

What's in an Appalachian Trail hiker's backpack?

Section-hikers carry with them virtually everything they'll need for days or even weeks. Backpacks are designed to transfer much of the weight to the wearer's hips. Here's what was carried on a recent four-day hike through part of New York. Many of the items are in sacks to keep the pack organized. The total weight of the backpack and everything in it, excluding water, is 25 pounds.

Section-hiker's 50-liter volume pack

Folding padded seat

Compass/thermometer

Headlamp (White and red bulbs. Using red light at night reduces the brief blindness that occurs when white light is shut off.)

Knife

Bandana

Bear bell (Lets them know you're coming.)

Lip balm

Bug spray

Bug-bite ointment

Trowel (Field toilet.)

Change of clothes (One extra shirt, socks for each day, underwear for each day)

Self-inflating sleeping pad (In addition to the padding, it provides insulation from cold ground.)

40-degree sleeping bag

Sleeping bag liner (Adds another 5-10 degrees of warmth.)

Single-person tent (81 x 34 inches, total weight of tent, poles, fly: 3 pounds, 8 ounces)

Tent rain fly

Six aluminum tent spikes

Tent footprint (Protects bottom of the more expensive tent from wear and provides some insulation from cold ground.)

Camp soap (Biodegradable)

Deodorant (This is considered a backpacking no-no because the scent can attract critters, including bears. But sometimes I need it to get to sleep.)

Toothbrush

Toothpaste

Anti-bacterial body wipes (In lieu of showers. Packed out after use.)

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Matches (In zipped plastic bag.)

First-aid kit (Bandages, alcohol wipes, blister pads, elastic bandage.)

Quick-dry towel

Spare boot laces

Breakfasts (Dehydrated eggs with sausage, peppers and potatoes; oatmeal.)

Energy bars, sports drink mix

Tent poles

Coffee cup, instant coffee

Collapsible sink

Fork and spoons

Water bottles (Wrapped with 2 feet of duct tape for use in tent and backpack repair or as an emergency bandage.)

Dinners (Dehydrated shepherd's pie, dehydrated chicken and rice, dehydrated lasagna, etc.)

Camp stove, pot and fuel

Pump-style water filter

Backpack rain cover

Heavy plastic, double-zipper bag for packing out trash

Added later: light rain jacket

Thru-hiker's 50-liter pack

Thru-hikers carry many of the same essentials but strive for an even lighter load. They can get by without a tent by staying in shelters and can resupply as needed in towns along the route. Here's what one hiker is carrying on her hike from Georgia to Maine. The total weight of her backpack and everything in it, excluding water, is about 18 pounds.

Three-quarter length sleeping pad (It provides padding and insulation from cold ground, but provides neither below the knees unless the sleeper is curled up.)

4-liter water bladder in backpack

Gravity-style water filter

35-degree sleeping bag

Hammock

One pair toe shoes (much lighter than hiking boots), one pair sandals

Change of clothes (Four pairs socks -- two toe socks, two thicker woolies, three pairs undies, one hiking skirt, one T-shirt, two tank tops, one pullover fleece, one puffy down jacket, one wool hat, one pair long spandex.)

Bandanna

Hand sanitizer

Glasses and contacts: lens solution, case, two spare pairs

Foot powder

Headlamp

Comb

Toothbrush

Toothpaste

Floss

Barometer/altimeter and compass (Used by her great-grandfather.)

Smartphone

Waterproof matches

Emergency blanket

Bug spray

Snack bag (Chips, nuts, dried fruit, cookies, string cheese, peanut butter.)

Her hiking partner, "Chaco Taco," carries a comparable set of personal gear plus these items, making the total weight of his backback about 20 pounds:

Alcohol stove

Kettle

Deli tubs (All-purpose cups/bowls.)

Dinner (Usually couscous, about 2 pounds.)