

3: Day Packs

Whilst probably not the most expensive item of walking kit in your wardrobe, your choice of day pack still merits some careful consideration. The wrong choice can have a big impact on your enjoyment and comfort.

Since there is a wide variety of products available here is a summary of what we consider to be the most important factors when choosing a day pack.



① Size

The size of a pack is measured in litres. For most single day trips, a pack of up to 35 litres will be adequate. With this, you'll have ample room for essentials such as Food & Water for the day, spare Dry Clothes, suitable Map, Compass, basic First Aid Kit, Pen/pencil and Paper, String (surprisingly useful for all sorts of things), Swiss Army Knife (just as useful), Survival Bag, Whistle & Torch. (See Hill Skills > What to Take > Essentials for more information on what to take.)

② Main Compartment

This is where you'll put most of your gear. It should be easy to access with 'gloved' or 'mittened' hands via a zip or a lid plus draw-string.

Newer designs may be able to hold an hydration system i.e. a liquid-containing 'bladder' plus hole through which a drinking tube is fed to the outside of the pack. There should also be some means of securing the drinking tube to the shoulder straps. Before deciding if this arrangement is for you, consider a couple of points. Do you like to check regularly on how much liquid you've consumed? Do you like to carry the weight of liquid further forward on your body rather than adding it to the load on your back? If the answer to either of these questions is 'yes', then you may prefer to carry water in a bottle carried externally. A water bottle is also easy to refill at a stream en-route.

③ Pockets

The external pockets are useful for storing items you'll need to access frequently during the day. As a minimum, it's a good idea to have one external pocket to hold a 1 litre water bottle plus one or two others for map/go4awalk.com pdf, hat and gloves. Half-moon or vertical zippers on these make it easier to access the contents than a straight-across zipper. Make sure all zippers have long enough 'tassels' to enable use when wearing mittens. Also, since the zipper is a weak point against water ingress, make sure all zips are covered by large enough flaps to keep out the worst of the weather.

④ Pole/Ice Axe Holder

If you use walking poles or an ice-axe it is important to be able to store them safely when you need both hands e.g. to climb up through rocks. Look for designs which include straps which can store these items safely out of the way.

⑤ Hip Belt

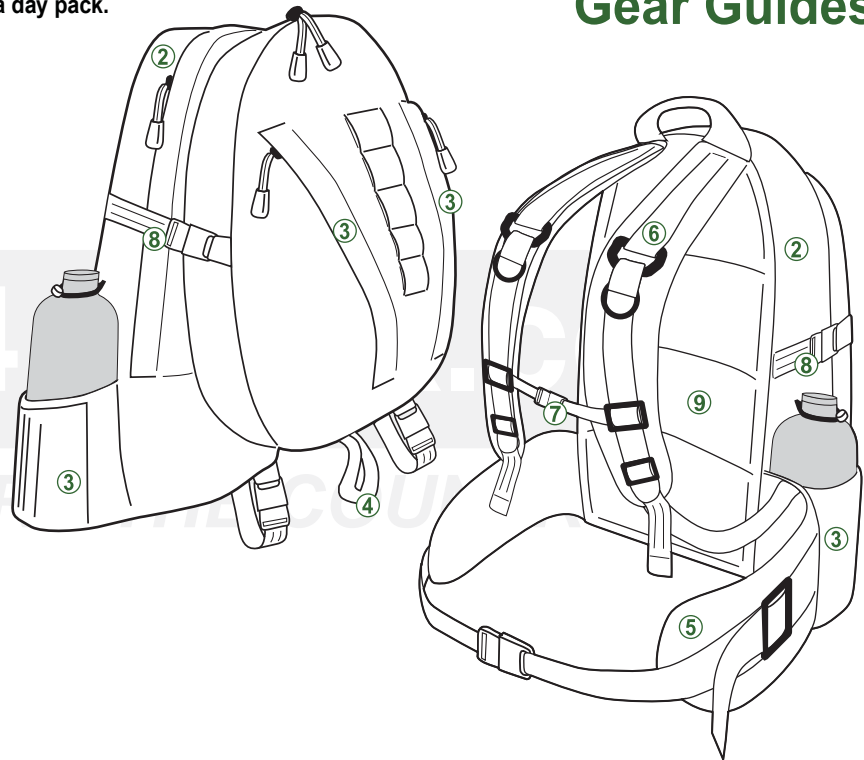
This carries the weight of the pack and should fit comfortably on your hips (NOT around your waist). It should be broad and padded. Some (more insightful!) manufacturers have recognised that women have a different shape to men and have hip belt designs which can be adjusted to suit. We would not recommend buying a day pack that did not have a proper padded hip belt.

⑥ Shoulder Straps

Should be padded, curved and adjustable so they 'hug' the natural shape of the body.

⑦ Chest Strap

Some models have a strap that fastens across the chest. By distributing the weight of the pack across the chest, pressure at the front of the shoulders is reduced increasing comfort. A chest strap will also prevent the shoulder straps from slipping off your shoulders if you're scrambling over rougher terrain.



⑧ Load Compression Straps

Usually located at the side of the pack, this simple strap and buckle allows compression of the pack around the contents stabilising the load when the pack is not full.

⑨ Back System

This should retain its shape even when the pack is fully loaded, be comfortably padded and include some means of ensuring ventilation between your back and the pack.

⑩ Fit

Don't be tempted to buy without trying. First put on the pack and fasten the hip belt making sure it settles comfortably. When the pack is empty, the shoulder straps should be about 2.5cms (1 inch) off your shoulder. You should then find that when the pack is fully loaded, the straps will be resting on your shoulders. If in doubt, get advice from the in-store technician.

⑪ Material of Construction

Most day packs are made of man-made materials which are light-weight and abrasion resistance. Another factor you may like to consider is tear resistance (or "Tenacity"). It is difficult to assess this in a shop but it is worthwhile checking out the manufacturers' claims.

Overall, the higher quality materials typically feel softer to the touch than their cheaper competitors.

The padding in a day sack is provided by foam. It's important to check that the strap which feels good in the shop will be just as comfortable when the pack is fully loaded. A good indicator of this is provided by the behaviour of the strap when squeezed. If the strap compresses to less than 25% of it's original size, then it's probably going to provide only minimum comfort when you're carrying the pack loaded.

⑫ Waterproof Covers

You're unlikely to find a day pack which is completely water-proof - even coatings only help a little as water will penetrate through zips and seams. To compensate for this you can use a rain cover either provided by the manufacturer or a generic cover. Make sure it is big enough to cover the day pack **plus** anything attached to it. This cover will reduce the accessibility of the day-sack but will keep it clean.

The other approach is to use an internal liner like a heavy gauge plastic bag or a "dry bag" designed for canoe/kayak trips. This ensures much easier access to the contents but the pack will get muddy and wet on the outside.

Miscellaneous

If you're likely to use your day pack as another piece of luggage, then a padded lifting handle at the top may also be useful.

The information given in this document has been provided in good faith. It is intended only as a general guide. We advise you to verify the accuracy of information before relying on it. It is the responsibility of individuals to approach outdoor activities such as the one described on this page with caution. The activity described can be strenuous and individuals should ensure they are fit enough before embarking upon it. If in doubt, seek medical advice.

Appropriate equipment and maps should always be carried, along with suitable clothing and footwear. Always follow the Countryside Code. More information about the Countryside Code, clothing, equipment and how to use it can be found on the go4awalk.com website.

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