




I usually just cram everything into my pack. If I would spend a little more time packing “the right way”, I probably would not have to spend so much of my day looking for something. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

How to pack your pack

I am not the world’s best packer. Most of my packing is done at the last minute, and consists of throwing everything in a big heap. It has always been that way for me. When we were kids, packing up for a pack trip to the woods, it was much simpler to load our gear. Packing simply meant taking every piece of outdoor gear we owned, and throwing it in a World War II surplus pack. Since most of our gear was war surplus, us group of kids looked like a misfit group of soldiers coming home from a



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

week of debauchery on leave. When we arrived at the campsite, which is where the first kid collapsed under the weight of his pack, we

all dumped everything we brought on the ground. From the pile of stuff, we would all take part assembling our makeshift campsite. My packing has not improved much over the years. I tried a pack with pockets all over it for a while. The pockets even had pockets. We would take a rest break, and someone would ask for a Snickers bar. I would begin to empty every pocket, in search of the bar. Forty minutes later, as I am standing knee deep in camping stuff, the exasperated person

forgets what he asked me for, and heads off down the trail. The next pack I went to was a top load pack that had no pockets. This proved to not be much better. The same guy asks for a candy bar and I begin taking everything out of my pack. To save time, I eventually just turned the pack upside down, and dumped everything on the ground. While I spent the next 30 minutes trying to load everything back up, the rest of the hikers took off down the trail without me. Backpacks have come a long way since those I used in my childhood. Today, there are untold numbers of high-tech packs that allow you to carry more gear for longer periods of time, in reasonable comfort. Hitting the trail with your pack, consider how long and what you want to bring. You will be carrying that pack for hours, perhaps days, and balance and comfort are important. Here are a few things to consider when packing. Each of those pockets really has a purpose. I have found that keeping the same items in the pocket each time, the memory kicks in, and I do not endlessly search for an item. Start with the pocket on the top of your pack, called the brain. This pocket is where you want to carry the items used most often during the day, things you know you will reach for. Put things like your flashlight and headlamp, snacks, GPS and perhaps your snack. Having this stuff at close hand prevents you from looking like a poorly organized garage sale at the first rest stop, as you search for a Snickers bar. The next pocket is the front pocket, sometimes called the kangaroo pouch. This pocket is the perfect place to store rain gear. The

rain gear is easily accessible in this pocket, and can be returned there after the rain. Using this pocket for wet gear will keep the inside items dry. Some packs have little pockets on the hip belt. These are perfect for the things you may want on the trail, and you don’t have to remove your pack to access them. A pocket camera and snacks work well there. I also keep a knife in one of these pockets. Many packs have a water bottle holder on one of the sides. I have found these are especially useful to grab a slug of water while underway, and always have it handy. I have one of those packs that have straps all over it. All those straps on your backpack help compress the gear inward, helping maintain a tight center of gravity. Make sure all of those straps are cinched up tight and buckled before you hit the trail. Being an over packer is something I am well known for. What usually happens is I don’t empty the pack from last time, and just add more stuff next time. By the end of several trips, my pack weighs more than I do. Lay out everything you want to bring on your trip. Keep all the important “can’t be without” items in one pile. Make a second pile of everything you consider luxury items, things you really could do without. Leave at least half of that luxury stuff at home and your pack will be just about right. When loading your pack, keep comfort and convenience in mind. All the gear should be loaded with comfort in mind so it does not interfere with your center of gravity as you navigate the trail. Keep convenience in mind when packing the items you will need during

the hike. You don’t want to look like a garage sale as you dump the pack contents on the ground as you search for a Snickers bar. The heaviest and densest gear should be packed as close to your back as possible. Food, extra water and cooking gear should be somewhere between your shoulder blades where the load won’t swing around. Keep these items in place with loose items, like extra clothes. Remember to keep “high use” items, like an extra jacket, near the top for convenience. Recently, I purchased some mesh zipper pouches. These pouches are similar to the pencil bags sold in office supply houses; only you can see the contents in them. I use one for first aid, one for extra batteries, lights and repair items, and one for survival gear. I like using these little pouches because it keeps all the loose stuff from just being thrown in pockets of the pack, or rolling around in the bottom. They also serve to make it easier to repack for next time. I miss the carefree days of just throwing everything you own in a pack and hitting the trail. If you pack all your outdoor gear, it is impossible to forget anything. If I tried that now, it would take a 35-foot utility trailer. Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff’s Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org For outdoors or survival related questions or comments, feel free to contact him directly at his email elkhunter77@icloud.com



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