

## Some Thoughts on Ultralight Gear

by Mary & Steven Robinson

*"The greatest comfort one can indulge in is a light pack".*

Last summer while lugging a 12 kg load over big hills in New Zealand, we read an article by Bryan Dudley of TrampLight in New Zealand, on going 'ultralight', with a total bare pack weight of less than 4.5 kgs. Sounded blissful, so we decided to try out some of Bryan's ideas.

We have now done several overnight trips (including winter trips in Tasmania) with what feels like a day pack (about 5 kgs each **all up** for a Tassie winter weekend). When asked if we would ever go back to 'normal' gear, our answer, and that of our muscles, knees and back, is decidedly "No way!"

Ultralight is generally accepted as a total bare pack weight of less than 10 lbs (4.5 kgs) for three season walking, going up by about 1 kg for snow camping. This includes everything (pack and contents) except consumables (food, fuel, water).

Going ultralight does not mean going without - it means substituting lighter gear for 'normal' weight gear, and using gear with multiple functions as much as possible. We are just as warm, just as safe and just as comfortable as we ever have been. New 'space age' materials mean that much lighter gear is possible, while still doing the things the gear is meant to do - keep off rain, stand up to wind, keep you warm, cook food etc. Unfortunately though, the major manufacturers, selling to a wide cross section and fearing returns, seem not to be prepared to market such gear as yet - ultralight gear does need a degree of care in use. This means that for now, you need to search widely to find what is available commercially (almost only from North America), or make your own (much cheaper). Kits are available if you decide to make your own. Lots of contacts are given below for ready made gear, materials and kits. The wonderfully warm sleeping bag we now use is from a kit, the tent is of our design.

### Some Useful Web Links

(NB 1 oz = 28.35 gms) :

#### Shelter

Note that this can go as light as 245 gms for a one person shelter, groundsheet and pegs.

[www.gossamergear.com/cgi-bin/gossamergear/xdpy/s/Shelter/index.html](http://www.gossamergear.com/cgi-bin/gossamergear/xdpy/s/Shelter/index.html) (very good service).

[www.rayjardine.com/tarp-nettent/index.shtml](http://www.rayjardine.com/tarp-nettent/index.shtml) (Duncan Cross has one of these and is very happy with it)

[www.thru-hiker.com/store.asp](http://www.thru-hiker.com/store.asp)

[www.sixmoondesigns.com/default.asp](http://www.sixmoondesigns.com/default.asp)

[www.tarptent.com/products.html](http://www.tarptent.com/products.html)

[www.integraldesigns.com/product.cfm?id=6&CFID=8851455&CFTOKEN=33548535&mainproducttypeid=1](http://www.integraldesigns.com/product.cfm?id=6&CFID=8851455&CFTOKEN=33548535&mainproducttypeid=1)

[www.backpacking.net/makegear.html](http://www.backpacking.net/makegear.html) (explore side index under 'Shelters')

[www.hikelight.com/shelters.html](http://www.hikelight.com/shelters.html)

You can make your own from ideas gained from any of these links, or that you have yourself.

As ever, gear should be chosen to suit expected possible conditions. For example, if extreme scrub bashing is likely, a heavier raincoat would be taken. This does not mean that a heavier sleeping bag, tent etc are also needed. Total gear weight would still be low.

The 'big three', where it is easiest to save substantial weight, are pack, shelter and sleeping gear. All three should be considered together - the weight saved on any one of these may well not be too apparent, but together they make a huge difference. It is not difficult to get the total of these three below the weight of a conventional internal frame rucksack alone (a little over 2 kgs). It is on these three that one should concentrate. For example, packs can go as low as 335 gms, sleeping gear about 800 gms (for down to freezing) and shelter down to 245 gms. How low you go depends on your priorities - we chose a 'heavy' 720 gm pack because it is made of much tougher material, does not have bush-snagging net pockets and other rubbish on the outside, has a hip harness and has a closed cell foam 'frame' (which can double as a sleeping mat). It will not last as long as a Macpac or WE pack, but then it is half the price.

Ultralight gear need not cost an arm and a leg. For under AU\$500, you should be able to get below 4.5 kgs, if you're prepared to do a little sewing. For example, the packs we use cost AU\$180 including postage (ready made), a winter-weight sleeping gear kit (single) from Ray Jardine is US\$79.90 and a shelter kit from Ray Jardine is US\$70.90 (or US\$118-85 with mozzie net inner) - a total of about AU\$450 for the 'big three' including exchange rates and postage.

Our gear is not as light as we plan to get to, but we have included some 'luxuries' in our gear - for example, a Thermarest, an EPIRB, and a double skin tent with full mozzie protection and heavy duty floor (rather than an ultralight tarp and plastic groundsheet).

For our present three season weekend gear list for two people, please refer to the **table on the final page**.

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### Sleeping Gear

[www.rayjardine.com/quilt/index.shtml](http://www.rayjardine.com/quilt/index.shtml) (we have a 'RayWay 2 person deluxe alpine quilt' - super warm, and very light. Ray raves on, but has a lot of experience (see his home page), and service is very good. His quilt kit is strongly recommended by us, either single or double - cheap also)

[www.thru-hiker.com/store.asp](http://www.thru-hiker.com/store.asp)

[www.featheredfriends.com/productoverview.aspx?CatId=1&selection=0](http://www.featheredfriends.com/productoverview.aspx?CatId=1&selection=0)

[www.gossamergear.com/cgi-bin/gossamergear/sleeplight.html](http://www.gossamergear.com/cgi-bin/gossamergear/sleeplight.html)

[www.integraldesigns.com/product.cfm?id=22&CFID=8851455&CFTOKEN=33548535&mainproducttypeid=1](http://www.integraldesigns.com/product.cfm?id=22&CFID=8851455&CFTOKEN=33548535&mainproducttypeid=1)

(click on image for more info)

### Packs

[www.tramplight.co.nz/feedback.htm](http://www.tramplight.co.nz/feedback.htm) (we have the 'Bushcrasher' packs - they are comfortable and easy to use, but could have more beef around the bottom for Aussie conditions. No attachments to catch when bush bashing. You need to post a cheque to order. Service good. Don't be tempted by Tramplight's sleeping bags - they lack insulation)

[www.thru-hiker.com/store.asp](http://www.thru-hiker.com/store.asp)

[www.sixmoondesigns.com/default.asp](http://www.sixmoondesigns.com/default.asp)

[www.gossamergear.com/cgi-bin/gossamergear/xdpy/s/Packing/index.html](http://www.gossamergear.com/cgi-bin/gossamergear/xdpy/s/Packing/index.html)

[www.backcountry.com/store/GOL0158/c3/s8/GoLite-Jam-2-Pack-3000-cu-in.html?id=F8cosLVN](http://www.backcountry.com/store/GOL0158/c3/s8/GoLite-Jam-2-Pack-3000-cu-in.html?id=F8cosLVN)

### Stoves

[www.tramplight.co.nz/feedback.htm](http://www.tramplight.co.nz/feedback.htm) (we have the little Varga meths stove. It is more fiddly to use than a Trangia burner, but is otherwise similar. Note that the 28 gms includes a stand! We have added a foil reflector, windshield and lid, which greatly increases efficiency. Total weight is then about 40 gms. We can give more of this foil to anyone who wants it (more robust than cooking foil))

[www.zenstoves.net](http://www.zenstoves.net) (any number of stove designs!)

[www.imrisk.com/woodgas/coffeestove.htm](http://www.imrisk.com/woodgas/coffeestove.htm) (a great little home made twig stove. See his other stove experiments by following the link at the bottom of his page)

### Materials and Kits

[www.thru-hiker.com/store.asp](http://www.thru-hiker.com/store.asp) (we bought all our materials here for tent etc. Very good service. Have also made one of their clothing kits, which worked well. Look at the weights of some of the clothing in the kits, and compare to what you carry!)

### Lightweight Breathable Raincoat

[www.integraldesigns.com/product\\_detail.cfm?id=840&CFID=8851455&CFTOKEN=33548535&mainproducttypeid=1](http://www.integraldesigns.com/product_detail.cfm?id=840&CFID=8851455&CFTOKEN=33548535&mainproducttypeid=1) (we have one of these on order. Will be interesting to see how it performs. E-Vent fabric has been widely reviewed as better than Gortex)

**Note** that postage from US is expensive - luckily this gear is light - but typically think of adding around \$30 to \$50 for postage. It is cheaper to order several things in one order.

For comparison, another couple of gear lists (with weights) from the US can be found here:

[www.fiddleheadpa.safeshopper.com/14/96.htm?567](http://www.fiddleheadpa.safeshopper.com/14/96.htm?567)

For how to go below 1.8 kgs ('psycholight'), see:

[www.gossamergear.com/cgi-bin/gossamergear/Photos\\_sub4.html](http://www.gossamergear.com/cgi-bin/gossamergear/Photos_sub4.html)

*(NB Looks like the Luddites miss out BIG time this time. For the others, please note that all the above web links can be accessed at the CMW website at [www.cmw.asn.au](http://www.cmw.asn.au) - click on 'Ultralight Gear' in the menu on the LHS of the screen. Again, the Luddites know who they are! - Editor).*

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Description	Steven (gms)	Mary (gms)
Pack (includes closed cell foam sleeping mat)	720	740
Sleeping quilt (extremely warm double, splits in two)	660	700
Fly, tent and pegs (equivalent to 630 gms per person)	1,260	-
Down jacket	340	340
Light fleece coat	240	240
Thermal top	160	160
Thermal long johns	60	60
Balaclava	60	55
Spare socks	50	50
First aid kit	-	160
Raincoat	150	150
Spare undies	45	30
Billy, meths stove including stand, windshield, fuel bottle	-	140
Mugs, bowls, cutlery etc. for two	-	140
Water purification	-	40
Pack liner (plastic bag)	60	60
Water bottle (platypus hydration bottle)	55	55
Head torch	60	60
Washing kit (teeth, soap etc. for two)	-	60
Knife, emergency blanket, odds and ends	30	150
Thermarest	440	440
Shovel	-	10
EPIRB	-	170
Long roller bandage for snake bite	40	40
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4,430</b>	<b>4,050</b>

The above gives an average of 4,240 gms per person. There is an excess of warm clothes for summer walking. Our aim is to get well below 4 kgs for Sydney region winter walking, still keeping our 'luxuries'. To do this, we plan to make new insulated jackets and a few other bits of clothing (our clothing at the moment is normal gear), and to try a much lighter shelter (around 400 gms), keeping our present tent for more extreme conditions.

Our advice to anyone contemplating going down this route is to weigh everything that you already own, see how it compares to what is available or can be made (which involves doing lots of reading on the web), then make decisions on where it is best to start **for you**. Make

lists of everything and total the weights up. But always remember, start with the big three - pack, shelter, sleeping gear. We are happy to share our experience, and will also consider making gear for others for a fair fee (to earn some money to continue experimenting!).

(NB Queries regarding the opinions, ideas and equipment mentioned in this article should be directed to the authors at email [stevenrobinson@optushome.com.au](mailto:stevenrobinson@optushome.com.au) or via their contact details in the Membership List - Editor).

