

Hydration Solutions

We review five small packs designed to keep you well-hydrated



BY ALLISON WOODS

Three testers, five small hydration packs, one month. Trail runners and cyclists Carla Schauble and Laurie Cullen, plus adventure racer Pat Gallagher, set off to abuse some of the smallest, fastest packs on the market today. While we tested these packs primarily for trail running, most of them would fare well for short or fair-weather day hikes.

gear for a day's run in decent weather. Pat commented that the hydration pocket is a plus because the water bottle holsters don't work at all. The small neoprene pouches are not deep enough to hold the provided bottles, which bounce to the ground at the first opportunity. If you instead drop your hydration bag into the main compartment, there won't be much room for clothes and snacks, making this a half-day pack at best.

The overall feel of the Jaguar is nice, and the mesh waist belt is comfortable and distributes weight well. The external compression straps hold gear in place without a fuss, and do not



DEREK JENSEN

The Cairn from Mountainsmith is a bit bulky for trail running and not quite big enough for day hiking, but the water bottle pockets are easy to access.

interfere with access to the main compartment. Trekking poles stayed put while strapped on the outside of the pack. The zipper tassels are a nice touch, and facilitate easy unzipping while running. Pat wished for small, easy-access pockets on the waist belt to hold snacks and electrolyte pills.

Conclusion: A well-crafted pack in every respect except the water bottle holders, which are basically useless. Very functional in every other respect, and carries well in spite of its diminutive size.

Mountainsmith Cairn Fanny Pack

\$100

www.mountainsmith.com

Tester: Pat

Mountainsmith's logo has an anvil on it, but Pat thought the

Golite Jaguar Fanny Pack

\$75

www.golite.com

Tester: Pat

Pat is partial to lumbar/fanny pack style hydration packs, so we sent him out with Golite's Jaguar. It's a tiny little thing, weighing in at just 16 ounces. The Jaguar is surprisingly roomy for its size, and comfortably holds enough



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The poorly designed holsters in the Golite Jaguar don't properly hold the provided water bottles when used as a trail running pack. Other than that flaw, a very functional pack.

Cairn had an anvil on it because it's such a burly pack. On the plus side, the Anvil is nice and comfortable. On a larger person, this big lumbar might be perfect. The fat waist belt snugs securely with a forward tug of the adjuster straps, and stays put.

The included water bottles are easy to reach, even while the wearer is running. The big mesh pockets are easy to get into, and hold water bottles securely. Pat found the ports for using a hydration bag are too small for a bite valve to get through. He had trouble finding a place to put his snacks and electrolyte tablets besides the water bottle pockets, and wished for small accessory pockets on the gigantic waist belt. Trekking poles took a bouncy ride due to a too-loose back bungee system, though a couple of hook-and-loop fasteners would fix this problem. There is an included rain fly that deploys from a secret compartment on the bottom of

the pack.

Conclusions: This pack may be well-suited for other uses, but as a trail runner, it had too much of some things, and not enough of others. It would make a nice, large lumbar for day hiking, and it would certainly be good for commuting though it's slightly too small to hold a laptop. Bigger people looking for a lumbar day pack might like this one, but we think it's a tad on the overbuilt side.

Hydrapak AS Trail

\$60

www.hydrapak.com

Testers: Carla and Laurie

Neither Carla nor Laurie could get behind this little pack due to one glaring detail: no waist belt. Everyone scratched their heads on this one, as packs of this type always come with

waist belts, and without one, they are terrible for running. Still, the Hydrapak was okay for biking, and has some nice features. Both

women liked the cell phone/gizmo pockets and found the interior space pretty usable. The anchor system for the hydration system was lauded as effective, though both testers commented that the roll top on the included hydration bladder leaked while they were running, and Laurie found the bite valve a bit leaky too. On the plus side, the bladder is easy to fill and clean, though Carla found the bladder caused the water to taste icky.

Conclusions: Some good features on this pack, but it needs a waist belt and the hydration bladder could use some work. A little too large for our petite testers.

Cerro Torre Alberta

\$60

www.cerrotorreusa.com

Testers: Carla and Laurie

Our small female testers preferred this little pack from Cerro Torre. The Alberta sports slender, contoured shoulder straps with an adjustable sternum slider adjustment that's easy to use. The thin waist belt holds everything in place, and the low-profile shape of the Alberta means it stays put. The included Source roll-top bladder is accessed from a side zipper that makes it easy to remove. Both testers favored this popular bladder, citing sturdy plastic, a simple, leak-proof design, and no bad plastic tastes. Carla commented that the pockets on this pack were

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The AS Trail from Hydrapak doesn't have a waist belt, the bladder leaked in our tests, and one tester thought the water tasted "icky." Not exactly a winner.

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The slim Cerro Torre Alberta features a roll-top bladder, leak-proof design, and no bad plastic tastes. A lot of pack for the money.

useful. Both testers liked the stowaway zipper pulls, cleverly placed to keep the pulls from slapping while you are running.

Conclusion: A solid performer. A lot of pack for the money.

Gregory Reactor

\$69

www.gregorypacks.com

Tester: Pat

This popular pack has been around for a few seasons, and with good reason. It's a solid performer with a nice tight fit and useful features. Pat raved about the TFO bladder (not included, 2 liters, \$25), and we agree that this bladder is the best that's out there. A big screw-top opening allows for easy cleaning and allows you to drop snow into the bag, plus the rock-solid bite valve closes securely and does not leak.

The Reactor can be easily modified to accept water bottles on the front straps with some bicycle toe clips and a bit of bungee cording, though we'd like to see a commercial version of this modification come from Gregory. The straps would be cooler and no less comfortable if they were made of mesh like some of the other hydration packs we have seen.

The twin zippered pockets on the waist belt allow for easy access to snacks. Add the capacity of the outer bottle pockets and you easily have food for a day. The rear pocket can hold a shovel or helmet, and the tool loop might help in securing an ice axe. The pack's not perfectly equipped to carry trekking poles, but the addition of a simple bungee drawcord would easily fix this minor quibble.

Conclusions: Nice pack, we'd buy this one. It would be nice if it came with a hydration system. A few minor tweaks and this one's perfect. ♦

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The Gregory Reactor is a solid performer, but if you want the hydration system, you'll have to pay \$25 extra.

Overall winners in our test: Cerro Torre Alberta and Gregory Reactor

NEAT STUFF!



Dryzone Boot Dryers

\$25

Need to dry your wet boots overnight? Perhaps you're car camping and day hiking, so you need a fix that doesn't require electricity. Dryzone Boot Dryers might just be the ticket. We did a few tests with them, including a night in sub-freezing temperatures, and they worked great. Simply drop them in your wet boots, and in the morning your boots will be dry and ready to go again. The Dryzones are very simple sealed cloth tubes filled with absorbent crystals. They can be "recharged" in the microwave, or on a heat vent. We highly recommend this innovative product. We'll use them for ski boots and gloves in addition to drying our hiking boots.

—Allison Woods

