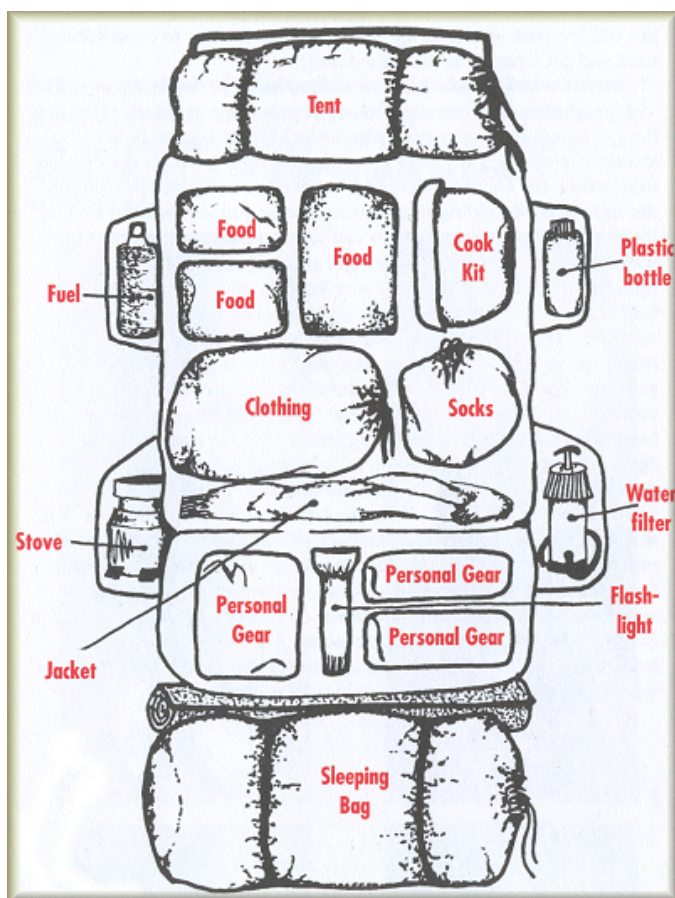
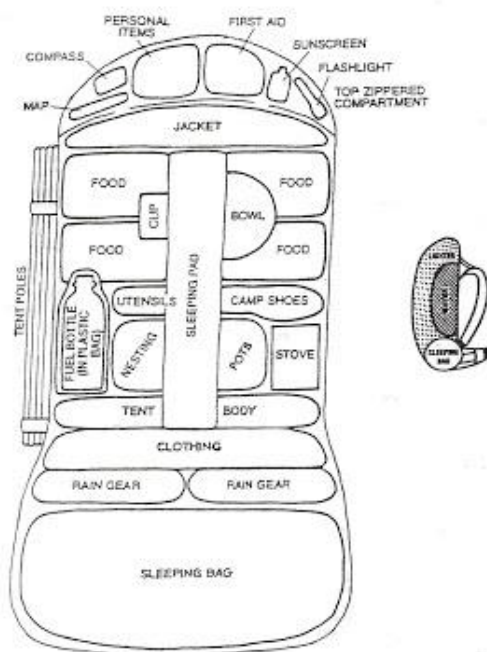


## EXTERNAL FRAME PACKS



## INTERNAL FRAME PACKS



## The Basics of Pack Loading

### The Bottom of the Pack

Virtually all backpacks have large openings at the top and are known as (ta-da!) *top-loading* packs. A seldom-seen alternative is a *panel-loading* pack which uses a zippered sidewall flap.

Most backpackers shove their sleeping bag into the bottom of the pack. On some packs, there is a zippered opening at the bottom of the packbag, known as the sleeping bag compartment, for this purpose.

The bottom of the pack is also a good place for other items you won't need until you make camp at night: long underwear being used as sleepwear, for example; a pillowcase; maybe a sleeping pad, if it's the kind that rolls up into a tiny shape.

Any other needed-only-at-night items can go down low *except* a headlamp or flashlight. Always have your light source in a readily accessible space.

In bear country? Try to keep your sleeping bag separated from anything that can transmit a fragrance. Bears can't distinguish between food and nonfood aromas, so toothpaste or sunscreen can attract their interest as well as tea bags or jerky.

### The Pack's Core

Your heaviest items should be placed 1) on top of your sleeping bag and 2) close to your spine. Usually these items will be:

- Your food stash, either in a couple of stuff sacks or in a bear canister.
- Your water supply, either in a hydration reservoir or bottles.
- Your **cook kit** and **stove** might also go here, though both could be wedged into the periphery of the load if small and light enough.

Carrying a hydration reservoir? Most newer packs include a reservoir sleeve. This is a slot that holds a reservoir close to your back and parallel to your

spine. It's easier to insert the reservoir while the pack is still mostly empty, so that leaves you 2 choices:

- If you prefer efficiency, insert it at home. You'll have a loaded pack ready to go as soon as you reach the trailhead.
- If you want the coldest water possible, carry the reservoir in a cooler and load it and your other middle- and upper-pack contents at the trailhead.

Heavier items should be centered in your pack—not too high, not too low. The goal is to create a predictable, comfortable center of gravity. Heavy items too low cause a pack to feel saggy. Too high and the load might feel tipsy.

In the past, traditional pack-loading advice (previously published here) recommended that for trail-walking, heavy items should be carried a little higher in a pack. Today, with most packs designed to ride close to the body, it's best to simply keep heavy items close to the spine and centered in the pack.

## The Periphery

Wrap softer, lower-weight items around the weightier items to prevent heavier pieces from shifting. What items are these? Your tent body, rainfly, an insulation layer, a rain jacket. These items can help stabilize the core and fill empty spaces.

Stash frequently used items within easy reach. This includes your map, compass, GPS, sunscreen, sunglasses, headlamp, bug spray, first-aid kit, snacks, rain gear, packcover, toilet paper and sanitation trowel. Place them in the pack's top pocket or other external pocket, if one exists. Some packs even offer tiny pockets on the hipbelt.

If carrying liquid fuel, make sure your fuel bottle cap is on tightly. Pack the bottle upright and place it below your food in case of a spill.

## Other Tips

- Fill up empty spaces. For example, put utensils, a cup or a small item of clothing inside your cooking pots. Fill up your bear canister.
- Split the weight of large communal items (e.g., tent) with others in your group. You carry the main body, for example, and your friend can carry the poles and rainfly.
- Tighten all compression straps to limit load-shifting.

## The Desired Result

Ideally, a well-loaded pack will:

- Feel balanced when resting on your hips.
- Feel cohesive, a whole unit, with nothing shifting or swaying inside.
- Feel stable and predictable as you walk, at one with your upper body.

