



Lighten Up!

A COMPLETE HANDBOOK FOR LIGHT AND
ULTRALIGHT BACKPACKING

Don Ladigin
with illustrations by Mike Clelland!

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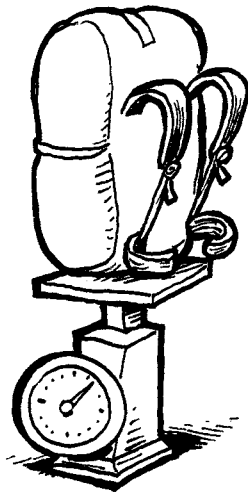
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PART 1

Understanding Lightweight Backpacking

Principles of Lightweight Backpacking
Computing Gear Weight



Principles of Lightweight Backpacking

1. Take enough gear to be safe, comfortable, and confident.

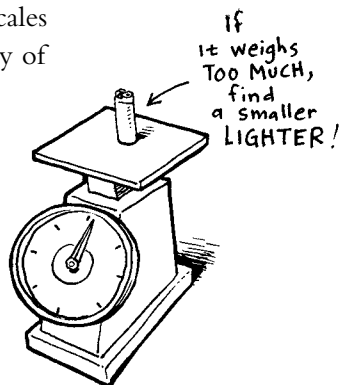
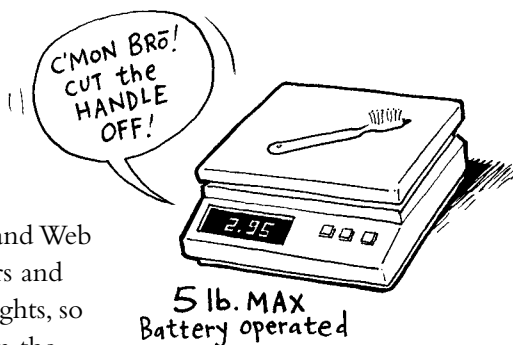
Lightweight backpacking is not about discomfort. It's about being comfortable with less weight on your back. The gear can be very simple and basic, but it needs to provide shelter, comfortable sleep, appetizing, nutritious food, safe water, and appropriate clothing for the conditions.

Psychological well-being is important too. It's important to have confidence in your gear. A gradual, thoughtful, step-by-step approach to lightweight hiking can develop confidence in your gear and abilities.

2. Know the actual weight of each item.

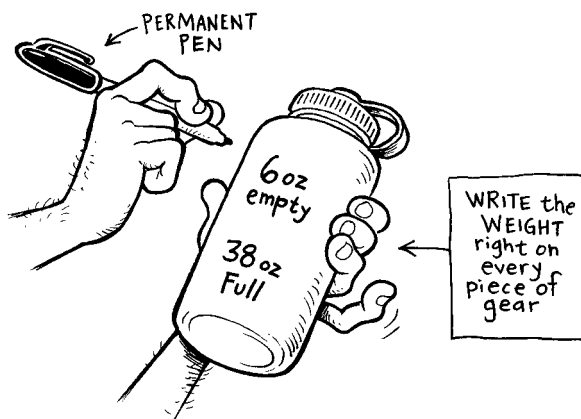
It is important to know the weight of each and every item that will go into the backpack. When considering a gear purchase, you can find the approximate weight of an item by studying the catalogs and Web sites of suppliers. Manufacturers and dealers may underestimate weights, so the real story is only told when the item is weighed on an accurate scale.

The best scales for weighing gear are postal scales designed for weighing letters and packages. Many of these scales have an accuracy of a tenth of an ounce, which is more accuracy than is really needed. A postal scale that weighs items of up to ten pounds is fine. Even major items such as sleeping gear or shelters for light and ultralight backpacking are not likely to weigh more than three pounds.



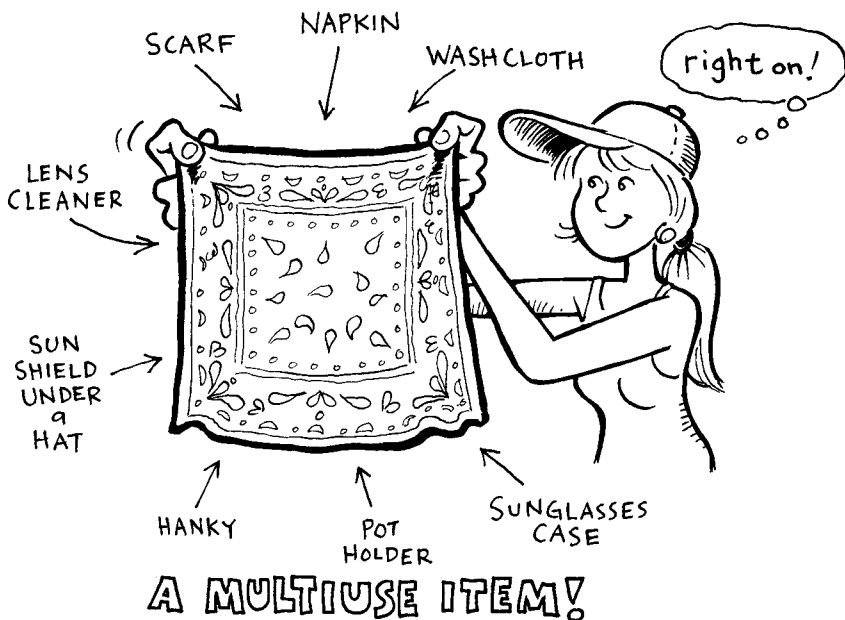


Many ultralighters use a notebook with descriptions of their gear and notations of weights. This makes it easy to total up gear weight without weighing the entire pack. One of the easiest ways to keep track of gear weights is to list the gear on a computer spreadsheet. This allows rapid sorting of items, with automatic totaling of weights.

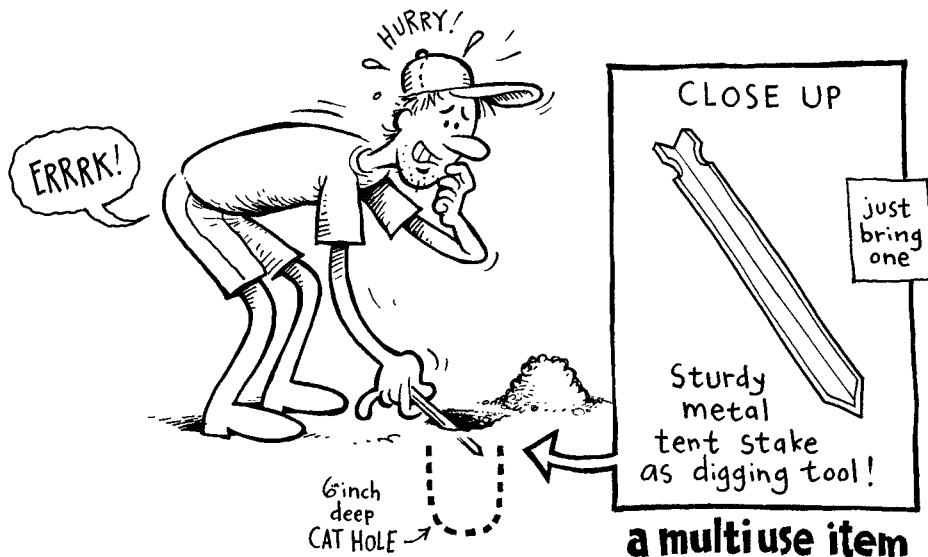


3. Whenever possible, use multipurpose items.

A typical multipurpose item is a poncho, which can serve as both rain protection and pack cover at the same time. It can also serve as an emergency tarp, ground cloth, or privacy screen; its uses are limited only by the ingenuity of the backpacker.

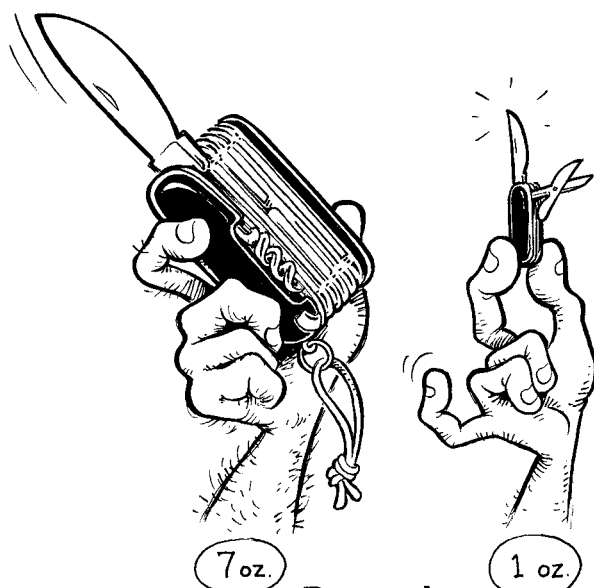


A bandanna is another typical multipurpose item. It can be used as a napkin, handkerchief, pot holder, washcloth, scarf, lens cleaner, sunglasses case, and more. Like a poncho, a bandanna's uses are limited only by a hiker's imagination. Bandannas are usually made of printed cotton and are one of the few items hikers carry for which



the absorbency of cotton is welcome. Instead of the common orange plastic trowel, hikers can carry a single very sturdy metal tent stake to use for burying human waste. An item doesn't need to be ideal for all of its potential uses, it just needs to get the job done and allow the user to leave a more specialized tool at home.

Be sure the additional utility of any multipurpose item is really necessary and will result in less weight. There may be no advantage to having all the tools on a massive "multitool" unless those tools are actually needed and used.



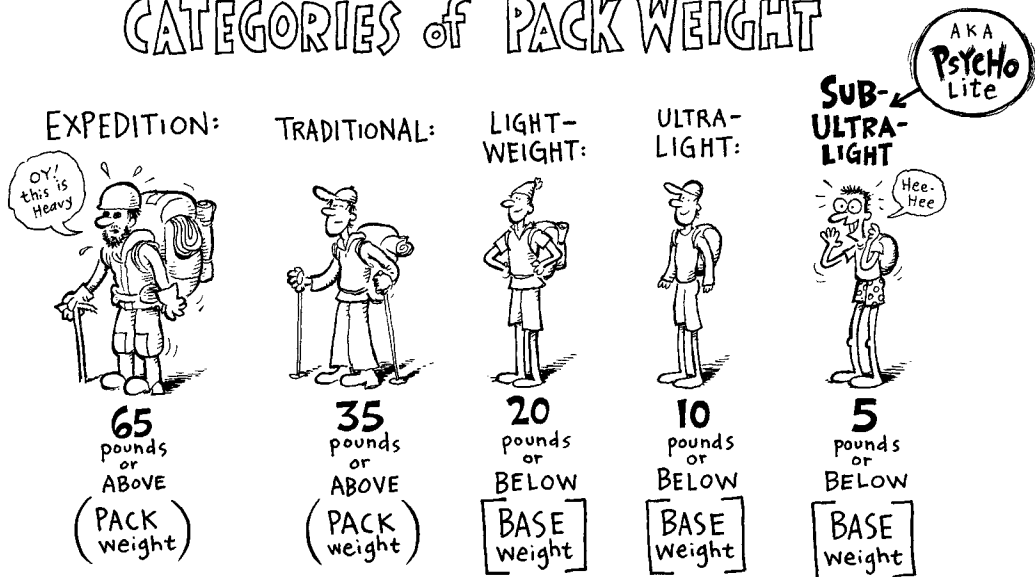
Remember:

In the backcountry, you may need to
cut a piece of string or
trim some moleskin...

4. Look at the heaviest items first.

The greatest potential for saving weight is in the heaviest items. The heaviest items carried by most backpackers are the backpack, sleeping system, shelter, food and cooking gear, and water.

CATEGORIES of PACK WEIGHT



5. When selecting gear, use the smallest items that will meet your needs.

Larger gear is proportionally heavier than smaller gear that may be just as effective.

6. Choose lightweight hiking gear that is useful, sturdy and dependable.

Judge gear in this order:

Is it useful?

Is it dependable?

Is it lightweight?

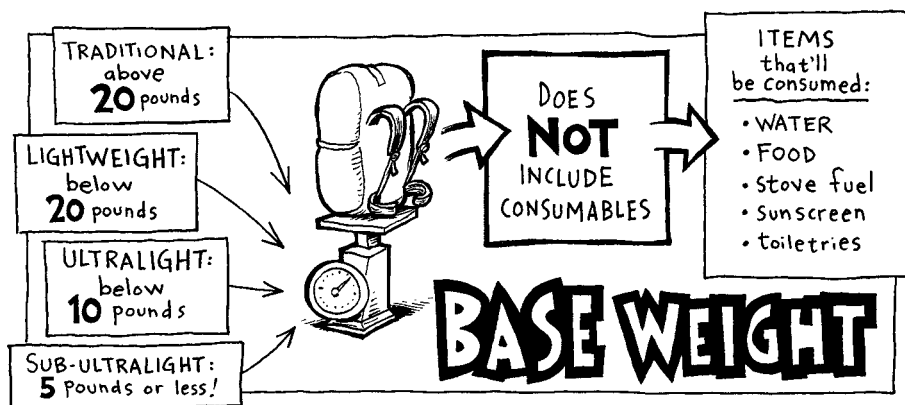
Is it compact?

If an item is not genuinely useful, not carrying it will, of course, save 100 percent of its weight. Gear that breaks down and needs repair on an outing is annoying and troublesome at best, and could result in serious risk at worst.

Computing Gear Weight

There are three distinct methods hikers use in calculating gear weights.

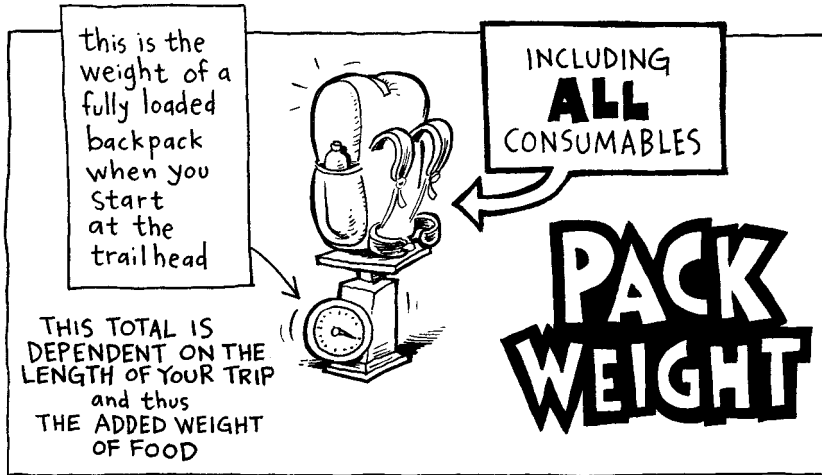
Base weight is the usual method used by light and ultralight hikers to describe the weight they carry. It is the weight of the pack itself and all the items carried in the pack that do not change in weight during the hike. Items that will be consumed, such as food, water, stove fuel, insect repellent, sunscreen, toiletries, and other items used up as the hike continues are not counted in base weight. This method comes from the tradition of long-distance hikers who replenish items that are consumed as the hike progresses. That's why consumables are not included. Most backpackers consider a base weight below ten pounds to be ultralight, and a base weight between ten and twenty pounds to be lightweight.



Pack weight is the method most often used by traditional backpackers to describe the weight they carry. It is the weight of the fully loaded backpack when the hiker starts out at the trailhead. This weight includes food, water, and all the other items in the pack, but does not include clothing the hiker is wearing or items in the hiker's pockets.

Both the base-weight and pack-weight methods leave out certain items, and neither has a definite convention for whether out-

side-the-pack items such as trekking poles are listed. So, when these items are carried, their weights may or may not be represented depending entirely on the preference of the individual. These irregularities are avoided by the “from the skin out” method.



From the skin out is another way to describe weight. It is the most complete but least used description of backpacking weight. It includes every item the hiker will be wearing or carrying as the hike begins. This is not the most convenient way to measure weight, but it does give the clearest picture of everything that is carried, including any items in the hiker's pockets



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