



★ BEST GEAR 2006

The time has come for our annual guide to the latest and greatest in the world of outdoor gear. We've slogged out there, schlepped out there and yes, even slept out there to bring you up to speed on what's good...out there. **By Kevin Arnold**

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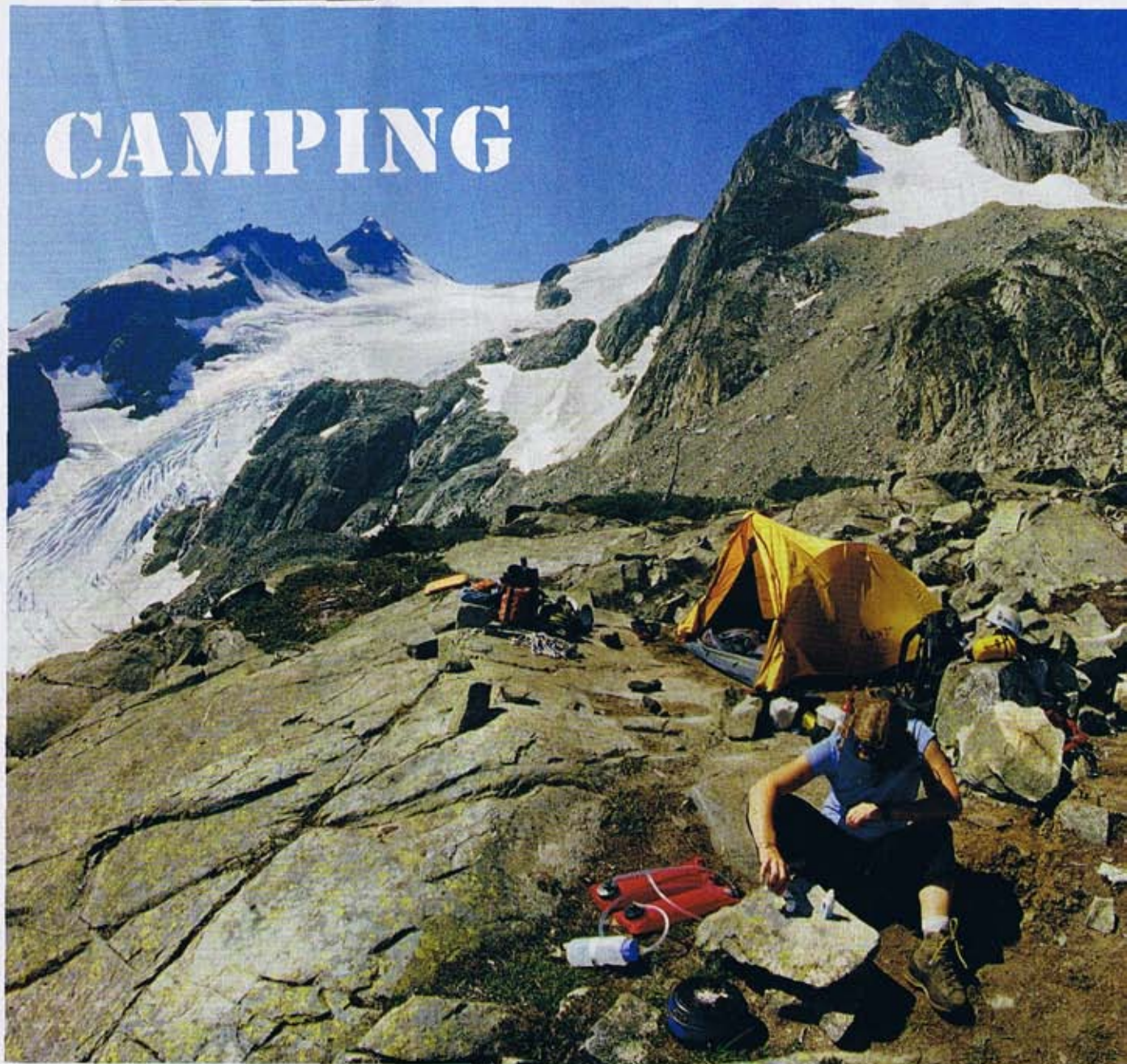
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CAMPING



TENTS

A. Mountain Hardwear Meridian 2 (4.2 lbs, 1.9 kg; floor: 27 sq. ft.; vestibule: 22 sq. ft.; \$300; mountainhardwear.com)

The Meridian's unique dual-hub pole design minimizes the number of poles needed, without sacrificing stability. At first, the unusual design is tricky to set up, but after a little practice, it actually proves to be faster than most three- and four-pole set-ups. The biggest advantage is minimal weight: for just over four pounds, you get a comfortable, full-featured, two-person tent.

Dual side doors, each with its own sizable vestibule, make coming and going easy without disturbing your tent-mate. A raised floor seam, waterproof taping throughout and welded anchor points—rather than sewn ones, which can wick moisture—provide storm-worthiness. **KEEP IN MIND** One thing that is lost in exchange for weight savings is interior space. There's room for two to sleep, but don't expect to break out the chessboard. **BEST SUITED TO** Backpackers seeking a versatile yet lightweight three-season double-wall.

B. The North Face Spectrum 23 (3.75 lbs, 1.7 kg; floor: 28 sq. ft.; vestibule: 6 sq. ft.; \$320; thenorthface.com)

The single-wall Spectrum is a one-of-a-kind tent that manages to nail the magical combo of being incredibly lightweight yet also incredibly stable in high winds. The secret is a unique top vent that's held open by two mini pole sections. Inspired by the lines of a car hood, the vent is designed to work in conjunction with the low, sleek cut of the tent to direct airflow through,

rather than over, the tent. The result is superior venting, minimizing the moisture buildup associated with most single-wall shelters. The funnel effect also adds stability by working with the wind rather than against it to anchor the tent to the ground. TNF designers actually tested it to 210 kilometres per hour in a wind tunnel—if it starts blowing harder than that, good luck. Combined pole clips/partial sleeves and colour coding make for a quick set-up in any conditions. **KEEP IN MIND** The built-in vestibule is a bonus not found on

most single-walls, but it still offers limited space compared to double-walls. **BEST SUITED TO** Mountaineers and alpine trekkers who want full storm protection for minimal weight.

C. Big Agnes Seedhouse SL3 (3.9 lbs, 1.77 kg; floor: 36 sq. ft.; vestibule: 6 sq. ft.; \$390; bigagnes.com)

Last year, the Seedhouse 2 was one of our favourite lightweight shelters. The SL3 uses the same simple clip and hub design, but with enough space for three. An added cross pole

creates extra headroom, while new lighter poles shave a few ounces. The result is a cathedral-like tent that somehow comes in at under four pounds—light enough, in other words, to make a generous shelter for two.

KEEP IN MIND

The new Seedhouse's interior may be spacious, but the vestibule isn't—three people will find it tough to keep all their gear dry in a storm. **BEST SUITED TO** Backpackers seeking a roomy shelter light enough for two to carry, but roomy enough to be pressed into service for three.

D. Sierra Designs Baku 2

(4 lbs, 1.8 kg; floor: 28 sq. ft.; vestibule: 14 sq. ft.; \$400; sierradesigns.com)

The Baku is the centaur of tents, combining a single-wall body with the mesh door and rainfly-covered vestibule of a double-wall. The result offers the light weight of a single-wall, but also much more versatility in hot weather—just open the vestibule and zip the mesh door shut to keep bugs out. If the weather closes in, and you end up tent-bound, the dual doors, spacious interior and dual vestibules provide a very livable shelter. The two pole freestanding design makes it simple to set up, while short pole sections add welcome headroom.

KEEP IN MIND Even with its large venting doors, the Baku will build up more condensation when battened down than a similar size double-wall. **BEST SUITED TO** Backpackers looking for a versatile, lightweight and sturdy tent that sets up fast.

E. MSR Mutha Hubba

(6.75 lbs, 3 kg; floor: 40 sq. ft.; vestibule: 14 sq. ft.; \$480; msr.com)

With its 46-inch interior height and 40 square feet of floor space, the Mutha Hubba is the monster home of backpacking tents. You'd think this kind of space would come with a serious weight problem, but a lightweight silticized-nylon fly and hubbed pole design keep it to an easily packable two pounds per person. Two big D-shaped doors, each covered by a large convertible vestibule that keeps light rain out even when it's open, add even more livability. **KEEP IN MIND** With its extra headroom, the Mutha sits high, making it poorly suited to places with high winds. **BEST SUITED TO** Groups of two or three seeking a roomy outdoor shelter.



LIGHT IS RIGHT

Outdoor Research NightHaven Shelter

(2.1 lbs, .97 kg; \$120; orgear.com)

Weighing in at just two pounds, the NightHaven takes the tarp concept to a new level of comfort. Like a standard flat tarp, set-up requires trekking or ski poles and stakes (skis work well in the snow). But a few tent-like features—including a partial floor that keeps bugs out, mesh venting panels and a zip-opening door—add immensely to the livability of this hybrid. It still packs down to almost the same size as a lightweight tarp—about the size of a Nalgene bottle. Pack it along as a multi-night shelter for light-and-fast outings or in the winter as a quick day shelter to get out of the elements when ski touring.



BUYING BASICS: TENTS

1. When choosing a tent, be realistic. Shelling out for the latest lightweight wonder if you mostly car camp will only lighten your wallet and cramp your style. And while that burly expedition tent is enticing, it's probably overkill if you can't remember the last time you weathered a gale-force storm.

2. Tent-pole wrestling is like a national sport at campgrounds across the country. If you want to skip the next rainy day bout choose a tent that sets up quickly. Pole clips are generally faster than continuous sleeves; colour-coded poles and grommets ease things even further.

3. Vestibule space is key for dealing with inclement weather. At a minimum, you need enough space to stow all your gear out of the rain with a little space left over to come and go. For multi-night trips, 10 square feet per person is a good benchmark.

4. When it comes to livable space, a tent's layout and wall angles—the steeper, the better—are as important as actual square footage. Your best bet—even if it does feel silly—is to get inside with your partner and some gear in the store.

5. While you're inside, check for taped seams; they're essential for keeping water out. Not taped? You'll need to apply an aftermarket seam sealer.

6. Details like a gear loft, interior pockets, reflective zippers (to help you find your tent at night), dual doors, and a separate footprint may seem like insignificant extras on the showroom floor. But outdoors they can immensely improve the livability—and lovability—of your tent.

7. Colour matters. A yellow fly, for example, can be truly therapeutic under gloomy skies. White and blue, on the other hand, are soothing under a hot sun. Unless you want to bake, avoid dark colours.

8. Rainflies and floors are rendered waterproof by their DWR (durable water repellency) coating. The quality of this coating determines how long it will last before it starts seeping. Consider a 1,500mm rating as a minimum for the fly, and 2,000mm for floor.

CAMPING

SLEEPING BAGS: DOWN



A. Mountain Hardware Spirit SL (0°C; 2.6 lbs., 1.16 kg; \$485; mountainhardware.com)

As the latest offering in Mountain Hardware's top-of-the-line expedition down bags, the Spirit SL is tricked out with all the features—like a waterproof shell, welded seams and an overstuffed down face gasket—that make these some of the most comfy bags on the market. But the Spirit steps it up a notch, with a new lighter weight shell fabric and a slimmer mummy cut, which shave over half a pound without losing any warmth. A sili-

con-impregnated waterproof nylon stuff sack with built-in compression straps lets you pack it down to the size of a football. **KEEP IN MIND** The Spirit belongs in the mountains, where saving weight is everything, but you may find it a little cold for some high-alpine areas. **BEST SUITED TO** Climbers and backpackers who want the ultimate in warmth for minimal weight.

B. Western Mountaineering Summerlite (0°C; 1.2 lbs., .544 kg; \$315; westernmountaineering.com)

You simply won't find a

lighter summer bag in the same temperature range—heck, in almost any temperature range—than the Summerlite. Stuffed with high-loft 850-plus-power goose down, and fitted with a well-packed draft tube that runs along the full-length side zip, the Summerlite proves that going light need not lead to suffering. The efficient mummy cut helps to further maximize warmth, while continuous baffles allow down to be shifted depending on the outside temp. The gossamer-light shell

fabric is made with ultra-thin fibres that are tightly woven to keep condensation at bay. **KEEP IN MIND** Western Mountaineering is a small-scale manufacturer, and this bag will

be made in limited numbers at first. **BEST SUITED TO** Ultralight fanatics and anyone who understands the advantages of paying more for less.

C. The North Face Blue Kazoo (-10°C; 2.9 lbs., 1.34 kg; \$280; thenorthface.com)

The 600-fill-down Blue Kazoo is a classic sleeping bag that does its job well. This year, the perennial favourite gets even better thanks to new trapezoidal baffles (which increase warmth by eliminating cold spots), a roomier more ergonomic footbox, and added synthetic-filled pads on the bottom—under the shoulders, head and feet—that resist compression, adding warmth. The mesh watch pocket is simple but ingenious, allowing you to view the time while your watch is in the pocket. **KEEP IN MIND** At almost three pounds, the Blue Kazoo is an all-around bag, not an ultralight. **BEST SUITED TO** Anyone—from hikers to car campers to ski

tourers—seeking a reasonably priced down bag that will last through a lifetime of adventures.

BUYING BASICS: SLEEPING BAGS

1. Down insulation is rated by fill power. The higher the number, the more loft, which translates into more warmth per gram. Consider 600-fill or above as a minimum. Currently, 900 is the best.

2. No matter how high the fill power, wet down offers zero insulation. Problem is, condensation is a fact of life when living in a tent. The key to a dry and warm bag is a water-resistant or waterproof shell. Most top-quality bags have them. The best also have welded, rather than sewn, seams to create an even better seal.

3. Synthetic bags are cheaper and warmer when wet. If you choose one, seek out a model filled with a quality brand-name insulation like Polarguard or Primaloft.

4. There is nothing more frustrating than a side zip that constantly snags. Here's the deal: if the side zip snags—even once—in the store, move on. It will only be worse in the middle of the night in a cramped tent when you have to pee.

5. Speaking of zippers. Unless you are absolutely obsessed with shedding grams, opt for a full-length side zip. The minimal extra weight is worth the added venting.

6. In sleeping bags, size does matter. A snug mummy bag is the most efficient, but if you're claustrophobic, you won't get a good night's rest anyway. On the other hand, a bag with too much extra room will sap valuable energy to heat empty space.

7. You've shelled out for a good bag. Now spend a few extra bucks on a silk or cotton/poly bag liner. It will add warmth and comfort, and, more importantly, keep your new bed free of grime and oil.

8. Though temperature rating guidelines have been established in Europe, on this side of the pond they are still an approximation at best. For now, start with the lowest temp you plan to sleep in and subtract about 5°C (i.e., if it rarely drops below zero at night, a -5°C bag will be perfect). But remember, not all bags with the same rating are equal—ask the salespeople for their opinions on different brands.

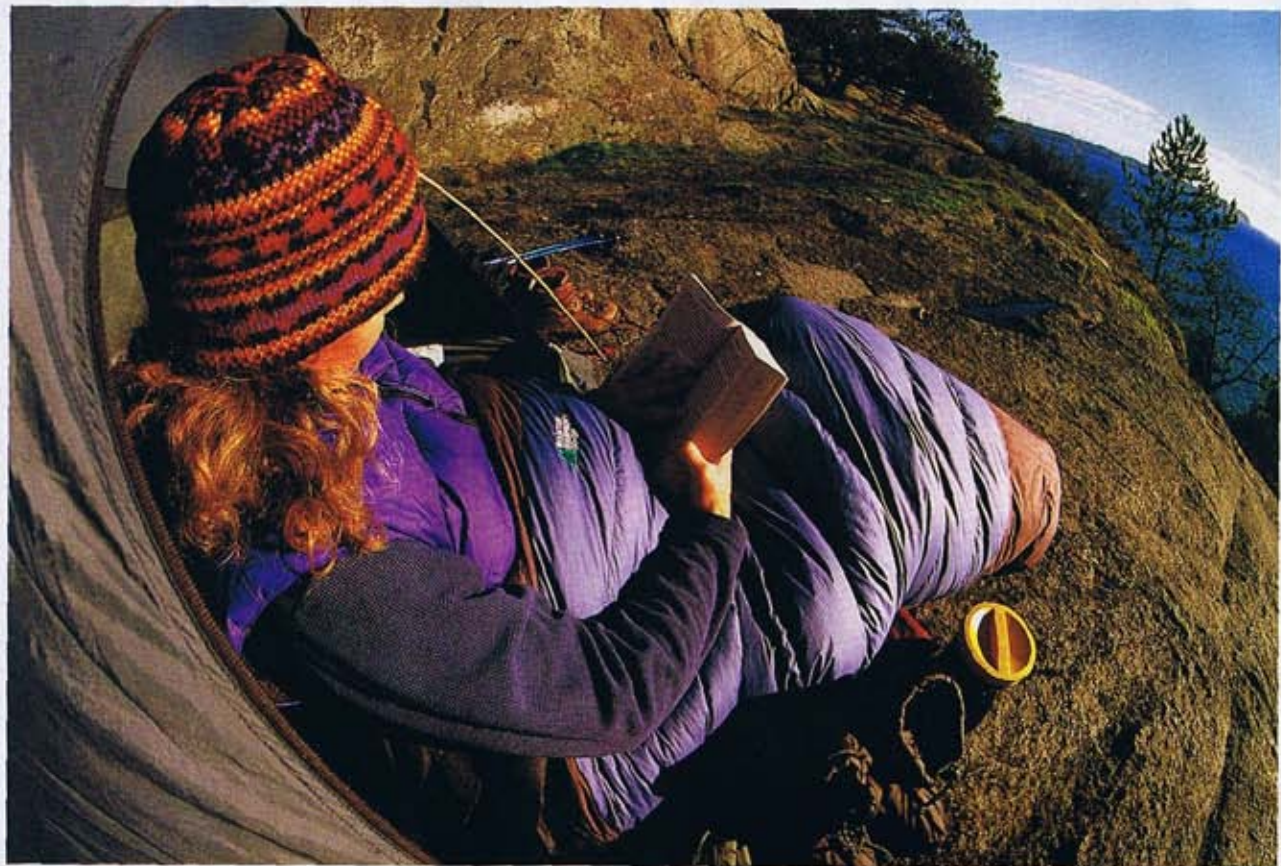
WOMEN ONLY

Mountain Hardware Lamina 32 (0°C; 2.5 lbs., 1.13 kg; \$190; mountainhardware.com)

While a lot of "women's" sleeping bags are simply shorter versions of their men's counterpart, the Lamina 32 features a women's specific mummy-cut that's ergonomically designed to fit the shape of the female body better from head to toe. The Lamina is insulated with a proprietary Mountain Hardware synthetic fill that's welded, rather than sewn, in place, eliminating the potential for the cold spots created when fill migrates and maximizing the water resistance of the shell. And the contoured multi-piece footbox—the same one used on Mountain Hardware's comfy, but expensive, expedition bags—allows your feet to lie naturally without compressing the fill, which translates into warmer feet.



CAMPING



RICH WHEATER

SLEEPING BAGS: SYNTHETIC

A. Marmot Pounder Bivi
 (-4°C; 2.2 lbs, 968 g; \$595;
marmot.com)

Insulated with a light layer of Primaloft, a synthetic down, the Pounder Bivi is a unique bag that doubles as either a stand-alone lightweight summer bag or as an insulated bivi sack. Used as the latter, the roomy mummy-cut allows it to be layered over a lightweight summer bag to create a super-warm three- or four-season sleeping system. The insulation is

bonded to the inside of the bag—rather than stitched—which prevents it from shifting around, but also maximizes the water-resistance of the outer shell in situations where you actually use it as a bivi, sans tent. As with a standard bivi, the

such as an ergo hood, insulated draft collar and a chest pocket. The no-snag zip is among the smoothest we've tested, down or synthetic. **KEEP IN MIND** The three-quarter-length side zip stops short of the footbox, limiting venting on warm nights.



B

BEST SUITED TO Travellers and occasional backpackers who need a durable sleeper that can handle the abuse of airport floors, hostel bunks and tents.

wrap-around side zip can be sealed shut over your face in nasty weather. **KEEP IN MIND** As a true stand-alone summer bag, the Pounder is a little bulky and heavy. **BEST SUITED TO** Those who already own a summer bag and want to create a warmer, more versatile system without shelling out for another full bag.

B. Sierra Designs Sidekick 30

 (-1°C; 2.6 lbs, 1.16 kg;
 \$150; sierradesigns.com)

One of the great advantages of synthetic fill is its lower price, and it's hard to think of a bag that gives you more value for your money than the Sidekick. For a bill and a half, you get a durable, fitted mummy bag filled with down-like Primaloft that is loaded with comfort features

C. The North Face Orion

 (-7°C; 2.4 lbs,
 1.07 kg; \$230;
thenorthface.com)

The Orion proves that synthetics can also be expedition-worthy. Designed for light-and-fast outings in any weather, the Orion has a unique jacket-style hood that maximizes warmth by eliminating unused volume around the head and shoulders. The vaulted footbox allows plenty of room for



C

your feet to fall naturally, without compressing the insulation, while the rest of the bag is cut extra slim to maximize warmth and minimize overall weight. A three-quarter-length side zip sheds a little extra weight. **KEEP IN MIND** Those with claustrophobia or who carry a little extra girth may find the Orion a bit cramped. **BEST SUITED TO** Climbers or backpackers who want a synthetic sleeping bag that packs as small as a down bag.

DOWN VS. SYNTHETIC

DOWN'S GREAT POINTS

- Gram for gram is warmer and more packable
- Will last for years without a drop in performance
- More comfortable to sleep in
- Can be harvested sustainably

DOWN'S GREAT POINTS

- Less expensive
- Easier to care for (you can toss it in the washer without worry)
- Remains insulative when wet

THE BOTTOM LINE: The choice comes down to budget: if you have the money, spend it on a good down bag. You can always get a model with a waterproof/breathable shell fabric—yet more money—if you're worried about getting it wet. That said, for those on a tight budget—or those who regularly sleep in snow caves—synthetics are getting better every year.

CAMPING



STOVES



A. MSR XGK EX

(\$170; msrcorp.com)

MSR's high-output XGK stove has been loved by mountaineers since its introduction for its 3.5-minute boiling time and unmatched high-altitude performance. This year, it finally gets a much needed upgrade with the addition of a flexible fuel line that allows for easier packing, retractable legs that are

more stable on uneven surfaces, and fold-out pot supports that can accommodate large pots with no worry of spillage. The new model will still burn anything from white gas to jet fuel. **KEEP IN MIND** Don't expect subtle simmering from this rocket. **BEST SUITED TO** Mountaineers and trekkers who require the utmost in reliability and heat output in a bomb-proof cooker.



B. Primus Gravity MF

(\$120; primus.se)

The Gravity hits the mark as an ideal all-purpose backpacking stove: it's lightweight (10 ounces—or 280 grams—without fuel bottle), compact, stable and a cinch to fire up. A unique pre-heating coil brings it up to its top temp in no time, and once there, the extra-wide burner ensures even simmering. An integrated

burner that sits low within the legs keeps the Gravity closer to the ground than most stoves, resulting in better performance in wind—aided by the wind screen—and a smaller package when folded down. **KEEP IN MIND** Average boiling time isn't as fast as other stoves—a drawback for mountaineers. **BEST SUITED TO** Backpackers looking for a lightweight, reliable, multi-fuel-burning stove at a good price.



D. Coleman Feather 442

(\$100; coleman.com)

With its sit-on-top design and built-in fuel tank, the Feather brings the all-in-one convenience of a canister stove to a liquid-fuel design that will burn either camping (white) gas or gasoline. Lighting is fast and easy, with minimal preheating required compared to other liquid fuel cookers. The extra-wide burner simmers superbly, and because it's recessed into a cup, it functions well in the wind. **KEEP IN MIND** The attached fuel bottle is a one-size deal. For long trips, this means packing a second fuel bottle for refuelling. **BEST SUITED TO** Backpackers and other campers looking for an ultra-convenient stove.

LIQUID VS. CANISTER FUEL

LIQUID FUEL

- Fuel bottle can be refilled and re-used
- Faster boil times and better performance in the cold
- Multi-fuel models can run on gasoline, kerosene or even alcohol in a pinch
- Improved simmering with new micro flame adjusters
- Determining how much fuel you have left is easy: just look in the bottle

THE BOTTOM LINE: Liquid fuel stoves still rule for travelling—you can find fuel almost anywhere—and cooking in the winter or high alpine. The smallest canisters, on the other hand, are impossible to beat for light-and-fast overnights.

CANISTER

- Lighter, smaller and easier to pack
- Foolproof set-up—no priming required
- More accurate simmering
- All canisters are now recyclable
- Determining remaining fuel level is tricky, but has improved with the advent of stick-on fuel gauges

COOL GEAR



GSI Ceramic Grill (\$20; gsioutdoors.com)

Unless you were willing to shoulder a Hibachi, barbecuing in the backcountry hasn't really been an option. GSI's new 28-ounce (800-gram) packable grill promises to change that. Slip it out of the magazine-sized protective sleeve, unfold the legs, and voila, your backpacking stove becomes an instant grill. A unique ceramic heat-exchanger sits between the cooking surface and the stove burner, and acts as portable coals, spreading heat evenly under your simmering meat...or veggie patties.

CAMPING



KNIVES

A. Leatherman K502x
 (\$100; leatherman.com)

Leatherman—the maker of top-notch multitools—has finally jumped into the folding knife game. The K502x is the premier offering in the new line of blades. Folded into the large easy-to-grip handle is a 3.1-inch locking steel blade, a multi-bit screwdriver (extra bits are stored in the handle), and a can/bottle opener. A nifty flip-out carabiner lets you clip the knife to your back, belt or harness. **KEEP IN MIND** The large grip makes it possible to use this knife with gloves on but also makes it a little bulky for

storing in your pocket. **BEST SUITED TO** Adventurers of all stripes who need a very functional, large folding blade that also offers a few key extras.

B. Buck Nobleman
 (\$40; buckknives.com)

With its sleek titanium-coated blade and slender profile, the Nobleman lives up to its name. Flip out the long 2.6-inch drop-point blade,

though, and you quickly realize that this knife's appeal goes beyond mere style. An ergonomic finger groove in the handle and a prominent thumbscrew for one-handed opening ensure that this pocket-sized knife is functional enough for real outdoor use. **KEEP IN MIND** The Nobleman's smooth handle looks good but is hard to hold with gloved hands. **BEST SUITED TO** Those looking for a knife that can be tucked away and forgotten until needed.

that makes it ideal for taking on the road. Added to the standard Swiss Army accoutrements—blade, scissors, can opener, bottle opener, flat screwdriver, tweezers and corkscrew—are useful extras such as a Phillips head driver, a nail file and a mini ball-point pen. Also tucked inside are three watch batteries that power a tiny LED flashlight and an external digital readout that displays the time, altitude, barometric pressure, temperature

and alarm setting. **KEEP IN MIND** The readout can be set for metric or imperial units but not a hybrid of both—bummer for Canadians who generally prefer a 12-hour clock and the temperature in Celsius. **BEST SUITED TO** Travellers, obviously, and anyone else in need of a very compact knife with a ton of neat features.

C. Victorinox Traveller Lite
 (\$190; victorinox.com)

As the name suggests, the Traveller Lite comes with a bevy of implements





MULTI-DAY PACKS

A. Gregory Pingora (54 litres; 5.5 lbs, 2.5 kg; \$220; gregorypacks.com)

When you load up the Pingora, the benefits of Gregory's new Response suspension system are obvious. Like the hand of King Kong, the pre-curved dual-density foam shoulder straps and hipbelt seem to take hold of your back, making the weight feel like part of your body rather than something hanging off you. Adding further to the comfort of this pack—especially once you're in motion—are the independent pivots that attach the hipbelt to the pack on each side. Not

only do they allow the belt to conform to the unique angle of your hips, but they also permit a completely unrestricted stride. **KEEP IN MIND** The Pingora's official volume is deceptive—this packer can easily handle a lightweight multi-night outing. **BEST SUITED TO** Hikers and mountaineers who need a pack that can carry full loads comfortably for days.

B. JanSport Endeavor 8000 (70 litres; 4.2 lbs, 1.9 kg; \$390; jansport.com)

Designed for high-altitude mountaineering by Ed Viesturs—summiteer of all 8,000-metre peaks—the

Endeavor is actually a great backpack for any outing. The diamond ripstop fabric is lightweight yet very tough. And it's loaded with smart design features such as colour-coded straps, glove-friendly buckles, glow-in-the-dark zipper pulls, a stash pocket accessible from inside and out, and a removable lid that converts into a minimalist day pack. The Endeavor is also incredibly comfortable thanks to the narrow profile back panel that leaves arms free to swing and a shoulder harness that can be adjusted—both in length and width—to fit the shape and size of your shoulders.

KEEP IN MIND Some will love the simple top-loading design, others will want more organizational pockets. **BEST SUITED TO** Hikers, ski tourers and mountaineers seeking a comfortable top-loader that is at home anywhere.

C. Osprey Aether 70 (70 litres; 4.7 lbs, 2.1 kg; \$300; ospreypacks.com)

The Aether was already one of our favourite packs because of its great load-hauling suspension system. This year it gets even more comfortable with the addition of a heat-mouldable hipbelt (stores that sell the pack have mini-ovens to do this) and a back panel made from dimpled foam and mesh that allows increased airflow between you and the pack. Also new is a removable top lid that can be mated with the hipbelt—it's also removable—to create a load-carrying fanny pack that's ideal for day hiking from camp. Features of the old Aether—separate sleeping-pad compartment, stretch woven side- and front-pockets, a head cavity, and wrap-around compression straps—remain. Available in men's and women's sizing. **KEEP IN MIND** The only zippered pocket for securing essentials is the lid pocket, and it's not particularly roomy. **BEST SUITED TO** Backpackers of all shapes and sizes who want custom-fitted comfort and superior load-carrying.

WOMEN ONLY

Deuter AC 50+10 SL (50 litres; 5.5 lbs, 2.5 kg; \$225; deuter.com)

Deuter has taken its most popular pack models and redesigned them from the ground to better fit women. The SL stands for slim, but there is more to the female-friendly tweaks than just a slimmer profile. The shoulder straps and hipbelt, for example, have been contoured and curved to match the female figure, and the length of the back and straps have been shortened. Beyond fit, Deuter has also loaded the AC 50 with a ton of pockets and access points—a response to research that showed female hikers prefer to keep gear organized and easily accessible. The pack has two large belted side-pockets, a separate sleeping-bag compartment, an easy-access hipbelt stash pocket, and a lid with no fewer than three compartments, including a mesh essential pocket, a large main pocket, and a separate map holder. Stylish new colours top things off.



BUYING BASICS: BACKPACKS

- Start by figuring out how much volume you'll need:
 - 40 to 55 litres is ideal for light overnight trips or gear-intensive day tripping.
 - 60 to 75 litres is sufficient for weekend to week-long summer outings.
 - 75 litres or more is strictly for winter trips or full-blown expeditions.
- Ultimately, let your gear decide. Yes, that means lugging your gear to the store, but it's the only way to accurately find out. Be sure to allow a little extra space for items like food that will be added later.
- Next, choose a style: top-loader or panel loader, pared down or fully featured. What works best for you will come down to personal preference. Do you like the simplicity of having all your gear in one main compartment or do you prefer to organize it in individual pockets? Is light weight or durability your priority?
- Now that you've narrowed your choices, focus on fit. This is the hard part:
 - Start by measuring your back length from the seventh vertebra (the bony lump at the base of your neck) straight down to a spot on your lower back that lines up with the top of your hip bones.
 - Check the in-store chart for the corresponding pack size and try it on loaded with gear.
 - You've got the right fit when the hipbelt sits on the crest of your hip bones (not your waist), the shoulder straps round over your shoulders with plenty of contact and enough length at the bottom for minor adjustments, and the load lifters (the straps that extend to the pack above your shoulders) sit at around 45 degrees when tightened.
- Once you've found a couple of models that suit your needs and fit your body, walk around the store in each—again, loaded with gear. Any pinching or prodding or discomfort? Move on. A small annoyance in the store will likely turn into a major pain on the trail.
- Lastly, if necessary, dial the fit in by exchanging the hipbelt and shoulder harness with others in the store.

BACKPACKING



A



B



C

OVERNIGHT PACKS

A. Lowe Alpine Beartooth Air

(35 litres; 3.7 lbs, 1.7 kg; \$180; lowe-alpine.com)

True to its name, the Beartooth Air has a back panel made from, well, nothing at all. Until now, the most breathable packs used suspended mesh back panels. But these, says Lowe Alpine, lose more than half of their potential ventilating qualities to the fabric itself, as airy as it is. Instead, the Beartooth is

designed with a system that suspends the load a few inches from your back, but still manages to transfer the bulk of the pack weight to your hips. The result is the driest back we've experienced while hiking with a pack, which in turn, means staying warmer. In addition to the unique suspension, the pack is appointed with bellowed side-pockets, a stowaway rain cover, an interior hydration sleeve, hiking-pole holders, and a separate sleeping-bag

section. **KEEP IN MIND** Don't be fooled by the pack's 35-litre rating—the volume is actually on par with some 50-litre packs we tested. **BEST SUITED TO** Anyone who needs a comfortable overnight pack that excels at high-output activities in all kinds of weather.

B. Arc'teryx Naos 55

(54 litres; 4.6 lbs, 2.1 kg; \$550; arcteryx.com)

Always a leader in gear innovations, Arc'teryx is

redefining yet another category with a new line of completely stitchless packs. One of these is the Naos, a sleek overnighter made entirely from two pieces of fabric. Welded seams, a rolltop closure and a new urethane-coated fabric combine to render the pack completely waterproof. The unique fabric also allowed designers to weld on buckles and straps, for increased strength and minimal weight, and to create a lightweight, laminated back panel with one layer of foam, a plastic frame sheet and two aluminum stays. The hipbelt—which also benefits from heat-laminating technology—is a pre-moulded integration of foam and mesh designed to hug your hips with no abrasion or wear points. It attaches to the pack via a unique circular plastic bayonet—similar to the way a lens screws on a camera—that allows the belt to rotate with your hips as you walk. **KEEP IN MIND** Remember this is new technology. The Naos is a cool pack, but expect even better things to come along as the technology matures. **BEST SUITED TO** Backpackers, ski tourers and mountaineers seeking a lightweight, truly watertight gear hauler for four-season adventures.

C. Mountain Hardwear Maestro (66 litres; 5.2 lbs, 2.3 kg; \$475; mountainhardwear.com)

Strap on the Maestro and at first it feels weird. Then, after a few strides on uneven terrain, it feels great. The secret is a truly unusual suspension system that uses a pivoting hipbelt attached to the pack via side-mounted swivels. The hipbelt, in other words, is essentially unhinged from the pack, allowing the pack's back length—the distance between the shoulder straps and the hipbelt—to be completely fluid. Why do we need this? Since the length of your own back is also fluid—as you bend over or step up, it gets longer—the Maestro allows for unequalled freedom of movement, especially during dynamic sports like ski touring and climbing. In fact, testing the Maestro was an eye-opener. We had no idea how much energy we spend fighting the straitjacket qualities of most packs. Happily, the Maestro doesn't sacrifice load-carrying abilities for the freedom gained. **KEEP IN MIND** The Maestro has plenty of plastic parts that may be hard to fix if broken in the backcountry. **BEST SUITED TO** Skiers and climbers who plan to carry a heavy pack.

BACKPACKING



BOOTS

A. Lowa Vertex GTX

(\$380; lowaboost.com)

With its space-age plastic ankle cuff, the Vertex is anything but traditional. Developed in Switzerland for inline skates, the hinged ankle cuff is designed to provide lateral (side-to-side) support without the weight or forward/backward stiffness of a leather boot. Does it work? In our experience, yes. At first the Vertex feels unnervingly light for a boot that's supposed to handle hikes with a fully loaded backpack, but after testing it extensively on rough trails with a big pack, we found it to be both incredibly supportive and very easy to walk in—like a tennis shoe on steroids. **KEEP IN MIND** You may find the anything-but-low-key style will draw strange looks from those around you. **BEST SUITED TO** Trekkers and backpackers—especially those with previous ankle injuries—seeking a lightweight waterproof boot for all conditions.

B. Asolo Power Matic 200 GV

(\$325; asolo.com)

Hidden behind the Power Matic's traditional styling are a host of modern features that add tons of comfort and performance. A hinged tongue and multi-piece ankle—soft leather on the outside, hard on the inside—combine to create a comfy ankle wrap that manages to provide both plenty of sup-

port and rotational freedom at the same time. Loaded into the lace eyelets are tiny brass pulleys that allow for a one-pull fit and also let the forefoot of the boot flex freely as you walk. Meanwhile, a deep heel cup and wide forefoot provide a rock-solid blister-free fit out of the box. And there's even more tech below the surface. In the midsole, the Power Matic is loaded with three different layers of EVA cushioning, spaced to reduce impact in hard-strike areas. **KEEP IN MIND** The only fault with this boot is the high price tag. **BEST SUITED TO** Serious trekkers and backpackers seeking an ultra-comfortable boot that will take years of abuse with very little break-in time required.

C. Dunham Wafflestopper Premier

(\$250; dunhamboot-makers.com)

The Premier's Dryworks waterproof/breathable membrane—Dunham's proprietary equivalent to Gore-Tex—combined with its synthetic, non-absorbent upper make it a top choice for wet-weather trekking. But its merits go beyond mere waterproofing. The synthetic upper is also incredibly lightweight yet as supportive as any heavy leather boot. Improvements over previous incarnations of this popular boot include a new rounded

heel strike for better downhill traction, improved sole rocker for a more natural stride, and a hinged tongue for added comfort on the long trail. **KEEP IN MIND** Not fond of bright red? Unfortunately, this is the only choice. **BEST SUITED TO** Since the Wafflestopper is one of the only trekking boots available in widths, it's ideal for hard-to-fit feet. And all backpackers will appreciate its lightweight load-worthy design.

D. Scarpa SL M3

(\$285; scarpa.net)

With its one-piece burgundy-died leather upper and rand-less toe, the SL M3 is easily the most classic of the boots we tested. But a close look reveals that, despite its conservative style, it benefits from modern performance features. Chief among them is a flexible soft leather ankle insert borrowed from Scarpa's incredibly comfortable high-end mountaineering boots. Like other boots we tested, the design allows the ankle to flex freely for a more natural gait—which translates into less fatigue and less stress transferred to the knees and hips. The outsole features deep lugs and an aggressively shaped braking heel that together provide wicked traction on wet or muddy terrain. **KEEP IN MIND** The rand-less toe design lends an elegant look, but

is less scuff-resistant. **BEST SUITED TO** Backpackers who like the longevity and simplicity provided by a classic design, but with modern comfort and performance benefits.

E. La Sportiva Glacier EVO

(\$290; sportiva.com)

This stiff, crampon-compatible mountain boot combines a waterproof, one-piece, silicone-impregnated leather upper in the forefoot with an extra-high neoprene collar around the ankle and a rubber ankle support. The flexible cuff does double duty, keeping out debris and allowing for a huge range of ankle movement, while the rubber spoiler adds spring-back support to align your ankle quickly on horizontal but uneven terrain. The result is a boot that permits the freedom of movement needed for secure footing on technical rock or ice, but still provides confidence-inspiring support when striding under a heavy pack. A unique removable, padded tongue lets you adjust the interior volume to provide for a custom-like fit that adds further to the boot's precise feel. **KEEP IN MIND** The Glacier EVO is lighter than a traditional mountain boot but is still heavy when compared to a backpacking boot—making it a poor choice for straight trekking. **BEST SUITED TO** Summer mountaineers and high-alpine trekkers.

BUYING BASICS: BOOTS

1. When shopping for boots, remember one simple rule: fit before features. The latest style and features are meaningless if your boots are too uncomfortable to wear.

2. Beyond that, follow three basic guidelines: find a shop with knowledgeable staff, wear the socks you will hike in, and shop after you've been on your feet for a few hours (so they are fully expanded).

3. Narrow down your choices by where and when you plan to hike most often. Boots made with one-piece leather uppers and/or a Gore-Tex lining are ideal for wet and mucky climates. A high rubber rand adds protection for rocky terrain. Breathable fabric uppers, on the other hand, are ideal for hot dry weather.

4. All leather is not equal. Full-grain or nubuck leather is the best and will last the longest. Split grain or suede (not to be confused with the reversed full-grain leather used on top-end mountain boots) is less durable, but also less expensive.

5. Multi-day hiking boots should be rugged and stable for carrying heavy loads over rough terrain. But they don't have to be heavy. Since you have to swing your boot with each step, a few extra grams can quickly translate into a lot of fatigue.

6. Durability is in the details. Good craftsmanship shows in the quality and consistency of the stitching, the eyelet attachments and the gluing. Don't be afraid to pull out the insole and take a close look.

7. Most boots—even expensive ones—ship with flimsy insoles that provide little support. A good aftermarket insole—either heat mouldable or off-the-shelf—will add comfort and performance, and reduce foot fatigue on the trail.

8. The key to buying the right pair of boots is to be diligent and patient. This will be one of the more important gear choices you make. The more time you spend in the store nailing the perfect fit, the less time you'll spend agonizing on the trail.

BACKPACKING



COOL GEAR

Nikon D50 (\$820, \$1,000 w/lens; nikon.ca)

For roughly the same price as a high-end point-and-shoot, the affordable and lightweight D50 offers all the creative benefits of an interchangeable lens system that were once reserved for pros or amateurs with thick wallets. Equipped with the same Matrix metering system found on Nikon's high-end SLRs, the D50 makes it easy to nail perfect exposures, even in difficult outdoor lighting. Lightning-fast auto-focus combined with immediate shutter response—none of that annoying shutter lag that plagues digi point-and-shoots—make snagging quick action shots and candid travel moments easy. At its heart is a large-sized, six-megapixel sensor with enough resolution to easily produce ultra-sharp 11-by-17-inch prints. Included with the camera is a 17-55mm [27-82.5mm film equivalent] zoom lens, but any of the dozens of Nikon lenses, from ultra-wide-angle to telephoto, can be used.

LIGHTWEIGHT SHELLS

A. Patagonia Spraymaster (11 oz, 311 g; \$380; patagonia.com)

Waterproof/breathable shells have come a long way in terms of comfort and versatility. The Spraymaster definitely puts the final nail in the coffin of the stiff, heavy jackets of old. A patterned interior lining helps pull moisture away from your skin and move it outside, while laminated membrane and taped seams keep outside elements like wind and rain where they belong. But what really sets this shell apart is the supple nylon outer fabric that's soft to the touch, stretchy and very lightweight—everything you want in a backpacking shell. A trim athletic cut, two large side-pockets and low-profile waterproof zips add up to a clean look and an overall weight of 11 ounces. **KEEP IN MIND** While the Spraymaster breathes better than most shells, it lacks underarm zips for additional venting on hot, wet days. **BEST SUITED TO** Active adventurers—from

hikers to bikers—who want a shell that provides full protection without inhibiting movement. The Green Flash colour—one of the brightest out there—is also ideal for commuters.

B. Sierra Designs Isotope (4.5 oz, 128 g; \$110; sierradesigns.com)

Tipping the scales at a scant four-and-a-half ounces—the weight of a can of sardines—the Isotope is the lightest waterproof/breathable shell we tested. The super-thin ripstop fabric doesn't offer the same durability as Gore-Tex or other laminated fabrics, but the DWR coating and fully taped seams can fend off wind and light rain without a problem. And when you don't need it, the entire jacket stuffs into one of the pockets—which means you're more likely to have it on hand when you need it. Minimal features include two hand-warmer pockets, a simple drawstring bottom, elasticized cuffs and

a drawstring-adjustable hood. **KEEP IN MIND** The trade-offs for the Isotope's ridiculously light weight and minuscule packable size are less breathability and waterproofing than heavier shells. **BEST SUITED TO** Ultralight enthusiasts and those who want an emergency shell to carry everywhere.

C. The North Face DIAD (17 oz, 198 g; \$250; thenorthface.com)

It takes a few outings to trust the DIAD jacket. At a mere seven ounces, it just feels too light to do the job. But it does. In fact, it kept us dry—inside and out—in a huge variety of conditions, from a complete downpour to a sweat-inducing uphill hike in light mist. The secret to the DIAD's combination of wispiness and weatherproofing is twofold: the lightweight two-and-a-half-layer ripstop fabric and the welded seams. The only stitches on the entire jacket are the ones attaching the zipper. Every other seam

is welded and sealed using ultra-skinny bulk-reducing 10mm seam tape. Adding to the lightweight, supple fit is a minimalist feature-set that includes a simple chest pocket and short pit-zips for venting. **KEEP IN MIND** The DIAD is styled with an athletic cut designed to be worn over a light base layer. If you plan to wear more, size up. **BEST SUITED TO** Three-season users—hikers, bikers and rock-climbers—who want full storm protection with minimal weight.



★ ★
COOL
GEAR
★ ★

BACKPACKING



LIGHTWEIGHT SHELLS

D. Marmot Minaret
(14 oz, 397 g; \$200;
marmot.com)

Marmot's Precip jackets have always been one of the best waterproof/breathable deals around. The lightweight Minaret continues that tradition but ups the ante with a new brushed fabric that's softer to the touch and stretchier. It also has added performance

features—such as double Napoleon chest pockets, a fleece-lined collar and a nifty rollaway hood—that add more weather protection and versatility for different activities. The athletic cut and two-tone colour scheme also give it a more stylish flair than the original Precip—allowing it to cross over better for street wear. **KEEP IN MIND** The Velcroed double-flap front zipper

keeps rain out superbly, but is a bit of a pain compared to the flapless water-light zips on other lightweight shells. **BEST SUITED TO** Anyone looking for three-season weather protection that won't break the bank.

E. Columbia Splendor Peak
(17.5 oz, 499 g; \$150;
columbia.com)

You'll be hard-pressed

to find a better deal on a lightweight shell than the Splendor Peak. The two-and-a-half-layer ripstop fabric has a slick exterior that beads water like a duck and easily brushes off abuse from trailside branches.

The simple feature-set includes an attached hood, two mesh-lined hand pockets, and extra-long pit zips that extend almost from elbow to waist for unsurpassed venting. Articulated elbows and a unique radial sleeve design—lift your arms and the jacket hardly moves—allow for full mobility, and interior snaps allow for integration with one of Columbia's zip-in fleeces for winter weather. **KEEP IN MIND** The Splendor, while plenty waterproof, doesn't breathe quite as well as more expensive fabrics. **BEST SUITED TO** Price-conscious hikers and backpackers looking for durable rain cover.

F. Cloudveil Zorro
(11.5 oz, 326 g; \$120;
cloudveil.com)

Incredibly, the Zorro, at 11.5 ounces, is one of the heaviest jackets we tested—proving that shells have gotten

LIGHT IS RIGHT

Komperdell Carbon Airshock (\$225;
komperdell.com)

For those obsessed with minimizing trail weight, the Carbon Airshock is the ultimate trekking pole. Weighing in at a mere 14 ounces—390 grams—per pair, these three-section poles have an almost unnoticeable swing weight. Yet the carbon fibre construction makes them strong enough for serious trail duty—even with a large pack. Foam grips and padded wriststraps add comfort, while a built-in air shock—which can be turned on or off—provides a break for your wrists on long downhills. Just don't expect to navigate with the grip-top compass—it's pure gimmick.

absurdly light. What you get for the few extra ounces is a full feature-set that includes two deep hand pockets, an adjustable hood, pit zips for ventilation, and a front zipper storm flap. And unlike other featherweight shells, the fabric—a two-and-a-half-layer nylon ripstop—is backed with a brushed interior that's comfortable enough to wear against bare arms without suffering that cling-wrap feeling as soon as you bust a sweat. Seam-free shoulder patches add protection from pack-strap abrasion. **KEEP IN MIND** One of the Zorro's trade-offs is a lighter DWR coating than other Cloudveil shells. If you wash your jacket often, opt for something more durable. **BEST SUITED TO** Backpackers looking to go light without sacrificing creature comforts.

GORE-TEX VS. THE COMPETITION

GORE-TEX

- Most hardcore users agree that Gore-Tex—the original waterproof/breathable—is still the best at cutting rain and wind
- Despite some rumours, performance isn't affected by salt water, which makes it ideal for paddle sports
- Strict manufacturing guidelines mean that all Gore-Tex jackets—no matter what brand—meet the same waterproof/breathable standards.

THE COMPETITION

- The best proprietary fabrics—like The North Face's HyVent—come close to Gore-Tex performance and are much less expensive
- Non-membrane fabrics—like Marmot's Precip—are not only cheaper, but also more breathable
- Other fabrics—like Sierra Designs' Nanolite—aren't as waterproof or breathable but are incredibly lightweight and packable

THE BOTTOM LINE How often do you actually wear your shell out there? If it lives mostly in your pack, sacrifice breathability and opt for something less expensive and/or lighter. On the other hand, if you literally put it through the wringer—summer and winter—shell out for Gore-Tex. You won't regret it.

BACKPACKING



bulbs have been too hot for use in headlamps, but Brunton has overcome this by installing fins behind the lamp that shed heat. The result is a lamp that can project 180 feet for 200 hours on a single set of batteries. With dual battery packs—and an optional C-battery holder for longer burn time—it's heavier than most LED lamps, but it's much lighter than the mining-style halogen lights. **KEEP IN MIND** If you don't absolutely need the full power of this torch, you may want to save some bucks and wait a few years for the technology to get lighter and cheaper. **BEST SUITED TO** Cavers, mountaineers and other explorers of darkness who need the ultimate in distance lighting combined with long battery life.

D. Petzl Tikka XP

(3.4 oz, 96 g; \$52; petzl.com)

In a departure from Petzl's other popular Tikka headlamps, the XP employs a single one-watt LED bulb—in place of the usual four standard LEDs—to do double duty as both proximity and distance light. To switch from beam to spread, simply slide a hidden plastic diffuser lens across the bulb and you have a swath of up-close lighting. On its highest power mode the XP will throw a beam 115 feet down the trail for 50 hours. A short-boost button allows you to crank it out to 165 feet for 20 seconds for a quick look further on. A handy battery-level indicator—something we've been wanting for years—flashes orange when battery power is down to 30 per cent and red when it's almost spent. Gone are the days of guessing how much juice is left in your batteries. **KEEP IN MIND** The XP makes a very loud click when adjusting the angle of light—not ideal for sneaking quietly to the campground bathroom. **BEST SUITED TO** Hikers, climbers or anyone who wants a lightweight, very versatile headlamp.



HEADLAMPS

A. Black Diamond Spot

(3 oz, 85 g; \$48; bde1.com)

The hybrid Spot combines three regular LED bulbs for proximity lighting with a single high-powered one-watt LED for distance. Despite its compact size and simple one-button design, the Spot is an impressive performer, both in terms of battery life and light output. On the highest setting, it can project a beam 120 feet, and on its lowest setting—which still illuminates 30 feet out—it will burn for an impressive 150 hours on three AAA batteries. Multiple power settings—including an emergency strobe setting—offer tons of versatility in a small package. **KEEP IN MIND** The Spot's weak point is the battery compartment—expect to wrestle when you have to change batteries, which, thankfully, isn't very often.

BEST SUITED TO Hikers, climbers and anyone seeking a stowaway headlamp that can handle any lighting duties.

B. Princeton Tec Quad

(3.5 oz, 99 g; \$45; princetonotec.com)

What sets the Quad apart from other simple four-bulb lamps? The new 5mm bulbs. Physically, they're the same size as standard LEDs, but they burn up to 50 per cent brighter, while using less battery power. Like other Princeton Tec headlamps, the Quad is designed to withstand serious abuse with its screw-down battery compartment, rubber gaskets that seal out water to a depth of three feet, and uncrackable plastic casing. The design philosophy here: simple but effective. **KEEP IN MIND** The bright new bulbs shed lots of light, but don't throw

light as far as a headlamp that has a dedicated distance lighting bulb. **BEST SUITED TO** Paddlers or any other outdoor folk who want a simple lightweight lamp that won't fizzle under the strain of hard weather or occasional rough treatment.

C. Brunton L3 (6 oz, 170 g; \$125; brunton.com)

The L3 is further evidence that LED bulb technology is far from topping out. Loaded into this powerhouse is a three-watt LED bulb, the brightest on the market. Until now, these

REGULAR LEDS VS. HIGH-POWERED LEDS

REGULAR LEDS

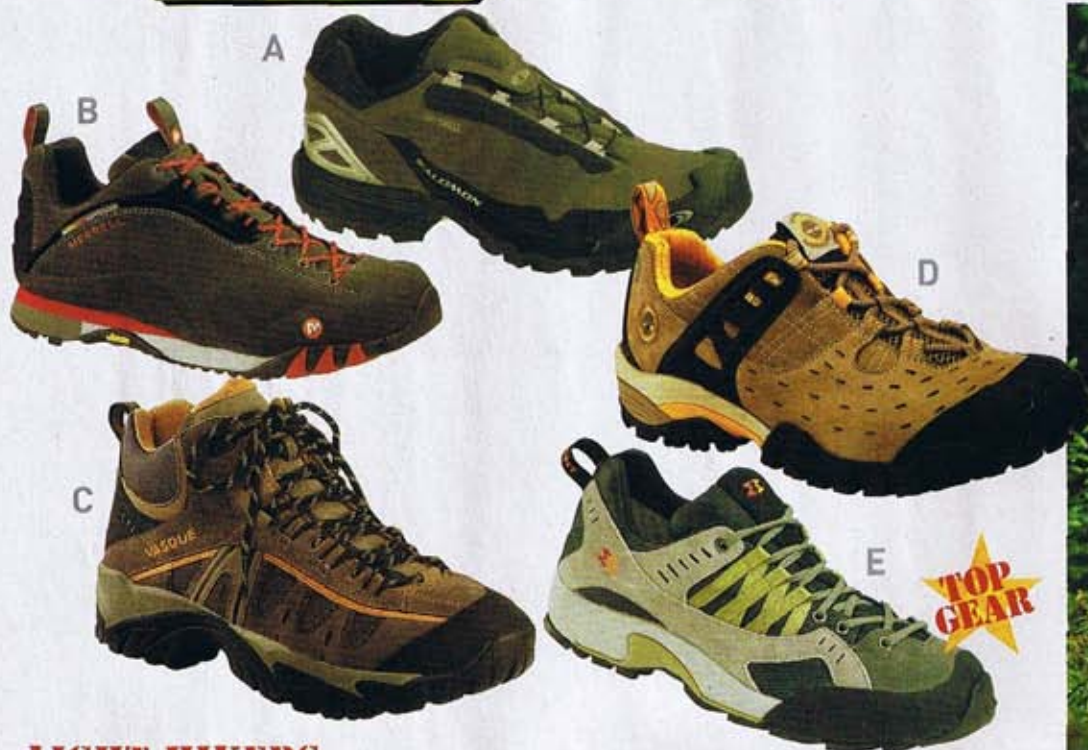
- Sufficient for close-range tasks such as reading or cooking
- Extremely long battery run-time
- Smaller and lighter

HIGH-POWERED LEDS

- Brighter and can project longer distance
- Better for moving—hiking, climbing or biking—at night
- Require more battery power and are bulkier—though this is changing fast

THE BOTTOM LINE: LEDs have officially usurped halogens as the bulb of choice in modern headlamps. But not all are equal. Basic LED lamps—most have three or four bulbs—are tiny and last for hundreds of hours on one set of batteries, making them ideal for general around-camp use or as an emergency light that you keep stashed in your pack. But for true nighttime adventuring use, you can't beat the new high-powered one- or three-watt LED bulbs.

ON THE TRAIL



LIGHT HIKERS

A. Salomon Fusion
 (\$130; salomonoutdoor.com)

It was only a matter of time before the softshell craze spilled over into footwear. Enter the Fusion, a light hiker with a stitch-free welded softshell fabric upper. We were skeptical at first, but the Fusion turned out to be extremely light, ultra comfortable and more breathable than any other waterproof kick we've used. Unlike other waterproofs, which have a membrane—usually Gore-Tex—added to a regular fabric or leather upper, the Fusion's single-layer fabric acts as a water barrier and upper in one layer. Less fabric equals better breathability. Extra pad-

ding around the tongue and ankle cuff combined with the one-pull Kevlar lacing system provide a glove-like fit. **KEEP IN MIND** With the unorthodox technology comes a somewhat unorthodox look. A shoe for the "fashion forward." **BEST SUITED TO** Urban or wilderness hikers who need a waterproof shoe that can handle most terrain—from serious trails to city walkways.

B. Merrell Edge
 (\$110; merrell.com)

Behind the all-leather Edge's urban-styled outer lurks a very functional approach shoe capable of handling steep rock with ease. Key to its alpine abil-

ities: a multi-part sole unit that consists of a three-quarter-length steel shank with an added stiffener to provide plenty of support for steep terrain; a triple-density EVA padded midsole with an air chamber under the heel for added cushioning on the flats; and a sticky-rubber Vibram outsole with a true edging platform and plenty of lugs. The beefy toe and side rands protect against abrasion. **KEEP IN MIND** If you're more likely to be found hiking trails than clambering on rock, you'll likely find the Edge too stiff. **BEST SUITED TO** Rock climbers or scramblers seeking a shoe that inspires confidence on the rock, but also holds its own in the bar.

C. Vasque Marga Mid
 (\$130; vasque.com)

The Marga Mid is one of those rare light hikers that's actually designed as a true trail shoe, rather than an everyday kick. In fact, few shoes we tested are as stable on rough and uneven terrain. The key is the combination of a high ankle cuff—which also keeps pebbles at bay—and side-stabilization straps that lock your foot against the supportive midsole when the laces are tightened. Sounds technical, but the bottom line is that you're less likely to roll your ankle, even in very rough terrain. Abrasion-resistant mesh patches provide breathability, while a large toe cap adds protection and durability. **KEEP IN MIND** Not a fan of mid-cuts? You're out of luck—the Marga doesn't come in a low-cut version. **BEST SUITED TO** Day hikers and light-load backpackers who want a nimble, breathable shoe for covering adventurous terrain.

D. Timberland Trailscape
 (\$120; timberland.com)

The Trailscape borrows some features from an approach shoe—high rubber rand, full-length lacing and narrow profile—and some from a light hiker—deep outsole lugs and soft midsole cushioning. The result is a Franken-shoe that can easily handle everything from rugged trail hiking to light scrambling. The leather upper is durable—

not to mention sleek enough to wear every day—but has a gusseted mesh tongue that acts like a chimney for your feet on hot days. **KEEP IN MIND** The sole is plenty sticky, but you'll want something stiffer for really technical approaches on rock. **BEST SUITED TO** Adventure travellers and day hikers looking for a do-it-all hiker.

E. Garmont Sticky Cat
 (\$145; garmont.com)

In our opinion, the Sticky Cat is the best true approach shoe on the market. It's light, stiff, narrow, abrasion-resistant and cushioned enough to hike in. Crucial to its per-

APPROACH SHOES VS. HIKERS

APPROACH SHOES

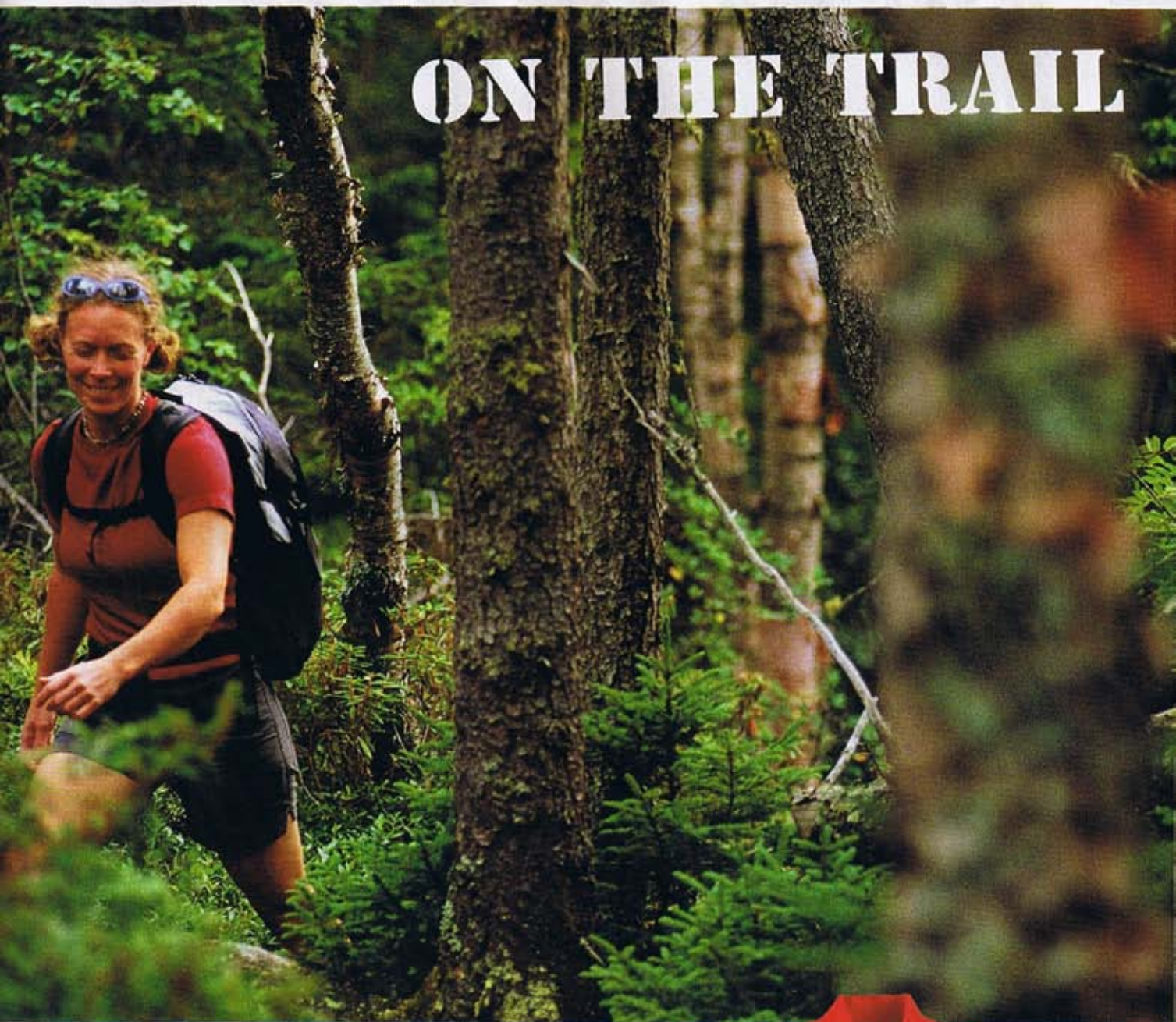
- Equipped with sticky soles that grip with tenacity on steep rock
- Rubber soles wear faster and also leave marks on floors
- To-the-toe lacing and slim profile provide precise fit
- Minimal cushioning under foot
- Rubber rand and burly uppers are designed to withstand serious abuse

TOP APPROACH SHOE Approach shoes are designed for climbers to get to and from the mountain or crag with ease. They also make great scrambling footwear for rocky terrain. But their marking soles and limited traction on wet ground make them a poor choice for all-around urban or trail kicks. If you spend more time on dirt and concrete, and less on steep rock, choose a light hiker—if you need some on-rock performance choose a model with a stiff shanked sole.

HIKERS

- Roomier, more comfortable fit for all-day use
- Deeper sole lugs provide better traction on wet, muddy or looser terrain
- Added cushioning under foot for long trail days

ON THE TRAIL



formance is a customized shank hidden in the midsole that is stiff in the forefoot for climbing, but cut out under the heel to create a padded heel strike when walking. Equally vital are the sticky-rubber outsole (which combines a large edging platform under the big toe—like a rock climbing shoe—with a pattern of lugs elsewhere) and a snug toe-toe lacing design that enables a very precise fit. **KEEP IN MIND** This is a shoe for the vertically inclined, not everyday hikers. **BEST SUITED TO** Rock climbers and scramblers seeking a lightweight shoe that can hold its own on surprisingly steep terrain.

WOMEN ONLY

Sugoi M-Wired T (\$75; sugoi.ca)

Tiny MP3 players have become ubiquitous, providing a soundtrack to our runs, hikes and bike rides. But as small as they are, we still need a spot to stow them that leaves our hands free. Enter the M-Wired T, a performance top with a mesh pocket on the left sleeve specifically designed for an iPod or similar-sized player. A tiny hole inside the pocket lets you run the headphone wire inside the shirt and out the neck, avoiding the possibility of dangling wires getting yanked by an errant arm or snagged on your pack. The deep invisible front zip and underarm mesh panels provide ample ventilation, while a discreet back pocket keeps keys and other essentials safe.



ON THE TRAIL



TRAIL RUNNERS


A. Salomon Trail Comp SCS

(\$120; salomonoutdoor.com)

Designed for all-out trail running, the featherlight Trail Comp rides atop a new high-tech chassis called the SCS sole unit. The multi-part sole features extra cushioning in the heel to absorb hard heel strikes and enhanced padding under the arch to prevent rollover on uneven terrain. An elasticized insert in the forefoot actually helps you run faster with less energy by springing you into the next stride as you toe off. If you're getting the most out of these shoes, you'll be building up a sweat, which is why you'll appreciate the all-mesh upper. **KEEP IN MIND** The shallow lugs aren't quite aggressive enough for prolonged runs in muddy or loose terrain. **BEST SUITED TO** Racers who are seeking a lightweight, breathable shoe for training and racing.

B. The North Face Endurus XCR Boa

(\$160; thenorthface.com)

Single-pull lacing systems are nothing new, but the Endurus takes the concept to a new level with its ratch-

eted Boa lacing. Originally developed for snowboard boots and inline skates, the system mates a stainless steel cable with a back-of-the-heel dial. Crank it and the "laces" constrict around your foot for an instant cling-wrap fit that can be minutely adjusted on the fly in a millisecond. The shoe itself is as comfortable and supportive as other TNF trail favorites. **KEEP IN MIND** Only available in a Gore-Tex version, the Endurus is great for wet or variable conditions, but too sweaty for pure hot-weather training. **BEST SUITED TO** Anyone, from serious trail runners to day hikers, who wants a lightweight all-weather performance shoe.

C. Montrail Odyssey

(\$140; montrail.com)

Most runners with mesh uppers tend to offer better breathability but less stability, but the Odyssey is not your typical mesh shoe. Montrail has loaded it with hidden stability straps that wed with the lacing system to wrap your foot securely in place. Adding to the shoe's sure-footedness is a flexible plate in the midsole that allows natural foot roll, but

prevents torsional twisting and pronation. A gel insert in the already well-padded heel provides ample cushioning for occasional dashes over road or gravel trails. **KEEP IN MIND** The mesh upper may be stable, but it's about as waterproof as a sieve. The shoe is ideal for hot weather, but not for wet weather. **BEST SUITED TO** Recreational runners who run on all kinds of terrain.

D. New Balance 907

(\$160; newbalance.com)

The 907 is a shoe for logging long kilometres over rugged terrain. The mesh forefoot breathes well enough to keep your toes dry, but is backed with a silky smooth fabric comfy enough for sock-free running (for those who prefer). The sole unit has plenty of grip and cushioning, and also features a rock protection plate that prevents bruising from sharp rocks or errant stones. And since the shoe is available in a huge variety of widths—a rarity in runners—it fits a huge variety of feet. **KEEP IN MIND** The 907 is a pronation-control stability shoe, which may not be for your feet. A good salesperson can set you straight.

BEST SUITED TO Those who are serious about their trail running and need a stability shoe that can sail over any terrain they can.

E. Garmont Nasty

(\$140; garmont.com)

The Nasty is a runner designed specifically for those who like to take their running adventures beyond the trail. The wrap-around sticky rubber outsole has multidirectional lugs for all-surface traction and quick directional changes—not just for straightforward plodding, like other runners. To help keep you on your feet, a plastic spine with strategic cut-outs and ribs is embedded into the midsole, which maximizes stability and cushioning without restricting the natural flex of the foot. Call it what you will, but we're calling it an off-trail runner. **KEEP IN MIND** The rubber-spiked toe and heel provide wicked traction and protect the EVA cushioning when bushwhacking, but the gladiator look isn't for everyone. **BEST SUITED TO** Those whose runs regularly involve hopping logs and rocks, and scrambling up steep hillsides.

**BUYING BASICS:
TRAIL RUNNERS**

As with all shoes, fit should be your first concern when seeking out a light hiker or trail runner. Once you find a few models that feel good, narrow your choice down with the following considerations:

1. How much cushioning you need depends on where your running adventures take you. If you clock a lot of kilometres on roads or hard-packed gravel, seek out a hybrid shoe that has the cushioning of a road runner. Pound the pavement with a true trail runner and you'll be nursing injuries in no time.

2. Not all rubber is equal. For rocky terrain, sticky rubber—borrowed from the rock-climbing world—provides the surest footing. For muddy or loose ground, deep self-cleaning lugs and a harder rubber are best.

3. On truly adventurous mountain terrain, sharp rocks are par for the course. A protective plate or lightweight plastic shank will protect the bottom of your foot from painful bruising.

4. In the store, a mesh upper and leather upper may feel much the same. Get outside and you'll quickly notice the difference. Mesh breathes better, but is less durable. Leather can be hot, but will last longer and keep your feet drier in the muck.

5. For true waterproof performance, choose a shoe with a Gore-Tex XCR liner. Just remember, they are clammy in hot weather, so don't bother spending the extra money unless you can remember the last time you got a soaker on the trail.

6. A stiff heel counter—the cup that wraps around your heel—is the key to a supportive, non-slip fit and healthy ankles. Give the shoe the baby-cheeks test. Grab the shoe from behind between fingers and thumb and squeeze: if it gives way like soft baby cheeks, move on.

7. For alpine scree or beach hiking, a sealed neoprene cuff and a gusseted tongue that's sewn to the body of the shoe will do wonders to fend off irritating pebbles and sand. Can't find a sealed shoe that fits? Pick up a pair of lightweight ankle gaiters.

ON THE TRAIL

DAY PACKS



A. Black Diamond Jackal (32 or 42 litres; \$145; bdeet.com)

From its unrestrictive load-carrying Y-suspension to its sleek, simple lines, the Jackal is a climber's pack through and through. Load it to the top with climbing gear for approaches, then pare it down by removing the padded waistbelt and sucking in the compression straps for the summit bid. Either way, it carries comfortably. And a host of climber-friendly features make loading and accessing vital gear a cinch. To wit: a rope-carrying strap, side A-frame ski attachments, belt-mounted ice-screw holder slots, a stowaway helmet pocket, and dual ice-axe holders that you can access while wearing the pack. **KEEP IN MIND** To keep weight and bulk down, the shoulder and hip straps aren't as padded as they are on more hiking-oriented packs. **BEST SUITED TO** Climbers searching for a super durable and comfortable load carrier that's versatile enough for serious alpine assaults.

B. Timbuk2 Track (35 litres; \$135; timbuk2.com)

The Track is the least technical of the day packs we tested, but it may be one of the most durable thanks to its strap-free design, bomber fabric and waterproof rubberized bottom. Designed for the urban environment, the Track features three zip-open panels: a slim front pocket for frequently accessed essentials, a separate padded laptop sleeve (which fits up to a 17-inch screen), and a large main compartment with an organizer panel that has a dedicated spot for everything under the sun, including an MP3 player (with headphone port), cell phone and keys. **KEEP IN MIND** With no waistbelt, the Track burdens your shoulders with all of the weight, making it a poor choice for long adventures, urban or otherwise. **BEST SUITED TO** Urban adventurers and travellers looking for a day pack that can endure many years of abuse, on a bike, bus or plane.

C. LowePro DryZone Rover (28 litres; \$420; lowepro.com)

The DryZone Rover is a two-section wonder that combines a watertight padded camera case in the lower half with a hydration-equipped day pack in the upper half. Made from ballistic coated canvas and fitted with a drysuit-style zip, the lower portion seals out water—even if submerged—and seals in air, keeping the pack afloat when loaded. The upper day-pack portion provides space for food, extra layers and a few essentials. It comes with a Hydrapak reservoir and two zippered mesh pockets. Because it's separated from the camera portion, you don't have to worry about a burst bladder fizzling your brand new digital SLR. **KEEP IN MIND** Compared to other day packs, the Rover seems very expensive, but for a waterproof camera bag, that's the price you pay. **BEST SUITED TO** Adventurous photographers and videographers who want to shoot in all conditions, from hiking to rafting.

D. Asolo Sorcerer 33 (33 litres; \$69; asolo.com)

The Sorcerer is a pack that lays down the gauntlet. It's half the price of most technical packs, yet in our opinion is easily as good as, if not better than, most at carrying a load. Two main compartments—one with a gear organizer, the other a hydration sleeve—plus a padded MP3 player pocket, expandable mesh side pockets, a waistbelt slash pocket, and external ice-axe and trekking-pole holders ensure there's a place for everything you need on a day trip. Once loaded, the Sorcerer's suspended mesh back panel and wide waistbelt transfer the load beautifully, while still leaving your back free to breathe. Tucked in a hidden bottom pocket is a stowaway rain cover in case of a down-pour. You won't find a better deal on a technical day pack. **KEEP IN MIND** Unfortunately, the Sorcerer only comes in one size, leaving the tall and the short out of luck. **BEST SUITED TO** Day hikers seeking a load carrier built for regular trail use.

BUYING BASICS:
DAY PACKS

1. A good day pack should be like a friend you want to travel with every day. The key is to find a pack that suits your needs.

2. If you plan to use it for commuting in town, make sure it has plenty of compartments—for a laptop, a music player and any other daily essentials.

3. On the other hand, if you're after a performance pack for hiking or trail running, make sure it has a breathable back panel—suspended mesh is the coolest—and side-compression straps to secure the load from bouncing.

4. A hydration sleeve comes standard on most day packs, but not all sleeves perform equally. Some models route the drinking tube through the shoulder strap—convenient on the trail and inconspicuous in the city. Others have a separate compartment for the bladder, which means a leak won't soak your gear.

5. If you regularly jam heavy loads into your day pack—climbing gear, say—be sure to choose a model with a hipbelt and a rigid back panel or lightweight stays that transfer the load to the belt.

6. As with larger packs, a good fit is key. Thankfully, the process is much less complicated with these smaller packs. If it feels right and there is room for on-the-go adjustments, it's likely a good fit. To be sure, you'll need to load it with gear in the store—an empty pack won't tell you much.

7. All else being equal, let the small details decide. Seemingly insignificant features—an MP3 pocket that you can easily reach, a secure key clip, a shock-cord attachment for lashing on a jacket—can all make life easier out there.

COOL GEAR

High Gear AltiTech2 (\$165; highgear.com)

The AltiTech2 is a unique take on the outdoor digital watch. Designed with a built-in carabiner on a hinge, it clips to your pack strap. To check the time, altitude or temperature, simply look down—no need to rummage through layers of clothing. And since it doesn't sit against your skin like a wrist watch, the temperature and barometric readings are far more accurate. A built-in levelling bubble—a feature absent from most outdoor watches—adds crucial accuracy to the electronic compass.



E. MEC Alpinelite 30 (26 litres; \$49; mec.ca)

Owning an MEC day pack is a Canadian rite of passage. The Alpinelite 30 continues in the MEC tradition, offering a great pack that's durable, well-designed and, most importantly, a hell of a deal. Made primarily for alpine climbers and skiers, the simple top-loader is constructed with a lightweight ripstop nylon fabric that has a reinforced bottom. Added features are kept to a minimum in the name of simplicity and weight savings, and include a front crampon patch, dual ice-axe loops, and removable compression straps.

With the removable back pad pulled out, the Alpinelite can be folded up and stuffed into a large pack or suitcase—ideal for travel or for packing along as a day pack on longer outings. **KEEP IN MIND** In exchange for the light weight, the Alpinelite has a soft back panel and relatively little load-bearing capabilities. **BEST SUITED TO** Anyone, from rock climbers to travellers, who appreciates the functionality of a simple top-loader.

ON THE TRAIL



LIGHT IS RIGHT



Helly Hansen Mars Wind Jacket (\$150; hellyhansen.com)

To pack a jacket or not? With the Mars Jacket you don't even have to think twice. Tipping the scales at a scant 60 grams—the weight of two packs of gum—and packable down to the size of a tangerine, there's no reason not to bring it along. When the wind or rain picks up, the stretchy DWR-coated nylon fabric cuts through the breeze and sheds light rain with ease. The back is cut long for added protection—especially when bent over the handlebars of a bike—and a series of small perforations under each arm add ventilation. The bright orange colour makes an ideal urban running or biking jacket—if they don't see you coming in this, they shouldn't be on the road.



SUNGLASSES

A. Smith Bauhaus
(from \$120; smithsport.com)

The Bauhaus proves that sport shades need not be geeky. The oversized frames may be pure Hollywood, but the lenses feature an anatomically correct curve for clear peripheral vision and are made from shatter-proof nylon. The photochromic model changes with the brightness of the ambient light, making it ideal for running or biking in mixed light. **KEEP IN MIND** The lack of grippy rubber on the earpieces and nosepiece can make the glasses a little slippery when wet. **BEST SUITED TO** Style-oriented travellers or urbanites who want a relaxed pair of shades that can be called into action when needed.

B. Ryders Chassis
(\$59; ryderseyewear.com)

For some activities such as bike racing and long-distance running, you just can't beat ultralight interchangeable. The Chassis is

affordable enough that you can buy them as a second pair of specialized shades for just such outings. Side vents combined with lenses shaped to maximize sideways airflow keep fog to a minimum, even when you're sweating heavily. Meanwhile, the grippy, rubberized nose bridge and earpieces keep the shades locked against your face. And when the light changes, swapping in either the clear or yellow lenses takes mere seconds. **KEEP IN MIND** The Chassis seems to fit a variety of faces, but the lack of an adjustable nosepiece means those with hard-to-fit (read: large) noses should look elsewhere. **BEST SUITED TO** Racers and other athletes looking for an affordable interchangeable.

C. Julbo Instinct
(\$164; julbousa.com)

The Instinct is fitted with Julbo's latest Zebra photochromic lenses. These new tint-changing lenses can morph into three cat-

egories of lens darkness (most photochromics vary between two) to block out anywhere from 58 to 95 per cent of light. And they do so at a speedier rate than most photochromics—going from one category to the next in under 30 seconds. In real life—assuming your real life includes skiing, hiking, running and biking—this trans-

lates into being able to wear the Instinct all day without having to lift or remove them when clouds roll over or tree cover changes. **KEEP IN MIND** So far the Zebra lens is only available in one frame design. Great if it fits; otherwise, you'll have to wait. **BEST SUITED TO** Anyone who plays in variable light, especially bright mountain light.

GLASS LENSES VS. POLYCARBONATE

GLASS

- Highly scratch-resistant
- Best optical clarity
- Can support prescription and photochromic (tint varies with ambient light) lenses

POLYCARBONATE

- Lighter weight
- Shatter-resistant but require more care to prevent scratches
- Less expensive

THE BOTTOM LINE: Glass lenses are still the clearest, while polycarbonate lenses are the safest. New technology on both sides have levelled the playing field somewhat. The newest glass lenses are more shatter-resistant than ever—especially polarized models, which have laminated film inside. The latest polycarbonate lenses, on the other hand, have improved optical quality and added materials to improve durability. Still, for fast-paced and potentially high-impact sports—such as mountain biking, skiing or rock climbing—stick with poly lenses.



A



B



C



D

LUGGAGE

A. Eagle Creek Load Warrior LT30 (100 litres; \$200; eaglecreek.com)

The Load Warrior has long been a favourite adventure travel wheelee due to its large capacity, simple design and durable build. This latest incarnation has been tweaked to make it one of the lightest wheelies around—vital in these days when airlines charge you for every extra gram. And the new oversized wheels with stainless-steel bearings roll more smoothly over rough ground. The smart layout remains: one large main compartment and two additional pockets—a mesh-lined laundry chute and a waterproof boot compartment, both with dedicated outside-access zips. **KEEP IN**

MIND The boot pocket is useful but may be a little tight for bulky hiking boots. **BEST SUITED TO** Gear-schlepping travellers who want a set of wheels to ease the way.

B. Vaude Samoa (85 litres; \$200; vaude.com)

From the indestructible, waterproof tarpaulin fabric to the smooth-rolling inline-skate wheels, the Samoa is built for abuse. It practically begs to be thrown on top of a bus in India. The huge 85-litre main pocket offers copious packing space, yet is easy to organize thanks to a split clamshell-opening design and interior zippered mesh dividers. Essentials that you need to access quickly can be stored in one of four exterior zip

pockets. **KEEP IN MIND** The lack of compression straps means the Samoa gets a little floppy when it's not packed full. Those who don't need the extra space might want to opt for something smaller. **BEST SUITED TO** Anyone who needs an ultra-durable pack for expeditions or other heavy-load travel.

C. Osprey Meridian (75 litres; \$360; ospreypacks.com)

The Meridian is an unusual beast of burden that combines the benefits of a wheeled suitcase, a travel backpack and a day pack. Roll it like a regular wheelie until the terrain dictates that you must carry. Then, simply pull out the hideaway backpack straps and pad-

ded hipbelt and shoulder it. When you get to your destination, simply zip off the 20-litre day pack—complete with laptop sleeve—and head out. The Meridian does it all, and in our experience, does it all well. Also, unlike other removable day-pack designs, this one zips and clips onto the main case securely and cleanly, allowing you to check in the whole package if need be. **KEEP IN MIND** The Meridian pack suspension is comfy and well-padded, but the nine-pound weight means it's best suited for short stints. **BEST SUITED TO** Travellers craving the ease of a wheelie, but needing just a little more versatility for those out-of-the-way trips.

D. Deuter Quantum 70+10 (70 litres; \$270; deuter.com)

The Quantum takes the dedicated travel pack to a new level of comfort by mating the same load-bearing suspension system used on Deuter's backpacks with a travel-friendly compartment design. Road-worthy features include a wide-opening, U-shaped zip for the main pocket, a removable day pack, and an integrated rain cover that doubles as a large duffel bag (toss the pack and your boots in for airline travel). The overall narrow profile keeps the pack out of harm's way when loading buses, taxis and other more adventurous modes of transport. **KEEP IN MIND** The Quantum doubles well as a trekking pack, but the extra travel features add weight compared to dedicated trekking packs. **BEST SUITED TO** Backpackers going for the long haul who value carrying comfort.

COOL GEAR

PacSafe (\$80; pac-safe.com)

Stolen luggage or gear can spell a quick end to a long-planned trip. The PacSafe is one of the best ways to secure your stuff while on the road. The simple mesh bag is made from high-strength steel and comes in multiple sizes to fit a variety of packs and luggage. When you

need it—when waiting in a train station, catching a nap at an airport, or leaving your stuff in a hostel room—simply throw it over your bag, cinch the draw cord, wrap it around something secure, and lock it with the included padlock. A determined thief with bolt cutters can still get through, but most will move on to easier prey. When you don't need it, the PacSafe stores away in its own wallet-sized pouch.



LIGHT IS RIGHT

ADVENTURE MEDICAL KITS

Ultralight .3 First Aid Kit (\$12) and Pocket Survival Pak (\$35; adventuremedicalkits.com)

Consider these two ultralight pouches as 6.5 ounces of travel insurance (2.5 ounces for the First Aid Kit, 3.9 ounces for the Survival Pak). The Ultralight .3—AMK's smallest first-aid kit (pictured)—holds an abundance of the basics, including bandages, dressings, tape, painkillers, antihistamine, moleskin, sting relief and antibiotic ointment. And for travel adventure beyond the beaten path, the Survival Kit adds enough essentials—duct tape, utility wire, nylon thread and a heavy-duty sewing needle—to patch up broken clothing or gear. It also contains a few things—like a triple-frequency survival whistle, fish hooks, fire starters and survival instructions—that may actually save your skin if you get into a bind.



ADVENTURE TRAVEL



SANDALS

A. Chaco ZX/2
 (\$126; chacousa.com)

The ZX/2 was born from the same basic design as Chaco's classic Z2—a favorite among sandal fanatics for its durability and no-slip fit. This new design features the same contoured, stabilizing footbed, but the continuous strap system features a double-strap design that offers finer micro adjustments to match the

shape of your foot. Also new is the hybrid Vibram outsole that combines the stickiness and light weight of the old water sole with the all-terrain lugs of the hiking sole. **KEEP IN MIND** The double straps can get tangled if you try to pull the sandals on in a hurry. A Zen mind is key. **BEST SUITED TO** Active travelers and adventurers who want a long-lasting sandal that can be worn hiking, biking or paddling.

B. Keen Tijuana Canvas
 (\$170; keenfootwear.com)

The Tijuana takes the same styling and rugged build that have made Keen sandals so popular and offers them in a more versatile shoe that doesn't scream outdoor geek quite so loudly. Thinner canvas straps, a toned-down toe bumper and a linen tire-traction sole all contribute to the relaxed look. Other

Keen comfort and performance features remain: the pull-on single lace design, anatomical footbed and hidden neoprene lining. What you end up with is a comfy travel sandal that flies under the radar, but can still perform on the trail when called into action. **KEEP IN MIND** Like other Keens, the Tijuana is not the most airy sandal. **BEST SUITED TO** Travellers looking for a technically proficient sandal that doesn't necessarily look the part.

C. Teva Corrado Cork
 (\$120; teva.com)

The Corrado blends beach comfort with low-tech functionality. The three-point thong style is quick to slip on and off, and allows the sandals to be flattened down easily when you need to slide them into a pack or suitcase. What makes them more than a standard beach thong is the added adjustable instep strap. Tighten it with the one-pull buckle and your foot is locked in for hiking or other adventurous pursuits. Underfoot, a soft sweat-wicking footbed, cork midsole (with added heel cushioning) and a grippy rubber outsole keep you



WOMEN ONLY

Icebreaker Superfine Nature Series
 (\$99; icebreaker.com)

Icebreaker's thin Superfine merino wool fabric makes ideal travel wear for a number of reasons. Like synthetic clothing, it wicks moisture away from your skin, keeping you dry and comfortable in a variety of conditions and temperatures. But unlike synthetics, its natural anti-bacterial qualities fend off the dreaded stink. In other words you can wear it for days—or weeks—without washing, which is perfect for long trips where pack space is at a premium. Even better, the new nature series tees are styled out with artistic interpretations of New Zealand flora and fauna created by Kiwi artist Elizabeth Thomson. With one foot in the fashion world and one in the technical clothing world, these tees can easily go from high tea to high trails.

BUYING BASICS:
ADVENTURE PANTS

1. Any pants will do for sightseeing, but for true adventure travel where you may be hiking, climbing, biking and riding ramshackle public transport, you need pants that are durable, quick-drying, low-key, and chafe-resistant. Small design features such as articulated knees, a gusseted crotch (seamless design) and flat seams can all add functionality to an otherwise normal pair of pants.

2. While nylon is usually the fabric of choice for hiking pants, it may not be the best choice for travelling. Nylon dries quickly, stands up to abrasion well and remains wrinkle free. But it's less comfortable than cotton on long days, can harbour odorous bacteria, and often screams "tourist." A cotton/nylon or poly/cotton blend is often a better choice for its versatility.

3. A built-in waistbelt lets you adjust the fit—for those extra burritos or layers of clothing—without adding the hassle of packing along a belt. If you plan to carry a pack, though, make sure the buckle is offset or flat enough to fit comfortably under the hipbelt.

4. The mesh pockets found on hiking pants add ventilation and drainage in the event of a downpour, but they're about as durable as a wet tortilla when faced with keys, pocket knives or wallets. Look for durable nylon or cotton pockets—preferably zippered or hidden ones.

5. White or cream pants may look good in the store, but you'll be cursing the name of John Travolta in no time if you pack them on a rugged trip. Instead, opt for dark earth tones that hide wear and tear.

comfortable and secure. And they're stylish enough to wear almost anywhere. **KEEP IN MIND** In the long run, the leather/cork sole unit won't stand up to abusive adventures. If you really need a sport sandal, get one. **BEST SUITED TO** Those looking to mix casual style with enough performance to flee the sidewalk occasionally.



A



B



C



PORTABLE MUSIC PLAYERS

A. Apple iPod 60GB (Memory: 60GB; \$500; apple.ca)

With its full-colour, 2.5-inch display and massive memory capacity, this latest version of the standard-setting iPod is more a pocket multi-media centre than just a music player. Sure, you can store 15,000 songs on it if you like. But you can also load and view photos directly from your digicam, download videos from your computer, and even hook it up directly to a TV to show your images—moving and

still—to friends and family when travelling. Sync calendar and contact info from your PC, and use it also as a personal organizer. Add a 20-hour battery life and one of the most intuitive user interfaces around, and it's still hard to beat the original. **KEEP IN MIND** The 60GB capacity is handy, but it's also expensive. Thankfully, there's also a cheaper 30GB model. **BEST SUITED TO** Frequent travellers and digital photographers on-the-go who want a music player and a portable storage device in one.

B. Victorinox SwissMemory s.beat (Memory: 1GB; \$230; victorinox.com)

The SwissMemory s.beat is a tiny flash-based unit that packs a lot of punch. Beyond storing and playing hundreds of music files, the 1GB unit also incorporates an FM radio and a voice recorder. The s.beat comes in two models: one with a knife, scissors and file, and one without for use on flights. Both come with an elasticized armband holder for running or cycling, and a

unique pair of headphones that are incorporated into the neck lanyard—a simple but brilliant solution to the problem of dangling wires. **KEEP IN MIND** The s.beat's built-in USB plug is super convenient—no cords required—but plugging it into a computer is also the only way to charge it, which is a bummer if you're on a long journey sans laptop. **BEST SUITED TO** Listeners seeking ultra portability with the added versatility of voice recording, data storage and radio listening.

C. Sony Walkman NWA3000 (Memory: 20GB; \$350; sony.com)

The portable music phenomenon started back in the days of the Walkman, and now Sony continues the tradition with the NWA3000, a high-tech music player whose stylish contoured design belies its not-so-catchy name. The unusual integrated display is completely intuitive—we were rocking out within seconds of loading it up—and the 20GB storage capacity is enough for

BUYING BASICS: WATCHES

Modern outdoor watches are adorned with so many features these days it's hard to keep up. Buff up your knowledge before you shop so you know what you're paying for:

1. Altimeter – Displays altitude above sea level based on barometric pressure. Resetting at known altitudes is key to maintaining accuracy. Good navigational tool for climbers and backpackers.

2. Barometer – Measures air pressure. The best watches also keep track of barometric trends, which is immensely helpful in predicting weather changes.

3. Compass – Electronic indication of direction of travel. True accuracy requires a built-in level bubble or three-dimensional technology.

4. Interval timer – Lets user set two or more consecutive countdown times, with an audible beep in between indicating when to rest and when to go. Vital for interval training.

5. Heart rate monitor – Measures your heart rate as you exercise. The best models will have an alarm that alerts you when you stray too far from your target heart rate.

6. Hydration alarm – A regular reminder to drink fluids. Can be more than just a gimmick for long runs, hikes or bike rides.

Once you've decided what features you need, consider how they're presented. If you need a Ph.D. to access them, or the buttons are too small to operate with light gloves on, they may as well not be there.

HARD DRIVE VS. FLASH MEMORY

Hard drive

- Larger capacity—currently available up to 100 gigs
- Latest models allow you to store and watch videos and recorded TV shows
- Extra capacity allows for storage of other digital files, like photos or word documents, while travelling

THE BOTTOM LINE: Portable hard-drive players still rule for audiophiles and travellers who must have their entire collection with them, or who need space to upload photos or video from other devices. For running, mountain biking, hiking or just going to the gym, flash players are the ticket—they're easy to slow away, less expensive and more durable

Flash memory

- Smaller and lighter
- Less expensive per byte of storage space
- Lower capacity—usually up to one gig
- With no moving parts, they are more durable, reliable and shock proof
- Longer battery life

thousands of songs. What sets the NWA3000 apart from other hard-drive MP3 players on the market is the incredible 35-hour battery life (double that of most players), the top-notch sound quality, and the anti-shock technology that protects the data in case of accident. **KEEP IN MIND** You'll need to install the supplied Sony software on your computer. **BEST SUITED TO** Music lovers who want a high-capacity player that's designed first and foremost for playing tunes. **C**