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From the flood lights drenching darkness with daylight, to the pocket-sized torches casting a spotlight on what's ahead...

in this episode of the Snowys Camping Show, Ben and Lauren discuss the variety of portable lighting options that best suit our campsite parties and after-dark outdoor endeavours. For those feeling in the dark about personal camp lighting, our gear gurus share some of the brightest lightbulb moments of the outdoor industry.

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Mentioned in this Episode:

Podcasts:

[Ep29 – 12V Lighting with Hard Korr](#)

[Ep32 – Battery Chemistry with Hard Korr](#)

Products:

[Headlamps](#)

[Lanterns](#)



[Coleman Northstar Lantern Mantle 95 Instaclip](#)
[Torches and Flashlights](#)
[Explore Planet Earth LED Area Camp Light Kit](#)
[Lithium battery lanterns](#)
[Black Diamond Moji Charging Station Lantern and Portable Power](#)
[Zempire Hangdome USB Rechargeable Light](#)
[Zempire Megadome V2 USB Rechargeable Light](#)
[BioLite SolarHome 620](#)
[MPOWERD Luci Lanterns](#)
[Exped Widget Inflation Pump, Lamp, and Power Bank](#)
[Goal Zero Lighthouse 600 Lantern and USB Power Hub](#)
[Hard Korr 100cm 3-Colour LED Light Bar Kit with Diffuser](#)
Brands:
[NEBO](#)
[BioLite](#)
[Ledlenser](#)
[Hard Korr](#)

Battery-Powered Lighting Options

In [Episode 29](#), Ben and Lauren were joined by Steve Buttigieg and Zac Buckley from Hard Korr to discuss the variety of vehicle and outdoor lighting options for a campsite. As not all campers have access to 12V, this episode covers the basic and more traditional lighting options, including handheld devices, headtorches, tabletop lamps, and hanging lanterns. From rechargeable to standard AA battery-operated, the lighting options discussed in this episode are those often used to flood a personal or group areas, shed light throughout a tent, or serve as that midnight toilet run chum!

Headtorches

For convenient use around camp as a personal source of light, a [headtorch](#) is that hands-free henchman. Often perfect for after-dark cooking, a headtorch is helpful during the more hands-on campsite activities at sundown.

When Lauren was younger, she remembers how heavy they were due to their awkwardly large battery packs. Now, most are rechargeable via a USB.

Lanterns

The more traditional style of [lantern](#) – cylindrical in shape and typically positioned in the middle of a table – are becoming less popular as time goes on, given their insufficient output of light in comparison to more advanced models. Due to its outer structure, the lamp casts shadowy spots and fails to effectively disperse light from underneath when suspended. These days, most hanging lanterns available cast light evenly throughout the tent space – including directly downwards – just like a standard light at home.

Nonetheless, Lauren admits she still thinks fondly of the glass gas-powered lanterns she'd

use growing up. These models featured a mantel on a stem, and threw light into the area effectively. Aside from Coleman's dual-fuel lanterns, mantels are becoming harder to claim. Still, Lauren advocates for how useful these lanterns are – especially if gas is already required for a camp stove.

Nowadays, lanterns are both more compact in design but pack a brighter punch. Most cars also feature USB charging points, helpful for powering lanterns during the day before they're put to use at night.

Handheld Torches

Well, we've certainly come a long way since the large, yellow Dolphin torches; the fat, golden Labrador of torches that requires six D-cell batteries and two hands to carry!

Handheld torches by Ledlenser in particular have a powerful beam for spotting and identifying objects in heavy darkness. While they tend to be higher in price than others, some models are more basic and suitable for young children who enjoy exploring. While a headtorch casts a fairly generic beam of light ahead, a handheld design enables more control of where the light is directed and thus better accuracy. As there are pros and cons to both models, keeping one of each in the camp kit would allow the best of both beams in relevant after-dark scenarios.

Area Lights

Brands such as Explore Planet Earth and OZtrail manufacture area lights that are attached to a large extension pole and hung above a space like a street lamp. Dispersing an impressive 15 square metres of beam, these lights are more beneficial for illuminating large communal spaces and setups beyond the caravan parks and out in the bush.

OZtrail also manufacture the Comet Light, chargeable via a 12V USB charging port in a car or a power bank.

Despite their remarkably large light coverage, these lights pack down smaller than a quad-fold chair or two-person hiking tent.

Fairy Lights

Those who follow the Snowys Camping Show on a regular basis will know how supportive Lauren is of the ambient, inexpensive, and efficient *fairy lights*! Not only are they a fun addition to a camp setup with young children, but they last for a long time on batteries too.

Types of Batteries

Batteries used in portable lighting are generally either rechargeable via a power point or replaceable (such as AA and AAA batteries). While the torch itself may not have a rechargeable battery, some good quality batteries can be charged via a power point and still used to operate it. Maintaining their low price point, Ben suggests that their affordability is nonetheless becoming more and more obsolete.

Most table and tent lanterns are USB-rechargeable, while many units such as handheld torches, headtorches, and some lanterns have a lithium battery built in. These can be recharged, but when the battery itself reaches the end of its life cycle it requires replacing. On the other hand, some rechargeable sealed units – many lanterns and some headtorches – have a built-in rechargeable battery that is completely sealed. This means that when the battery's life cycle ends, so does the unit in its entirety. This somewhat dismisses the movement to choose rechargeable in order to avoid replacing batteries – so Ben and Lauren recommend first ensuring that the unit's rechargeable batteries are replaceable, or that the lithium types last for substantial length of time.

With respects to the above, Zempire's Hangdome and Megadome lantern models are recommended. While the battery is sealed and irreplaceable, the power drawn by the light is minimal and the realistic length of time spent using the unit itself will translate to multiple years of service. By the time the battery reaches the end of its life, it'll likely be time for an upgrade anyway.

For Lauren, rechargeable sealed batteries are inconvenient when featured in headtorches. Usually, a headtorch is used at a greater intensity and brightness level than a more gentle area light. For this reason, one may not see further use from their sealed battery headtorch after 18 months.

Another consideration is a battery's chemical composition. Some headtorches can be charged during the night and reach full capacity by the early hours of the morning. For some batteries, leaving it on charge from that point can be harmful due to their chemistry, while others of a different makeup aren't affected. The details are complicated, so Ben and Lauren simply recommend asking the question before purchasing.

Solar

Solar-powered lighting options are compact and efficient, enabling users to charge their lighting throughout the day for use later in the evening at sundown – for example, MPOWERD's Luci lanterns. While most lanterns alike only offer solar as a powering option, with a sealed battery – these units are often bomb-proof. On road trips, simply place your lights on the dashboard to catch the sun from through the windscreen.

Like all batteries too, allowing too long between camping trips can mean solar batteries slowly empty out in storage. Draining a solar-powered battery completely may mean recharging takes hours. On the other hand, using a solar light for only a couple of hours each night and charging them in the sun the following morning will often mean they're constantly at capacity to generate power.

Some solar-powered lights also provide the option for 5V or 12V charging, such as those from BioLite. This is beneficial for winter camping when the sun is less present, as solar charging is less efficient during these times than simply plugging in.



Solar-powered lighting is a compact and efficient option. Credit: MPOWERD

Lumens and Lux

Lumen and lux go hand in hand in giving a measure of how much light a lantern puts out. As

elaborated on by the Hard Korr team in Episode 29, a lux gives a more accurate indication. For example, one 'lux' at x distance denotes how far one can stand from the light source and still comfortably read a newspaper. While some lights boast 600 lumens with one lux at 20 metres, other lights may only boast half the number of lumens with one lux at 50 metres. Regarding the latter, the light reaches further despite less lumens because the output of each individual light depends on the particular beam structure, reflectiveness of the light's facets, and how the light as a full unit has been constructed.

As a guide, Ben and Lauren suggest that a light with 80-100 lumens is adequate in wayfinding to the loo at night, while an area light is best suited to more lumens with less lux. This is because there is larger area to illuminate, thus requiring brighter 'flood' lighting as opposed to light that reaches a considerable distance.

Light Functions

Standard light modes include high, low, on, and off. Sometimes, too many functions can mean we're 'scrolling' through each mode for longer than we'd like before we eventually land on our desired setting. For this reason, Ben and Lauren suggest that unless there is a specific need for a particular feature, most of the 'cooler' settings aren't necessary.

Nonetheless, orange and red light modes are helpful and recommended. Where red light bodes well for night vision purposes and is less of a disturbance for others at the campsite, orange light repels insects and is helpful for after-dark cooking. Additionally, the difference between spot and flood lighting stems from a lamp's intensity versus its brightness. A flood light is neither directional nor blinding, but more dispersed. On the other hand, a spotlight has a more pointed beam and is best used for identifying, searching, or wayfinding at night. Ultimately, Ben and Lauren suggest looking into lighting that offers modes relevant to what you may require in your camp area. While some may only require a simple headtorch with both a flood and spotlight function, others may need a combination of both lanterns and handheld devices.

Design Functions

The design functions determine how a user interacts with their light – for example, suspending them from awnings and tents, or sitting them on tabletops.

A hanging light is often useful in how it disperses light evenly across a space, just as a domestic light. That said, they can be heavy. Lauren recommends first assessing whether the lantern is both light and short enough to hang from the centre of your tent, without distorting the tent's structure or invading your head space.

Multi-Purpose Lights

Nebo manufacture handheld torches that double as an area light via an inner component that slides out of main body.

While Nebo have many, other innovative designs include headtorches by BioLite that feature a diffuser bag. These are perfect for hikers or space-conscious campers to suspend from the top of their tents.

Headtorches: Strapping and Adjustability

For camping, a headtorch merely requires strapping securely around the head and across the forehead. For running, it's more ideal to choose a sturdier design that evenly distributes the weight of the unit around the head.

In regard to adjustability, most headtorches will fit without issues. That said, some of the more senior campers have found the adjustability features of some headtorches to be tedious and fiddly. For these after-dark adventurers, it's recommended to choose a headtorch with less componentry and strapping.

Lighting Units Doubling as Power Banks

Desirable among the younger generation, some lighting units double as power banks to charge smaller devices such as mobile phones. Given their attractiveness, some manufacturers merely state this feature as a selling point rather than a key function. This is because most models only boost a phone's battery capacity by 20%, serving as more of a means of topping up than fully charging.

Albeit, GoalZero manufacture some models that achieve a better balance of lighting and charging functions. Nonetheless, most affordable portable lighting options will exploit the latter feature as simply a desirable dot point on the packaging.

Cost Vs Benefit and Quality

When it comes to lighting, one usually gets what they pay for. Lights at a lower price point tend to lack robustness, will likely crack if dropped or met with too much force, and won't last the same lifespan as those with better quality LED and componentry. For example, Hard Korr's LED bar lights are well designed and sealed in an aluminium casing. On the other hand, a ten-dollar torch from an outdoor department store with replaceable batteries may still be in good working order after years of use, but the quality of the light itself is lower. The condition of a light can often be determined by shining the torch onto a blank wall. Within the circle of light projected by a lower-budget torch, usually only 30% is lit while the rest is a series of dark patches. Sometimes it's not always the quality of the materials that determine a good lighting unit, but that of its output.

Ultimately, Ben and Lauren recommend to simply buy what you can afford without the expectation that a ten-dollar light will last in the back of a 4WD for the next ten years of touring. Consequently, keep in mind how often you'll need to replace these lights over time. Know what you need your light for, and go from there.

Waterproofing

For those looking at waterproof lighting, search for an Ingress Protection (IPX) rating. As well as dust, the IPX rating varies from unit to unit depending on the extent to which it can handle water – such as heavy rain, submersion, or a light splash. Choose the IPX rating based on the type of environment you're likely to be in.



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

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If you have any questions for Ben and Lauren, make sure you head over to our [Facebook group](#) and let us know as we'd love to hear from you.

Catch you out there!