

A Book Review of THE ULTIMATE BACKPACKER'S GUIDE TO THE WILDERNESS by AIDEN CROSS

(Available through Amazon.com)

By Carol Hardin

Cross has written this book “to help beginners understand the basics of backpacking and the more complex aspects of outdoor travel.” It serves well as a ‘brush up’ manual for more experienced hikers as well. He says, “Safe and enjoyable backpacking not only requires basic skills but also the right equipment that enables your support on the trail. Space in a backpack is limited so you need to choose well!”

Based on the author’s experience and knowledge about backpacking accumulated over several years of travelling around the world, it covers:

1. The best trails and destinations to choose as a beginner;
2. The essential equipment and gear you will need;
3. The right way to choose your backpacking essentials from your clothing and backpack to your shoes, tents, sleeping bags, water bottles, medicines and toiletries;
4. Food and meals you can eat during your trip...including shopping and storing;
5. Handling medical and weather emergencies and finding your way through unknown territories.

He starts with how to choose a backpack and what is the right way to pack a backpack? Obviously, a lot will depend on your destination and the anticipated weather where you will be hiking. He tells you how to choose undergarments, socks, pants, shorts, shirts, t-shirts, outerwear, etc. He spends a fair amount of time on choosing boots and good, appropriate socks, for obvious reasons!

Next, he moves on to choosing the best sleeping bag and covers types, temperature ratings, types of insulation and bag shape. He tells you how to size your pack: first, check the size of your hip belt and evaluate the length of your suspension system as backpacks are NOT sized by your height but by the length of your back or more specifically, your torso.

He then moves on to choosing a backpacking tent. Do you need a single wall or a double wall tent? The first wall is the tent body and the second is the rain protection. Some tents have mesh paneling to increase ventilation and keep tent cooler. Four season tents can be used all year but are more suited for winter excursions.

Your water treatment system may be your most important choice for your good health and to ensure a good, safe hike. Do you choose a water purifier or a water filter? Also, on the comfort side, experienced hikers suggest you leave your deodorant at home as it can attract bugs, bees and other wildlife. You need to wash your hands after going to the bathroom and before and after cooking meals. Does that sound familiar, like something your mother told you? And in that vein, be sure to dispose properly of all your waste! Remember the first rule of backpacking: Take out what you take in! Do not leave messes for others to clean up! Bet your moms told you that one too!

Next, he gives you a complete guide to what you need to pack in your First Aid kit. You want to be sure that you have at least the minimum here...it could save your life! And don’t forget a small pair of scissors. They have numerous uses.

Planning meals gets a big chapter. He suggests you dispense with fresh food and take dried and freeze-dried foods. Your goal should be to pack at least 2,500 to 4,500 calories per person per day, depending on weight and exertion level. This is roughly 1.5 to 2.5 pounds of food a day. You are going to need those calories to fight off stress, fatigue and headaches. You need complex protein and carbohydrates for the long haul. Tuna and other meat products in vacuum sealed pouches are always good. Just remember, you have to carry everything you are taking!

The next sections are on weather and how to best cope with it. He suggests that, although you cannot predict the weather accurately, you can do some good research on weather patterns for the time of year where you are planning to hike. You need to watch the sky. The National Weather Service estimates that more than 100,000 thunder storms take place in the US each year. Lightning should never be taken casually! (Refer to Dan Groebner's article "Hiking in the White Mountain Monsoons" in the August, 2016 issue of GYMOAZ.)

Next, he gives you an Essential Backpacking Checklist. First essentials such as map and compass for navigation (See article by Dan Groebner on pre-setting your GPS with your computer, "A White Mountain Pairing Party" in the September, 2016 issue of GYMOAZ for in-depth information on how to use your computer to set your GPS before you go on your hike.), sunscreen, protective eyewear, flashlight headlamp & extra batteries, first aid kit and matches and lighter. Then he adds: Useful Accessories, Nutrition and Hydration; Clothing and Footwear; Electronics and Assorted Items. It is a relatively complete list.

He then covers camping and cooking out and keeping clean and safety. Traveling to the site gets coverage as well and choosing a camping site and planning your camping menus. He does a bit on using compression bags also.

He covers a bit on surviving cold weather camping and suggests layering up. He has a section on staying hydrated and how important this is and, also, how to deal with condensation which most new campers don't anticipate.

He writes about conditioning BEFORE you go on your trip and getting in good high intensity workouts to train your body for this backpacking trip...lots of cardio as well as resistance training.

He even covers Budgeting Basics and where you shouldn't skimp. The last section covers a number of State Parks and other destinations that you might consider for your first backpacking trip.

I found the book to lack good editing but it isn't so bad that it hampers your getting good information.