

Lighten Up Ladies!

In 2020, when the crazy idea of a 550 mile solo backpacking trip came to me, my pack's base weight (which includes everything but food, water and fuel) was about 28 pounds. One of my first tasks was to lighten up my pack. It can be an expensive endeavor - I estimate I spent about \$2000 on gear that year, but you can take this one step at a time, shop the sales, look for used gear and get creative.



Important philosophical note:

Serious thru hikers might aim for an 11 pound base weight, but I was taking a more moderate approach. I wanted the comfort of a lighter pack, but I was not willing to live for months in deprivation to get it. Here are some of the choices I made, and how I arrived at my current 16 – 20 pound base weight pack (depending on how many luxuries I was willing to carry on any given trip).

This is a photo of all my base gear

The Pack

I learned a valuable lesson early on. I had my heart set on a Hyperlite Mountain Gear pack, one of the cool white ones. A friend gave me a great piece of advice - you gotta try the pack on before you buy it. I could not find a good selection of UL (ultra light) packs in retail stores in Seattle, so I drove 3.5 hours to Portland and tried on packs from 6 different manufacturers in one day. Much to my disappointment, the Hyperlite was just not comfortable on my body. It was a total magic moment when I strapped on the ULA Circuit – I had found my pack! Among the many things I love about this pack are the optional hand loops that prevent blood pooling in the hands. Sometimes it's the little things...

Total weight – after I removed unwanted accessories and trimmed the excess strap lengths off, 36 oz.

Dry bag liner – I use a Zpacks liner dry bag inside my UL Circuit, weight 2 oz

Pack Cover – I carry a Zpacks pack cover, weight 2oz

The Tent

I love my Zpacks Duplex. The tent itself weighs 19 oz. You can put 2 people snugly inside, but it shines as a spacious solo tent with plenty of room for my pack and morning stretching. I have sat out 2 day deluge rainstorms in that tent and been bone dry. You set it up using trekking poles, so I include those in the weight, but I almost always hike with them anyhow.

Tent is 19oz. Stuff sack and 8 lightweight stakes 6oz.

Trekking Poles – Black Diamond Carbon Z poles 9.7oz



Pictured Above: Zpacks Duplex tent, optional pole system (+stuff sack) to make it freestanding, 8 lightweight stakes (+stuff sack), repair kit for the freestanding poles, stuff sack for the tent

The Sleep System

Sleeping Bag - This one was easy for me. I was going quilt all the way. I sleep hot and for years had struggled with mummy bags (roasting feet, impossible to side sleep). I did my research and settled on the Enlightened Equipment Revelation, 20 degree, regular/regular, 850 fill. In all but the coldest winter conditions, it keeps me more than warm enough. (I have since purchased a winter quilt, zero degree with a sewn foot box that I use in the winter).

Important note – your sleeping bag/quilt will only perform at close to the rated temperature if you store it properly. DO NOT store it in a tight stuff sack! If yours is in a stuff sack now, take it out, apologize, and put it in a spacious bin or hang it in your closet.

Total weight – 22.5 oz, 24 oz including the elastic straps that wrap it around your sleeping pad for colder conditions.

Pillow – yes, I want a pillow. I want 2 pillows because when I sleep on my side, I need some more pillow height. Currently I use the Nemo Fillo Elite, weight 3 oz.

I also use a Zpacks pillow dry bag. It's a dry bag that does double duty. I use it as my sleeping quilt stuff sack. Then, you turn it inside out and one wall is lined with fleece. I stuff my down puffy inside it and voila, second pillow for side sleeping comfort. Total weight – 1.8 oz.

Sleeping pad – I have 3 in rotation right now, which I use together or apart. When I am counting ounces, I carry 2 and 3, total of 19 ounces, giving me a “chair” and a sleeping pad. When I am not counting ounces, I carry 1 and a chair, which is 30 ounces – and sleep like a baby and luxuriate in camp comfort.

- 1) Therma rest Neo Air Xlite NXT, regular wide – weight 16 oz. I use this one when I'm not counting ounces because it's super wide and oh so comfy. It has an R value of 4.5 (that is how well it insulates from the cold) so it's not my go to when I'm sleeping on really cold ground or snow.
- 2) Therma rest Neo Air Xlite Women's regular – weight 12 oz. I use this one when the ground is really cold (it has an R value of 5.4) or when I am counting ounces. It's not as thick as the one listed above and is quite narrow. When I use this one, I use the pad below (3) laid crosswise about midway down the sleeping pad, which allows me to side sleep and hang my knees off the narrow pad without hitting the cold ground.
- 3) Therma rest Zlite Sol regular – cut in half so it's 36” long (my husband uses the other half) and weighs 7 oz. This is my sit pad, and my chair when I am counting ounces (but you need a stump or tree or rock to use a backrest). It also gets used as my side sleeping pad with the Women's Neo Air Therma rest (see above).
- 4) The stuff sack, inflation bag and repair kit for both 1 and 2 – total weight 3 oz. (yes, I could manually blow the mattresses up but I HATE that task. I'll take the 2 oz penalty and use the inflation sack)

The Food and Water Preparation

I decided to get serious about how I eat on the trail when I realized I would literally be spending months of my life living out there. See my website section on UL Backpacking Meals for a more complete explanation.

Stove – The JetBoil Stash – Stove, pan, lid, fuel tripod, Bic mini lighter. Total weight 7.4 oz

Cozy – for “cooking” the “add boiling water” meals. I refuse to eat out of an envelope. See the meals section of my website for more info on how to make one. Total weight 3.2 oz

Spoon – I just have a standard Toaks Titanium Spoon. Total weight 1 Oz

Cup – yes, I want an insulated cup to enjoy my morning coffee. When I am not counting ounces, I carry my full size Thermos 16 oz mug, which weighs a whopping 8 oz (!!)

When weight is a factor, I carry a GSI Infinity Backpacker mug, which has a spill resistant lid (good idea when you’re in a tent), doubles as a measuring cup, and has minor insulation. (if you get one of these, put a piece of clear packing tape over the white printed measurement markings because the numbers wear off) total weight 3.5 oz.

Water filter – Sawyer Squeeze. Wonderful little filter! Here is my setup:

- Sawyer squeeze filter
- Extra gasket in my repairs kit (I lost mine once and the filter leaked that whole trip)
- Cleaning coupling – you can buy this on Amazon, maybe at REI. it’s a blue screw on top that replaces the white “drinking” spout top the filter comes with. This piece allows you to screw a water bottle onto the filter for use in a gravity feed system. It also allows you to use a water bottle in the field to backflush the filter (that way you don’t have to carry the silly syringe the filter comes with)
- Water scoop – the water bags the Sawyer comes with are awful, they break easily. Take one of them and cut it in half. The bottom half is now your super lightweight water scoop so you can easily fill your “dirty” bag even from standing water.
- Dirty water bag – for whatever reason, Platypus water bladders have a different thread measurement than the Sawyer, so won’t work well as your dirty bag (they leak). I have used CNOC 2 liter bladders, which are amazing, but I have gotten holes in 3 of them now, and they are expensive. They weigh 3 oz. Now I am using an Evernew 2 liter bag (also compatible with the Sawyer) which weighs 1.5 oz and is more durable.
- To make a gravity feed system: it gets old squeezing water through the Sawyer Squeeze. It becomes one of those chores you dislike more with every day on the trail. Make yourself a really simple gravity feed system! Make sure you swap out the white cap on the filter with the cleaning coupling (see above). If you use a CNOC bladder dirty bag, the wide end already has a hanging attachment – just thread a 2 or 3 foot length of lightweight cord through that hanger. If you are using the Evernew, get a single hole punch (like you would use for paper). Punch a hole on each side of the bottom of the water bladder (do it in the thickest part so the hole won’t rip out) and thread the same 2-3 foot length of light cord through it.
 1. fill the dirty bag,
 2. Attach the Sawyer (following the flow direction arrow printed on the filter), to the dirty bag
 3. On the other end of the Sawyer, screw in a 1 liter Smart Water bottle – back it off a little for better airflow

4. Hang the whole setup from a branch or whatever you can find – and let gravity do the work. It's quite fast. If it's not, you may need to backflush your filter.



Water Bottles – I carry 2 Smart Water bottles with me - a 1 liter and a .7 liter with a sport cap. The sport cap will screw onto the Sawyer if you want to drink directly from the filter. The bottles weigh almost nothing and are pretty durable. Make sure you put a couple wraps of some duct tape around your water bottles – it comes in handy in a hundred ways. These bottles, being tall and thinner, fit well and are easily pulled out of side pockets in your pack. Total weight, about 2 oz.

Pictured Above: Evernew 2L dirty bag with gravity feed cord, Platypus 1L clean bag, Sawyer Squeeze filter, ½ of a Sawyer 32 oz bag (used as a scoop to fill the dirty bag)

I also carry an extra 1 or 2 liter water bag, especially if I know I will be staying at dry camps – then I have the capacity to carry almost 6 liters of water.

Food Storage – I carry an Ursak All-Mitey because I loathe doing bear hangs and it's often difficult to site a good hang. The All Mitey is a bear bag and is critter proof – rodents or squirrels can't gnaw through the bag. I can get 6 days of food in one bag. They are legal bear proof containers in most national parks, however not Olympic National Park. I sometimes break the rules and carry it there anyhow. But I am METICULOUS in my food handling practices. I store all food in odor proof bags inside the Ursak. I wash them before every trip and try my hardest not to get food scent on the outside of them. You must learn how to tie the bag to a tree or store it on the ground if need be, they have YouTube videos with good instructions. Total weight with a small carabiner and odor proof bags – 14 oz.

If I know there will be issues with bears, especially camper habituated ones, I usually choose to carry my BV500 bear canister. Although bears will almost never get your food out of the Ursak AllMitey, if a bear gets your bag in its jaws and gnaws on it for a while, all your food will be crushed and ground into a mess of food and plastic. That will put an end to a nice trip. The bear can weighs 41 oz and will hold about 6 days of food but is a bitch to pack in my UL Circuit.

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When it's not sunny or
buggy, I won't carry the
mosquito net or the
sun hat.

Socks – I only buy Darn Tough socks. They are pricey but you will never get a hole in them in the middle of a trip. I find them on sale, in the ugly colors no one else wants. I usually carry

a lightweight pair to wear with my sandals if I need them, and a mid-weight pair to wear for warmth in the evening. The two pairs weigh 4oz

Tilley Air Flow Hat – this is my sunhat during the day and doubles as my mosquito net holder in camp. Weight 3.5oz

Light weight wool beanie and gloves – Outdoor Research makes a lightweight glove with a removeable rain proof outer liner. Together with a lightweight wool hat, they weigh 3.5oz.

One standard bandana, one pair of hiking underwear, and one lightweight Pack Towel , total weight about 3oz

The Clothing Total (minus the shoes)

That is right around 5.5 to 6 pounds of clothing – which includes what is on my body. One of the biggest mistakes I see people make is carrying WAY too much (or the wrong kind of) clothing. If you are summer backpacking and you have a wool shirt, a button down, a down puffy, gloves and wool hat, and a rain jacket...you are not going to get cold. And if somehow you do, get out your sleeping quilt and wrap it around you, or get into bed and read. Pray for menopause to leave you in a state of long lasting inner fiery warmth, as it did me.

Shoes: I hike in sandals. My favorites are the Chaco Z Cloud, which weigh 13 oz for the pair. My feet get hot and since I walk around barefoot a lot, I don't have calluses on the back of my heels so am prone to blisters. Try it, see what you think. They are lighter than the lightest shoes. I find them much more comfortable, and I can tromp through stream crossings all day long and never worry about wet feet.

If I'm walking thru long stretches of volcanic area, think lava fields, I bring a pair of Altras. When I was on the PCT, I sent my Altras in a resupply box for the miles of lava fields. Then sent them home and went back to my sandals.

If I need to do a lot of snow travel, I carry a pair of Altras and my Kahtoola micro spikes. Total weight 18 oz for both. For short stretches of non-technical snow, I can wear the micro spikes on my Chacos and carry a pair of lightweight neoprene socks to keep my feet warm and provide some cushioning. I wouldn't want to walk for hours in them, but for a couple long snow fields, it's just fine. (who knew you could put micro-spikes on sandals?)

The Essentials

Electronics:

Phone - I break "the rules" by depending solely on my phone for navigation. Unless I am going somewhere off trail, where if my phone died, I would really be screwed...then I will reluctantly carry a map and light compass. I have Gaia GPS and CalTopo on my phone for nav. I have a heavy duty protective phone case which I only use for backpacking. Total weight about 8oz.

Garmin In Reach Mini – I consider this essential equipment for solo backpacking. I always have a check in person, giving them instructions about what to do if they don't hear from me on the satellite messenger every day. See my website under Safety Considerations. Total weight 3.5oz

Battery Pack – right now am using the LOVELEDI 15,000 mAh battery pack, which weighs 8.1 oz and will charge my iPhone 16 about 3.5 times. That will get me through about a week of trail hiking where I am not using intense nav.

Headlamp – the Petzl Arktik Core is a rechargeable headlamp, love it! Weight 2.9oz

MP3 player and headphones – if I want to listen to audio books and music quite a bit, I carry an old school super lightweight MP3 player. I have a converter to load my spotify and audible content on the player. The battery lasts about 25 hours. That way I don't have to use my phone for media and the battery life on the phone is prolonged. Total weight 2oz

Journal – I write a lot when I am on trail. My Rocket Book is an essential piece of equipment. The pages are erasable (with a damp cloth) for unlimited writing. Using the app, you take a picture of the page – it is transcribed to text and stored on the phone until my next encounter with wifi – and then erase the page and fill it up again. They use special pens, so I carry one pen and one ink cartridge. (as a side note, the ink they use is sensitive to heat – it disappears if the notebook gets super hot – don't leave your rocket book sitting in direct sun for a long time) Total weight for book, pens and reading glasses 5.7oz

The Not Much Else

Sunglasses – if I think I will need them, Tifosi in a soft bag 1.2oz

Chair – I have a 14 oz chair – It's the first luxury item I will pack if I'm not counting ounces.

First Aid Kit: total weight about 5oz



NOTE – find some sticker backing paper – cut strips of Leukotape and put them on the sticker paper. Carry an assortment of sizes, from full width 6" long, to thinner smaller strips. You will use this to make your own bandaids if needed. Cut a small piece of gauze and plop it on the middle of the tape - the Leukotape will stick to your skin longer and better than any bandaid ever invented. Brilliant for waterproof, virtually non-removable blister covers.

Kit – Neosporin 2 small travel packets, 4 Alcohol wipes, 2 blister bandages, asstd Leukotape, 4 small gauze squares, 1 large sterile gauze pad, about 3 feet stretchy bandage tape, small ace bandage, N95 mask if in fire season. Put them in a small plastic bag.

A collection of various items including a Smartwater container, a bundle of sticks, a bottle of Elmer's glue, a roll of white tape, a cardboard box, a bag of white material, a black pen, a coiled cable, and a small instruction card.

Personal Hygiene Kit: total weight about 8.5 oz

Head net for bugs, small sunblock in plastic container, small Deet in plastic container, light weight tooth brush, powder tooth paste in small plastic bag, travel size floss (or wrap a bunch around your toothbrush handle), foot salve (which you don't need if you wear shoes), a sliver of bar soap and lotion (totally optional), a light weight wide tooth comb (I have hair half way down my back), extra hair tie

(This is a hard one for a lot of people – they carry WAY too much crap. Do you really need deodorant in the back country? Especially if you are going solo? Do you really need to brush your hair? Wash your face with soap? Do you really need sunscreen if you have a sun hat and a light weight long sleeve hiking shirt?)

Toilet Kit: Total weight about 3 oz

The Deuce lightweight trowel, re-usable pee cloths (I cut old pack towels into 3” wide strips and carry 1 per day, or carry a few and wash them after they are all dirty), toilet paper (you only need about 5 squares per poop with creative folding techniques), a snack size ziploc for dirty TP (and yes, you really need to start carrying out your used TP if you don’t already). Keep your fingers away from your shit and you don’t need to carry hand sanitizer.

The Grand Total!!

Without the chair, that is a 17 pound base weight pack

With the chair, close to 18 pounds

Food weighs about 1.5 lbs per day (if you do it right)

A small fuel canister (full) weighs 7.4 oz – that will last me for 6 days

6 days of food and fuel weighs about 9.5 pounds

1 liter of water weighs 2 pounds (that’s normally what I carry for a hiking day in my pack – unless it’s really hot and I won’t be passing any water sources. I pack my filter and dirty bag in the outside pocket and filter on the fly to refill my 1 liter bottle)

That means a pack for 6 days solo, including everything, weighs just under 30 pounds.

You can carry that!!