

How to pack a rucksack – not as stupid as it sounds....

The Rucksack

Let's get this clear; how you pack your rucksack is a very personal thing, each person has their own funny little techniques. However, there are some golden rules that you'd be fairly stupid to ignore, especially in the context of undertaking our expeditions in the Beacons, Snowdonia or Dartmoor.

Kit List (see attachment)

What goes in a rucksack for an expedition can differ enormously from person to person but ideally you'd want to carry as little as possible, as let's face it, walking for days on end with a big pack is hard work and something that not many teenagers/young people are likely to have encountered before.

What goes where?

The consideration of the order in which you pack things in your rucksack can be simplified to the interplay between the two major factors: balance/comfort and accessibility.

Kit that's only required last thing at night should go towards the bottom of the rucksack; e.g. sleeping bag/liner should be right at the bottom. Things that are needed quickly like waterproofs, snacks, water and first-aid should be quickly accessible near the top or in side pockets.

Symmetrical – this is really important. Try and get the side-to-side weight balance even and have nothing protruding from the rucksack into your back/ribs. Even a slightly mis-balanced pack will give you a sore neck/shoulder/back after a days walking; a full water bottle in only one side pocket might not be a good idea...

Try to concentrate the weight as close to your back as possible to prevent you losing balance on climbs or descents.

Heavier items. For normal walking on easy going terrain, heavy items near the top of the pack allow you to get the weight over your centre of gravity by leaning slightly. This option also allows for very easy tuning of weight transfer to hips or shoulders using the appropriate straps. **THIS IS A GOOD**

THING.

The only disadvantage is that the high centre of mass makes it quite hard to balance when you're on awkward or extremely steep terrain. In this case, moving heavy items down the bag towards your waist makes it much easier to balance, but will tend to drag the weight onto your hips and pull back at your shoulder straps giving a secure but more sluggish feeling.

If possible, the zipped lower compartments of rucksacks for sleeping bags shouldn't be sealed off with the internal divider; this creates a shear plane allowing the rucksack to twist and flex which upsets the weight balance between shoulder and hips. This will give you a sore back.



Waterproof things thoroughly; a bin bag will not be suitable as a rucksack liner unless it's an industrial/food one. A plastic fertiliser or cement/sand is the kind of thickness required; Better still if you can afford it, buy a purpose built dry bag.

Put things like clothes and sleeping bag inside another waterproof layer (such as a plastic shopping bag) inside your liner.

Keep things in groups; it sounds stupid but keep your waterproof trousers with your jacket, your pans with your stove and lighter so everything is at hand quickly when you need to perform a certain task. Keep snacks, headtorch and first aid kits in an easily accessible outer pocket.

If you carry a water bottle don't try to carry it on YOUR rucksack. The side mesh pockets are rarely accessible on your pack, instead ask your mate to carry your water bottle and you carry theirs. This makes access a lot easier and avoids the need to drop rucksacks each time you need a drink.

If you have a system it may help massively if you get to a position where you have to finish the day and setup camp in the dark. Try not to have the entire contents of your rucksack strewn around your tent at night – if it rains you will regret it, if there are foxes nearby you will lose kit.

Never dangle things from the outside of your pack; at best they'll get wet/torn and at worst they'll fall off in the mist and you'll never see them again.