

LIGHTEN UP!

Shed pounds from your pack using these **ULTRALIGHT STRATEGIES.**

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY RYAN JORDAN

Members of Montana's Venturing Crew 2001 are traveling along the crest of the infamous Chinese Wall in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. To our left, 1,000-foot cliffs drop off sharply.

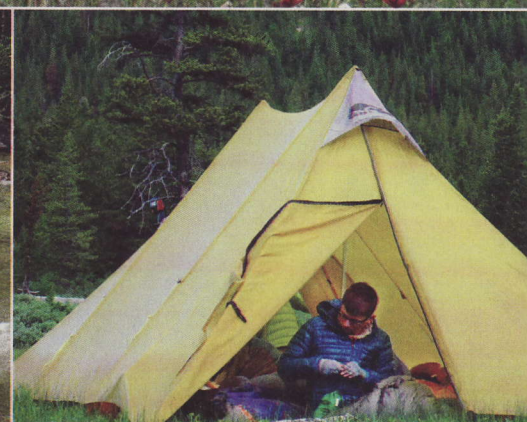
We are on the ninth day of a two-week expedition. When our trek began, our packs weighed about 50 pounds on average. And, yes, we were practicing ultralight backpacking techniques.

Two weeks' worth of food and fuel amounted to about 28 pounds per person. We also carried packrafts — inflatable solo whitewater boats (with paddles, life jackets, helmets, repair kits and dry bags) — that let us cover more than half our trip along rivers. The packrafting kit weighed less than 10 pounds. So the base weight of our personal and shared group gear (camping, cooking and more) was only about 12 pounds each.

It's true: You and your Scouts can do more — and go farther — with less.

Ultralight backpacking lets you do so much more with gear that is light, functional, comfortable and safe. But often this technique is met with skepticism. Turn the page and learn how to debunk common ultralight-backpacking myths.





From glacier traverses, a 100-mile-plus packrafting journey, mountain biking excursions and more, the Venturers in Crew 2001 have racked up the mileage with less gear on their backs because of the ultralight backpacking techniques they use, like sharing lightweight group gear.



WATCH A VIDEO from Crew 2001's latest expedition and find even more ultralight backpacking tips at scoutingmagazine.org/ultralight.

Myth No. 1: Ultralight backpacking is for experts only.

Some think ultralight backpacking is for otherworldly expeditions, not weekend trips in your local woods. However, ultralight style isn't just for experts!

My son was 12 years old and 78 pounds when he completed his first 50-miler — an eight-day traverse across Montana's Beartooth Mountains. We trekked at altitudes up to 12,000 feet across talus, snow and trail with six other Scouts. Our base pack weights (not including food and water, but including group gear) averaged less than 13 pounds.

With the right training and preparation, even the youngest Scout can benefit from ultralight backpacking — a lighter pack will serve him well during long- or short-distance treks.

Myth No. 2: Ultralight backpacking is uncomfortable.

Some people believe hunger, wilderness survival, and pain and suffering go hand in hand with ultralight backpacking. That's simply not true.

Advances in materials, technology and equipment have dramatically increased a person's equipment choices. High-performance ultralight gear is widely available. There's no need to sacrifice comfort.

For example, a down sleeping quilt with 3 inches of loft (and a 30-degree temperature rating) can weigh as little as 16 ounces. Compare that to the 5-pound synthetic bags that dominate the shelves of your local sporting goods store.

Of course, the best proof that ultralight backpacking can be comfortable: 20 pounds on your back as opposed to 40 — especially when you're faced with a 3,000-foot mountain hike and you're an 11-year-old Scout (or a 50-year-old Scouter!).

THE SEVEN STEPS TO ENLIGHTENMENT

1 Weigh your stuff. Get a digital scale and weigh your old gear. Add up the pounds and ounces, and then make a beeline to your local outdoor shop for some lighter gear. Ounces add up to pounds, and pounds add up to discomfort on the trail.

2 Trim the fat. Camp chairs, GPS devices, espresso makers, the latest novel — do you really need this stuff? You're going into the backcountry to get away from it all, so don't bring it all with you! Remember, we're interested in experiencing the benefits of ultralight backpacking, not in transferring a car-camping philosophy to the wilderness.

3 Plan your trip and limit your contingencies. Do your homework and assess your destination's terrain, climate, weather and natural hazards. Then plan

and pack accordingly. How light you go will depend, in part, on your experience and skill — so don't cut it too close. But at least grab a last-minute weather report and adjust your equipment list accordingly. And practice! Backyard and KOA camping in bad weather is a great way to tune your gear and take risks you normally wouldn't take in the backcountry.

4 Consider function first. Take the lightest possible item that will do the job. Rethink your equipment list. Most backpackers think they need more than they really do. For example: "I need a tent." In reality, you might only need an overhead shelter on a summer hike in the desert. Solution: an 8-oz. silnylon tarp that saves you pounds.

5 Consider multiple-use items. Taking multi-use gear reduces the number of items you carry and can dramatically simplify life on the trail. Some classic examples: using a poncho as both

raingear and shelter; socks as mittens; or one pot for boiling, eating and drinking.

6 Don't just take a bunch of stuff — build a system. Exploit the synergies among items to achieve maximum performance. This is especially true when planning your clothing, sleep and shelter system. For example, ultralight hikers who wear their sleeping bags around camp as insulating gear (or those who opt for a lighter sleeping bag and combine it with an insulating jacket at night) are able to save significant weight over backpackers who bring a jacket for camp and simply use it as a pillow with a too-heavy sleeping bag.

7 Learn to be an outdoorsman. Develop a solid foundation in backcountry skills, and you will lighten your load. Dealing with weather, injuries, route-finding challenges and natural hazards depends as much on your backcountry skills and ability to improvise as it does on your gear.

Myth No. 3: Ultralight backpacking is expensive.

Make no mistake: Ultralight gear can be expensive! It's not hard to drop several thousand dollars on a complete kit by buying new gear made with state-of-the-art materials. (Thousand-dollar sleeping bags and \$500 backpacks are not uncommon.) However, that's not necessary.

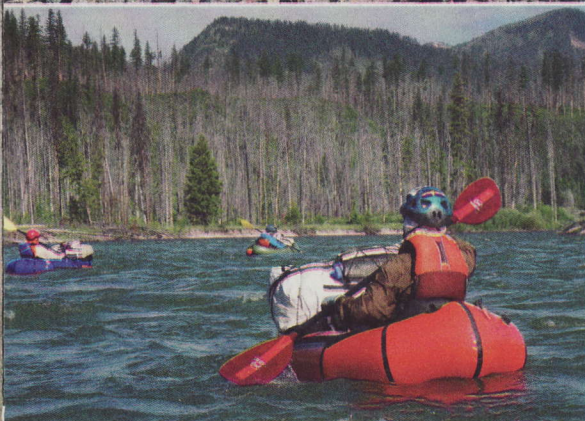
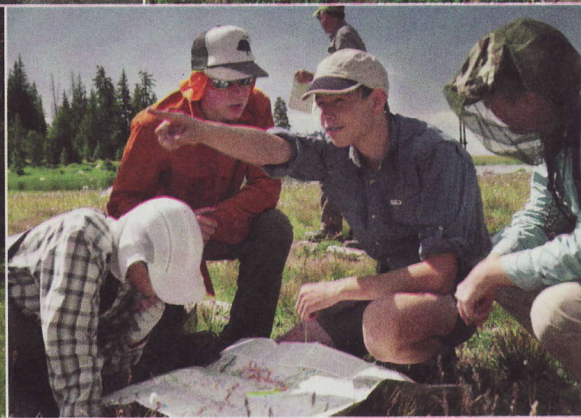


Find a list of new ultralight gear at budget-friendly prices at right.

In most cases, the difference between spending a few hundred dollars and a few thousand dollars on a complete kit can be measured in ounces, not pounds.

Challenge your Scouts to do their research. Consider function first and encourage them to take the lightest

Ultralight Gear on a Budget				
TYPE		BRAND / MODEL	WEIGHT	MSRP
Backpack		Jansport Katahdin 40	1 lb., 12 oz.	\$80
Sleeping bag		Vaude Sioux 400	2 lb., 8 oz.	\$80
Sleeping pad		Gossamer Gear Nightlight	5 oz.	\$24
Rain jacket and pants		Frogg Toggs DriDucks	5 oz. jacket, 5 oz. pants	\$22
Gas stove		Etekcity Gas Stove	4 oz.	\$14
Cooking pot		Open Country 2-qt. kettle	9 oz.	\$15
Water bottle		Empty Gatorade 32-oz. bottle	2 oz.	\$3
Shoes		Asics Gel Venture 5	22 oz. (pair)	\$55
Tarp shelter		Oware USA 10-ft.-square FlatTarp (shelter for three)	18.5 oz.	\$150



Packrafting goes hand in hand with ultralight backpacking because the lighter pack lets hikers make room for a 10-pound raft and its accessories, like a paddle and life jacket. These watercrafts allow Crew 2001 to take their adventures to the next level. Members of Crew 2001 include (from left, at top): Ryan Jordan, chartered organization representative and author; Chase Jordan; Nikolas Torgerson; Walker Roy; Justen Torgerson, adult leader; Aiden Fink; Andrew Meyer; Frank Meyer, adult leader; Erick Lawrence; and Eric Vann.

possible item that will do the job. Discuss the cost savings compared to weight savings.

Save further by shopping at thrift stores in towns with an outdoor recreation industry or sales at outdoor equipment retailers and outlets. You can even buy used gear through online hiking forums.

Myth No. 4: Ultralight backpacking is unsafe.

With such a light pack, how can you have enough gear to be prepared for adversity? This is hands-down the most common misconception about ultralight backpacking.

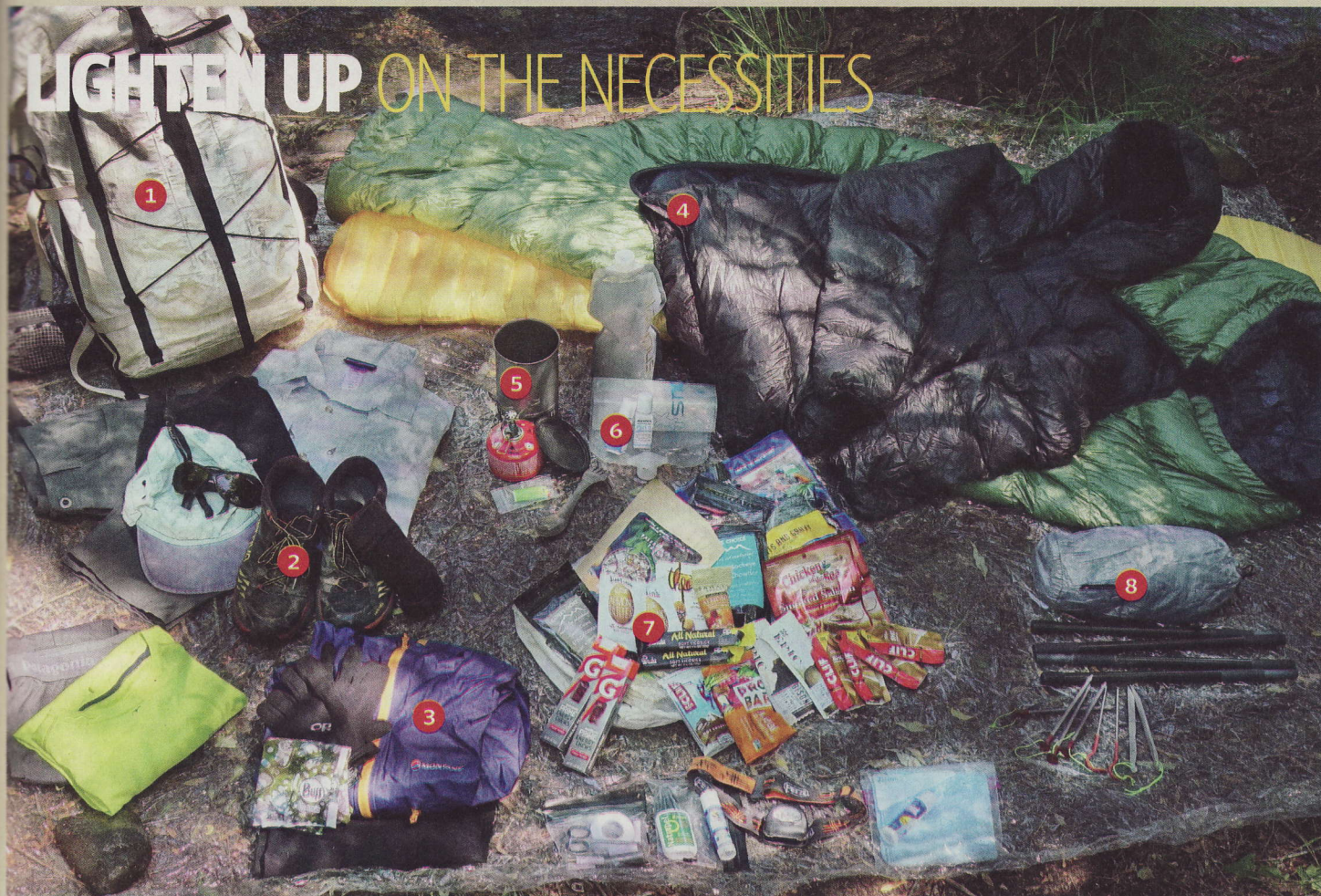
Managing risk requires a well-planned, comprehensive program that starts as much as a year in advance of a trek. The program should go well beyond the weight or quantity of gear taken on a trip. It's just as important to know the limitations and appropri-

ate use of gear, get advanced skills instruction and practice, carefully plan your trip, be physically fit and have qualified supervision.

Practice makes perfect. You can't weather a storm in a light tarp without having mastered this skill first. Solicit experts to teach these skills in a safe environment, and then practice them ruthlessly until you have mastered them enough to teach others. Once you build your skill set and have practiced in a variety of inclement conditions, you'll be ready for bigger and bolder expeditions. ✦

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LIGHTEN UP ON THE NECESSITIES



1 Backpack: When you lighten the load, you can get away with a lighter pack! Simple packs without complicated suspensions and harnesses weigh less than 2 pounds. Compare this to conventional backpacks designed for loads of 50 pounds or more, which can weigh 8 pounds. But don't make the rookie mistake of cutting the handle off your toothbrush without lightening the rest of your gear and expecting your still-heavy load to be comfortable in a frameless 12-ounce pack.

2 Shoes: Mountain boots with lug soles have their place, but if most of your hiking program involves light packs on trails, boots are overkill. U.S. Army research shows saving a pound from footwear is equal to saving 5.7 pounds from your backpack! So take the pounds off your feet and hike in trail-running shoes.

3 Clothing: Pack only the clothing you can wear at once. "Extras" are nice but not required for wilderness travel. Rinse socks and underwear en route, and dry them by hanging them off your pack while hiking. Three layers of clothing — hiking shirt and pants, base layer (long underwear) top and bottoms, and rain gear (jacket and pants) — plus an insulating top layer (fleece, down, or high-loft synthetic appropriate to your locale and weather) are all you need during the summer.

4 Sleeping Bag: You don't need a winter sleeping bag for summer camping. A 750+ down fill, 30-degree rated bag weighs less than 2 pounds, and when combined with the clothing you are carrying (which will add at least 10 or 15 degrees of comfort), it will keep you warm enough anywhere you spend the night outside between the Fourth of July and Labor Day. To save even more weight, try a hoodless down quilt or higher-loft (e.g., 850 cubic inches per ounce) down bags.

5 Stove: White-gas stoves are heavy, inefficient and prone to flare-ups. For four- or five-person groups, consider a canister stove like the MSR WindPro and an aluminum 4-quart pot. In normal summer conditions, this system consumes less than half an ounce of fuel per person per day (compared to more than 1.5 ounces with white gas).

6 Water: Water filters can be heavy (11-plus ounces) and prone to clogging with silt. They also require tedious field maintenance. Classic 1-liter hard-sided water bottles and hydration bladders weigh 5 to 7 ounces per liter of water storage. Switch to chemical treatment (consider liquid or tablet chlorine dioxide kits) for lighter treatment of large volumes of water. One 3-ounce Aquamira kit treats 30 gallons. Use soft-sided water bottles (a 1-liter soft-sided bottle weighs about 1 ounce) to shave pounds off of your group's water systems.

7 Food: Don't neglect the valuable metric of calories per ounce (CPO) when planning your menu. High-carbohydrate foods, such as rice and pasta, have a low CPO (50 to 70), while high fat foods, such as peanut butter and nuts, have a high CPO (150 or higher). A balanced menu is best — make sure you have a reasonable supply of protein, as well — but try to minimize water weight in your foods, pack a healthy portion of high-fat calories and target a total CPO in the 120-140 range for your overall diet.

8 Shelter: Floorless shelters such as tarps and pyramids require more campsite selection and pitching skills, but are pounds lighter than double-walled tents. They are also drier due to increased airflow (less condensation), roomier and can accommodate an entire patrol or crew.