

## **Idaho Hikers and Backpackers**

### **Backpacking Guide version 2.0 ©**

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Trip leader: Idaho Hikers and Backpackers



Photo: ULA Ultra Circuit backpack. I used this on a 2 night trip in Canyonlands.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Welcome backpackers! Whether you are new to backpacking or have minimal experience, I hope this guide will be helpful to you. For experienced backpackers, you might learn something new as well.

### **I. What to expect from spring/summer/fall backpacking trips:**

In general, there will not be access to electricity, cell service, running water, and medical care. *This is a chance to step out of our modern life into somewhere more genuine.* Water will be either filtered, chemically treated, or boiled (more on this below). Sometimes we will need to carry all our water in. Rarely, we will make water catches beforehand, e.g., in the desert. You will sleep in your own tent. On longer trips, you may find it easier to share a tent with a friend or partner to save weight. You will carry a backpack weighing 20-35 lbs typically 5+ miles going through various terrain (e.g, uphill, loose rocks, stream crossings). *Distance is often less important than difficulty.* With experience, you'll be able to get to a low base-weight (weight without consumables). For example, my base-weight for a 4 day trip on the Pacific Crest Trail trip was about 15 lbs and 23 lbs with food and water. My current total weight averages about 24 lbs. I value joy and health over an ultralight pack. At the same time, I am lightweight to protect my back and joints. Finding what works best for you takes time and practice.

### **II. Types of backpacking trips:**

- Loops
- Out and back
- Base camp. Backpack to a certain point, camp and day hike/climb to another point.
- Shuttle/through hike. We either have one or more cars at each end of the trail and start at the same point or each party starts at on end and we swap car keys
- Multi-day. More than 1 night. Can include any of the above types.
- Air drop off: a plane or helicopter drops you off and picks you up at a designated airstrip. This is sometimes done in the Frank Church Wilderness of No Return.
- Coin toss. The direction or trip is determined by the flip of a coin.

### **III. Difficulty level:**

## Definitions used by Idaho Hikers and Backpackers:

- *Beginner's backpack:* These trips are designed for members with no or minimal experience. Members are learning to use their gear and how to adapt to eating and sleeping in the wilderness. Base-weights may be heavier than average. They may feel uncomfortable with wind and rain while camping. The trip is suitable for any age (18+). There will not be any significant elevation gain, hazards or navigation challenges. Backpackers are comfortable with a trip under 10 miles. Examples: Jenny lake, Boulder Lake to Fogg Lake, City of rocks/ Indian Springs.
- *Intermittent level backpack:* Group members will have a good knowledge of their gear. They may still be testing their equipment out. They are not “dialed in.” Base-weights are average or below average. They feel comfortable camping in rain or wind. They are fine with some elevation gain. The trail may be faint in some places. There could be some easy scrambling over rocks (class 2). Backpackers are comfortable with a 10-20 mile trip. Examples: Goat Lake (Pioneer Mountains), Leatherman Peak, Alice-Toxoway loop.
- *Advanced Backpack:* Group members are knowledgeable on their gear. They can quickly set up and take down their tents. Their base weight is below average ( approx. 5-10 lbs). They can adjust to different types of weather conditions. They may have special skill sets such as map and compass, first aid training, knot tying, or survival skills. They are comfortable with route finding and off trail hiking. Trips may have significant elevation gain and be multiple days. We may exceed 15 miles per day. There may be some scrambling (class 3-4). Examples: Seven Devils loop, White Clouds loop, Grand Sawtooth loop.

**Note about difficulty.** This is very individual. The above definitions are general. A lot depends on your fitness level, gear, weather, and the terrain. What is easy for one person may be very challenging for some else. That is why we recommend doing practice uphill hikes with a full backpack— the one you plan to use on your event with us.

## Definition for base weights:

- “Stupid light.” Not a weight limit per say but is an overly aggressive weight reduction that compromises safety, comfort, and functionality, often by neglecting essential gear or using inappropriate, too-light equipment. Some authors would call a base weight < 5 lbs “stupid” light.

- **Ultralight:** Ultralight backpacking is a minimalist hiking philosophy focused on significantly reducing pack weight by prioritizing essential gear, using lightweight materials, and adopting efficient practices. A common target is a base weight (all gear minus consumables like food) of 10 pounds or less, achieved through smart choices like ultralight shelters, sleeping systems, and footwear, though this approach may involve a trade-off in comfort at camp and requires experience to navigate safely
- **Light:** carrying a base-weight of less than 20 pounds, with the most common range being between 10 and 20 pounds. Base weight includes all your gear but excludes consumables like food, water, and fuel. This approach allows backpackers to hike faster, cover more miles, and experience less physical strain, though it often requires investing in lighter and more expensive equipment or being very strategic about gear selection.

Heavy: a baseweight above 20 lbs.

*\*Generally, we recommend your backpack (including all consumables) to be less than 30 lbs.\**

### **III. Backpacking season in Idaho:**

Generally, the Idaho backpacking season starts in mid July and can go as late as early November. In the Owyhee desert one can backpack as early as April. September and October are hunting season in Idaho. In some areas, it is advisable to wear brightly colored clothing during hunting season. Winterbacking is also an option with the right gear. See <https://winterbackpacking.com/> for all things winter backpacking. We can organize a winter back if there is interest.

A note on weather forecasts: You should be prepared for unexpected weather such as rain, hail, and snow. Weather forecasts are most accurate within 3 days of the event. However, weather forecasts are often inaccurate and do not reflect the particular area we are hiking in. As long as it is safe, we will continue with the event. A saying goes in the backpacking “There is no bad weather only bad preparation.” We carry short wave radios (Brand Rockie Talkie); as long as we are in range, we can get up to date forecasts.

Some resources for forecasts:

- General forecast: <https://forecast.weather.gov/>
- Mountains: <https://www.mountain-forecast.com/>
- Wind: <https://www.windy.com/-Waves-waves?waves.42.885.-112.444.5>

Lightening often starts in July-September. You should understand how to respond if you are caught in a lightning storm. This is a great short video on the topic:

<https://youtu.be/q-7ya7qYME0?feature=shared>

#### IV. Health and safety precautions

If you have any medical conditions, please inform the organizers (your information will be kept confidential). *We cannot be held liable from any condition that becomes unstable during a trip.*

The organizers carry very basic first aid. Make sure to bring any medications or inhalers (including extra) you may need. Everyone should have their own first aid kit. Here is the first aid we recommend you bring:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/18gXCr9hmJtOkojxx-OcyRZPDC5PNZRWtuZjfp3a6Sg4/e/dit?usp=drivesdk>

- Idaho DOES charge for rescue. Typically, someone in the group will have a garmin inReach™ to call for help. It's a good idea to have your own inReach™ with rescue insurance. That said, injuries requiring rescue are rare. The group's philosophy is to self-rescue when feasible.
- Sun screen, long sleeve shirts, sun glasses, lip balm and a broad brim hat will help protect you from sunburn and skin cancer. Consider a hiking umbrella for even better protection. Also, group members get %20 off the OuterU face glove: <https://outeru.com/>  
Discount code: HIKINGMEETUP20
- Bugs: We will do our best during the planning phase to avoid "buggy" areas but come prepared. Mosquitos can be a nuisance. Mosquito borne illness such as Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, and West Virus are rare in Idaho. We encourage you to use insect repellent and check yourself for ticks. The thermacell bug machine is a good option (<https://www.thermacell.com/products/mr300-repeller>). We found pretreating clothes, backpacks, and tents with Sawyer permethrin has been most effective. There is no conclusive evidence that permethrin is harmful to human health <https://a.co/d/6fobufs>
- Bears: Idaho has two types of bears: black bears are mostly found in Northern Idaho around the Sawtooths and Salmon River Mountains. The Idaho Panhandle and Yellowstone are the habitat for Grizzly Bears. On average, there are about 11-12 bear attacks recorded annually in North America, with a smaller number specifically in Idaho. Typically, bear attacks occur when hiking alone. Hiking in groups of three or more lessens the risk. Therefore, always stay with the group when hiking in bear country- even

if you are in a hurry to get home. The organizers will notify you when bear precautions are required. There is no evidence that bear bells are effective (but they sure are annoying!). Also, there is no evidence that carrying a firearm is helpful. After all, there are more hunting accidents than bear attacks per year. *If you do not have the required precautions you cannot join our trip. No exceptions.*

- Rattlesnakes: can be found in Hell's Canyon and the Owyhee desert. Watching your step and possibly wearing gaiters are good preventative measures. Deaths from rattlesnake bites are rare. There is no evidence that rattlesnake kits are effective.
- Water: Most backpackers have a filtering device to keep water clean. Tablets are a good backup if the water filter fails. Boiling is an option but is time consuming and wastes fuel. The main concern here is Giardia — a parasite that causes bloating, belching, and diarrhea. This can be treated with antibiotics if it occurs. Glacier melt and water that percolates through rock is generally considered safe to drink.
- Blisters: The best way to avoid blisters is to wear a liner sock under a thicker sock.

Read Dr. Bussell's article on blister prevention and care:

<https://winterbackpacking.com/blisters-a-guide-to-prevention-and-treatment/>

- Dehydration and muscle cramps: 2 liters of water minimum per day is required on all our backpacking trips unless stated otherwise. Also bring electrolytes, such as salt chews, tabs or drinks. Water bladders have the risk of leaking but are convenient on hot days. *Do not bring a water bladder if there is a possibility of freezing temperatures.* For health reasons, some of us avoid drinking from plastic and instead use metal water bottles. A

favorite salt chew:

<https://www.rei.com/product/107488/saltstick-fastchews-chewable-electrolyte-tablets-10-tablets>

Muscle cramps are avoidable with good hydration and adequate salt intake. If you get a cramp, stop, rest, and consume salt.

- Altitude sickness

Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS), i.e “Altitude sickness”, can start even at 8000 feet . Common signs of altitude sickness include headache and difficulty breathing despite an adequate rest period. The risk of altitude sickness is not related to your fitness - even elite athletes can develop AMS. The best predictor of altitude sickness is prior AMs. Unfortunately, we often do

not have time to acclimate. Helpful preventative tips include doubling your normal fluid intake, rest breaks, and pressure breathing.

Please watch this video to familiarize yourself with AMS:

<https://youtu.be/HTynblTRzT0?feature=shared>

If you are feeling unwell, you should descend immediately. AMS can spiral into lung and neurological collapse, and even death. Also watch for reverse altitude sickness when you get back to Boise.

The temperature will be much different at higher altitudes. Please have wind, water, sun protection and extra layers of clothing.

## **V. Equipment “Gear”**

Now we get to talk about the fun stuff: the gear we will bring- our outdoor “toys.”

The big 3 (tent, sleeping bag, and mattress) will take up the most weight and space in your backpack; you want to research and invest wisely. The total weight of these items should be about <10 lbs.

- Tent recommendations:
  - A three season tent; that is, a tent appropriate for all seasons except winter.
  - Either a free standing tent or a trekking pole tent.
  - Lightweight 2- 3 lbs; ultralight: <2 lbs

Below are my recommendations based on personal experience and reviews. Ultralight does not necessarily mean a quality product. It may be worth an extra ounce or two for gear that is more durable and/or comfortable.



| One Person Tent recommendations 2025 |                       |        |   |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------|---|
|                                      |                       | Cost   | Review  |
| Good                                 | Lanshan 1 tent*       | \$     | <a href="https://youtu.be/XTIRNpQgOj4?feature=shared">https://youtu.be/XTIRNpQgOj4?feature=shared</a>   |
| Great                                | REI Passage 1         | \$S    | <a href="https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/budget-backpacking-tent/rei-co-op-passage-1">https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/budget-backpacking-tent/rei-co-op-passage-1</a> |
| Great                                | Gossamer Gear the one | \$\$   | <a href="https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/ultralight-tent/gossamer-gear-the-one">https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/ultralight-tent/gossamer-gear-the-one</a>             |
| Outstanding                          | Zpack Plex Solo lite  | \$\$\$ | <a href="https://www.adventurealan.com/product/zpacks-plex-solo-lite/">https://www.adventurealan.com/product/zpacks-plex-solo-lite/</a>   |
| *Requires you to seal the seams.     |                       |        |   |

| Two Person Tent Recommendations 2025 |   |        |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|--------|---|
|                                      |   | Cost   | Review  |
| Good                                 | Alps Mountaineering Trail Tipi 2 person | \$     | <a href="https://youtu.be/ubhyX28TlwM?feature=shared">https://youtu.be/ubhyX28TlwM?feature=shared</a>   |
| Great                                | Gossamer Gear the Two                   | \$\$   | <a href="https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/ultralight-tent/gossamer-gear-the-two">https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/ultralight-tent/gossamer-gear-the-two</a>                 |
| Great                                | Big Agnes Copper Spur HV UL2            | \$\$\$ | <a href="https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/backpacking-tent/big-agnes-copper-spur-hv-ul2">https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/backpacking-tent/big-agnes-copper-spur-hv-ul2</a> |
| Outstanding                          | Zpack Duplex LITE                       | \$\$\$ | <a href="https://www.irunfar.co">https://www.irunfar.co</a>   |



|  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
|  |  |  | <a href="https://m/zpacks-duplex-lite-tent-review">m/zpacks-duplex-lite-tent-review</a> |
|--|--|--|---|

*One vs two person tent?* One person tents offer less space but are generally lighter than two person tents. Some tents listed above require 1-2 trekking poles, which is an extra expense that should be factored into the total cost of your purchase. Taller or larger persons tend to feel more comfortable in a 2 person tent. People with heavy backpacks generally have a two person tent.



Photo: Zpack 1 Plex Solo Lite with (optional) ground sheet.

- Sleeping bag recommendations
  - Your sleeping bag should be rated to at least 30 degrees- that is, the lowest temperature you would be safe from the cold. This should cover most events. If you have the resources, you can buy sleeping bags in 15 degree increments: 0, 15, 30, 45 Degrees. *Always bring a sleeping bag that is rated 10 degrees lower than the expected temperature.*
  - Backpacking quilts are great but we would recommend beginners start with a sleeping bag.
  - Your sleeping bag should weigh less than 3 lbs.

| Sleeping bag recommendations 2025  |  |        |   |
|--|--|--------|---|
|  | 30 degrees +                             | Cost   | Review  |
| Good   | Alps Mountaineering Genesis              | \$     | None  |
| Great  | REI Magma                                | \$\$   | <a href="https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/backpacking-sleeping-bag/rei-co-op-magma-30">https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/backpacking-sleeping-bag/rei-co-op-magma-30</a>                             |
| Excellent  | Western Mountaineering Megalight         | \$\$\$ | <a href="https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/backpacking-sleeping-bag/western-mountain-eering-megalite">https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/backpacking-sleeping-bag/western-mountain-eering-megalite</a> |
| Excellent  | Western mountaineering Astralite quilt * | \$\$\$ | <a href="https://www.halfwayanywhere.com/gear/review/western-mountain-eering-astralite-quilt/">https://www.halfwayanywhere.com/gear/review/western-mountain-eering-astralite-quilt/</a>   |
| *Backpacking quilts are generally lighter than sleeping bags. Some people may find them less comfortable than sleeping bags. |  |        |   |

**Backpack recommendations 2025**

|       |   |        |   |
|-------|---|--------|---|
| Good  | Simond Men's MT500 AIR 50+10 L Backpacking Pack | S      | <a href="https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/budget-backpacking-pack/deathlon-forclaz-mt500-air-50-plus10">https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/budget-backpacking-pack/deathlon-forclaz-mt500-air-50-plus10</a>   |
| Great | Osprey exos 48                                  | \$\$   | <a href="https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/ultralight-backpack/osprey-exos-48">https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/ultralight-backpack/osprey-exos-48</a>   |
| Great | ULA Catalyst                                    | \$\$\$ | <a href="https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/backpacks-backpacking/ultralight-adventure-equipment-catalyst">https://www.outdoorgearlab.com/reviews/camping-and-hiking/backpacks-backpacking/ultralight-adventure-equipment-catalyst</a> |

#### Air mattress

- This should be full length supporting your whole body.
- R value is the warmth provided by the air mattress . We recommend an R value at least 2. You can increase R-value by placing a foam mat under your sleeping pad.
- Options include: Klymit Static V (\$) or thermarest neoair x lite (\$\$\$).

Foam pad. These either come in accordion style or can be rolled. They provide extra warmth (R-value). Favorite foam pad (lighter than Therma rest):

<https://alpsmountaineering.com/foldable-foam-mat.html>

Protip for summer trips ONLY: cut the full length pad to your torso.

### GEAR CHECKLIST (PRINT)

- ☐ Sleeping bag
- ☐ Tent
- ☐ Tent poles
- ☐ Tent stakes
- ☐ Backpack
- ☐ Trash bag or backpack liner
- ☐ Tooth brush
- ☐ Tooth paste
- ☐ Dental floss
- ☐ First aid kit
- ☐ Ear plugs
- ☐ Sun screen
- ☐ Sun glasses
- ☐ Hat
- ☐ Lip balm
- ☐ Bug spray
- ☐ Wet wipes
- ☐ Prescription medications (if you take)
- ☐ Pocket knife
- ☐ Trowel or wag bag
- ☐ Bennie
- ☐ Lightweight gloves
- ☐ Long sleeve shirt
- ☐ Extra pair of socks
- ☐ Lightweight jacket
- ☐ Rain jacket
- ☐ Headlamp
- ☐ Powerbank
- ☐ Stove: suggestion: BRS-3000T Ultralight Burner (very cheap but works well)
- ☐ Fuel canister
- ☐ Spork
- ☐ Pot 700 ml to 1000 ml
- ☐ Lighter
- ☐ Water filter or tabs
- ☐ Smart water bottles or nalgene x 2 OR 2 liter water bladder.
- ☐ Electrolyte drink or tabs
- ☐ Food
- ☐ Hiking shoes or trail running .



**How to pack your backpack.** Watch Scottie's video:

<https://youtu.be/K7JUviwnmkM?feature=shared>

**Finding discounted gear:**

- Facebook marketplace
- Gear trade: <https://geartrade.com/>
- Steep and cheap: <https://www.steepandcheap.com/>
- REI garage sale : <https://www.rei.com/used>
- Backcountry.com: [backcountry.com](https://backcountry.com)
- Campsaver: <https://www.campsaver.com/>
- EBay

**Food for backpacking trips:**

Eating good meals during backpacking trips is key for maintaining energy and keeping up morale. You will likely need more calories than on an average day at home. Unfortunately, we see a lot of backpackers eating junk food for convenience or to save weight. They believe erroneously that since they are exercising they have a blank check to eat whatever they want. This is unfortunate, as backpacking should be a time to improve our health as much as possible. A lot of prepackaged backpacking meals are just junk food. They contain palm oils, sugar, and preservatives. Below are some ideas for healthy snacks and meals.

Snacks: nuts, dried fruit, Trader Joe's olive packs, artichoke packs, Lara bars, Huma chia energy gels, Muir Energy (cashew lemon flavor), popcorn, Trader Joe's freeze dried berries (goes well in oatmeal)

Breakfast: oatmeal ( add raisins, cinnamon, chia seeds), peanut butter on whole wheat bread, organic instant coffee or tea (black or herbal). Bagels are good for long trips but most have sugar and unhealthy fats.

Lunch: generally we will not stop to cook lunch. On a one night overnight trip, unless otherwise stated, bring your lunch. Use up the fresh foods during lunch to save weight.



- Avoid things that can spoil like mayonnaise, lettuce, eggs.
- Beans, rice, and cheese burrito in a whole wheat wrap.
- Peanut butter on whole wheat bread
- Fresh fruit with peels like apples and oranges
- Vegetables with peels do well like carrots, cucumber, radishes, bell peppers
- Hummus ( fresh or powdered)
- Hard cheeses
- Pea or whey protein powder mixed in water

#### Dinner

- Pasta with pesto and dried mushrooms
- Couscous with olive oil, sun dried tomatoes, olives, and pine nuts.
- Polenta with cheddar and cucumbers.
- Herbal tea

#### Dessert:

- Dried fruit
- Dark chocolate ( if temperature is not too hot)

## Club Rules:

We don't have too many rules. The ones we do have are aimed at safety and enjoyment of the group. The difference between hiking alone versus with our group is it's a collective effort. It is not about what you want but what the group wants. That might mean not finishing a stated objective or changing course. We are your new friends so treat everyone as a buddy. Making friends as adults is tough. We hope you can make meaningful connections through our shared hobby. Hence our motto: Where friends and nature meet

- Pre-event expectations:
  - You will communicate with the organizer(s) if you need to cancel or if you are adding guests.
  - You will sign a release of liability
  - You will read the full event description.
  - To the best of your ability, you will understand the route ; if able you will download or print a map of the route.
  - If you have any questions about the event, contact the organizer(s)
- During the event
  - *Leave no trace.* Do not collect any rocks, plants, animals (or their parts) or insects ; have a way to bury or carry out human waste. In general we discourage fire building. We emphasize using your gear to keep you warm rather than external heat sources. Sometimes fires are allowed. This is at the organizer's discretion.
  - No discrimination based on biological sex, race, religion, or sexual orientation.
  - Have a flexible attitude. Things may not go as planned.
  - Carry all safety equipment as required in the meeting up description. Examples include a helmet, bear spray, ice axe, orange hat, crampons, microspikes, head lamp. You may be asked to carry a walkie talkie; training will be provided.
- What not to bring:
  - Firearms or weapons. A small pocket knife is one of the 10 essentials and is recommended .
  - Speakers/boom boxes etc.

- Drugs or alcohol. Often we go out to eat after the event. You are free to have an alcoholic beverage at time. Cannabis is illegal in Idaho and all National Parks. If you smoke or vape do so away from the group.

We are a dog friendly group. If you want to bring a dog, they need to be on a leash at all times. As a courtesy to others, post on the event that you are bringing a dog. If anyone has a dog allergy/fear /objections then the dog is not allowed. Some natural areas do not allow dogs. Please inquire beforehand .

Before our event, please sign our release of liability form and send electronically or in person to the organizer.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1T0snei0AJwk7y7vyEkliXtW2EwcbNVnYl89TTuLpMsc/edit?usp=drivesdk>