

Baggy's Guide to Hiking

Equipment	2
Buying A Rucksack	6
Blisters.....	8
Food.....	9
Packing your Rucksack	11
Final notes & help	12
Other sources of information	12

Equipment

Basics

Backpack (50 – 80 litres for adults)
Sleeping bag (rated –5 to 20°C)
Tent
Sleeping pad

Eating & Drinking

Water bottles (at least two 1-litre bottles or a hydration pack)
Water purification (filter or iodine)
Stove and fuel
Cook kit
Matches and lighter
Insulated mug
Lightweight bowl and spoon
Utility knife (e.g. Swiss Army-type)

Clothing

Boots (broken in and waterproofed)
Waterproof jacket and trousers
Camp shoes (old trainers, sports sandals, or moccasins)
3 pair socks (no cotton! wool or synthetic)
1 pair long underwear bottoms (synthetic)
1 long underwear top (synthetic)
1 pair shorts
Underwear (optional)
1 T-shirt (synthetic)
Wool or fleece sweater or jacket
Wool or fleece hat
Liner gloves

Wool/fleece gloves or mittens
Bandanna

Accessories

First aid kit
Compass (if you know how to use it)
Maps and guidebook
Small torch or headlamp
Extra zipper-lock/trash bags
Lip balm
Toothbrush/toothpaste (travel size)
Back rain cover or garbage bag
Whistle
Emergency Blanket

Optional Items

Trekking poles
Baseball cap
Sunglasses
Extra long underwear top, wool shirt, or fleece vest if you tend to be cold
Small Hair brush/comb
Journal & pen
Book
Camera, film
Ground cloth
Small strainer

Other Items

Experienced hikers take LESS stuff, not more...

However many hikers have their own favourite items and although not everyone would agree often these hikers swear by their choices.

A bandanna. It can be used as a washcloth, to mop up the wet floor of a tent on a rainy day, as a napkin, as a pre-filter for especially gunky water, as a sweatband, and in a dozen other ways.

Duct tape. With a little thought this can be used to fix just about anything. Examples include fixing holes in tents, holding rucksacks and boots together, a waterproof top to a box, first aid for blisters and many more

Walking sticks. If you've got knee problems, these can change your hike from a limp to a lark.

Cord. Use it as clothes line, to tie stuff to your pack, or to hang food out of reach of animals.

Rubbish bags. Use them as emergency rain gear, a pack cover, for sitting on wet ground, and of course, for taking home your rubbish..

Bungee cords These can be used to attach just about anything securely to your rucksack.

Baking soda. Baking soda makes a good deodorant (don't forget your feet), can be used to freshen up a smelly water bottle, or serve as toothpaste.

Sleeping Mat. This is a good extra item for winter camping: It gives you an extra layer to sleep on at night, and you can sit on it during the day, which reduces the amount of heat your body loses to the cold ground.

Pouch. Worn on your waistbelt, a pouch can keep necessities like insect repellent and sunscreen close at hand.

Hydration system. This could just be a bottle placed so you can reach for it and take it out without having to stop or adjust your kit or it could be a full blown system with a clipable tube that you can draw water through whenever you want.

Repair kit. If you ever have cause to use it you will know why it can be so important.

Essentials

A map. This is essential. With practice you can know where you are and where you are going and be able to cope with emergencies by finding help, shelter or your way to safety. You need a 1:25 000 Explorer Ordnance Survey map ideally. It must be carried in a waterproof carrier (such as a special map case).

Compass. A compass can help you find your way through unfamiliar terrain—especially in bad weather where you can't see the landmarks.

Route plan - You will need to take a copy of your route plan with you and also leave a copy with someone. This is a form completed with details of where you intend to go, type of terrain, escape routes, names of those taking part, weather forecast and so on.

Whistle – Vital in emergency situations when you need to attract attention.

Torch and extra bulbs. For finding your way in the dark and signalling for help. Fluorescent clothing will also be necessary if walking in the dark.

First aid kit. Essential item for any outdoor work. Should also include specialised items for coping with blisters.

Survival bag - This is a heavyweight plastic bag which is large enough for someone to get into in an emergency such as hypothermia.

Walking boots - If you are intending to go hill walking, then you will require a good pair of walking boots that will give good support to your ankles. Always 'break in' new boots before undertaking long hikes.

Waterproof outer clothing – No matter the weather you need waterproof and windproof outer garments. This will keep you warm and dry and quite simply will save your life.

Food – Extra food is important for those unforeseen circumstances. Energy boosting food is also vital in an emergency situation. When walking, you expend a lot of energy, so you will need to take food with you. Have a hearty breakfast before you set out and take something rich in carbohydrates for lunch, for example, sandwiches, biscuits, nuts, raisins, cakes, chocolate. It is also a good idea to have something that you can eat whilst walking, such as glucose sweets, to keep your blood sugar level high. If the weather is cold, a thermos flask with a hot drink, such as hot chocolate, tea or soup will be appreciated!

Layers of clothing - It is better to wear several layers of thin clothing, rather than one thick garment, as several tops, for example, will trap layers of warm air around you. If you get very hot, then one or more layers can be removed and you can still keep warm. Do not wear tight fitting clothes or jeans, as they will not keep you sufficiently warm and they may possibly rub and become uncomfortable. Thick socks also help with not only keeping feet warm, but also with reducing the possibility of blisters. Depending on the terrain, weather forecast, and time of year, you may also require a hat, scarf and gloves.

Rucksac – You are going to need a rucksack to put all this gear into. One with padded shoulder straps and a good hip belt is best. Items should be packed in a waterproof plastic bag to keep them dry. Remember.. you are going to have to carry everything you take. Check the weight carefully and get used to carrying this weight around for several hours before you go on the hike.

Water and a way to purify it. Without enough water, your body's muscles and organs simply can't perform as well: You'll be susceptible to hypothermia and altitude sickness. not to mention the abject misery of raging thirst.

Firestarter and matches. The warmth of a fire and a hot drink can help prevent an encounter with hypothermia. And fires are a great way to signal for help if you get lost.

Army knife or multi-purpose tool. These enable you to cut strips of cloth into bandages, remove splinters, fix broken eyeglasses, and perform a whole host of repairs on malfunctioning gear—not to mention cut cheese and open cans.

Sun screen and sun glasses. Especially above treeline when there is a skin-scorching combination of sun and snow, you'll need sunglasses to prevent snowblindness, and sunscreen to prevent sunburn.

Buying A Rucksack

Hip Belt

A very important option to look out for is the hipbelt. Taking a good portion of the weight on your pelvis can make a huge difference to your comfort. The pack still needs to be designed to transfer the weight onto the hip though through the design of the internal frame.

Shoulder Straps

The more expensive packs have a complicated design that will allow the strap to curve round without forming and bubbles or twists that will turn into sore spots. Sometimes the cheap options have large foam padding but these can actually cause problems in themselves.

Back Panel

When carrying a load you can't avoid having a sweaty back. Modern rucksacks in particular make a feature of air flow technology to allow a cooling airflow to alleviate the problem to some extent. Look for something with good padding that will disperse the sweat. Make sure you pack soft stuff against your back to stay comfortable.

Material

Every major maker of packs uses good quality materials and stitches them together with all the requisite back-stitching and bar-tacks so that a pack is very unlikely to fall apart during years of normal use. Cordura nylon, nylon packcloth, ballistics nylon, and proprietary materials (generally similar to Cordura) are all plenty strong and abrasion resistant. Of more concern is the design of the pack bag—and this is largely a matter of personal preference.

Extra pockets

Most rucksacks are loaded from the top. If the top flap is well designed this allows you to overpack the rucksack to accommodate bulky items (e.g. a tent). Most rucksacks offer a bottom sleeping bag compartment with its own access. The more expensive also offer a large zip on the main panel for easy access to the main storage area.

Don't get too carried away with extra pockets and storage compartments. You won't really need an extra 10 pockets dotted around the rucksack else you may be tempted to overpack the rucksack and uneven distribution of weight could become a problem.

Look out for lashing points (for attaching extra gear) and the type and use of buckles and zips.

Capacity

Depending on where you are going and for how long, a good 50 – 80 litre rucksack should be plenty big enough for most adults.

Adjustment

It is important that you get a rucksack that fits. It should rest on your hips just right without sagging on your shoulders. Look out for a make that comes in different sizes and offers an element of adjustability.

Its often best to ask for help in finding a pack to fit and making the adjustments. Your friendly local dealer should be experienced enough to offer the correct advice and help you fit the rucksasck to your requirements and make any adjustments neccesary.

Testing

Don't be afraid to walk around the shop carrying the sort of load you expect to carry. Look out for a good grip on your back, make sure they are not obvious points of pressure or anything digging into your body. Move your arms and legs around like an idiot and see if the rucksack is drawing you off balance.

Daypacks

Be wary of buying the multitude of daysacks on offer at the local clothing store or supermarket. They may be fine for carrying books to school but rarely are they designed to support a proper load in comfort.

Look out for a hipbelt of some kind, preferably one with some padding rather than a strip of webbing. They probably wont have an internal frame but a contoured fit can do wonders in transferring the load to the correct areas.

External pockets are useful for items in use throughout the hike. Some strap points or similar for lashing on extra items is important.

Again practice with the pack you intend to buy. Test it out with the essential items and walk around with it.

Blisters

Blisters. Any serious hiker has had problems with these in the past. Left untreated they can cause a good deal of pain and put people of hiking for life.

The most important first step is your boots. Do they fit? You need to wear your boots for several days to make sure they are comfortable. Put them on at home and do everything in them for at least a couple of days. When purchasing boots make sure you visit a quality store where the salesperson knows what they are talking about. They can help you through the buying process and show you what to look out for and how to care for them. If the shop is worth visiting they will allow you to wear the boots at home and bring them back and exchange them if they are not quite right.

Break in your boots. This is usually as much of an issue of toughening your feet as softening your boots. Any way you look at it, your feet and boots are going to have to reach a compromise and it is best to sort this out before you hit the outdoors. Its best to practice walking in your boots for a few short trips before you start hiking, even if they are boots you have worn before.

Wear wicking socks—polypropylene or nylon are fine—under a pair of wool or wool-and-nylon blend outer socks. The wicking socks are less abrasive, plus they move moisture away from your feet. Never wear cotton socks—cotton absorbs moisture and practically guarantees blisters.

Make sure the weight of your gear is sensible and is at the low end of the scale (safety and purpose having been taking into account).

Don't walk too far. Quite simply know your limits and gradually increase your distance according to experience, fitness and practice.

The absolutely number one most important rule of blister prevention: The instant you feel the slightest hint of something rubbing in your shoe, STOP! Don't worry if your companions start moaning. Find the problem and sort it out. If it's a tight boot that's causing trouble, rub the inside of your boot with the blunt rounded end of a Swiss army knife to try to stretch the leather or fabric.

If you know you've got a vulnerable trouble spot, like the back of your heel, put a piece of moleskin on it before you start walking.

Treat a hot spot with moleskin on the trail. Blisters that have formed can be treated with special blister dressings available from most chemists. This dressing was developed to treat burns—and after all, blisters are nothing more than friction burns. Whether you're putting moleskin over a hot spot or adhesive tape over a blister dressing, remember that tape adheres better to dry skin than wet skin—so dry your sweaty feet first.

Food

Hiking is a an energy intensive task. You will need to make sure you eating the correct amount to keep your energy up. However the food has to be lightweight, must not spoil easily and should be easy and quick to prepare with the minimum of fuel and utensils.

Basic Staples

A plastic container of olive oil
Instant milk
Parmesan cheese
Packets of clarified butter (available from distributors of freeze-dried food)

Breakfast:

Pop tarts
Cereal
Bagels (they pack well for a couple of days).
Cereal bars

Lunch:

Cheese
Salami or other preserved meats
Peanut butter
Crackers (don't repackage these; store them in the original containers or they will crumble), tortillas, crisps or breadsticks.
Nuts and other snack foods.

Dinner:

See below for some options

Freeze-dried meals. You cant really beat these for an easy meal. They do tend to be expensive and limited in their range though.

Convenience foods. Various makes of noodles and rice meals come in handy here. You can add a little variety by adding in a little extra like a small tin of tuna or a bit of cheese.

Pasta. Thin is better than thick because it cooks faster. Some hikers swear by less processed pastas, such as whole wheat and corn pasta (available in health food stores).

Other instant foods. Instant rice, instant potatoes, and stuffing mix can also be mixed with sauces, cheese, veggies, or canned meats.

Sauces. You can make your own tomato sauce by combining a six-ounce can of tomato paste, a package of spices for making spaghetti sauce, and water: it makes enough for two hungry hikers. Other instant sauces are also available, but check to see that they don't require other ingredients.

Spice kits. A useful tip is to pack along a few spices. For a short hike, you can use mini-zipper-locking bags for storage, but on a long trip, you'll find that over time the zipper channels get blocked with a combination of dirt and spices. To avoid that problem, buy tiny plastic containers:

Salt and pepper
Cayenne pepper sauce
Soy sauce
Garlic and oregano
Onion flakes
Dried mushrooms or sun-dried tomatoes
Oxo cubes

Home dehydrating. If you can cook it, you can dry it. Dehydrating meals brings home-cooked food right to your tent. Dehydrating works especially well with sauces, chilli, thick soups, and fruits and vegetables.

Health food stores. Health food stores carry an interesting assortment of foods that work well when hiking, including quick-cooking grains (couscous and polenta are practically instant), unprocessed cereals (more nutritious), interesting instant soups, and just-add-water foods, including black beans, refried beans, and hummous.

Fresh Foods. Onions, potatoes, cabbage, carrots, and garlic can all survive a while without refrigeration. You can't take too many, because of the weight, but a little bit of fresh flavour goes a long way to add zest to soups and sauces.

Packing your Rucksack

There is no definite way to pack a rucksack but there are certainly some useful rules of thumb that can be applied.

Before you get carried away you need to be absolutely certain that you items you are packing are needed!

Do you really need to take all this stuff? You are going to be carrying all this gear and you may regret taking everything but the kitchen sink 1 mile down the road when your legs feel like they are on fire.

It is generally true to say that lighter weight items go at the bottom and the heavier items go at the top and close to your body.

Most rucksacks are designed to be comfortable with the load high up on the pack (more near your shoulders than near your waist). A lot of rucksacks have a separate compartment at the bottom for sleeping bags and other light items. With some there is an obvious attachment point (at the bottom) for such items. A good point to note here is that your sleeping bag is packed into a waterproof bag.

Items that you may need during the day need to be at hand or easily obtainable.

Examples of such items include: First Aid kit, waterproofs, insect repellent, water bottles, sunscreen, snacks, food. Obvious places to stow such items are in the side pockets or on the small pockets available on the back of the rucksack or even the hipbelt.

There is no such thing as a waterproof rucksack

Make sure that everything is packed in waterproof bags. Your rucksack should have a rucksack liner, a heavy gauge plastic bag (not a bin liner) that can keep all your gear dry. Stuff sacks are also a useful investment as they can help you to organise your gear as well as keep it dry.

Tents and cooking items need special care

You may be able to fit your tent into the same sort of compartment as your sleeping bag. That way you can unpack just the tent and sleeping bag when it is raining and set up camp without having to empty your rucksack. Also if the tent is wet it won't drip over anything else. You could strap tentpoles to the outside or the top of your pack (securely!).

Fuel should be stored upright, away from food and in a properly designed container. Most people chose to put this in an outside compartment. Be careful of sharp edges on any cooking utensils.

If you are walking as a group it may be a good idea to spread the load of the cooking gear and tentage.

Not everything has to go IN the rucksack

Most hikers attach a few items to the outside of their packs. A good candidate is the sleeping mat. This can be rolled up and attached to the top or bottom of the rucksack.

Final notes & help

Don't forget there is no substitute for experience...

If you have never hiked before then it is important that you practice and ease in slowly. You will have to get used to walking longer and longer distances and to carry heavier and heavier weights as you walk.

You can start by walking to school and carrying your books.

After a week of walking add some more weight and increase your distance each day. Ease up slowly. One mile first day with a light backpack. Over the course of several weeks or months you can get this up to 10 miles with the type of gear you would be taking for a weekend away.

It is important that you take it slowly, not only to break in boots and get used to wearing boots but because you need to increase your fitness and get an idea of how much weight you can carry comfortably. This way you won't be stuck on an expedition with a rucksack that is too heavy and feel yourself getting tired less than a quarter of the way into the hike.

If you need any more advice on the technical aspects (such as map reading or compass work), the equipment (such as what to buy) or the training (how much to carry and how far to walk) then please speak to a leader.

If in doubt, ask for help NOW before you start hiking properly

Other sources of information

In this pack you will also find:

- Factsheets on hiking and packing a rucksack from The Scout Association
- Packing a rucksack information sheet
- Baggy's Kit Guide
- A blank route plan

Other factsheets are available including:

- Map reading
- Compass
- Route planning

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