



Username

••••••••

LOGIN

Register | Forgot Login?

articles

news

events

reviews

blogs

world info

photos

videos

training

competitions

shop

Check out our stores



search planetFear.com

myplanetFear
click here to customise your homepage

planetFear / Latest articles / Packing for an Adventure Race

Packing for an Adventure Race

Article by Anna McCormack

Monday 6th February 2006

Packing for an Adventure Race

Packing for an adventure race can be fun (especially if you are a gear freak) but it can also be daunting. And, if anything, it gets more complicated, the more experienced you are. The mandatory gear lists get increasingly bigger and your kit pile spills out of your closet and starts to take over your spare room.

Love it or hate it, there is simply no way round it. Packing is an integral part of racing, whether it is simply throwing a few items into the back of your car for a local weekend race or arranging a hundred kilos of high-tech kit and clothing into piles in preparation for a week-long event halfway around the world.

Regardless of the competition, you need to be organised, and unless you have a photographic memory, this means making a list to work from. Some organisers make it easier for you, by providing a very comprehensive mandatory gear list as well as an additional 'recommended' kit list. However, whether intentionally or not, they invariably miss key items out, so you have to start thinking for yourself before the gun even goes off on the start line.



The first moments of gear chaos on arrival at the race hotel

Using your head

Organisers presume, for instance, that you will use your own discretion even at the packing stage, and wise racers spend a lot of time preparing their own ideal team lists for each race. For example, even the least experienced racer will realise that it is wise to pack shoes for each discipline, whether or not they are on the organiser's list. Similarly, the absence of a head-torch from the provided lists doesn't mean that you won't need one as you trek through the night (although I have heard that question asked in all seriousness at a race briefing).

Your team list should be the tool to ensure that there is no unnecessary repetition between what individual members are bringing with them, but it should also ensure that the team as a whole has covered all eventualities. The temperatures you expect may be out by up to 30 degrees. Have you got enough warm, cold or wet weather kit with you to cope? You may aim to try to get away with a rope-man as an ascender, but have you got a jumar with you as a back-up if the organisers refuse to accept them in the kit tests? Do you all really mean to use poles during the race or only one pair within the team (in case of blisters, injury or simply because one person moves better with them)? If so, who is bringing them? Team work is already crucial at this point.

A good rule of thumb is to allocate the same amount of time to kit organisation and packing as the days you expect to spend on the race course itself.

We generally take it in turns to compile a race-specific spreadsheet using a base list honed from years of experience. We combine, with that, the organiser's mandatory and recommended lists and added insights from research into the area and the environmental conditions we are likely to encounter. This is sent around the team members for them to then sign up to take specific items of team kit or to take responsibility for sorting things like choosing the best tyres for everyone to bring etc. We have found this the best way to ensure all bases are covered without having to take mountains of gear 'just in case'. It is also the best way of getting the lazier team members to sign up for some of the necessary pre-race chores.

Choice of transport container

Although it is always preferable to fly to international races with two hard-sided, water-resistant kit boxes (one for the bike and as much extra kit as you can squeeze into it and one for everything else), it is increasingly difficult to do so. Weight-restrictions on baggage are getting stricter and in September 2006 the 2 x 32kg baggage allowance that used to apply to flights going to or through the US was also rescinded. As a result of this, it is increasingly common to see racers racing from flexible duffle bags rather than from rigid, organised, compartmentalised race boxes, simply because they have been unable to get the latter to the start of the race.

The first thing you need to do is to check with the organisers if they have a rigid policy on either the type of box or bag you can use in transitions since they might have transport restrictions. The bigger the box or bag, the easier it will be for you to organise your gear within it and the faster you will be able to transition, but the heavier and more awkward it will be for you to transport and carry. NB: If you simply can't take a box with you because of weight limitations, we have found that you can buy collapsible plastic boxes in most countries and two of these fit neatly within e.g. an XL North Face duffle, providing both rigidity and compartmentalisation to facilitate organisation. Failing that, you can definitely find cardboard anywhere and make your own partitions but make sure you pack wisely since things can easily get scrambled if the bag is then handled roughly during transition.



Airline variables

Next, check all the airlines flying to your race destination and go through their sporting equipment baggage policies with a fine tooth comb. Find the airline that charges the lowest standard fee for flying with a bike box in addition to your standard 22kg weight allowance. (Most charge £30-£60 one way for a bike box but this is a small price to pay against the potential cost of excess luggage – especially given that you can then pack up to 32kg of race gear into the box.) By the time that you have

checked at least 55kg through in this manner and have somehow wangled an additional 20kg through as hand luggage, you will have more or less enough stuff with you 'to get by'. However, for the big races in particular, this really isn't a lot of kit, given that you may have to take with you everything from inline skates to crampons and ice axes, a wetsuit and buoyancy aid (or two), two different types of helmets and paddles, four or five different pairs of shoes, bike etc. Hence pre-race organisation and honing down of kit is absolutely vital.

Airport tricks

We missed a plane once, even though we got to the airport with two hours to spare, simply because we tried to go up in ones and twos so as to be able to get away with a huge amount of hand luggage each and it took the airline an inordinately long amount of time to deal with the fact that we each had bikes with us. If you have a friend to drive you to the airport, this is ideal. They can quietly sit in a different area surrounded by your extra bags and you can claim that all you have with you is what you are presenting.

Alternatively, get friendly with the left-luggage guys and bring a lightweight but very large sack with you so that you only have to pay for one piece of left luggage and leave all your hand luggage there. If you know the layout of your airport well and also the policy of the airline you are travelling with, you may also be able to risk leaving additional heavy items in left luggage. In my local airport, for instance, I know the left-luggage guys well and sometimes don't even get charged for leaving kit for this short period. I also know that when I have checked my bike box through they may weigh it so I make sure that at that point it weighs less than 32kg. Before taking it to the outside drop off point, I then pick the extra kit up from left luggage and add as much as is reasonable to the bike box since they won't weigh it again at that point. Simple tricks of the trade.

In general, we use our race rucksacks as hand-luggage (unless it is a hot race and these are too small, in which case we may take larger, lightweight rucksacks with us for this purpose). I also take a business man's roll case, since it is easy transport even if filled with heavy items like karabiners, bike batteries (but make sure you also take a light unit with you or you may find the batteries confiscated, as I did once, in the States).



Despite the weight issues, I tend to take a laptop with me to long races. These can come in useful if GPS is involved. They are also useful since, if organised, you will have more team planning time at races themselves than you normally do, so the time can be put to good use. On the return flight you also have time to deal with race photos, make copies for the team and potentially get the race write-up done too. Make sure that you have a few bare essentials with you in your hand luggage (sunglasses, training shoes, spare t-shirts etc) since it is pretty common for one or both of your big boxes to go astray and you want as little extra stress as possible in the days leading up to a big race.

Packing again when you get there

Inevitably you will pack your gear boxes three or four times before a big race. You initially pack to travel to the race, you unpack for the gear check (make sure you have a photocopy of the mandatory kit they will want to see with you), you pack again to get back to your accommodation, you unpack to re-sort everything into your individual piles so that you know where you were at with your kit when you first got off the plane. (You may also, at this point, have to dry clothing used during skill testing.)



Post skills testing, pre Himalayan Raid Gauloises, hotel garden in Kathmandu

You then re-pack again when you are given the course notes, and pack once more when you realise you left something out or put something in that you don't need. You may even need to pack and unpack one final time in an assisted race if you have to transport you and your kit to a race start a long journey away.



After the race kit and transition gear was sorted in Ecomotion Brazil, 2004, we then had to pack everything back into bigger boxes and bags to get it to the race location, 100s of kilometres north of our briefing village.

However you pack, you absolutely need to know where everything is, both in terms of your individual kit and shared team kit. Otherwise, you will spend an inordinate amount of time digging around in a mess of dirty socks, rotting food and tangled climbing gear during transitions. Most experienced athletes prepare laminated kit lists taped to the inside of their boxes to remind them where everything is in transition. Things get slightly more complicated when you don't have your own box – an increasingly frustrating trend of race organisers.

In Baja California, in December 2005, for instance, we had three team boxes that we were to see on one occasion only during the race course, as well as individual bike boxes which we would meet at every bike transition. We were given only half of the course maps and had no time to make our own race time estimates. Hence we were totally at the mercy of the organiser's estimates for each leg when it came to deciding about the smaller items of non-mandatory kit like head-torches, spare batteries, extra food, sun hats etc and which boxes they should go in. For safety we should have each had these spare items in each box, but even if we had had four sets of everything with us (which we couldn't have had, weight wise) we wouldn't have been able to fit them into the boxes. In the mad scramble to complete packing pre deadline, confusion reigned and when, on the course, we realised that the timings for the top teams had been completely out, we reconciled ourselves to doing without glasses, sunhats, spare warm clothes etc at key times. (Carrying everything 'just in case' isn't really an option.)

We couldn't have done much to make that particular situation go more smoothly but at least we knew that we had the right kit and clothing choices with us for the conditions we were going to encounter and everyone had arrived with their individual and team kit totally organised to start with. Had that not been the case, it would have been a total disaster.

In conclusion, whether you appreciated the fact before or not, I guess you now understand that entering a life of adventure racing means entering a life of constant packing and re-packing of kit. And when you are married to an adventure racer, you might as well give up the whole concept of having a spare room. Three rooms of our house and an outside storage space of over one hundred square metres are entirely given up to outdoor kit. Packing and re-packing have become a way of life.



One of the rooms in our house - entirely given up to organised gear storage

Bookmark:

Comments

There are currently no comments on this article.

Add a Comment

Title

Comment

Security Code:

Please enter the security code in the text box below.



planetFear

- Home
- Our Stores
- About Us
- Contact
- Customise Your Homepage
- Links
- Environmental
- Advertise with Us

Online Shopping

- Start Shopping
- Terms & Conditions
- Returns Policy
- Delivery
- Size Guide
- Privacy Policy

Help

- Testimonials
- Forums
- Enquiries
- Recycling your old electricals

Copyright © 2008 planetFear. All rights reserved.
Web design, development and hosting by MTC Media Ltd.

