

# The Ultimate Hiker's Gear Guide: Tools and Techniques to Hit the Trail

*By Andrew Skurka*

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Supreme long-distance hiker Andrew Skurka shares his hard-earned knowledge in this essential guide to backpacking gear and skills. Described by *National Geographic* as “one of the best traveled and fastest hikers on the planet,” and named “Adventurer of the Year” by *Outside* and “Person of the Year” by *Backpacker*, Skurka recounts what he’s learned from more than 30,000 miles of long-distance adventures, most recently a 4,700-mile 6-month loop around Alaska and Canada’s Yukon.

Whether you're a first-time backpacker, an occasional weekend warrior or a seasoned long-distance trekker, you'll love this guide. Learn exactly what you need to carry – both on your back and between your ears – for all seasons and circumstances through a show-and-tell of clothing, footwear, backpacks, shelter and sleep systems, and more, as well as through detailed articles on foot care, campsite selection and hiking efficiency. Skurka's practical and priceless recommendations give you all the tools and techniques you'll need to hit the trail.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"[Andrew] Skurka, *Outside* magazine's 2010 'Adventurer of the Year,' packs his comprehensive guide with practical information about the best clothing, footwear, trekking poles, backpacks, sleeping bags, knives, shelter systems, and cooking gear that will help you plan your next trip."

--*Scouting Magazine*

#### About the Author

A graduate of Duke University, ANDREW SKURKA is a sponsored long-distance backpacker, paid speaker, and writer. He has hiked 25,000-plus miles since 2002, most recently on a 4,700-mile loop around Alaska and the Yukon. Named "Adventurer of the Year" by *National Geographic Adventure* (describing him as "a Gen Y version of Thoreau") and "Person of the Year" by *Backpacker Magazine*, he was also featured in *Outside* and *Men's Journal*. Skurka has appeared in numerous newspapers and television broadcasts.

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I wrote this book from the perspective of an unapologetic Ultimate Hiker, which I define as a backpacker who simply loves to walk. We maximize our on-trail comfort by packing light; we move efficiently from dawn to dusk; and we consider the physical and mental challenges inherent in this style as part of our backcountry experience. Our antithesis is the Ultimate Camper, who hikes only a very short distance in order to do something else, like fishing, journaling, or birding. Neither approach is superior to the other—it's simply personal preference—but our contrasting styles have major consequences for our gear, supplies, and skills.

My target reader is one who at least sometimes wants to be more like an Ultimate Hiker. You need not take this approach on every future trip or take it to the extreme that I do, but you must want to enjoy the hiking component of your back-packing trips more. This book may be most valuable for beginners and intermediates, who are too often relegated to the status of Campers-by-Default. These backpackers lack the knowledge and skills to pack lightly and move efficiently, which makes hiking more strenuous and less fruitful than it should be. To avoid a sufferfest, they instead opt to camp.

I have intentionally refrained from describing this text as a "lightweight backpacking" book. Although weight is an important consideration for the Ultimate Hiker, we must also be concerned with the comfort, safety, durability, efficiency, and best use of our gear. Moreover, it's possible to go "stupid light," whereby desperate weight savings can have adverse effects.

My hope is that this book will become the go-to manual for back-packing how-to, a modern successor to Colin Fletcher's *The Complete Walker*. An original 1968 copy of that classic sat on the corner of my desk for inspiration while I wrote this manuscript. I wanted my book to be credible, informative, and occasionally just a good read. And while my recommendations are based on my extensive hiking experience, I'm not a backpacking guru—remember that you must always exercise your own judgment in evaluating the applicability and utility of the information in this book based on your own ability, experience, and comfort level. I readily admit that there are alternative tools and techniques that will achieve similar outcomes.

At the risk of outdateding this text quickly, I felt that it was important to include specific brands, products, prices, and weights. On numerous occasions, I advocate the use of unconventional items—like frameless

backpacks, tarps and tarp tents, and alcohol stoves—that are not made by conventional out- door companies or sold by conventional outdoor retailers. But by focusing on the gear type—not on the specific product—I hope that the information in this book will remain valuable long after the prod- uct itself disappears from catalogs and store shelves.

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