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With only a microphone, a page of notes, and their minimalist mindset,

Lauren and Ben set the scene for this episode of the Snowys Camping Show. From multi-use items, to shoes, undies, and liners, snapping a toothbrush in two, or eating straight from a packet – our gear experts discuss how to pack tight, choose light, and do it for the gram (only this time, off the grid).

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Mentioned in this Episode

Blogs:

[Snake Survival: What Everyone Should Know](#)

[Spider Safety: What Everyone Should Know](#)

[Hiking Poles – Why You'll Never Look Back!](#)

Products:

Solar panel system

Power pack

Compasses

Maps

Merino shirt (women's)

Merino shirt (men's)

Carabiner

Sleeping bags

Sock liners (men's)

Sock liners (women's)

Buff

Hiking boots (men's)

Trail runners

Sandals

Hiking socks

New Gear

Stoves

Pots

Cookware

Stainless steel cup

Cup, bowl, and plate set

Bowl

JetBoil

MSR Windburner

Dehydrated meals

Long-handled spoon

Water bottle

All-in-one knife, fork, and spoon

Pocketknife

Gas

Gas guage

Multi-fuel stove

Wilderness Wash

Pack cover

Dry bags

Poncho tarp

First Aid kit

Snake bite kit

Personal Locator Beacon (PLB)

Survival tools

Camp chair

Hiking poles

Freestanding hiking tent

Pegs



Repair kit

Camp pillow

Water bladder

Sleeping mat

Hiking backpacks

Other:

Using a Buff

Under- and Over-Packing

On shorter hikes, sometimes we feel the need to pack more than we need – often because there's more room to do so, or we're travelling with children who may require more items. That said, when it comes to hiking, less is best. With limited supplies in our packs, we can take more time to enjoy our surroundings without the strenuous slogging.

Trial-packing in the lead-up to a hike is a great idea – but while it's one thing to trot about the house with a full pack, it's another to have the same pack on your back for four hours, scrambling and sweating your way up the slopes in searing heat! Where Ben is typically a minimalist on hikes, Lauren tends to over-pack. Her thoughts are that space-saving and lightweight loads are great...but only because it means she can pack more stuff!

With this in mind, Lauren and Ben keep three specific questions top of mind throughout their packing process to help determine what goes in, and what stays out:

Do I actually need this?

Is there something else I have that will do the same or a similar job?

If something did happen that required this, could I get by without it?

Multiple Use Items

Contrary to what some may assume, smartphones are a useful gadget on the gradient. As well as a communication device, a smartphone quadruples as a guidebook, camera, e-book, and GPS. While guides and e-books aren't so relevant on day trips, multi-day hikes can often benefit from their use. Sam – an avid hiker here at Snowys – recommends a phone app called Libby. Linked to the South Australian state library, the app houses an extensive range of the library's e-book collection without the need for payment of a subscription (as with a Kindle, for example). Lauren simply pre-loads four or five books before her trip away as her source of solitude and entertainment.

With a phone also comes the need for a charging device such as a solar panel system. That said, Lauren suggests using Aeroplane Mode throughout the hike and limiting the length of time spent listening to music. Aside from a potential 2-5,000 milliamp power pack, the former method is unlikely to chew through too much battery life on a short, two-night trip away. It's important to note too that while a smartphone offers various uses, it should never be taken in place of a compass or a map. The latter two should still be tucked away somewhere in case the phone becomes wet and malfunctions.

Another multi-use item that Ben advocates for is the Zip Lock bag. This can be used as a wash bag, keeping maps and phones dry, and for storing food, rubbish, and elements of nature for memorabilia.

Clothing

When tackling outdoor terrain, it's recommended to minimise how often you change clothes. In that, consider using one set for walking and another for sleeping. Aside from fresh socks and jocks, it's unlikely you'll need four t-shirts and three pairs of shorts on a hiking trip. That said, to avoid the stench of the same shirt day after day, Lauren and Ben recommend choosing lightweight merino over cotton fabrics. While cotton becomes increasingly unpleasant over a shorter period, merino remains fresh and dries faster after riverside rinsing. Lauren tends to steer clear of the suffocating synthetics too, and Ben often wears a heavy-duty nylon shirt.

Socks and Undies

A clever approach to socks and jocks is simply taking two pairs of each and rotating them throughout the trip. While one is being worn, the other can be washed and hung from your pack during the day using a carabiner.

Layers

The best approach to layering on an outdoor trek is assessing the weather ahead and having an awareness of the type of environment you'll be travelling in.

Windcheaters and jumpers are an example of clothing that likely isn't needed. Circling back to multi-use items, simply wrapping yourself in a sleeping bag will offer the same warming function. Placing yourself in a hypothetical situation can also help to assess a potential approach if the weather temperature was to drop suddenly.

Ultimately, referring to weather information online in the lead-up to your departure will give a reasonable gauge on temperature averages during your time away.

Sock Liners

While Lauren has never felt the need for sock liners over simply a good pair of socks, Ben has found them comfortable with heavy leather hiking boots. That said, as long as your style of sock aligns with your style of shoe (for example, heavy-weight socks with heavy-weight boots), and leather boots have already been worn in, there's often little need for sock liners. While they help in avoiding blisters, those who choose not to wear them should simply treat hot spots as soon as they arise.

Bufs

A Buff is a tube of fabric that one can use however they like, where examples include a scarf, bandana, beanie, headband, pot-holder (be careful with synthetic material around hot surfaces!), and a pillow slip. In Lauren's opinion, you can't go wrong. As well as synthetic, other Buff materials include merino, which is highly recommended.

In the same multi-use realm, a pair of socks can double as mittens while an extra t-shirt can

couple as a Buff. Again, these multiple-use items often stem from the question, 'is there something else I have stashed away that can be used for the same function, to avoid over-packing?'

Hiking Boots

While they serve a useful purpose on the tracks, there isn't necessarily a need for heavy-duty hiking boots. As technology in footwear evolves, there are now more lighter weight shoes available over the stiff, heavy leather boots. That said, there is a tradeoff – with a lighter-weight trail runner comes a faster rate of deterioration than a more durable leather shoe. On the other hand, it isn't necessary to first wear-in trail runners as it is leather hiking boots. Ultimately, Lauren and Ben suggest not buying a pair of hiking boots before a trip away if you can continue to use the 'old faithfuls' – especially those that are decent trail shoes or solid, sturdy sneakers. Hiking-specific footwear is necessary depending on the type of hiking you're taking part in, where trail-hiking on hot, rocky, uneven ground is more likely to call for a heavy-duty pair over a lighter-weight counterpart.

Lastly, Lauren suggests simply knowing your feet. For example, as someone who finds closed-in shoes on hot hikes uncomfortable, she tends to wear sandals on the slopes, with thick socks during the Winter. On the other hand, Ben would find this style of footwear difficult to sport, where weaker ankles bode better in a higher cut, closed-in shoe.

Extra Shoes

With a sturdy pair of hiking shoes, an additional lighter-weight pair for pottering about the campsite is all that's required. This could include a pair of flip-flops, or Crocs. Despite their odd design, Crocs are a comfortable combination of breathable and protective. With closed-in toe protection, they're also capable of clipping to the side of your pack while you pace to the mountain peak.

New Gear

If you're anything like Lauren and Ben, you'll find any new item that arrives instore both exciting and tempting! That said, there isn't as much of a need for new gear and gadgets as one may be led to believe.

In the hiking world, it's often prevalent that attempting to pack all the latest and greatest gear can leave your pack too heavy. Avid hikers tend to want to swap the gadgets for grams, where saving 50-100 grams is often a huge feat. That said, even occasional hikers are encouraged to stick to the basics.

Just like new boots, it's best to avoid using new equipment for the first time on a hiking trip. Ahead of your adventure, break in stoves, pots, and other cooking equipment. For example, porridge is often cooked more successfully when the water is heated first – where a blackened, burned pot base was a wake-up call during one of Lauren's hiking trips! A helpful catchphrase? *Trial before you trail!*

Cookware

Following on from above, it's ideal to carry cookware that serves multiple uses. Ben uses stainless steel equipment, where a cup can also double as a billy in which to boil water and a stainless steel plate has the potential to be used as a fry pan.

Depending on the types of meals you're likely to consume, it's not often one will need a cup, bowl, AND plate on a trip away. For example, if there isn't a plan for steak, veggies and bread, a plate may not be necessary, where pastas and soups will merely require a bowl.

That said, Lauren flags that even most pre-packaged dehydrated meals can be consumed without crockery, where the packets themselves double as a bowl. Simply add boiling water from a JetBoil or MSR Windburner eat with a long-handled spoon.

In terms of beverages, consuming liquids straight from your drink bottle is an apt way to save space, while coffee could be enjoyed straight from a JetBoil. Nonetheless, Ben reminds us that the latter requires cleaning first (possibly following a porridge breakfast), which involves more water and subsequently adds weight to your pack! As for utensils, often an all-in-one knife, fork, and spoon is a more practical choice, where a sharper knife and scissors can be utilised via a small pocketknife.

While these seem like only small changes, they add up – for example, saving eight grams ten times could leave enough room for a Mars bar (hey, that's a great outcome). Again, Lauren and Ben encourage asking the key questions: do you really need a particular item for the types of meals you plan to cook? If so, what could you use instead?

Gas

While gas isn't usually too heavy to carry, it's often the awkward size of the canister that causes the difficulty. Gas gauges, screwed into the top of the gas bottle, are a useful method of determining how much gas is available for the duration of your trip. Ben also suggests first weighing the gas bottle, cooking with it, and weighing it again to verify the rough quantity required for cooking, multiplying this by the predicted number of meals. That said, he often resorts to a multi-fuel stove and only carries as much as he needs.

Toiletries

Lauren recommends Sea To Summit's Wilderness Wash, covering dishwashing and laundry detergent, body wash, shampoo, and conditioner – all in one! While biodegradable, it's recommended for use away from waterways, but safe to use on skin, cookware, clothing, and outdoor equipment.

A toothbrush and toothpaste tube are both non-negotiables, and Ben even goes as far as snapping his brush in half to fit one of his many 10cm-long storage bags. In doing so, he saves roughly four grams.

While Wilderness Wash may not have you smelling like coconut as you wade out of the waterhole, it will nonetheless leave you clean – so deodorant is a toiletry item that Ben and Lauren recommend leaving at home. This decision could be reassessed if the plan is to stop into public venues and pubs along the way – but not for those roughing it wild and free.

Wilderness Wash is safe to use on skin, cookware, clothing, and outdoor equipment. Credit: Sea To Summit

Pack Covers

Ben has owned his pack cover for 15 years – yet hasn't once removed it from its cover.

Instead, he stashes everything in dry bags within his pack. Lauren has had a similar experience, where she bore 100 grams of extra weight for no reason at all.

Just like Buffs and Zip Lock bags, this calls for another multi-use item – the poncho tarp! The item is designed to fit over the top of your backpack, as well as you – also eradicating the need for a raincoat. Serving as a groundsheet to sit on, a tarp within a tent, shelter from rain, shade from the sun, or even an awning, the poncho tarp can be used in all weather conditions.

First Aid Kits, Safety Devices, and Survival Tools

While a first aid kit is a given on any outdoor adventure, it's recommended to assess what is required and strip away what isn't. For example, Ben keeps compression bandages but removes Zip Lock bags, given their pre-existing uses throughout his pack. In the middle of Summer, Lauren suggests taking a snake-bite and spider-bite kit over a burn module to cut down on unneeded supplies. Snake-bite kits can be found on our website.

A Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) or some sort of safety device is highly recommended to keep in a pack. Often needed when you least expect, PLBs can be required in situations that may only be a stones throw from suburbia. Considering this, a PLB is exempt from the question 'what would I do if I didn't have a certain item?' – just pack it!

While a PLB, map, compass, and a small pocketknife is necessary, other 'survival tools' could likely be a waste of space. Items considered 'spare', such as a chair, should also be left at home. Ultimately, Ben and Lauren agree that if you're unsure whether you'll use it – you likely won't.

Hiking Poles

As with hiking footwear, the use of this equipment depends on the type of hiking you're undergoing. While Lauren doesn't see a use for hiking poles, she acknowledges that they provide a means for balancing on rocky, uneven surfaces when bearing a hefty load on your back. On the other hand, Ben advocates for hiking poles across almost all bases – relieving weight from the legs, activating shoulder movement, propelling forwards, and even serving as poles for a shelter or awning.

Tunnel Tents

Unless trekking in the Alpine areas amid intense winds that require aerodynamic features, tunnel tents are often unnecessary.

Their design can make them both limiting and difficult to erect on some hiking tracks, where



their absence of freestanding features has hikers requiring pegs or platforms. The stability and shape of a freestanding tent, however, are owed to the cross-over pole design, where a person's body weight keeps it grounded until pack-down the next morning. As mentioned previously, another multi-use tent option involves a poncho tarp with a set of hiking poles and some pegs.

Repair Kits

With cable ties and possibly a needle and thread – duct tape is the most multi-use, versatile repair item to take on every outdoor adventure!

Luxury items

While a hiking trip is supposed to nudge us beyond the luxury high life, the lack of a good night's sleep on the slopes is often what can turn a fantastic, free-spirited trip into an achy, uncomfortable ordeal.

Along with a soft plush hiking pillow, a yoga mat or a water bladder filled partially with air can also serve as a place to rest a hiker's heavy head.

While some like to keep it simple, others like to be reassured they'll be comfortable away from their wooden-legged bed at home. Sleeping mats aren't always essential, but one with an appropriate, substantial design is one of few items that Ben and Lauren agree is worth the investment of both money and weight.

Packs

Contrary to what some may say, a pack embellished with bells and whistles isn't needed. Ben carries a canvas sack with a decent harness but without pockets, packed with his dry bags of belongings.

While every zip and patch of fabric adds weight, the ultra-lightness of a pack without pockets and zippers comes at a sacrifice of durable fabric. Considering this, Lauren recommends a basic bag constructed with a heavier fabric, without the added nooks, crannies, and trinkets, to ensure the longevity of the pack itself. Packs that merely present as a lightweight material sack may not look to give the required support – though within the ultralight realm, it's how one packs the bag that provides this.

So, to reiterate the ultimate catchphrase of the track, repeat after us:

Less is best, and no trial on the trail!

Thanks for listening, tune in again for next week's episode!

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group and let us know as we’d love to hear from you.
Catch you out there!