

Tough Test of Tenba Shootout 32L



Having used lots of Benro products and found them to be excellent quality and value, I was keen to see some of the other brands available from the MAC Group. A huge thanks to Tenba UK for providing the Shootout 32L.



Tenba Shootout in use high in the mountains. Note easy stowing of trekking poles and really useful pair of zipped pockets on the back

I was more than happy to review any backpack but Tenba were keen for me to test out the new Shootout 32L. This was useful to me since it was the largest in their range. Those that know my photography will realise my kit is minimal so what was the idea behind the large pack choice?

Working as a mountain guide and photographer on Scotland's Isle of Skye, I'm usually out for long days carrying lots of gear. If guiding then I may have climbing gear as well as a camera and because of the harsh climate and conditions there's always going to be waterproofs and survival kit. Even for landscape photography there's always a reasonable amount of gear and typically I might take the following;

Sony A7RII

Zeiss Batis 25mm and 85mm lenses would be my go to lenses
Sony 35 and 55mm lenses; although these are not always taken

Benro TMA28C tripod and GD3WH geared head

Spare batteries, memory cards, lens clothes

Goretex top and trousers

An insulated jacket, hats and gloves

Water bottle and possibly a Thermos type flask, food for a day

(In winter additions would include ice axe and crampons and extra clothes)

Thus, I'm looking for a reasonable sized pack but above all I'm looking for usability and toughness. If a bit of gear doesn't work for me then it won't be leaving the house. The Cuillin is a tough testing ground for gear with extremely abrasive gabbro rock, acres of rough scree, dust and grit. Then there's the invariable bad weather, lots of rain, high winds and salt water due to the mountains rising a sheer 3000 feet out of the sea.



Shootout 32L high above Loch Coruisk



Set up for the above shot. Note Benro TMA28C tripod and Benro GD3WH geared head. Taken whilst testing H & Y filters. My Benro filters fit easily into the magnetic filter frames making for an easy to use set up



The author wearing the Shootout 32L during a typical day at the office

What Tenba says about the backpack;

“Our goal in designing the Shootout Backpack was to create the most comfortable camera backpack on the planet — as comfortable as a bag for hardcore hikers and adventure travelers, but with a streamlined, professional look that would not be out of place (or draw unwanted attention) at a wedding or executive photo shoot. The unique Pivot Fit™ straps adjust automatically to different shoulder shapes. All the materials have been carefully selected to deliver extraordinary long-term durability, but with the least possible weight. We use only nylon fabrics — no polyester — because nylon is more water-repellant, durable and tear-resistant than polyester. This is the ultimate "Never Compromise" backpack for photographers and filmmakers.”

It's a large pack and should take a large, professional system with ease.”

First impressions were mixed as my wife and I unwrapped the Shootout 32L. I liked the tough materials and the design but Bridgette seemed less than impressed and thought it “a bit of an oversized man bag.” Luckily my impressions were spot on and over the last few months the pack has seen a lot of time out in the mountains.

It may look a bit over engineered with lots of pockets and dividers, tripod holder and raincover but real world use soon proved the practicality of the Shootout. The pack has had just under three months of pretty heavy use and has performed faultlessly for a variety of tasks.



Lenticular clouds above the Red Cuillin hills. Photo taken on first trip out with the Shootout. We live behind Glamaig, the hill on the left, so this was a typical local shoot



With Genghis before guiding him up the mountain behind

Most use was probably landscape photography both with clients but also personal trips high up for sunsets and sunrises. It proved it's worth for photo shoots both roadside and mountain top. Typical was a series of outings with a dog, Genghis The Springer, who has just one mountain left to climb to finish all the Scottish peaks over 3000 feet known as Munros. That's 282 mountains so he's one capable canine.



Genghis has his boots put on to protect his paws from the rock. Note Shootout in the background which did an equally good job protecting my camera gear and carrying climbing kit and gear for a day in the mountains



Photobombed by Genghis as I prepare to guide him and his owner up the mountain on the right. This is a Munro, or mountain over 3000 feet, called Am Basteir which translates as The Executioner. Note rope and climbing gear which all fitted in the pack

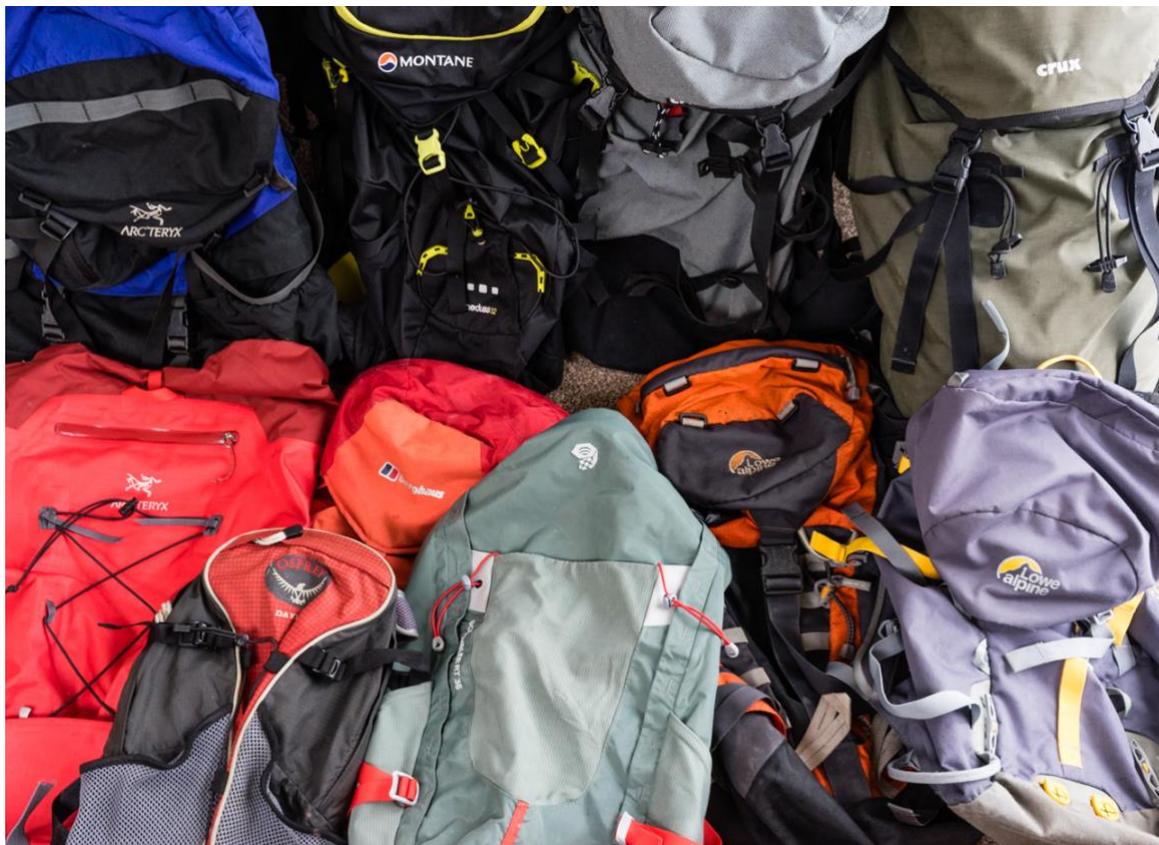
Days were spent with Genghis and his owner Mac as we ticked off the tricky peaks in the Cuillin, culminating in an ascent of the massively exposed spire known as “The Inaccessible Pinnacle.” For these climbing and photography trips, the Shootout was perfect; it swallowed all the gear needed. Thus not just camera gear but food and drink for a day, spare clothes, first aid kit but also a 40 metre climbing rope, climbing gear and helmet. True, the helmet was attached to the outside but everything else squeezed in.

Other trips have been pure guiding with minimal camera gear, usually just one body and 35mm prime lens. There have been other reviews to do including some clothes from Keela Outdoors and H & Y Filters and the Shootout has coped perfectly with all that was asked of it.

The pack is large and meets my needs but here’s just how much camera gear can be fitted in, according to Tenba;

“The 32L backpack will fit a large professional camera system, yet it meets U.S. domestic and some international airline carry-on requirements. It will protect 1-2 Mirrorless or DSLR cameras (up to Pro size with grip) with 5-7 lenses, up to attached 400mm 2.8, plus a 17-inch laptop. It also fits a DJI Mavic and other compact drones.”

Being a guide and photographer I’ve got loads of different packs of varying sizes, makes and uses. There’s some top brand one’s in my store cupboard, renowned outdoor kit made by Arcteryx, Mountain Hardwear, Crux, Montane and Berghaus. These have been honed down, each for a specific job and many others have been discarded. In the past, I’ve used several different premium brand packs designed for photographers but never really liked the design or the fit and comfort; no names, no pack drill but think very high end.



Some of the packs I currently use and against which the Shootout was judged

Photo specific packs have never worked out for me hence there being none in my store room. Mostly they have seemed very heavy and uncomfortable and have long since been sold. For a long time I have just used climbing/trekking packs with camera gear in separate padded pouches. It works but isn't the most accessible so having the Shootout to try was an eye opener and I have to say it's been put to a lot more use than I might have expected.

“The Tenba Shootout collection is designed for the outdoor crowd, whether a weekend photo warrior or a die-hard backcountry hiker. Even with a full complement of photo or video gear, the tough-in-any-weather Shootout backpack is an option for outdoor adventures.”

“Our goal in designing the Shootout backpack was to create the most comfortable camera backpack on the planet—as comfortable as a bag for hardcore hikers and adventure travelers.”

No pack is perfect but the Shootout certainly lives up to the above hype and whilst it may or may not be the most comfortable camera backpack on the planet, it is certainly the most comfortable pack I have ever worn and light years ahead of other premium photo packs. What really surprised me was how much more comfortable it was than climbing/trekking specific packs.



Lush padding and wickable material on the shoulder straps, hip belt and back of the pack make it a pleasure to wear even when carrying a heavy rope and climbing gear. This is partly down to the combination of fabrics used but also the Pivot-Fit Airflow Harness.



The pack is built like a tank from water repellant nylon, YKK clips and self healing zippers. I love that the base of the pack is made from even stronger waterproof fabric so it can be stood upright in the dirt with no ill effect. Lots of packs seem to absorb water especially if the base is on wet ground then it just soaks up and through the rest of the pack. Not so on the Shootout.



Shootout 32L in it's conventional configuration ready to take a pro set of camera gear. Note huge zip opening panel for easy/quick access

The zip front panel is brilliant for quick access to camera gear and other kit. Whether it is better or not than the more traditional rear opening panels, only time and more use will tell. The only downside seems to be that the back and straps can potentially get dirty when put down.

Everything is well made, stitching and fabrics all seem very durable and Tenba are obviously confident since their gear comes with a 5 year warranty against workmanship and material defects. Despite months of hard use with lots of contact with aggressively abrasive gabbro rock, apart from a few dirty marks, the pack looks and functions as good as new.

The pack works well for me but not in it's original set up. I envisaged getting a largish camera pack and removing some of the dividers so as to make room for outdoor kit and clothing and this works really well. This obviously isn't it's intended use and I can see this pack being useful for most photographers, especially pros with lots of gear which this will easily swallow. The pack looks smart in black and besides rugged outdoor use, it could be great for wedding or portrait photographers with lots of gear. I wasn't sure how useful the compartment for a laptop would be but it's worked well for giving talks at camera clubs and business meetings. This pack really does cover every conceivable need.

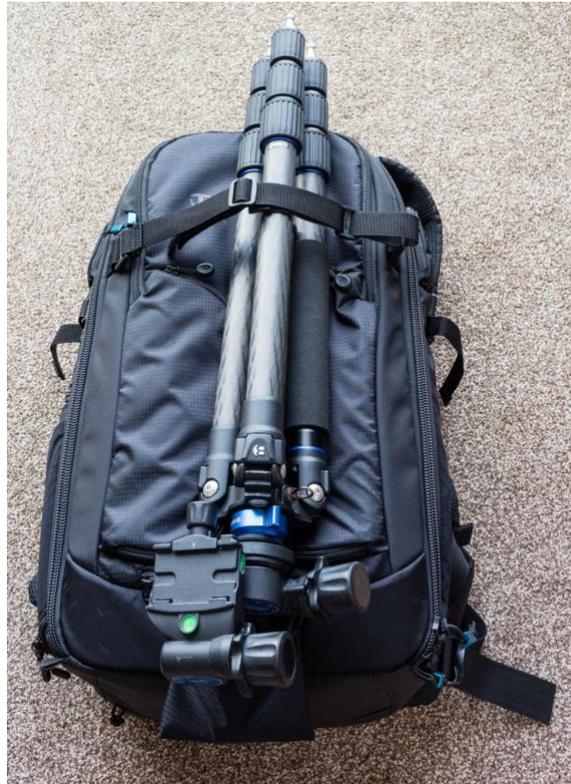
Here are some of the features that I really like;

1. It is capable of configuring internally exactly how you want it. Thus you could carry a shed load of camera gear or strip out the dividers to make space for outdoor gear. Versatility is key.



Shootout 32L configured for my landscape photography kit of camera body, 3 lenses and filter system. The rest of the space will take clothing and outdoor kit. Sony A7RII with 25mm lens attached, 55 and 85mm lenses, 3 GND and 2 ND filters and filter holder

2. Ease of tripod attachment.



Benro TMA28C and GD3WH securely attached. Because I have spiked feet on the tripod, I have attached the opposite way to suggested so the spikes don't damage the lower attachment pouch.



Pouch that pulls out to slip tripod into. When not in use, it zips away keeping the outside of the pack neat and snag free.

I'm not sure of the technical term, but I really liked the strap included to fix the tripod. It clips on and off really easily and is fast to use and adjust. Not sure if you can buy these separately but it would be good if the pack came with at least another one as it's so useful.

3. Rain cover is included as standard and isn't an optional extra. Again, it has a neat compartment for it to pack away in to.



Tripod pouch above and rain cover below

4. Easy access to camera without having to open the whole pack up and expose all gear to the elements.



Zippered side access compartment makes removing the camera for a shot a breeze. Note clear, zipped pouch and included lens cleaning cloth. Nice, useful touches.

5. Laptop compartment. Not a feature I thought I'd make use of but it has proved invaluable for business meetings and talks.



6. Loads of compartments to keep not only small bits of camera gear organized but plenty of space for outdoor gear.



A very useful clear pocket for business cards and clear zipped pouches that you can easily see the contents of so great for batteries etc.

The large zipped pocket on the rear is truly capacious and I can fit a set of waterproof trousers and jacket in it easily and, if necessary, a lightly insulated jacket. The proliferation of pockets may seem overkill but works well for keeping stuff organized and safe.

6. Probably equally important are the already mentioned degree of comfort even when carrying a huge load, and the tough, protective nature of the whole pack which seems bombproof.

7. Easy and fast access to camera/outdoor gear via a zip that runs around three sides of the main compartment.

Is it the perfect camera backpack, well, no but nothing's ever perfect. What would I change? Ideally, it would be lighter but then that would mean compromising durability and robustness. Black does look professional and doesn't show up dirt and wear too badly but a bright colour option would be nice; vivid coloured gear looks great both as good PR for the manufacturer but really shows up in outdoor photography. Note how well the red Keela jacket that was on test shows up in pictures!

All in all, a big list of positives and I've really had to scratch my head to find some negatives so the Shootout 32L obviously gets a big thumbs up from me. Above all it does it's job and allows me to get on with mine.



Wearing the Shootout on the summit of Sgurr nan Gillean



Sunset from the Cuillin Ridge



The Shootout in use high above Loch Coruisk with the Cuillin Ridge in the far distance



The Shootout being put through it's paces in a tough environment

Below are a few landscape photos taken during the testing of the Shootout;





In conclusion, it's definitely the most comfortable pack I've ever used in the hills and perhaps manufacturers of hardcore climbing and trekking packs could learn a lesson or two here. For landscape photography and mountain photoshoots it works really well and I imagine it would be equally good for more mainstream genres of photography especially if it entails lots of kit.

I've only had the Shootout for three months so the jury's still out on long term durability but given the harsh work it's been put to then I'm confident the design, material and build should ensure years of trouble free use.

The best testament to how good the Shootout works is the amount I've used it. It works for me so it gets taken out on the mountain. Had it not been a useful addition to my backpack armoury it would have been consigned to the cupboard.

The basic Shootout design is available in a variety of sizes, 14, 16, 24 and 32 litres so a size for most jobs and people. See link below to check out all the range and it's features;

<https://www.tenba.com/en/collections/shootout/shop>

