

Scout Skills...



Pack a Rucsac

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When you go to camp or on an expedition, it is usual to carry everything in a rucsac. Below is a list of things that you might need to pack for going to camp and also some tips on how to pack your rucsac more effectively.

What to Pack

Here is a suggested list of things which would be suitable to take. This list is not exhaustive but it provides a starting point:

Hiking boots or strong shoes	jumper or sweatshirt	Wet weather gear
Uniform	T-shirts	Shorts
Underwear	Socks	Swimwear
Sweater	Trousers	Nightclothes
Gloves	Hat	Scarf
Towel	Wash kit	Teatowel
Plate	Bowl	Mug
Cutlery	First aid kit	Torch
Day sack	Ground sheet	Sleeping bag

Other things might be required for special activities. Depending upon the occasion, you may also need to consider space for parts of a tent, a stove, fuel, food and so on.

This sounds like rather a lot, but it will fit into a rucsac!

Packing a Rucsac

The way a rucsac is packed is important because it can affect your balance, your posture, and your breathing. Therefore, it is important to think about where you put things. The main rule is to pack the light things in the lower part and the heavier things in the upper part. This means that the centre of gravity is high on your back and the rucsac is much more comfortable to carry. The total weight will be the same however you pack it, but it is much less tiring when the rucsac is packed in such a way that it helps your posture and stresses the muscles that you use a lot in everyday life.



Low centre of gravity Heavy rucsac High centre of gravity Lighter rucsac

Items that you might need to lay your hands on quickly should be in the side pockets or just under the top for easy access.

When you pack a rucsac it is easiest to pack everything in plastic bags. This keeps all your things dry even if the rucsac leaks in heavy rain and it also helps to keep order in the rucsac. You can even pack using plastic bags of different colours to help with identification. For instance, your wash kit in a yellow bag, your cutlery in a red bag and so on. This makes it much easier to find a specific item. The sketch below shows how your rucsac should be packed.



Tricks of the trade

- There is a huge range of rucsacs on the market and when you are buying your own, it can be a confusing business. The important thing, apart from price, is to choose a rucsac that fits you and is not too big or too small. If your rucsac is too big for your back, it will be very uncomfortable to carry and might damage your back for life.
- If you are going on a long walk or hike with a rucsac, it is best to have a padded belt attached to the lower part of the rucsac. This is tightened around your hips and takes some of the weight from your shoulders to your hips. It can make the rucsac feel lighter.
- When you go away, always take extra straps and buckles as you never know when some will get lost or broken.

Further information and resources

If you want more information, talk with other Leaders and Scouts in your Troop about packing a rucsac. They might have an experience that they can share with you. It could also be valuable to have a chat with people in your local Scout Shop, Camping and Outdoor Centre and so on.

TEACH YOURSELF

Time

Packing a rucsac might possibly take between 30-60 minutes allowing for packing and repacking to ensure the right balance and getting things in an order which suits you.

Equipment

You will need a rucsac, plastic bags (a selection of different sizes and colours might be helpful) and all the things that you are going to pack. Use the list on the Information Sheet as a starting point. You may wish to modify this list to meet your own requirements.

Learning all about it

Details on "how and why" to pack a rucsac are contained in the Information Sheet. It would be useful to read it - if you haven't already done so!

Lay out everything where you can see it.

Identify those items that you might need to put your hands on quickly. These are going to be packed into the pockets and at the top of the rucsac, and therefore, will go in last. These are things like your first aid kit and wet weather gear. Put all these in a pile to one side.

Now look at the rest. This will need to be packed into plastic bags and you should split it into groupings that are logical to you. This could be all your underwear, socks, T-shirts and swimming gear together. Your wash kit with towel, warm clothes, and so on might also go together. Another system could be shirt with socks and clothing in sets as per day. There is no specific system for this but it is important that you pack so that you can find things when they are needed.

When you have decided on your 'system', put each of the items into specific piles. Now pack each of these piles into one or more plastic bags. You might like to consider the use of coloured bags to help with your identification. It helps keep order in your rucsac.

Now you can start packing the rucsac. At the bottom of the rucsac you should pack anything light such as bags of clothes that you will not need immediately, making sure that you pack into the corners. Your sleeping bag should also be towards the bottom of the rucsac.

On top of this you should put any heavier items such as cooking equipment, cutlery, spare shoes and so on. When you pack the part of the rucsac that is against your back, make sure that there is nothing that sticks out to make the rucsac uncomfortable to carry.

You then pack those items that you need to have easily accessible. These can go on the very top or in the side pockets. If you have two side pockets, split the heavy items between the two pockets to help you with your balance.

Some items can be strapped to the outside of your rucsac, for instance, any parts of a tent that you might be carrying, a ground sheet and so on. These are heavier items and should be strapped to the top of your rucsac.

Try on the rucsac. This is the time to find out whether there is anything uncomfortable poking you in the back or that the balance is not right. It is also the time to adjust straps and webbing.

Now you are ready to go away on your hike or to camp. If this is the first time on a hike carrying a rucsac, it is a very good idea to practice beforehand with your loaded rucsac. This will give you a good idea of your own physical capabilities and will certainly show up any discomfort with the positioning of webbing and straps. Extra padding or readjustment might be necessary.

One final tip. You can never guarantee that straps or buckles will not break or get lost. It is wise to practise changing buckles and belts at home, rather than finding out how to do it on the hill in a howling gale and when you are already behind time. Keep spare straps and buckles in a handy position in your rucsac.

Can you do it?

When you have had a go, ask yourself the following questions and see which ones you can tick off:

- I know how to organise my kit for packing
- I know which items go at the top and which at the bottom
- I know which items go in the pockets
- I know how much weight I can carry for a day
- I know how much weight I can carry for a week

So you want to know more?

- Go to your local Camping and Outdoor Centre and see and discuss different types of rucsac.
- Weigh different items to see what the lightest kit is you can take.

Your notes on this session

Time

If you have ever had to re-pack a suitcase before going on holiday, then you will know that you need to allow plenty of time for participants to pack and repack their rucsacs. It might be a good idea to allow time for a short walk of 20 minutes duration, carrying the loaded rucsacs at the end of this session.

Equipment

You will need one rucsac per participant plus all the contents as listed on the Information Sheet. A useful visual aid could be a clear plastic fertiliser bag, cut to the approximate size of a rucsac. Or you could use a full size drawing of a rucsac and cardboard cut outs of the contents to stick on to your diagram in the appropriate places.

You may like to have a selection of different types of rucsac (for example, those with and without frames) available.

Training method

This is essentially practical but some explanation will be necessary before participants try it themselves:

- Explain what a rucsac is and show it to the participants. A key difference between a rucsac and another container such as a suitcase is that a rucsac leaves your hands free. Why is this important on hikes, expeditions and so on? Another key difference is that the load is distributed across the back and shoulders, rather than being held in one hand. Why is this important? Try to get hold of some different types of rucsac, for example, those with and without frames. Explain the advantages and disadvantages and the method of adjusting to suit the individual physique.
- It is worth stressing that it is always difficult finding things in a rucsac and some 'system' is advisable. The last thing a participant will want to do is to unpack the entire rucsac, simply to find a clean handkerchief! Explain that the use of plastic bags helps with this and has the additional advantage of keeping everything dry. Identify places on or in the rucsac for items that might be needed in an emergency.
- Demonstrate the correct way of packing a rucsac with the light things at the bottom and the heavy things at the top.

HOW TO TRAIN OTHERS

This section is designed to give some practical ideas about how you can help other people to understand this subject. This might be Leaders or Scouts - either in an informal way on a Troop night or more formally on a skills workshop, training course or something similar.

Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- I. Demonstrate packing a rucsac in a way that makes it comfortable to carry and easy to use;
- II. State why different items are packed where they are;
- III. State the ways in which damage to a person's back might be avoided.

- Let each team or participant pack a rucsac, and let them explain why they have packed it in that way.
- Try a short walk of two or three km with a packed rucsac so that participants get the feel of walking with a rucsac, making necessary adjustments to webbing and buckles when required.

Training activities

Ask each participant or group to make up a song, rap or poem about what goes where in a rucsac.

Pin a large drawing of an empty rucsac to a wall and have a number of cardboard cut outs of the items to go in the rucsac, for example, first aid kit, sleeping bag, cooking equipment, washing kit and so on. Ask participants to stick items on to the rucsac where they feel they should be put. You can then look at the rucsac and ask them to justify why they have placed the items where they have.

Try a relay game where each team is given an empty rucsac that has to be packed. All the items are at the opposite end of the room and in turn, participants run up to the pile and select an item which has to be packed immediately. They will, therefore, need to select lighter weight items for the bottom of the rucsac or/and things for the pockets. At the end of the game, the rucsacs can be unpacked in turn, to check.

Hints and tips

- Stress the need for extra straps and buckles and the knowledge of how to change them if they are broken or lost.
- Try different sizes of rucsac and let participants find out what size suits them best.
- Practise putting on and taking off a rucsac on steep or slippery ground, as would be experienced on hills. If the rucsac is properly adjusted for carrying, is it easy to get it on or off their backs?
- Pack a rucsac incorrectly and compare it with one done properly. How does it feel in terms of weight? Is it comfortable?

Other information

- Ask participants to consider their own systems for finding things in a packed rucsac! Stress that it will be a personal system but there is a safety element - some things must be readily accessible in an emergency.

- Consider demonstrating the value of plastic bags in wet weather conditions. Again, there is a very serious safety element here. Emergency clothing is useless if it is saturated.

Checking their progress

Ask participants whether they feel happy with their ability to:

- Choose a rucsac for themselves;
- Pack a rucsac correctly;
- Carry a rucsac over difficult ground for long periods;
- State the reasons for correctly packing a rucsac.

So they want to know more?

- Why not practise packing the absolute minimum requirements for a weekend camp? How much does this reduce the total weight?
- Use different systems to find things in a rucsac. What's the most appropriate for you?
- Ask a camping equipment retailer to come along and demonstrate what rucsacs there are currently available.

Your notes on this session