

## Lose Weight Now! *Ask me how!*



**CARRY ALL THAT UP THERE?** Hunting and backpacking can be more enjoyable, and you can travel farther each day, if you shed a few pounds from your pack and footwear.

# I can help you drop 10 pounds, no dieting required.

by Jack Ballard

Hunting and backpacking are hard enough without carrying around an extra 10-pound dumbbell. Okay, I don't mean an actual dumbbell, but I've found that many fellow hunters and backpackers haul excess or unnecessarily heavy gear when afield. The added burden makes it harder to climb mountains, hike long distances, and haul a big game carcass back to camp or the trailhead. Dropping that surplus weight from what we carry—I estimate most hunters could do away with up to 10 pounds—can make backcountry outings more enjoyable and allow us to spend more time in the mountains or on the prairie.

If you're ready to shed a dumbbell's worth of weight from your load, here's how:

### SHARE WITH OTHERS

Hunters and backpackers often travel with others, both for safety and fellowship. One of the easiest ways to drop a few pounds is avoid carrying duplicate gear. Maybe because of American individualism, many feel they need their own stuff. For some items, this is true: We

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each need a personal rifle or shotgun, spare ammunition that matches the firearm, water bottle, daypack, and, in case we get separated and lost, a fire-starting kit, headlamp or flashlight, and other basic survival gear.

But a party actually needs only one, or one set, of many items for the entire group. A few seasons ago, one of the two fellows I was hunting with killed a bull elk. As we prepared to quarter the animal for packing, he asked if any of us had game bags. Turns out we *all* had game bags, 16 total. Even if we'd been lucky enough to kill another bull—which didn't happen—we still had twice as many game bags as necessary.

Game bags don't weigh much, but you get the point. Group members can share plenty of heavier items. For instance, a folding or collapsible saw capable of cutting bone and branches has many uses on a big-game hunt. A small party of hunters won't need more than one. My favorite field saw weighs 17 ounces. If a pair of hunters brings only one, they can save more than a pound.

Look closely at what you plan to carry, then talk to others in your group to see who else is bringing along a stove and fuel canister, stout rope, insect repellent, GPS unit, or other items that could be shared to lighten everyone's load.

### LIGHTEN YOUR GEAR

Midpriced hunting rifles weigh between slightly over five pounds to more than eight pounds. Simply switching to a lighter firearm could take up to three pounds off your shoulder.

Years ago, lighter rifles kicked much harder than heavier ones. That's still true, but not nearly as much, thanks to new recoil pads and stock design. The main problem with lighter guns is that they generally cost more. But you can find some adequate big game rifles weighing less than seven pounds for about \$750.

Even without plunking down hundreds of dollars for a new rifle, most hunters can shave a pound or so from their shooting outfit. Switching to a compact scope whittles a few ounces without sacrificing optical performance. A nylon sling is much lighter than a heavily padded leather version, and, in my opinion, nearly as comfortable. Attached bipods weigh up to 1.5 pounds. Do you really need to carry that extra weight, or could you make an equally steady shot by resting your rifle on your daypack?

Another easy way to shed weight is to stop carrying too much ammunition. Many of my hunting companions feel unprepared if they don't have a full box of extra bullets in their pack. A box of 20 cartridges for a big-game rifle weighs at least one pound. Yet a competent shooter with 10 cartridges is well prepared for a hunt. If you're shooting more than that, perhaps you need better judgment or marksmanship.

### PARE DOWN THE APPAREL

Don't get so wrapped up in evaluating the weight in your hunting daypack or backpack that you neglect to apply the same consideration to what you're wearing. My closet holds two pairs of pants, both providing enough insulation for hunting in moderately cold temperatures. One pair, adorned with camouflage fabric purported to block human scent, came from a respected hunting apparel manufacturer. The other I plucked from a rack at a local thrift store, formerly the natty wool threads of some gentlemanly type with an inclination for loden green slacks. Not only did I save a bundle on the wool trousers, they're significantly lighter. Compared to the 30.6-ounce "hunting" pants, the woolies weigh a wispy 17.5 ounces. That saves more than three-quarters of a pound from just one garment.

I figure that switching to a lighter jacket and other clothing can trim a total of three or more pounds from a big-game hunter's burden. I consider many of the so-called "hunting" garments to be unnecessarily bulky, especially for active hunting.

Of course, you don't want to be foolhardy and put yourself at risk of hypothermia. No matter where you hunt in this state, a rainstorm or even blizzard could quickly blow in. This is Montana, after all. Like so many hunters, I carry some essential backup clothing. Most important is a lightweight down sweater I stuff into a pint-sized stuff sack. Mine weighs 13.2 ounces, including the stuff sack. Compare that to a quilted hunting jacket in my closet that weighs 30.7 ounces—more than a pound heavier.

### STEP UP TO FLYWEIGHT FOOTWEAR

The most significant place to lighten your load is in your hunting or hiking boots. When extra weight is on your shoulders, you simply carry it. But when unnecessary ounces or even pounds are on your feet, you lift that weight with every step—thousands of times a day. With boots, even a few ounces makes a huge difference in your ability to hike extra miles.

Traditionally, backcountry boots were heavy—with insulation, layers of leather, and thick rubber soles. Unfortunately many still weigh six or more pounds. Yet so many reasonably priced lightweight boots are now on the market that there's no reason a pair is not in your hunting lineup. Even lighter are ankle-high hiking boots. These are great for most conditions and can be paired with waterproof gaiters for hiking through light snow or wet vegetation. Of course, deep snow and below-zero temperatures still call for the taller, insulated boots. But most of the time, I'm not hunting in those conditions. In mild weather I don't miss the bulk or insulation of a traditional hunting boot, and my legs are happier at the end of the day.

We hunters are getting older each year. And the big game animals we pursue are moving farther than ever into the backcountry, away from roads and trails. If we want to reach those deer, pronghorn, and elk, lightening the load on our back and feet may be the most productive thing we can do this season (though shedding a few pounds from around the waistline wouldn't hurt, either).



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