



# Huntin' Fool Extreme Gear

Exclusive Article By Bryan Martin

## Packing for a Backpack Hunt, Part 1

This is the first article in a multi-part series about packing right for a backpack hunt. In this article I have split my packing list into an “essentials” list and an “optional” list. The essentials list is what I consider minimum equipment to keep the pack weight low, hopefully under 55 lbs, including food. Certain hunts may require a few extra items. You should go over both lists and decide what you need on each hunt. Personally, I tend to go a bit over prepared and am accustomed to carrying heavy packs; I treat a backpack sheep hunt like a soldier going to battle and personally would take many of the optional items.

This list is designed for both a self-guided and a fully guided backpack hunt, from summer/desert conditions to extreme cold and deep snow. Because most people will be hunting with a friend or guide, many of the items can be shared, creating a lighter pack for each person. There is no need to pack multiple stoves, spotting scopes/tripods, satellite phones, GPS units, etc. if you'll be hunting and traveling together.

Backpack hunting solo is not for everyone, but sometimes, because of time constraints and the hunt difficulty, going solo is your only option.

It is up to personal preference as to how much you want to carry. When I do such a hunt, I am self-sufficient and don't need to rely on the environment for food or shelter, except in a true emergency. My focus is on maximizing my hunting time, not on trying to survive or on just “getting by.”

I carry the lightest equipment I can, but if durability and strength are important, I'd rather carry a few extra pounds than have equipment failure. Also, if something fails, I'm generally equipped to repair it in the field. I hope I won't need some of the “emergency” items I've listed, but nearly every item in my pack has been used by a client, friend, or myself, on more than one occasion.

When I leave on a solo backpacking hunt, with 10 days worth of food, my pack and rifle will normally weigh in excess of 80 lbs. on the way back, assuming I'm successful, it will weigh 130-150 lbs. Remember, I spend months at a time in the field and am accustomed to heavy loads, the average hunter should try to go as light as possible, 55 pounds is a good target weight.

Backpack hunting requires a lot of mental and physical toughness and determination in addition to equipment preparation. If done properly, backpacking allows a serious hunter the ability to access remote and isolated hunting areas quickly and efficiently, without having to backtrack to the base camp every night.

Good backpacking equipment is not cheap because it has to be both strong and light. This is a difficult combination, but quality equipment can last for many years. The beauty of it is that you can use it for horseback hunts and day hunts.

## THE “ESSENTIALS” LIST

### CLOTHING

- Socks: wear 1 set, pack 1 set or take enough for a change every 2-4 days
- Briefs/Boxer briefs (2): wear 1, pack 1
- Long Underwear Tops or t-shirt (2): wear 1, pack 1
- Long Underwear Bottoms (1): generally not necessary in hot weather
- Pants (1): wear them
- Shirt or Pullover: wear it
- Gloves: light weight (1 or 2 pair)
- Hat (1): wear it
- Raingear: Jacket and Pants, for desert/dry conditions, just take jacket or no raingear
- Hunting Jacket (1) and/or Insulated/wind shell jacket hood (down or synthetic fill), for extreme cold, jacket with hood is recommended
- Cotton Handkerchiefs (1 or 2): for nose and sweat

### FOOTWEAR

- Boots: waterproof, unless in desert, new laces and leather treated/conditioned
- Blister/foot care kit (moleskin, Band-Aids, blister covers/pads, 2nd Skin, athletic tape, and/or duct tape)

### SLEEPING

- Sleeping bag (mummy or modified/semi mummy style) in water resistant/proof compression sack
- Inflatable sleeping pad with stuff sack and repair kit or foam pad (3/4 or full length)
- Backpack tent or Bivy Bag

### HUNTING EQUIPMENT

- Large backpack
- Binoculars: waterproof (minimum of 7 power and 30 mm objective) with cover and/or
- Rangefinder or Rangefinding Binoculars
- Spotting Scope-Variable: 40x minimum or eyepiece doubler for binoculars
- Compact Tripod, preferably with quick detach head and extra plate (for camera)

- ❑ Telescopic Trekking Pole (1 or 2)
- ❑ GPS: with extra batteries (light weight model)
- ❑ Lens cloth (Spuds), individual lens wipes and/or Lens Pen
- ❑ 1 compact hunting knife (sharp) and small Diamond Stone
- ❑ Havel's Orange Handled Piranha Scalpel Knife with 60 XT blades (5-10) and size 21 scalpel blades (5-10)
- ❑ Mini-Leatherman: pliers and screwdriver
- ❑ Topographical maps (1:50, 1:100, or 1:250) and/or Google Earth print out and/or maps on your GPS

#### **RIFLE/SHOOTING EQUIPMENT**

- ❑ Gun and Scope (Bolt action preferred, .25 caliber minimum)
- ❑ Rifle sling and scope cover
- ❑ 10-20 Cartridges (Premium factory or reloads) and a nylon shell holder
- ❑ Gun oil, wet a few patches with oil and put in ziploc or use Birchwood Casey individual cloths

#### **COOKING AND FOOD**

- ❑ Lexan, 12 oz cup and spoon; Lexan bowl and/or fork
- ❑ Light weight backpack stove: either a whitegas or butane/propane cannister type
- ❑ Whitegas in aluminum fuel bottles or butane/propane cannisters (can't take fuel on commercial flights)
- ❑ Cookpot (stainless steel, aluminum, or titanium)

#### **FOOD ITEMS**

Your total food should weigh 1-2 lbs per day per person or 2,000-4,000 calories per day

Dinner: 1 Mtn House or similar, freeze dried meals - 16-20 oz portion sizes

Breakfast: Granola cereal or oatmeal for breakfast (1 pre-made package per person), 2-3 instant packages, carnation instant breakfast or similar or 2 granola/power/energy bars if you don't want to cook

Lunch (biggest meal of the day): take around 1,000-2,000 calories per day, items might include:

- ❑ Jerky or pepperoni sticks: not more that 1/4 lb per person per day or sardines,
- ❑ Bag of trailmix per day: almonds, pecans, raisins,
- ❑ Bag of dried fruit for every 2-3 days,
- ❑ Candy bars: 1-3 per day per person,
- ❑ Nature Valley Granola Bars: 1-2 per person per day,
- ❑ Wilderness Athlete, Powerbar, Cliff Bars: 1-2 per person per day,
- ❑ Juice or energy drink mix,

#### **MISCELLANEOUS**

- ❑ Digital Camera: 10-12 mega-pixel with extra battery, memory card, and waterproof case/bag
- ❑ 1 Headlamp: LED using 3 AAA batteries and extra set of batteries
- ❑ 2 liter size Platypus or 3 liter Nalgene wide mouth collapsible Water Bladders

- ❑ Water filter, Steripen, and/or Iodine or Katadyn Water Pure Tablets
- ❑ Matches in waterproof container and 1 or 2 butane lighters
- ❑ Firestarter: Pitch witch, military issue, Zipp sticks, waxed paper, etc. (no petroleum products near food)
- ❑ Bug repellent (1 or 2 oz bottle): Deet is best (especially in July and early August)
- ❑ Sunglasses with head strap (take extra lens or an extra pair if hunting in the snow)
- ❑ Ziploc Bags (2 or 3 each, 1 gallon size and 1 liter sized)
- ❑ Garbage bags (2-3, heavy duty kitchen or larger type - compactor or lawn/leaf bags are best)
- ❑ Nylon cord (30'-40')
- ❑ Small Ditty bags for organizing clothes, emergency supplies, food, etc.
- ❑ Hunting and Fishing License in license holder or Ziploc
- ❑ Airline ticket, passport/ID, firearms permit, wallet, credit card, emergency phone numbers
- ❑ Trophy fees, emergency and tip money (US cash, bank check, or traveler's checks) - outfitted hunt

#### **PERSONAL**

- ❑ Tooth brush, tooth paste, and dental floss, and/or toothpicks
- ❑ Toilet paper or paper towels in Ziploc (Kleenex pocket packs are good too)
- ❑ Lip balm with SPF 10 minimum and mini Sunblock tube: SPF 20-30 (especially for snow conditions)
- ❑ Prescription medication (antibiotics, etc.)(if required)
- ❑ Glasses or contacts (if required)
- ❑ Advil or aspirin and/or Mobic or Celebrex (anti-inflammatory)
- ❑ Compact First Aid Kit: Band-Aids, butterfly closures, ointment, needles, medical tape, and antibiotic cream

## **THE "OPTIONAL" LIST**

#### **CLOTHING**

- ❑ Extra Briefs/Boxer briefs
- ❑ Weather/waterproof glove (optional, but necessary for cold weather)
- ❑ Gaiters (optional, but recommended for wet conditions, mud, or thick bush)
- ❑ Sweat band for wrist and/or head
- ❑ Travel and/or spare clothes - leave at base camp or in town

#### **FOOTWEAR**

- ❑ Camp shoes
- ❑ Stream crossing waders (optional, but recommended for Alaska and northern Canada)

- ❑ Gore-Tex socks (optional, but recommended for wet/cold conditions)
- ❑ Garbage bags or light weight waterproof bag for putting boots in sleeping bag to keep from freezing
- ❑ Stocking cap or headband for sleeping (cold weather); Thermarest Pillow slip

#### HUNTING EQUIPMENT

- ❑ Backpack rain fly and extra hip buckle
- ❑ 2, 1" wide nylon straps with buckles (20"-36" long) (optional, but recommended for strapping on antlers, etc.)
- ❑ Portable, light weight, bone saw - Gerber Gator or WY Saw are strong (optional, but recommended)
- ❑ Light weight shooting bipod or shooting sticks
- ❑ Satellite phone - handheld model with extra battery or a SPOT email messenger - in waterproof bag
- ❑ Rifle carrying system like the Kifaru Gun Bearer or Gunslinger
- ❑ Acu-Sight Laser Bore-sight for your caliber with extra batteries or Leupold Bore Sighter
- ❑ Compact cleaning rod (3 piece alum or Otis Cable) with copper or nylon brush and cotton patches

#### RIFLE/SHOOTING EQUIPMENT

- ❑ Electrical tape for barrel: High Quality, like Scotch 3M Super 33+
- ❑ Any specialty tools for tightening scope mounts and stock screws or use the mini-leatherman
- ❑ Hard weapon case (for commercial flight) - to be left in town or base camp
- ❑ Light weight soft case or leather horseback scabbard - for trip on plane or jeep; not for backpacking
- ❑ Customs 4457 Declaration Form (fill out at US Customs Office before leaving), for firearm and optics

#### COOKING AND FOOD

- ❑ Soap (1/2-1 oz) small plastic container with plastic scrubber - put in Ziploc
- ❑ Paper towels in a Ziploc bag

#### FOOD ITEMS

- ❑ Kipper Snacks, Sardines, or Oysters: 1 every 2-3 days per person
- ❑ Freeze dried ice cream, desserts, gum, hard candy

#### MISCELLANEOUS

- ❑ Hard water bottle (Nalgene) or Gatorade type bottle: 1/2 - 1 quart/liter sized
- ❑ Tea bags, instant coffee, hot cider, or hot chocolate
- ❑ Spice shaker/seasoning salt and/or salt/pepper and small container of cooking oil
- ❑ If you'll have a base camp, then bring fresh food (onions, fruit, bread), skillet, utensils, etc.
- ❑ A little salt and/or baking soda - sometimes helps with cramps
- ❑ Drinking hose for your water bladder
- ❑ Compass with mirror

- ❑ Orange flagging tape and/or small whistle
- ❑ Game bags: Alaska Game bags or Pillow cases (optional, but recommended)
- ❑ Caping Salt: 4-6 lbs for sheep/deer shoulder, 8-12 lbs for bear rug, elk cape, or sheep/goat life size
- ❑ Book (small paperback) and small notepad and pencil/pen
- ❑ Small repair kit: needle, thread, tenacious tape, seam grip, Gore-Tex patch, and/or duct tape
- ❑ Small (1-2 oz) liquid soap (no-scent hair and body) or shampoo or body bath towel
- ❑ Small chamois pack towel and wash cloth
- ❑ Deodorant (baking soda or no-scent type) or Lavalin
- ❑ Babywipes 1 per day and/or Wet Ones for face/hands (optional, but recommended)
- ❑ Prednizone, Flagil, Ciprol, painkiller (Codeine or Vicotin), Epi-pens: emergency medications
- ❑ Sport shield or Body Glide for feet and/or inside of legs, etc.
- ❑ Athletes Foot/Jock Itch Cream: Tinactin and/or Desenex for rashes/irritations
- ❑ Gold Bond Medicated or Monkey Butt powder
- ❑ Nail clippers, disposable razor
- ❑ Knee or ankle brace
- ❑ 50' of 3/8" rope for mountaineering situations
- ❑ Multi Vitamins
- ❑ Video camera with extra batteries, several tapes, and headset; Mini-DV or HD - if videoing
- ❑ Digiscope system for taking photos with spotting scope and digital camera
- ❑ Altimeter watch - very useful for alpine conditions and to help predict weather
- ❑ Handheld radioes, VHF or UHF
- ❑ Safety blanket (light weight foil type): if carrying a sleeping bag with tent or bivy, generally not necessary
- ❑ Kneepads - Arcteryx knee caps: great for sneaking and for crawling in rocks
- ❑ Crampons or snow shoes: for ice/heavy snow

In part 2 of this series I'll go line by line through my equipment checklist. I'll make comments and suggestions on each item I take and where weight can be saved and why I may or may not take a particular item. I'll be discussing not only some good models and products, but some product features to look for, regardless of the brand. There are probably some excellent products available that I'm not aware of. The products I recommend are not the only ones out there, but I try hard to keep track of the "best" products for the job. I've done a lot of research and have used many brands. The products I recommend are the items I'm most familiar with and that have proven themselves time and time again in the field. I look forward to sharing my knowledge and enthusiasm for backpack hunting in these upcoming articles.