

RYAN JORDAN

*Explore Your Wild Side (*without having to drink your pee)*

Ultralight Backpacking Boot Camp
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CREATING A GEAR LIST

by Brian Green | briangreen.net

Brian Green is a contributor to Ultralight Backpacking Boot Camp, and a backpacker, hiker, blogger, gear junkie, ultralight evangelist, Tenkara addict, watch designer, and barefoot running convert. He blogs at briangreen.net and you can follow him on Twitter (@bfgreen).

Scope

In this module you will learn the purpose and benefits of creating and maintaining a detailed gear list. More than just simply listing out your items of gear, a properly created, organized and sorted gear list can help you understand how much weight you are carrying, what you can eliminate and where you can shave off some unnecessary ounces.

Introduction

In order to know how much weight or gear you need to eliminate, you first have to understand what you currently have and how much you carry on a regular trip. One of the most common mistakes that people make with a gear list is that they forget to maintain it, refer to it, and adjust it. Having a detailed list of your gear is great, but keeping track of what you use and don't use will provide you with valuable insight into areas where you can reduce or eliminate weight. Another common mistake is not breaking your gear down into their individual components, for example don't just weigh your first aid kit, weigh all of the pieces individually. Weigh everything!

Outline

- Weigh Everything
- Using the Gear List
- Weight Summaries
- Your "Base (dry) Weight"
- Analyze
- Update and Assess
- Take Less Stuff
- Take Lighter Stuff
- The Big Three

Weigh Everything

It's possible that you may be able to get started with this using scales that you already have. But eventually you will want to have a digital scale that can weigh up to about 8 or 10 lbs in pound, ounce, and gram increments. They are not very expensive (often, under \$20), and can be used for all sorts of things other than just weighing your backpacking gear.

Assemble all of the gear that you typically take or might take on a trip. Consider weighing every piece of gear, writing down the weight and an accurate description of each piece, and a note so that you'll know exactly what it is and whether it needs any attention the next time you refer to your gear list. Make sure that you weigh all the individual components of your gear. A great example of this is your first aid kit. Don't just weigh the whole kit and write down "9 oz", weigh all of the pieces so that when it comes time to eliminate, you can be very granular in your approach. Your tent or shelter is another good example, separate out the tent poles, ground sheet, tent body, and the fly sheet. Be sure to break everything down into its component parts.

Using the Gear List

Now that you are ready to accurately weigh all of your gear, it's time to start filling out a gear list. A sample gear list template and example of a completed list is provide with this module. If you have spreadsheet software (such as Microsoft Excel) you can open the electronic version of the template and take advantage of the pre-formatted gear categories and automatic formulas that will sum up the weight of each section. If you do not have any spreadsheet software, you can simply print out a copy of the PDF and use it manually. Either way will work just fine.

In addition to using a gear list to track the weight of your gear and help you identify areas for improvement, it can be used as a checklist tool to help you gather, inspect, and pack all of your gear before a trip. There's nothing worse than getting a few miles into a hike and realizing that you left a critical piece of gear at home on the kitchen table. Your gear list will help you to avoid that from happening. The three check box columns on the left of the spreadsheet have been designed to walk you through the steps you need to perform as you start this process.

Using the template provided, check off each box as you find, inspect, and pack each item of gear. As you get ready to weigh each individual piece of gear, first inspect it to make sure that it is functioning and that it doesn't require any maintenance or resupply items. If it does be sure to make a note of that on your gear list to remind you.

Add a meaningful description for each item as you complete the gear list. Weigh your item of gear making sure that whether you use ounces or grams that you are consistent throughout your entire list. Use the notes section for maintenance issues or reminders.

Continue to weigh all of your gear and complete the list as much as possible. The template lists out most of the common pieces of gear that would be taken on a backpacking trip, but if you do not see a placeholder for a particular piece of gear you can add a row if using the electronic version, or simply use the blank line at the bottom of each section. Make sure that where possible you list the right items of gear that belong to each section. This will be especially important as you start to summarize the weight of each section in order to calculate your base (dry) weight and weight of consumables. Note: If you are using the electronic version of this gear list with spreadsheet software, do not enter data into the cells that have been shaded yellow or orange – they contain automated formulas to

calculate the weights of each section. Continue to fill out the gear list until all of your items have been weighed and described accurately.

Weight Summaries

Once you have completed filling out the gear list, it's time to start doing some calculations. If you are using the electronic version the weight summaries at the bottom of the gear list will have been automatically calculated for you. If you are using a printed version you will need to add up the weight for each of the list sections and then write them in the summaries section at the bottom of the form.

Your Base (Dry) Weight

Underneath the weight totals for the individual sections of the gear list you'll see a summary labelled "BASE (DRY) WEIGHT OF PACKED GEAR". Base weight definitions can sometimes vary from one gear list to another, but as a general rule of thumb your base (dry) weight is the total weight of your pack excluding items worn while trekking (such as clothing and footwear) and consumables (such as food, water and stove fuel). The gear list template provided calculates your base (dry) weight using this calculation and also includes any containers used to carry your consumables, assuming they are listed in the cooking section on the list so make sure you don't miss them.

Your Total (dry) Weight is the combination of your base weight plus all of the items worn while trekking (clothes and shoes). If you then add the weight of your consumables (food, water, and fuel) you will end up with your total weight of all gear and supplies. This is not the same as the FSO or "From Skin Out" weight. See below for more information on how and when to use the FSO method.

The final calculated summary on the gear list template subtracts the weight of the items worn while trekking to end up with your maximum pack weight at the beginning of your trek.

Analyze

After you understand how much all of your gear weighs you can begin the process of finding ways to reduce your base weight or maximum pack weight and work towards your ultralight goal weight. If you are familiar with spreadsheet software, you'll find that using it is extremely useful to help sort and organize your gear list. It can be extremely useful to be able to sort your list sub categories in descending order of weight. In this way your gear list not only shows you how much total weight you are carrying on a trip, but you can also see how much each of the items of gear in a given category weighs in relationship to the total for that category.

Update and Assess

Now that you know how much gear and exactly what items you are carrying, it's time to start keeping track of what works, what doesn't work, and what doesn't even get used on the trail. There's only so much elimination and weight reduction that can be done at home, so at some point you are going to have to validate this by being getting outside and using your gear. Keep accurate notes using your notepad so that you don't have to rely on memory to recall what it was that didn't work and you

thought could get left behind. Getting into the habit of good note taking will help you in the long run.

After each backpacking or hiking trip, use your notes to assess your gear list and make determinations on what you can adjust for next time. You may need more of one thing but less of another. Practice, practice, practice!

Take Less Stuff

This sounds simple enough and straight forward, but if you don't take notes on your hikes and evaluate what didn't get used after a trip, there is no easy way to do this. Based on a combination of your trail notes, you can identify the pieces of gear to eliminate and leave at home on your next trip. Look at your notes to see if there were things that only got used occasionally and might be able to be substituted by another item that can serve double duty. For example, you might not carry a bowl and a cup when one or the other will serve for both purposes.

Take Lighter Stuff

Once you've eliminated all of the items of gear that you no longer need or use on a regular basis, it's time to look at what is left to see if you need to carry as much as you have been. Good areas to focus on are consumables like toiletries and cooking fuel. There's no need to carry a full tube of toothpaste with you for a weekend trip. Consider squeezing just enough for what you need into a tiny empty (but clean) dropper bottle. Don't carry a whole bottle of ibuprofen tablets when 4-5 pills will do. Many hikers forgo toothpaste altogether in favor of a concentrate like Dr. Bronner's liquid soap, which can be used for washing clothes and dishes, personal hygiene and brushing teeth. Go as far as you want to go in order to still feel comfortable about what you are taking. Pay close attention to things like sunscreen, soaps, ointments, and repellents.

The Big Three

After going through the exercise of weighing all of your gear and entering weights into a spreadsheet so that you can sort items by weight, you probably noticed that the three heaviest items were your tent, pack and sleeping bag. Since these are typically the three heaviest items in anyone's gear list, it's worth paying particular attention to ways where you can save some weight with each of them. As a general rule of thumb, aim to make each of your "Big three" items weigh under 3 pounds if you are serious about achieving a base pack weight of less than ten pounds.

Your Pack

Not too long ago an internal frame backpack would weigh well over eight pounds empty. By today's standards that might account for half of the overall base weight for a lightweight backpacker. The advancement in super lightweight materials and improvements in the structural design of backpacks has enabled dozens of cottage manufacturers to produce packs that weigh as little as 5 oz. Mainstream manufacturers are also taking notice of this new trend and coming up with lightweight and affordable packs. Things to consider when choosing a backpack:

- What types of trips will you be going on?
- How long will you be on the trail?
- What seasons will you be using it?
- Will you be going to dry/arid areas (hydration)?

A simple but effective way to help you carry less stuff on the trail is to buy a smaller pack. Don't opt for a 45L pack if you know that you are going to fill it up to the brim with gear. Limit yourself within reason and go with a smaller pack that will help you have to lighten your load.

Your Tent/Shelter

Just a few years ago, a single person tent weighing 5 or 6 pounds would have been considered lightweight by most standards. Now materials like Cuben Fiber, ripstop silnylon and carbon fiber (for poles) make it feasible to carry a roomy two-person tent for half that weight. If you are willing to consider switching to a tarp shelter, you can easily save 50% of that again. It will depend on your level of comfort, size of your sleeping party, the season you will be outside, and what type of bug and critter protection you'd like.

Sleeping Bag

When it comes to choosing a sleeping bag the options are almost endless. In fact it can seem overwhelming to inexperienced backpacker. Here are some simple considerations to make choosing the right bag slightly easier (many of these will be your personal preference):

- Down vs. synthetic (down is lighter and warmer as long as it doesn't get wet)
- Blanket or quilt style vs. a bag
- Hood vs. no hood
- Insulation on the underside of the bag vs. using a separate pad
- Full length zipper, half zipper or no zipper at all (zippers add weight)
- A material that is breathable vs. a fabric that acts as a vapor barrier

About the Examples Here

We've discussed a number of examples in this introductory document (first aid, toiletries, the "Big 3", etc.) but the examples are here merely to illustrate some of the thought processes that might go into your weight reduction strategies. More comprehensive discussion of specific gear categories and items will be presented later in the course. So for now, focus on developing your *process* for weight reduction rather than the intricacies associated with purchasing or selecting any particular piece of gear.

Conclusion

A gear list can be a powerful tool for helping you understand, manage, and reduce your overall pack weight. Your gear list needs to be constantly updated and tweaked as you adjust the items you carry and

make notes along the trail. It serves as the reference point to where you are and where you want to get to with regards to pack weight. careful observation and experimentation both on and off the trail are key. Reducing your pack weight won't happen overnight, but your gear list can help you track your progress and keep you on the right track.