

Backcountry

The Gear Closet »

Choose Your Own EATING Adventure

Nourishing your body in the backcountry isn't a one-way trail. Some approaches to this task require substantial preparation time. Others could squeeze every penny out of your wallet. And some just won't suit your palate, try as you might.

In this issue, our gear closet more closely resembles a pantry, as we look at how each member of WTA's gear team fuels their body on their outdoor adventures. Read on as they extol the virtues of going light, gourmet or cheap, and you might just be convinced to try a new approach on your next trip.

Food Without Fuel

When you are looking to cut down on weight, there are three areas of your pack you can look to for additional economy. While there is usually room for improvement in how one provides shelter and water, food and the tools necessary to make often represent a sizable percentage of anyone's pack. Here is the low-hanging fruit.

Even the lightest homemade Cat Can alcohol stove requires that you carry fuel and a pot. If the prospect of lugging around a couple of chunks of metal on your back is unappealing, consider changing your eating habits and adopting a no-cook approach.

Of course, the usual suspects—nuts, dried

You're about to spend the weekend backpacking.
Are you looking for a wholesome meal?

Nah, that can wait.

Yeah, that'd be great.

It's 40 degrees and a light rain is falling. Would you like a cup of cocoa?

Cocoa?
Meh!

Mmmm,
Cocoa!

If you can go without this comfort food, you can go without fuel. Pick Food without Fuel.

Cocoa is tasty, and cheap. Choose Budget in the Backcountry.

Do you grow your own veggies, belong to a C.S.A. or have a neighbor with a fruit tree?

Sure Do!

I wish!

Sounds like you might have excess produce. Do you also have spare time at home?

Not so much.

Why worry about a few extra ounces when your taste buds are titillated?

A fair bit.

Like!

Dislike!

Don't let those plums rot! You should really try DIY Dehydration.

Crack open an ale. You're Gourmet on the Go.

If lighter is always better, you'll be best going with a Freeze Dried Favorite.

fruits and meats, energy bars, Oreos, fruitcake and hard cheese—will probably make up a significant portion of your growing no-cook menu. Try to integrate some fresh fruit and vegetables, looking for those that can survive the rigors of your pack.

Keep in mind that any weight you leave behind in the way of gear can become edible weight. Bring along a few little extras like chocolate bars or your favorite candy, and the extra calories may give you enough extra energy to extend the distance you're able to hike. Even if you bring treats that don't pack enough calories to be more than a flash in the pan, the psychological boost gained from munching while walking down the trail and taking advantage of long summer days helps to pass the miles. —*Matt Thyer*



Do-It-Yourself Dehydration

Dehydrating your own foods is a great way to eat healthy while you are on the trail. The taste is superior, there are no chemical additives, and it can be easy on your pocketbook. If you are tired of the basic peas and carrots you get in pre-packaged meals, doing it yourself allows you to incorporate a plethora of exciting vegetables. If you have the time to plan ahead, it is possible to save more than three dollars per meal compared to store-bought dehydrated meals. Also, dehydration reduces the volume of food to roughly one-fifth of its original size and reduces the weight. All these reasons compelled me to escape into the world of food dehydration.

A fun way to jump into dehydrating your own food is to start with fruits and vegetables. The dehydrator that assisted me on my adventure was the American Harvest Snackmaster. This unit will dry about 20 pounds of produce a day. When preparing fruit, cut whole fruits into slices that are an eighth- to a quarter-inch thick. Allow the fruit to dehydrate for six to twenty hours at 135 degrees. Vegetable preparation varies quite a bit, as some require cooking beforehand and the manner in which you cut it down to size changes. Plan on cooking vegetables at 130 degrees for anywhere between three and fourteen hours. Remember to periodically check on your produce throughout the drying process. Overdried food can be tough and not so satisfying. The final step is to store the dehydrated fruit properly. You can use a ziplocked bag if you will be consuming the produce within a month, but it is best to use an airtight system. Try using one of the Reynolds food sealer systems.

One of my favorite experiments was preparing seasoned rice. The process was simple, and the outcome will allow me to add tasty cheap carbs to



my backpacking pantry. Other items that are fantastic for dehydrating are beef, ground meats, ham and shrimp. You can dehydrate beans and potatoes and sauces and use them as the base for tasty stews and other dinners. —*Cherie Bevers*

Would you rather take pictures at sunset

or putter about in your outdoor kitchen?

Sunset colors.

Hand me a spatula.

Find a Freeze-Dried Favorite

For a long time, I had been trying to find the ideal prepackaged, lightweight backpacking meals, but my experiences had been hit-and-miss. There are many backpacking food companies out there, and they each have items that are tolerable, terrible, and “what were they thinking!” But last year, while planning my meals for a thirty-day thru-hike on the John Muir Trail—and wondering, “How am I going to eat the same three to four acceptable meals I’m used to packing?”—I happened across an ad for Packit Gourmet, an online backpacking food supplier out of Austin, Texas. I ordered a bunch of their meals to try out and was amazed to taste food that was not just tolerable, but actually good!



My favorite meal, and the winner of several outdoor publication editors’ awards, is their Austintacious Tortilla Soup. So good! It comes packaged with tortilla chips and Tabasco sauce, and it warms the insides on those chilly evenings. Other tasty dinner offerings include Dottie’s Chicken and Dumplings, Bangers and Mash, and another award winner—Tuscan Beef Stew. For lunches, instead of the typical beef jerky and gorp, just heat a little water and have a Trailside Bean and Cheese Burrito or All-American Burger Wrap (get it with “the works”). On their breakfast menu, you’ll find Migas del Sol, Tex-Mex Breakfast Taco, and my favorite (since I’m not a big breakfast eater), their Jump-Start Fruit Smoothies—full of good stuff to get you going and available in four flavors. Not only is their menu a lot of down-home goodness, but their meals are affordable (roughly five dollars a serving) and serving por-

tions are very generous.

Many of Packit Gourmet's meals are made with organic and all-natural ingredients, and this is a big plus for me. Thoughtful additions like chicken broth packets, olive oil, hot sauces and real Parmesan cheese really boost the flavor of many of their prepared dishes. If you're a do-it-yourselfer, they also offer a full range of freeze-dried meat and vegetable ingredients that you can put together to prepare your own creations. Give this brand a shot. You won't be disappointed, and they'll change the way you plan your future backpacking meals. Check them out online: www.packitgourmet.com.

—Eli Boschetto

Gourmet on the Go

One step I never skip when trip planning is contemplating what would be delicious to eat in the backcountry. My top priority is to incorporate "real" food into the weekend. I want to be slightly conscious of weight, but I'm definitely willing to pack in a bit more so that I can indulge in something truly delectable.

If it's Thursday night and I am about to embark on a solo mid-summer weekend backpacking trip, my preparation will go something like this. Since I haven't had smoked salmon in a couple weeks, I pack salmon and pair it with sesame crackers and white cheddar. This will make for two excellent lunches. Some trail mix, dried fruit, and a few cookies will complement my meal perfectly. I grab oatmeal from the cupboard, enough for two mornings, and throw in a handful of freshly picked blueberries. I still need to figure out dinner. Since I won't want to cook on Friday, I'll pick up a turkey, Havarti and pesto sandwich on rosemary focaccia from the grocer and eat it at the trailhead before I start on my moonlit hike. I will want something hot and satisfying on Saturday night after hiking all day, so I grab two tortillas and an 8-ounce bag of sharp cheddar out of the fridge. I can make some mouth-watering burritos by adding rice, beans, veggies and hot sauce. Kale is a great source of flavonoids (with both antioxidant and anti-inflammatory



benefits) and makes any hot dish taste and feel like a home-cooked meal. I add it to my pack. I also grab two carrots, one avocado, and a bag of Vigo red rice and beans. I make sure to bring along a couple of teaspoons of cayenne pepper and garlic salt, knowing they should really help give the wraps a spicy kick! I decide to bring a couple protein bars and a few Emergen-C drink packets, just in case. I almost forgot victory beverages! I immediately add two to three canned craft ales (Oskar Blues, Caldera or the like), the stronger the better, to my bounty. Soon, very soon, I'll be sitting on top of a mountain, surrounded by rows and rows of jagged peaks, sipping on a citrusy, hoppy double IPA. —Patrick Leahy

Budget in the Backcountry

Being the perpetual student that I am, I need to pinch pennies wherever I can in order to reduce the size of my student loans, and I need to spend as little time as I possibly can preparing my food. Instead of the pricey prepackaged meals one finds in fancy retail stores, I take a trip down to my local grocery store. Herein lies an abundance of cheap, tasty meals that are packed with calories and enough nutrition.

My typical meal plan in the backcountry consists of Pop Tarts (\$.80 for 500 calories) and coffee for breakfast, peanut butter and jelly (\$.61 per 500 calories) or peanut butter and Nutella (\$.72 per 500 calories) and a piece of fruit for lunch, and some ramen (\$.38 per 500 calories), Easy Mac (\$1.41 per 500 calories) or

mashed potatoes (\$1.70 per 500 calories) and hot cocoa for dinner. I add generic granola bars, chocolate, homemade trail mix and dried fruit to snack on throughout the day. A great place for dried fruit

and tasty nuts is your local Trader Joe's. I've also found bulk food bins to be an excellent place to invent my own trail mix. I try to stock up on these trail mix staples when I see them on sale.

Remember, buy in large quantities and your food will be even cheaper. —Cheri Higman



You studied the map,
You loaded your
backpack
and drove to the
trailhead,
You climbed two ridges
and forded a stream.
Now it's time to reflect:

**Buckskin Larch
and Bedrock**
(The book)
by Mike Hiler

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