Page429.html This company makes the Silnylon mittens that I used and have been very happy with. They also make much other gear, too.

How to make your own gear

If you have the skill set and the equipment, making your own gear is a great way to make gear that is light, functional and suitable for your needs.

Zen Stoves: <http://www.zenstoves.net> A comprehensive guide to Backpacking **Stoves**.

Homemade Outdoor Gear <http://www.backpacking.net/makegear.html> - instructions for homemade backpacking equipment, home made outdoor gear, homemade backpacking stoves, and more.

Lightweight Backpacking Discussion

Want to talk gear or find more about it? The sites below should help!

Sgt. Rock's tarp setup: <http://hikinghq.net/gear/tarp.html> Sgt Rock has the best page I've seen for setting up tarps.

Backpacking Light: <http://www.backpackinglight.com> Ryan Jordan's subscription site that has some of the biggest gram weenies in the world. Very analytical and gear focused discussion.

BackpackingLight: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BackpackingLight/> A Yahoo group devoted to discussing lightweight backpacking techniques and gear.

Backcountry.net: <http://www.backcountry.net> Has the National Scenic Trails mailing lists. Thru-hiking is what started this whole lightweight movement. As a thru-hiker, I can tell you, we are lazy. We don't want to carry more than we have to. :)

Whiteblaze: <http://www.whiteblaze.net> Excellent site for the Appalachian Trail with much gear discussion

Backpack Gear Test <http://www.backpackgertest.org/> For non-biased reviews of gear in real-world conditions

Books

Sometimes an on-hand reference is still the best way to find out about techniques and get new ideas.

Beyond Backpacking by Ray Jardine Ray Jardine is arguably the person who helped popularize the current lightweight movement. Though some of his ideas are controversial, his overall thesis is still correct: Go as light as possible. Only take what you need. Going minimalist leads to more enjoyable hiking. What I like about this book is that there is less an emphasis on gear and more on the overall philosophy of going light. Ray Jardine has some very strong opinions and the "Ray Way" is not only way, but the book still makes for some good reading.

Lighten Up! a Falcon Guide: A good "meat and potatoes" guide for those who are traditional backpackers and want to lighten up their load. Not as detailed as other guides, but sometimes too much details gets in the way of the overall goal. Basically, start with this book if you want to go from 30 lbs base packweight to 15lbs.

Lightweight backpacking and camping edited by Ryan Jordan: A very detailed gear-wonk workshop in book form. If you want diverse opinions and wish to fine tune your techniques, this book is a great guide. I think this book has a bias towards high end gear for lightening your load, and it definitely shows the analytical side of backpacking gear (engineer types tend to be gear wonks)but it does give some interesting ideas from many different people The editor is the grand poombah over at Backpackinglight.com/

Quality Gear on the Cheap: If you read those glossy outdoor magazines, you'd think you need a \$300 pack, a \$300 shell and a \$300 fleece. You do not need expensive gear to enjoy backpacking. Often the brand name gear, besides being expensive, is heavy, bulky and overkill for what is supposed to be for the simple joy of walking.

Though written for the Appalachian Trail, the general concepts apply for quality gear on the cheap:
<http://www.whiteblaze.net/forum/showthread.php?p=206678#post206678>

Some additional information I will add is that you should invest in a decent sleeping bag. The Campmor down bag is rated to 20F and is known as a good budget bag.

<http://www.campmor.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/ProductDisplay?productId=86896&memberId=12500226>

If you are looking for a light, compressible and warm jacket check out an army liner jacket (mentioned in the above article, but deserves to be emphasized) : <http://tinyurl.com/2dfgpk>

If you don't mind a bit of sewing, you can make a Montbell Thermwrap clone for less than \$20 with the above liner jacket. A men's large comes in at 12oz! Considering a Montbell Thermawrap is \$150 and weights 10oz, the cheap way is nice for those on a budget on who need something warm, light and cheap!

Check it out: <http://www.whiteblaze.net/forum/showthread.php?t=41034>

Finally, for high altitude/desert hiking I suggest a long sleeve polyester dress shirt for the princely sum of \$4 from many thrift stores. I've used this type of shirt for literally several thousand miles of backpacking.

If you have more questions or comments, please feel free to contact me! Most of all? Enjoy the outdoors! Gear is used to access and enjoy the outdoors. We don't use the outdoors to enjoy the gear. :)

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