

How to Prep Your Pack Like a Pro

by Alexandra Mier y Terán '19

As Dickinsonians, we pride ourselves in learning both in and out of the classroom. We are lucky enough to be near the halfway point of the Appalachian Trail at Pine Grove Furnace National Park, a great place for hiking and camping. And the on-campus Gear Box offers free gear rentals to students, faculty and staff! Following are some tips from members of the Office of Campus Recreation on how to best prep your pack for hiking or camping success.



STEP 1: Start with your sleeping bag.

The first thing that you want to pack is your sleeping bag. Backpacks should be balanced, so you want something small and dense to lay horizontally at the bottom of your pack. To prevent a wet sleeping bag, it's helpful to pack it inside of a plastic trash bag before compressing it into its sack. Tie the garbage bag in a loose knot, because you will be retying it every day and night.

STEP 2: Fill in the gaps.

You want to fill in the nooks and crannies around the sleeping bag with other gear. When packing your personal items, use plastic garbage bags again so they don't get wet. Load in the plastic bag first, then tuck items like clothes, toiletries and assorted tools into the gaps on both ends of the sleeping bag to maximize space. Before tying a loose knot on this plastic bag, push all of the air out to compress it as much as possible.

STEP 3: Divvy up the heavy lifting.

Now that your pack is about halfway full, it's time to load in the heaviest items. This would usually include parts of a tent or bulkier food items. If you're traveling with friends, you can disperse different parts of the tent into separate backpacks so that one person isn't

carrying an entire tent. Tent poles and stakes are best packed vertically in the side pockets of the pack, and items such as a rain fly and the tent body can fill in any empty holes around the other items in the backpack. Heavier food items and cookware should also be placed in the middle of the pack, as you typically won't need them until you set up camp.

STEP 4: Keep hydration top of mind (and pack).

Dromedary bags help hikers carry their water. These bags can be placed toward the top of the backpack, also known as the brain, for easy access. We recommend keeping a personal water bottle clipped to the outside of the pack and using the dromedary only to refill when necessary. Hydration is key on the trail!

STEP 5: Top it all off.

Additional items that require easy access could include a rain layer, a map, a compass, snacks or a headlamp, and these can fill the space above the dromedary bags. Be sure to include a first-aid kit, because you never know what to expect in the great outdoors. It's also smart to pack any technology such as cellphones in protective bags/cases to prevent water damage.

STEP 6: Use the outer loops and straps wisely.

We recommend keeping liquids like bear spray or stove fuel in the outer pockets along with the tent poles and stakes and away from your water bottle to avoid any contamination. The outer straps can maximize carrying capacity, so use them to attach tools such as an ax. There might also be straps on the bottom of the pack for a sleeping pad, which can add a little more stability to the backpack.

STEP 7: Get out there and start exploring.

Now that your gear is ready to roll, get out onto the trail! But be mindful of your impact on the wilderness. Students in the Outing Club live by the Leave No Trace (LNT) principles. Some important LNT takeaways include traveling and camping on established campgrounds and trails, remembering to pack out whatever you packed in, leaving what you find and respecting wildlife and other visitors in the great outdoors.



Check out a video produced by the Office of Campus Recreation that walks you through these steps at dickinson.edu/magazine.

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