Travelling Light

Going mobile with your kit

Sheet
O.7

Version 1, September 2008. Produced by the Free Range *Energy Beyond Oil* Project 'Great Outdoors' Initiative
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(where sold)

To begin with, when you're learning the basics of living outdoors, you might not want to travel with your camping kit. However, the main benefit of being able to live comfortably with very little is that you can pack up your stuff and move, enabling you to go from place to place or just tour around a small area. This unit looks at a few of the things you need to know.

Travelling isn't the same as static camping

You can be very good at camping, and you can be good at walking or cycling, but travelling with your camping kit under your own power is not the same thing. Especially if you're going for more than a couple of days, it requires you to develop a knowledge of your physical abilities so that you can pace yourself. Travelling and carrying a lot of extra weight, if you don't do it regularly, can stress your body and so you need to be very careful that you don't injure yourself. The simplest way to do that is to take the bare essentials to minimise the weight.

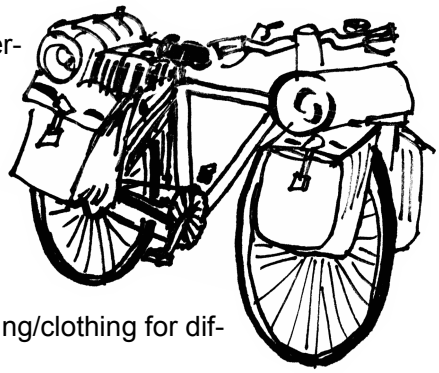
Backpacking or cycle touring, rather like camping, is an art that you learn rather than a set of rules you can be taught. It's something that develops with experience. Most seasoned backpackers will tell you that a few years after beginning the activity they don't carry quite the same amount or type of kit. This is why, as part of the 'Great Outdoors' initiative, we're looking as travelling with your camping equipment: camping is a means for people who are used to living in houses to gain the skills to live with less; but cycle touring or backpacking are a way that campers can learn to minimise their needs even further.

What do you need?

Ideally, as little as possible!

As with the organisation of the units in this series, your kit should comprise the following elements:

Shelter. At its simplest that's a tent, but for 'comfortable camping' you need another fly sheet and ground sheet to sit under/on and cook (a tent that's big enough to cook in it too big; a tent that's not big enough to cook in is, on its own, too restrictive). In addition to this you need to have enough bedding and clothing for the conditions prevailing at the time of year. Again, going back to the “bad equipment” phrase in unit 2, most of the cheap summer-only sleeping bags sold with tents or in supermarkets will not keep you warm enough in the Summer. Even with an adequate sleeping bag it's a good idea to have a number of layers to augment your bedding/clothing for different times of the year. The important thing about backpacking (as opposed to cycle touring), especially if you're wild camping, is that “*you're on your own*” – if problems arise you have to deal with them (which, again, is why backpacking is such a wonderful tutor for energy descent!)



Heat and Fire. At the very least that's a cheap gas stove, but as you develop you skills you might find that you're using a more reliable primus stove, or abandoning fossil fuels altogether and opting for something like a Kelly Kettle and cook-set that burns small sticks to heat water and food. You'll also need matches, but it's a good idea to take and learn how to use a sparking device and a tinderbox in case you run out of matches.

Water. Or rather, the capacity to carry and/or purify water. Water carriers are very useful things to keep around the house should the water be cut off, but by keeping you carriers clean, and/or have purification equipment ready, you're can go off at a moments notice (for camping or other emergencies!).

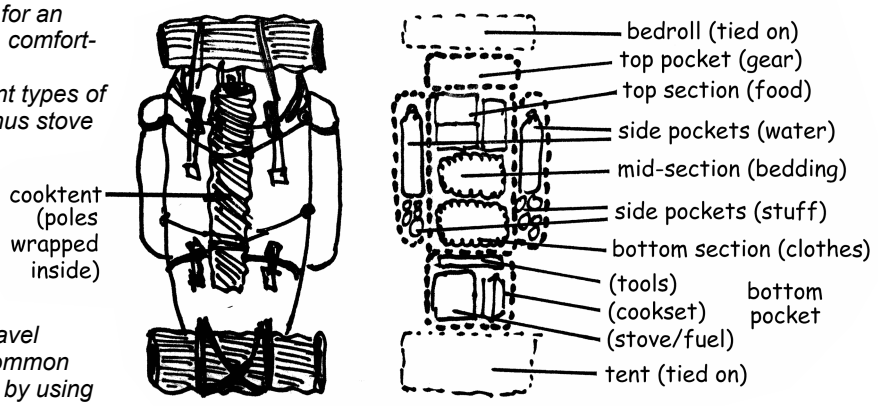
Food. Unless you very get fit and strong you're unlikely to be able to carry more than a couple of days of food whilst at the same time carrying enough water to drink and wash-up. As discussed in the *Food* unit, although the modern camping trend is for dried and tinned foods, you can get by just as effectively with the same simple, raw foods that you use at home, and by doing this you won't generate a lot of non-degradable waste either.

Waste. The essential things you need to manage 'your waste'; toilet paper, soap and towel, toothbrush, etc., and a trowel to bury the most noxious bits.

Travel. To travel with your kit you need to put it in something (this is dealt with in the following two sections). A large, comfortable fitting rucksack is one option. Even if you travel by car, packing into a rucksack rather than the boot makes you take less. Or if travelling by bike you'll need pannier racks and bags. If you keep your kit in the bags at home it's all together, you're less likely to lose it, and you're ready to go at a moments notice.

Light and Power. 'Simple' does not mean 'primitive'. Today there's a whole variety of fairly lightweight wind-up gadgets that you can buy, from torches to radios. Avoid the ones with small solar panels built in – they're more expensive and in practice, unless it's high Summer, the solar panel is less effective than the winding mechanism.

A good rucksack, to backpack cross-country for an extended period of time, must be waterproof, comfortable, and it must be functionally designed. It should be divided internally to carry different types of equipment separately (e.g., so that your Primus stove doesn't stink-up your clothes) and it should have external pockets to carry the stuff you need to access whilst travelling. Ideally it should also have a number of rings or loops to tie things onto the outside. To fit all the equipment inside, a lone backpacker needs a rucksack of at least 70 to 90 litres in volume. When two or more people travel together you can carry less by sharing the common items (stove, tent, cook tent, etc.) and so get by using smaller and lighter packs.



Backpacking

The greatest advantage of backpacking is that it allows you to access places that would otherwise, because they're well off the road network, be off-limits to you. If you want to be able to access some of the last remote and wild places in Britain then backpacking is really the only cost-effective option.

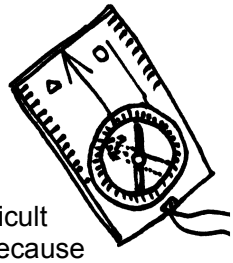
The diagram above shows how you can organise your backpack. There are no hard and fast rules, but generally the heavier items should be at the top or they will behave like counter-acting levers and cause back-ache. The items that you need when camping should go inside (as outlined in the *Shelter* unit). Things that you might need whilst travelling should go in the pockets on the outside (things like toilet rolls should be in waterproof bags as the external pockets are not as watertight as the main bag).

Your tent and your foam bedroll (which should be in a waterproof bag) are probably easiest tied to the outside because they're bulky – otherwise you'll need to a much larger pack to carry them inside. The pack should be internally divided so that you can access one section of the bag without opening the whole bag. This allows you to access your stove and cooking utensils in the rain without getting your clothes and bedding wet. If it's not internally divided they'll have to go in the top of the bag, and this runs the risk that if the liquid fuel leaks from your stove you'll spoil your bedding and clothing.

To be comfortable you need to kit yourself out with some good boots. Whilst more expensive, proper walking boots will last you a few years and so overall they don't cost more to buy than those fashionable trainers which only last six months! The most important thing about getting new walking boots is that before you use them properly they need a period of “walking in”. Wear them on shopping trips, to work, etc., and after a few weeks the materials bend and deform to the shape of the bones in your feet. Only at this point, when they feel that they fit like gloves, should you try walking on them for long distances carrying a lot of extra weight on your back.

Another essential is that you always wear two pairs of socks to avoid blisters. The outer, bulky sock (wool or padded walking socks) pads and protects your feet. The inner thin and smooth sock (ideally a soft wool sock or silk-like material) allows your feet to easily slide inside the boot so that rubbing and compression of the skin doesn't cause blisters. If you do get blisters it's probably because you're boots are too small – ideally you get walking boots that are a little bigger than your normal footwear size and it's the padding of your bulk socks that make them fit.

Cycle touring



Cycle touring is a good way of getting from A to B if it takes more than a few days walking. It's different from backpacking because you won't be going 'off the beaten track'. It's not just that it's more difficult to ride off-road when touring. It's because the stress of all that camping equipment on the frame and wheels will cause damage to your bike if you try to take it off-road! (unless you buy one of those extremely expensive off-road bikes with a frame and wheels made of space-age metal alloys).

Cycle touring might seem less effort than carrying the weight on your back, but in energy terms it's not much different. In addition to powering your body and equipment you're also having to move the bike – so it obviously helps if you have a lighter bike. If possible get one with a frame designed for touring because the torque applied to the bike frame from having weight on the front and back is much greater than just having a rider on top. The wheels are probably the weakest point and you should get 'touring rims' which are designed to take the extra weight.

To securely tour it's essential to have pannier racks fitted front and back, with pannier bags big enough to take your baggage. Normally the loading on a bike is mostly on the back wheel (unless you use a racing bike and you bend your head down to the front wheel!). For this reason you should load the bulky bedding, tents, clothes, etc. onto the back and put the heavier food and water on the front. If you're a regular cyclist this takes some getting used to – it can feel like you're trying to steer a brick! Eventually you get used to it, and one of the essential features of cycle touring will soon become obvious – *with all that extra weight you can't rush and dart about*.

What to take... double bagged!

It doesn't matter if you're touring or backpacking, you should always put your kit in waterproof bags before putting them into your rucksack/panniers. Your rucksack/panniers are waterproof bags, and in the worst case if rain were to enter at the top (because you left a small opening) the bag will fill with water! Double bagging stops rain water getting through to the important contents inside, as well as guarding against leaking cooking oil and sticky foods from the inside.

The 'kit list' in the box on the right lists a whole load of things you might consider taking. Some are obviously essential (tent, bedding) whilst others are optional depending on the time of year (although things like sunglasses are a good for walking in the snow, not just in the sunshine!).

It's a good idea if you can keep your kit together when not in use. That way all you need to do is throw in your food and clothing and you can go off for a day or two at the slightest opportunity. Also, small items like needles and thread or balls of string can be easily "borrowed" for use around the home, and so keeping a spare set kept in your rucksack means that you'll always have them when you need them.

Clothing

Apart from the tent and bedding (covered in the *Shelter* unit) the other important element is your clothing. There are two elements to this:

Firstly, don't take lots of clothes – you take enough underwear and socks to change at least every day and everything else is only changed every few days.

Secondly, your outer clothing should be organised in layers. Wet weather is a problem, but its cold winds that cause the most harm (wet makes you miserable, but the cold kills you!). For this reason we wear warm layers and then top it off with a waterproof external layer. So rather than wearing a thick waterproof coat we wear a jumper and/or a warm fleece and then top it off with a thin waterproof coat.

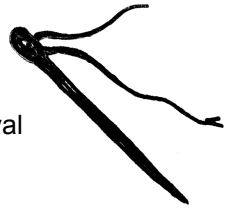
Working with warm layers means that you change the number of layers as you change your level of activity. Note also that when you take a stop after walking or cycling for a while, even if its just a five minute stop, you will cool rapidly, especially if there's a breeze. This is because as the moisture evaporates from you skin it cools you very quickly. For this reason it's a good idea to have a thin warm layer easily accessible to put on when you stop.

Finally, for backpacking (but not so much for cycling) the most important thing to take care of is your feet. If your feet have been sweating in your boots all day it's important that the skin can dry out and breathe, otherwise it will soften and you're more likely to get blisters (you're also more susceptible to fungal infections). For this reason always carry a pair of light shoes or sandals to change into when you've made camp, and you might also consider giving you feet a dusting of pure (unscented) talcum power if they're damp. By having spare shoes you can also deliberately get your boots wet if necessary.

The Basic Kit

Here's a list of the basic items you should take. It's not prescriptive, and you can customise it to suit your own needs and/or the time of year.

- Main kit:
  - Tent (fabric/fleece lined if it's cold)
  - Tarp. + poles for cook tent (advised)
  - Sleeping bag ("2 season" minimum)
  - Additional blanket/duvet (if required)
  - Foam roll (or air bed + pump, but it's heavier)
  - Stove (and fuel to last for trip + 15% extra)
  - Cooking utensils/kettle
  - Knife, fork, spoon and mug
  - Tin opener and carving knife
  - Small water bottle to carry/sip
  - Large water bottle(s) to store water
  - Small trowel for digging
  - Small saw (e.g., foldaway pruning saw)
  - Small axe (but a saw is usually lighter option)
  - Torch (plus batteries if required)
  - Candles + lantern/jar (to save batteries, if req.)
  - Radio (plus batteries if required)
  - String and scissors
  - Needle/thread for repairs
  - Short chain to hang cooking pots on gin pole
  - Scrubbing pad for pans
- Consumables:
  - Food (for two or three days, if possible)
  - Cooking oil
  - Seasoning/herbs and stock for cooking
  - Tea/coffee and sugar/honey
  - Dried milk (if required)
  - Emergency food (dried) in case you run out
  - Toilet roll/sanitary towels
  - Soap
  - Water purifying/taste masking compounds
  - Matches
  - Firesteel + tinder (in case matches run out)
- Clothing:
  - Shirts, trousers – to change infrequently
  - Underwear, socks – to change often
  - Flannel and towel
  - Jumper
  - Warm coat (warm but not waterproof)
  - Swimming gear (optional)
  - Waterproof coat and leggings
  - Hat/gloves
  - Boots
  - Light shoes/sandals (for camp)
  - Gaiters (for use in mud and scree)
- Navigation/safety:
  - Maps to cover the area
  - Compass
  - Whistle
  - Outside of Summer, a survival bag
  - Watch/clock



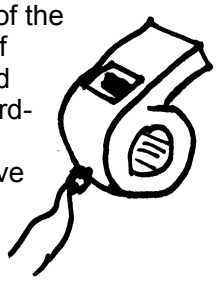
- Extras:
  - First aid kit/anti-septic cream
  - Mosquito net
  - Talcum powder (for feet)
  - Sunglasses/sun cream
  - Boot polish
  - Spare plastic/waterproof bags
  - Pencil + paper

Navigation and safety

Cycling on roads isn't as difficult in terms of navigation as walking. Walking cross country requires you to be able to read a map and interpret the information from the map to the land you see in front of you – and if necessary trust your instincts to believe either your eyes or the map if the two don't seem to match up (although if they don't match up it's usually because you're lost or you're not where you think you are on the map).

Even if you're not doing serious walking, a compass is useful. If the weather forecast if for gales from the west it's good to be able to know where 'west' is! If you're walking, even if your not going into the moors, having a compass is also a good way of quickly finding your location using a process called "resection": Take take a bearing on two visible landmarks about 90º apart; plot the reverse bearing (subtract 180º from the bearing from you to the landmark, and then plot that bearing from the landmark back to you on the map) from the landmarks on the map; where the two lines cross on the map is where you are.

Another issue with walking is time. Although you don't have to "be somewhere" when wild camping it helps to be able to judge how far you can move in a given time. Walking on the flat is easy – you will get to know how fast you walk. The problem is hills because climbing slows you down. You can guess how long you'll take using a process called *Naismith's Rule*: Let's say you walk for 15 miles a day at 2½ miles per hour – that will take about *[15 ÷ 2½]* 6 hours plus stops and lunch. Climbing hills un-laiden usually takes an hour for each 2,000 feet/600 metres of ascension, or 1,500 feet/450 metres per hour if carrying a large pack. If over the day you have 2,500 feet of hill climbing that would take an additional *[2,500 ÷ 1,500]* 1 hour and 40 minutes. So the whole day will take nearly 8 hours, plus stops.



You also need to have the maps of the area to know where you are going. If cycling you can get away with a road map, although the 1:50,000 scale Ordnance Survey 'Landranger' (pink) maps are better because that will give you information on woodland and unfenced roads where you might be able camp. If you're walking the Landranger maps are usable, but the 1:25,000 scale 'Pathfinder' (orange) maps are better because they show you field boundaries, scrub, access land and other features so you're less likely to lose your way (it also a whole lot easier to spot thick hedgerows, shelter belts and woodland for wild camping).

If you're going off the beaten track then another useful device is a whistle. If you get stuck or injured in the open countryside the recognised distress signal is six repeated blasts on the whistle. You repeat this every minute or so – not just so that people can hear you in trouble, but because they can also home in on where you are.

Finally, you should always carry a first aid kit. Unless you know how to use it there's no need to take a full kit with triangular bandages and the like – all you need is a basic kit to patch up any holes that you make in yourself, treat bites and stings, sunburn, and blisters.

Cycle spares

If you're on a bike you'll also need to carry spares and equipment to maintain it. At the very least:

- Two spare inner tubes – it's quicker to fit a new inner tube than repair a puncture, and it creates a better patch of the hole if you repair the puncture in the evening and give the rubber glue chance to dry fully overnight.
- A spanner and Allen key to fit every nut and bolt on the bike, and a screwdriver to fit every screw;
- Two spare rear brake cables (you can cut one down to fit if the front one breaks, but otherwise you've got two rear cables) and two spare rear (dérailleur) gear cables;
- A complete spare set of brake blocks;
- A bike pump, preferably of the 'high pressure' kind, to keep the tyres well pumped up (well inflated tyres are easier to ride on);
- A puncture repair kit;
- A small can of lubricating oil to keep the chain and wheel lubricated (a good idea in wet weather, when rain water can displace the oil in the links and bearings);
- A spare chain link to allow you to reconnect your chain if it breaks (you're unlikely to use it, but it's so little extra weight for the benefit it gives should you ever need it);
- Some spare spokes as one of the problematic but likely consequences of touring with a load is that you break a spoke (although this would only be of use if you know how to repair and rebalance the wheel).

Of course, there's no point carrying spares unless you can use them! For this reason you should learn how to maintain your bike before you go out touring. Especially if travelling long distances in remote areas, being able to maintain your own bike is possibly the only guaranteed way that you're going to get back to civilisation in a reasonable time! From this point of view, the cost of a day course on bike maintenance is a good investment.

And finally, and most importantly...

An average person weighs about 70 kilos. It's generally recommended that you carry no more than a third of your body weight for a long distance – that's about 23 kilos (50lbs) – but in the hills the average person shouldn't carry more than 13kg–14kg (30lbs–32lbs). Try not to exceed this figure or you could damage you joints or pull muscles!

Produced by the Free Range 'Energy Beyond Oil' Project – http://www.fraw.org.uk/ebo/