

BACKPACKING CHECKLIST

What to Take on Multi-Day Hiking Trips in the Wild



This backpacking checklist covers exactly what you need to take hiking, without carrying extra weight, or wasting money on useless gear.

I've tested all equipment for 200 nights on the trail, over a 10,000-mile hiking career, to ensure the best backpacking gear for every scenario.

Scroll down & get the backpacking checklist.

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Backpacking Checklist - Big Mistakes to Avoid



Most backpackers make 3 big mistakes & spend their trips tired or miserable.

These mistakes are:

1. Heavy backpack from too much useless gear
2. Decision fatigue from too much useless gear
3. Too tired to enjoy hiking, from items noted above

I made all of these mistakes, but 10,000 miles on the trail provided some better alternatives.

Let's start with all the stuff you don't need.

This will ensure you don't waste money and carry extra weight.

The backpacking checklist is below that.

Backpacking Gear You Don't Need



Soap: Wash your body with water. Soap is bad for the rivers. Hand sanitizer for hands after the bathroom.

Extra Clothes: Backpackers need two sets of clothes, no duplicates.

- Trail clothes
- Camp clothes

Deodorant: Wash daily & do without it.

Carabiners: Only for technical mountain climbing.

Camp Towels: Heavy! A [15" by 15" quick-dry washcloth](#) and your body heat is all you need.

Boots: Wear trail runners instead. They are light, dry quickly, and keep your feet from getting sore.

Bug Repellant: Under high bug pressure nothing works, instead:

- Camp in windy locations.
- Stay on the trail until it cools down.
- [Use a Bug head net.](#)

Music Speaker: Wear headphones.

Water Bottles: Heavy & bulky! [Use water bags.](#)

Camp Chairs: Sit cross-legged on the ground [with foam pad](#)

Cooking Pots, Pans & Plates: Heavy! Cook, eat, and drink with a [Jetboil](#) only.

Carrying Too Much Water: Water is essential to carry, but it's also very heavy.

If you're hiking by streams, lakes, and water all day, carrying 2 liters on your back is crazy. That's 4 pounds!

Don't skip on water. Instead, make calculated decisions on when & where to fill up.

Too Much Gear On Outside of Backpack: Only daily "trail use" equipment should be stored outside of the backpack. Anything stored on the outside can:

- Get lost or snagged
- Get wet/heavy
- Throw off-center of gravity making hiking harder

It also looks sloppy, but I'm OCD about this stuff:)

Let's get into the backpacking gear checklist...

Tents for Backpacking



The Best Backpacking Tent

Zpacks Duplex Tent: I use and recommend the Zpacks Duplex Tent for backpacking & landscape photography.

- Weighs 1 pound
- Waterproof (Dyneema Material)
- Holds up in 60 mph winds (tested by me)
- Can fully sit up at 6'2" tall / spacious to wait out long storms
- I've used it for 300 nights on the trail & it's my favorite tent of all time

MSR Regular Size Tent Stakes: I carry 8 for the tent above. Don't get the small version of these.

Cheaper Backpacking Tent Options

When starting out I used cheaper tents that are not waterproof and weigh much more.

If you have the money, go with the Zpacks tent above.

If you are on a budget, these tents are average but are not optimal.

- [REI 1 Man Tent](#)
- [REI 2 Man Tent](#)

Sleep System - Sleeping Bag, Pad & Pillow



Down sleeping bags and inflatable sleeping pads are the best option for the highest warmth to weight ratio.

I Use a 20 Degree Sleeping Bag for All Seasons

- ***Warm Weather:*** Unzip bag fully and use as a blanket
- ***Cold Weather:*** Use the bag as intended
- ***Really Cold Weather:*** Wear a down jacket and down pants inside the bag to add extra warmth.

20 Degree Sleeping Bag: I've used this bag for over 300 nights on the trail. It's my favorite of all time.

Pillow: Great way to improve sleep for 3 extra ounces of weight

Ground Sheet / Bivy Sheet: Helps to protect the sleeping pad from sharp objects & doubles as an emergency blanket.

3 Season Sleeping Pad: All conditions & seasons less snow camping

Winter Sleeping Pad: Snow camping or very cold weather.

Ear Plugs: On stormy or windy nights it can be very hard to sleep. These are essential to always have in your kit.

Best Backpacking Backpack



Simplicity is essential for backpacking backpacks.

Don't buy complex packs, with a million weight-adding features & straps from REI, Deuter, or Osprey.

They are heavy, complicated, and don't work well.

When selecting a backpacking & photography backpack, I look for:

- Simplicity (no extra straps or pockets)

- Low weight (2.5 lbs or less)
- Waterproof (Dyneema material)
- Durability (Dyneema material)
- Storage capacity (modular & works for all trips)

The Hyperlite Mountaingear backpacks meet all of my criteria.



[Hyperlite Mountaingear 5400 Porter Pack:](#) If you're doing 10+ day trips, taking photo equipment, or packrafting, I would recommend the "5400" size pack. This is what I use.

[Porter Back Pocket for Pack:](#) Great for storing water, snacks & quick access gear.

If you're doing shorter trips, without photography equipment or pack rafting, I would recommend the "4400" size pack.

[Hyperlite 4400 Porter Pack](#)

[Hyperlite 4400 Southwest Pack:](#) Ideal if you're not taking a camera tripod or pack rafting equipment.

Stuff Sacks & Equipment Organization



Stuff sacks are used to organize gear & keep it dry in your backpack.

Everything should have an exact location in your pack.

Hyperlite XL Stuff Sacks: I carry 3 of these. 2 for storing clothes and 1 to protect my camera gear from rain.

They are lightweight, waterproof, and durable.

Hyperlite POD (4400, 70L) Large Size: I carry 2 of these. 1 for storing small essential equipment. 1 for daily food supplies.

Scent Free Trash Compactor Bags: For wet conditions, line the inside of your pack with a trash compactor bag, then place all stuff sacks and gear inside of this. Depending on trip length, you may need 2.

Ursack Major Animal Proof Food Storage Bag: Only used on trips where I cache food.

Small F-Stop ICU for Camera Equipment: See my [camera equipment page](#) for complete details.

Clothes & Layering Systems



Correct layering is essential for keeping you warm & dry in all conditions.

Incorrect layering leads to increased pack weight or dangerous scenarios where you can't stay warm and dry.

No one piece of gear should perform the same function as another piece of gear.

- When it's cold layers are added.
- When it's warm layers are removed.
- If it's wet or snowing the shell coat and pants are added over whatever you're wearing.

Layering Basics

Base Layer: This is the layer directly next to your skin.

- The goal of the base layer is to keep your skin dry by removing moisture.
- It will keep you cool in warm temperatures and warm in cool temperatures.
- You'll wear a base layer year-round, no matter what season.

Middle Layer (Warmth & Insulation): During cool summer nights, autumn, or winter you'll also need a middle layer.

- The goal of the middle layer is to keep you warm but also allows the skin/body to breathe.
- Good middle layers are breathable material that also provides warmth such as fleece or down.
- I prefer to carry a down jacket as well as a fleece as denoted below.

Top Layer / Shell (Weather Protection): The goal of the top shell layer is to protect you and all of your layers below from the weather.

- The top layer is just as important as your other layers if not more so.
- If your middle or base layers are completely wet they won't work very well.

Go Gear - What to Wear on the Trail



Below is my base layer of "go gear".

This is worn every day of the trip and during every season.

It will get sweaty, wet, and dirty. You Get used to this.

Bringing duplicate pieces of "go gear" is too heavy and unnecessary. Skip it!

Trail Hat: Sun & wind protection. Great for rafting as well.

GPS Watch: Essential for knowing distance covered, elevation covered, and current weather trends such as pressure, temperature, sunrise & sunset times.

Long Sleeve Trail Shirt: Button-up shirts are the most versatile. You can configure them for the current conditions. They provide warmth, cooling, sun protection & wind protection.

Pants: Stretchy durable material that takes a beating is essential for backpacking & climbing.

Underwear: Stretchy breathable and smell-resistant material that lasts a long time.

Calf Compression Sleeves: Compression sleeves are great for increasing trail mileage and managing muscle soreness

Socks: Darn Tuff socks have a lifetime warranty. If you get a hole, just send them back in for a new pair.

Trail Runners (Altra Lone Peaks): Stop wearing boots. They are heavy, don't provide better ankle support, and become very heavy when wet.

Trail runners are light, dry quickly, give your feet a better "feel" for the trail, and work well in all seasons. I even wear them in the winter.

Trekking Poles: Essential for reducing stress on legs and covering long days on the trail. Also essential for off-trail travel & holding up the Zpacks Duplex Tent.

Thermal Sitting Pad: Weights 3 oz. Reduces calorie burn by increasing body temperature loss while sitting down. Also comfortable. Taken in every season.

Camp Clothes & Cold Weather Layering



Layers are listed from the skin or base layer first to the outer layer last.

- If you are going to use a layer on the trail, it has the chance of getting wet.
- Make sure you don't need that wet layer for staying warm at night.

Top Layers

Thermal Shirt: Bring one to wear at camp for all trips. Bring 2 if it's cold weather.

Fleece Hoody: Worn on the trail & at camp for all-mountain & cold weather trips.

Light Down Jacket: Worn at camp or on-trail rest breaks during late spring, summer or early autumn, in all ecosystems.

Medium Down Jacket: Worn at camp or on-trail rest breaks during early spring, late autumn, and winter

Heavy Down Jacket: Layer the two jackets above for snow or winter trips.

Rain / Shell Jacket: I don't recommend Goretex jackets unless it's very cold weather where wind protection is essential. Goretex is heavy and takes too long to dry once wet.

Bottom Layers

Long Underwear: Baselayer is always worn at camp during all seasons

Down Pants: Worn at camp during trips with lows in the 30s. Lighter than another pair of long underwear.

I don't recommend heavy-down pants. They are too warm unless you're in arctic winter environments.

Wind / Rain Pants: Worn at camp or on the trail during windy, cold, or wet conditions.

Gloves

Light Gloves: Any trips with lows in the 30s.

Winter gloves: Snow trips only.

Camp Socks

Thin Socks: Worn at camp during all seasons.

Thick Socks: Layer over thin socks for cold weather conditions.

Camp Shoes & Sandals

Bread Bag Technique: Don't bring camp shoes or sandals. They are too heavy!

1. When you get to camp, dry your feet and put on your dry camp socks.
2. Over your camp socks, put on two bread bags.
3. Put trail shoes back on over bread bags.

Your feet and socks will stay warm and dry inside the bread bags.

Your body heat will dry your trail shoes.

Down Booties: For snow or very cold weather trips down booties are essential to keep your feet warm.

Cold weather and snow also means longer nights and more time spent hanging out around camp after dark.

Being able to sit outside in the snow, with warm body and feet makes the trip way more enjoyable.

Small Essential Equipment



This section covers task-specific small items that are required for every backpacking trip.

Keep them in a small storage stuff-sack, close to the top of your bag for easy access.

Hyperlite POD (4400, 70L) Large Size: Holds all small essential equipment.

Small External Battery Charger: 3 days of charge for Nikon Z7, Go Pro, and phone.

Large External Battery Charger: 7 days of charge for Nikon Z7, Go Pro, and phone.

Headlamp with Batteries: 350 lumens or more is recommended. 1 set of batteries for every 4-5 days, depending on day length.

Small Camp Washcloth: Use this to wash, then wring it out to dry 90% of the moisture off your body. Put warm dry clothes off and let your body heat dry the rest.

Floss

Toothbrush & Paste

Headphones

60 Feet of Utility Cord: Dyneema cord is light. Use it to hang food, create make-shift splits for first aid, repair gear & more.

Mini Bic Lighter: Light camp stoves & make fires.

Mosquito Net: Only taken during high bug pressure times.

Chapstick

Sun Protection Lotion: Use a small Nalgene bottle and fill it with lotion to reduce weight.

Sun Glasses: Essential for snow trips. Recommended for all trips.

Tyvek Tape: Essential to repair & patch tents, sleeping pads, packrafts, or any other piece of equipment. Strong & light. Backroll a small amount, just enough for trip.

Emergency & First Aid



Taking a Wilderness First Aid or Wilderness First Responder Course, then building your own first aid kit to meet the requirements of the expedition, is ideal.

I use & recommend the [Wilderness First Responder Course from NOLS](#).

Although better than nothing, the pre-made store-bought first aid kits don't include many essential items.

If you don't have any training, all first aid kits are almost worthless.

It's also essential to carry an emergency response beacon.

[Rescue Beacon / Backcountry Texting & Weather](#)

[Andrew Skurka has a great first aid kit blog post you can also check out.](#)

Toilet Kit & How to Use It



Bathroom Technique

Pee anywhere off the trail preferably on rocks or gravel.

Poop using the following technique.

Carry out all dirty toilet paper with you.

1. Locate an area with soft organic matter at least 200 feet away from any water sources.
2. Organic matter will decompose human waste, rocks and sand will not.
3. Dig a hole 6-8" deep, with 6-8" diameter.

4. Upon completion, backfill the hole and firmly stamp it down.

Equipment List

Gallon Ziplock Freezer Bag to hold the following.

Duece Bathroom Shovel: Weighs less than an ounce. Strong. Works well!

Toilet Paper - Thin Ply: Backroll it and only take enough for the trip. Keep in a small ziplock bag.

Hand Sanitizer - Travel Size: Small travel size. Keeps you from getting sick on the trail from dirty hands.

(2) Quart Ziploc bags for dirty toilet paper. Put the dirty toilet paper in one bag, then double bag it to keep things clean.

Poop Bags: All snow trip. Don't poop in the snow. It will melt out in the spring and is disgusting.

Food & Supplements



I make my own pre-made meals for backpacking trips.

It's much more nutrient-dense and tastes better than the store-bought stuff.

If you're just getting into backpacking, use [Mountain House Premade Meals](#) at first.

It will reduce the stress of learning everything else about backpacking.

Once you are an expert at all the equipment, then start making your own meals.

Here's how I do it:

Food Dehydrator

I prepare rice & quinoa in a dehydrator as the base for all meals.

Both are high in carbs & protein, essential for long trips.

Excalibur 9-Tray Electric Food Dehydrator

Sheets for Dehydrator (You Need 9 Total)

- **Yesker 6 Pack Teflon Sheet for 16x20**
- **Yesker 3 Pack Teflon 16x20**

Breakfast Ingredients

Organic Instant Coffee: This stuff tastes so good that I use it at home.

Before the trip add all the following ingredients to a big plastic container with lid, and shake it up.

Next, add one cup of mix to a **Zip-lock style snack bag** per meal.

Each meal is premade before the trip, making trail consumption quick & easy.

Chia Seeds

Flax Seeds

Coffee Grinder to Grind Seeds

Raisins

Cashews

Walnuts

Oats

Organic Cacao Cocoa Nibs

To eat on the trail, add water and the following & mix up:

Bulk Peanut Butter: I carry 16 oz of peanut butter for every 2 days of a trip. This is the most calorie-dense food you can buy, providing a high calorie to weight ratio.

Organic Coconut Milk Powder

Lunch & Dinner Ingredients

Buy these bulk & dehydrate them on your own.

Dehydrated Basmati Rice: I cook & dehydrate this.

Dehydrated Green Lentils: I cook & dehydrate this.

Dehydrated Quinoa: I cook & dehydrate this.

Dehydrated Mushrooms: Buy fresh, slice & dehydrate

Forbidden Rice Ramen

Frontier Deluxe Vegetables Soup Blend

Frontier Co-op Beans, Black Flakes

Before trip, add all ingredients to a big plastic container with a lid and shake it up.

Change up portions of each ingredient to your liking.

Next, add one cup of mix to a **Zip-lock style snack bag** for every meal.

I eat one bag of the mix for lunch & one for dinner.

Spices & Flavoring for Meals

I eat the same meals every day and flavor them differently.

This makes trip planning and prep very easy.

Here is what I use to flavor meals & add taste.

[Olive Oil](#)

[Coconut Milk Powder](#)

[Curry Powder](#)

[Soy Sauce Powder](#)

[Garlic Powder](#)

[Roasted Red Peper Flakes](#)

[Black Pepper](#)

[Salt](#)

Trail Snacks

[Whole Wheat Tortilla](#) with peanut butter, coconut milk powder, and olive oil.

[Cliff bar / high calorie per oz energy bar](#): Cliff Bars are the highest calorie/ounce bar that tastes good. This means the most calories for the least amount of weight.

[Raw Greens Superfood Powder](#) + big spoonful of [Coconut Milk Powder](#). Shake up in Talenti Ice Cream cup or Jetboil.

[Theo Dark Chocolate](#) with peanut butter on it.

Backpacking Supplements & Greens Powder

Supplements are essential to maintaining energy while on the trail, especially on trips longer than 2-3 days.

This is my regimen.

CBD Oil: Inflammation reduction - 15mg in am, 15mg on the trail, 15 mg in pm.
My favorite backpacking supplement.

Greens Powder: 1-2 scoops in water a day. Drink with food or coconut milk powder for optimal uptake.

Multivitamin: 2 with the first meal & 2 with the second meal

Caffeine Pills: Early starts with no time for coffee. Emergency scenario with all-night evac. As required any other time.

B-12: 2 in the am.

Electrolyte Pills: 1 in am, 2-3 during day as required, 1 before bed

Bear Containers & Food Storage



Do what makes you feel comfortable.

Just because I use one method does not mean it will be right for you.

My food is always kept in a [Loksak odor-free storage bag](#) inside a stuff sack.

If I need to cache food or leave it alone for a day, then a [Ursack Major Bear Bag](#) is used for protection along with hanging it from a tree if available.

I don't use bear containers & sleep with my food by my head, unless in grizzly country.

Bear cans are heavy, bulky, and horrible for enjoyable backpacking trips.

- They are only necessary when in grizzly country.
- Some parks without grizzly bears require them because government & nuance don't mix.

The [bear can](#) I used in the past is now a stool for sitting by the campfire.

It worked well...if you want to carry around a bear can.

Cooking System & Stoves



During spring, summer & early fall, I don't carry a stove and use the [cold soaking food preparation technique covered here](#).

During the winter or for shorter trips where I don't mind carrying extra weight, I make the meals noted above, with a Jetboil stove.

Stoves can also be used to melt snow for water on all snow trips in the winter.

Cooking Equipment

[Stove:](#) I eat, drink and store my fuel in the Jet Boil Stove. Skip the bigger stoves. Go small & simple.

[Titanium Long Handle Spoon](#)

[Mini BIC Lighter:](#) Your stove starter will eventually fail if you're backpacking enough;)

[4 Oz. MSR Fuel:](#) 2 days in winter when melting snow / 3-5 days in other seasons.

8 Oz MSR Fuel: 4 days in winter when melting snow / 6-10 days in other seasons.

Water Purification & Storage



Only Carry Water You Need - Cut Down on Weight & Save Energy

At each water fill-up stop:

1. Check your map and locate your next water source
2. Fully hydrate at each water stop. "Camel Up" so your stomach is full.

3. Determine how many miles/hours until your next water source before leaving.
4. Only carry what you need to get there plus a 1/4 liter extra.

Water Carrying Bags: I take 2 bags, equaling 4 liters total, for mountains and all non-desert environments.

For deserts, I carry 4 of these, for 8-liter carry capacity.

I don't recommend Nalgene bottles or bladders with drinking tubes. They are heavy and often fail.

Keep it simple!

Water Purification Drops

I prefer these since they are much lighter than an actual filter.

In the desert, it's essential to use water drops since the silt and sand in the rivers will clog your filter quickly.

The main downside of drops is you need to wait 15-30 minutes before the water is ready.

Water Purification Filter

Only the filter is required. Don't buy any other gadgets that are offered with it.

The filter is heavier but you get instant access to water, without having to wait 30 minutes like the drops.

I prefer drops.

Snow Travel & Cold Weather Camping



If you're just starting out, skip the snow and winter camping.

It's too much gear and extra skill when just starting.

Ice Axe: Any steep ice or snow travel without safe runout. Does not work if you don't know how to use it!

Micro Spikes: Non-glacier ice travel

Winter Boots: only wear with snowshoes. Otherwise wear trail runners.

Snowshoes: 6"+ deep snow or more.

Gaiters: Keeps snow out of your boots.

Poop Bags: All snow trip. Don't poop in the snow. It will melt out in the spring and is disgusting.

Wax Fire Starters: Emergency use & standard fires. It's sometimes impossible to find dry wood in the winter.

Rescue Shovel: Great for moving snow to set up camp and avalanche rescue.

Avalanche Beacon: Only works if you learn to use it very well & practice.

Avalanche Probe

Maps & Navigation



Navigation & first aid are the two most important backpacking skills.

Always carry a hard copy map as a backup, a digital map on your phone, and a compass.

All of this equipment is worthless if you're not an expert at using it.

Take a class or go out & teach yourself in a safe area with phone service.

Here is what I use:

[Compass MC-2](#)

Digital Maps: I use and recommend [GAIA GPS](#). It's great for planning on the computer and navigating in the field using a smartphone.

Map Physical: Print maps or buy National Geographic Trails Illustrated Maps.

Bonus Section - 3 Essential Backpacking Tips



Tip 1: Buy the Best Backpacking Gear You Can Afford

Higher quality backpacking gear, although more expensive, performs exponentially better, and lasts much longer.

In the long run, it's much cheaper to invest in the beginning, and enjoy your equipment for years.

Tip 2: Don't Buy All Your Backpacking Gear at Once

Start out with a few basics on a 1-night trip during nice weather.

Take note of items you use and don't use on this trip.

Buy or reduce gear upon returning home.

Repeat this cycle while slowly increasing the trip length & difficulty.

Tip 3: Don't Trust Gear Review Videos IF The Gear Isn't Worn Out

All equipment provided on this page has been tested for a minimum of 200 nights on the trail.

Lots of "gear reviewers" don't backpack and hike for a living.

They review gear for a living. This is their entire income.

This incentivizes them to quickly test gear then recommend it to you to make money.

Sometimes the recommendations work out.

Sometimes they are horrible.

If the gear isn't filthy and worn out, most likely it hasn't been tested very well.