

# Packing That Equipment

There are lots of different ways and philosophies on where things go in the pack. Suggested below is just one of those ways. Recent versions of internal and external frame packs are shown as illustrations. Internal and external frame pack designs seem to be converging, with external frames sometimes taking on nearly the same profile as internal frames -- tall and narrow with a lower (sleeping bag) compartment -- and internal frames adding many external pockets and places (web daisy chains and lash patches) to hang things off the top, sides and back outside the pack -- areas where external frame have traditionally excelled. Some external frame packs have also become more flexible with poly/PVC frames. Both have added mechanisms to adjust the shoulder strap position, a feature first found only on a few external frames. We now see in the blending together of the "best" features of traditional external and internal frames designs. This should all but finish the debate as to which is best -- you can "have your cake and eat it too".

## Pockets and Compartments for Stowing Gear.



External Frame

To the left and right are somewhat typical external and internal frame packs. As the name implies, the external frame (often looks like a ladder) can be seen from the back of the pack (the side against your back). The frame stays of internal packs are often two 3/4" to 1" wide flat aluminum bars 20" to 30" long sewn into the back of the pack itself. One main difference is that the sleeping bag and tent are often lashed to the outside of an external frame at points #8 and #9, while, internal frames are designed so that, all gear can either be stored inside the main compartments or in the outside pockets. The first internal frames and specialized climbing ones have fewer outside pockets and require that much of what should be accessible be buried inside the large main compartment.



Internal Frame

After you've decided on your list of backpacking equipment to carry, you'll need to pack for the trail. Before getting into the details of matching equipment to compartments and pockets, consider the following observations:

- Small, frequently used items should go in your pants pockets, "throw" pockets on the pack, hung from your shoulder straps, or placed in other readily accessible place. These include knife, compass, map, whistle and watch.
- Other items that need to be readily accessible to you or others should be in conspicuous outside pockets. These may include rain gear, first aid kit, sun and insect protection, trail snacks and lunch, bandana, some matches, toilet paper, digging trowel, and perhaps camera, binoculars and paper and pencil.
- Packing several small similar items together in heavy plastic (Ziploc) bags organizes items that could get "lost" inside the pack and keeps the contents dry even if the pack gets soaked.
- Items that must be kept dry but are too large for Ziploc bags, like a sleeping bag, should be placed inside a heavy plastic bag and the opening closed with a "gooseneck".
- Your water bottle should be easy to retrieve. The harder it is to drink, the more likely you are to get dehydrated.

- Equipment you won't need until you make camp can be buried deep in the pack, but reserve an outside pocket for isolating your fuel and any other "smellables" that might contaminate food, clothing, tent or sleeping bag.
- Assign each item a specific "home" in your pack so that it can be located quickly and always return it to that home.
- Normally, arrange the pack's contents so that its center of gravity (heavy gear) is high and close to your back. Compression straps can help. Where stability is vital, some comfort can be traded for the stability of a lower center of gravity by placing heavy gear in the bottom of the pack.

Now on to matchmaking. The pockets and compartments in the illustrations are designated as follows:

- 1. Upper Main Compartment.** It usually holds the bulky and heavy things (to keep weight over your skeleton). The external frame shown is "front-loading", meaning that it has a zippered door/flap that allows scouts to place gear when the pack is lying down. The internal frame pack is "top-loading". The top pocket (#6) is swung off and all gear is loaded from the top like putting groceries into a shopping bag. On most newer design packs, that compartment has a draw string at the top to close it before it is covered by the top flap/pocket. Some external frames are also top loading. Top-loading main compartments are often quite a bit larger than front-loading main compartments. Basically, everything that doesn't go somewhere else gets "dumped" into here.
- 2. Lower Main Compartment.** It is often called the sleeping bag compartment, after its usual contents in internal frames.  
Generally, this compartment is front-loading with a heavy zipper. Because the sleeping bag is put in a stuff sack and lashed on the outside (at #8 or #9), this compartment on the external frame can be used for clothing. Many external frames (especially ones with top-loading main compartments and older designs) don't have this second main compartment, so more is stored in the upper compartment. Sometimes the two compartments have a removable (drawstring or zipper) separator and it is incomplete so that long things (like tent poles) can "passed-through" both compartments. Instead, sometimes one of the external side pockets is not fastened to the main pack at the top and bottom to allow tent poles to be "passed-behind" or "tunnel" it to rest in a lower pocket.
- 3. Left Upper Pocket.** Because of accessibility, this is a good place to put rain gear.
- 4. Right Upper Pocket.** Because external pockets allow isolation of potentially contaminating items, this is a good place for the stove fuel bottle and other potential contaminants (toiletry articles) and things that can be washed if contaminated (cat hole/sump trowel).
- 5. Front Pocket.** It is sometimes called a "shovel pocket". Because of accessibility and its prominent visible position, this is a good place for important things like the first aid kit, tour permit and medical forms. It may also be a place for a camera and binoculars. Frames without this pocket often have a "top pocket" that can be used for the same purpose.
- 6. Other External Pockets.** They may include the top pocket on a top-loading main compartment (#6 of internal illustration), lower external pockets (lower-left #6 of external illustration) and elasticized throw pockets (middle #6 of external illustration). Don't put the fuel bottle or other contaminants in a top pocket for fear of contaminating the contents of main compartments; they can be used to distribute the contents of #3, #5 and #6. The lower left pocket is where you can keep a compass, flashlight, ziplocked toilet paper and iodine bottle.
- 7. Water Bottle Holder Pockets.** Sometimes they are specifically designed for this function. Other times extra external zippered or elasticized pockets can be used. Some packs have the bottle pockets near the top where #3 and #4 are pictured, with these pockets positioned lower. This provides "over-the-shoulder" access instead of "under-the-shoulder" access. Both work. If none of these are available, bottle bags [from Campmor] or canteen holders with belt loops or clips [Army surplus stores] can be used on the hip belt.
- 8. Top Lash Points.** These points are often used for sleeping bags (in stuff sack), sleeping pads, tents (in bag) and ground cloths, especially on external frames (as pictured). The same purpose can be achieved by placing things between the top pocket (#6 of internal illustration) and the top-loading upper main compartment (#1 of internal illustration) and tightening the fastening straps. This isn't recommended if you don't have a drawstring on that compartment.
- 9. Bottom Lash Points.** They serve the same purpose as those on top.

## Where To Pack Your Gear

### Upper Main Compartment (#1)

- Cookware -- utensils, cup, bowl, cleaning pad, dish towel and stove inside cook kit, all in mesh bag
- Food and matches in Ziplock bags stowed in a bear canister used only for "smellables"
- Toiletries in bag -- sunscreen, lip balm, insect repellent, biodegradable soap, toothbrush and paste, bathing towel,
- Bear canister and rope (lashed on outside if soiled)
- "Yummy bag"
- Extra garbage and Ziplock bags
- Water bag or collapsible container

### Lower Main Compartment (#2)

- Complete change of clothes -- light "liner" socks, heavy wool socks, underwear, pants, shirt, each "rolled" and sealed together in gallon Ziplock bag (wear other set)
- Clothing appropriate for the season in gallon Ziplock bag(s) -- gloves, ear muffs, other hat (wear brimmed hat), wool/flannel shirt, sweater or coat
- Camp footwear (if not hung on exterior compression strap)

### Left Upper Pocket (#3)

- Rain jacket or poncho
- Pack cover

### Right Upper Pocket (#4)

- Stove fuel bottle in Ziplock bag
- Matches (spares) or lighter and fire starters in waterproof container
- Repair kit -- duct tape, sewing kit, tent pole sleeve, zip ties in Ziplock bag
- Light rope or twine
- Trowel for digging sump, cat holes

### Front Pocket (#5)

- First aid kit and personal medicines
- Bandana (with first aid kit)
- Camping/tour permits
- Medical forms
- Maps inside Ziplock bag (usually in pants pocket)
- Pencil and paper, diary
- Advancement, training materials

### Other External Pockets (#6)

- Lower Left Pocket
  - Flashlight
  - Regular compass
  - Pocket knife & watch (if not in pants pocket)
  - Toilet paper in Ziplock bag
  - Iodine
- Shoulder Strap Pouch
  - Camera
  - Binoculars
- Whistle and mini compass hang from shoulder strap

### Water Bottle Holders (#7)

- Two 1 qt. plastic water bottles -- one for "clear" water, other for "mix" (only need 1 if your pack has a hydration bladder)

### Top Lash Points (#8)

- Tent, stakes, poles and ground cloth rolled together inside tent bag

### Bottom Lash Points (#9)

- Sleeping bag in plastic bag inside stuff sack
- Foam sleeping pad wrapped around stuff sack