

RUCKSACKS

“...it is not the mountain that we conquer but ourselves...”

Size

Rucksack sizes are advertised in litres. For an expedition rucksack somewhere between 55 and 70 litres is adequate. 60 to 65 litres is the ideal.

It can be argued that along with boots, rucksacks have the greatest impact on the enjoyment of an expedition. A poor quality or ill fitting rucksack can ruin a trip. We have all seen pictures of DofE expeditions carrying poorly packed and overloaded rucksacks. Well not at Hamilton College. The information contained in this leaflet will give you all the information you need to buy or borrow a rucksack that fits and has the right features for your expedition.

Points to note

- * Spending more money does not always get you a better rucksack
- * You do not need the features of a rucksack designed to get to the South Col on Everest
- * The bigger the rucksack the more you are tempted to put in it
- * High Tech harnesses usually cost more; weigh more and don't live up to the hype
- * It will always weigh more than the last time you wore it.
- * Your Gran will refer to it as a knapsack.

Lid pocket—surprisingly a pocket in the lid.

Adjustable back—the shoulder straps slide up and down to get a precise fit.

Shoulder tension straps—used to pull the rucksack into the back for stability and to shift the weight from the hips

Side pockets—useful for storing things for easy access

Chest strap—used to stabilise the rucksack. Make sure it is height adjustable.

Ice axe/trekking pole holders – Used to carry these items on the outside of the rucksack.

Hip belt tension straps – Used to pull the bottom of the rucksack tighter to the back. Has the effect of shifting the weight from the shoulders to the hips when tightened. Used in conjunction with the shoulder tension straps.

A good padded hip-belt is essential. This is where the weight of the rucksack is carried. Not on your shoulders. If you are skinny, make sure you can tighten the hipbelt fully against you. Some rucksacks will be too big.

Bottom compartment—most large rucksacks come with 2 compartments. Rucksacks are easier to use and pack as a single compartment so check that there is a zip out divider.



RUCKSACKS

Other features to look for

Padded back—padding at the point where the rucksack meets your back can make it more comfortable to carry.

Water Bladder pockets—a lot of rucksacks have an internal pocket which is designed to carry a water bladder. These are useful but not essential.

Rucksack cover—Some rucksacks have an attached rain-cover that stows away into a special pocket.

Keeping your kit dry

Rucksacks are not waterproof. Although most of them are made out of waterproof fabrics, the seams are not lined with tape (as with jackets) and there is a big hole in the top where water gets in. Zips also let water in. If you walk in heavy rain or drop your pack in a river everything inside

will be wet. You therefore need a way of keeping it dry. A rucksack-cover will help for a while, but the only sure way is to use plastic bags, rucksack liners, waterproof stuff sacks or a combination of all of them. Lining the rucksack with a heavy duty plastic bag or rucksack

liner is the simplest way of waterproofing your gear. This is not very versatile, however, as everything goes in together. Using multiple sized waterproof stuff sacks is a good option as you can separate your gear. These are particularly useful for sleeping bags and dry clothes.

Compression straps—Compresses the rucksack to stop loads moving around. Useful when the rucksack is not completely full

Wand pockets – Pockets at the side of the rucksack at the bottom. Useful for carrying trekking poles or items that you need access to without taking off your rucksack. Sometimes made of mesh



Looking after your rucksack

When you get back from your expedition, dump your rucksack in the middle of the kitchen floor then wander off and turn on the TV. When you go back to the kitchen, the fairies will have sorted it out for you. If that doesn't work, try emptying it yourself and then dry it thoroughly. Brush off any mud or dirt before storing it in a dry place. Damp rucksacks just go mouldy.

So how to make sure a rucksack fits:

- * Load the rucksack with a reasonable weight.
- * Loosen all the straps on the harness.
- * Put the rucksack on and hitch it up so that the hip belt is resting the top of your hips.
- * Lean forward and tighten the hip belt.
- * Stand up straight.
- * Adjust the length of the back to the correct length (you may need help).
- * Tighten the shoulder straps.
- * Tighten the hip belt tension straps. You should feel the weight of the rucksack come onto your hips.
- * Tighten the top tension straps to stabilise the load.

Top Tips

Take your time when choosing your rucksack to make sure it fits you.

Ensure you carry the weight on your hips not your shoulders.

Make sure the hip belt can be tightened properly.

The shoulder straps should curve round the shoulders without gaps.

Do not tighten the top tension straps too much you will splint your back which is very uncomfortable.