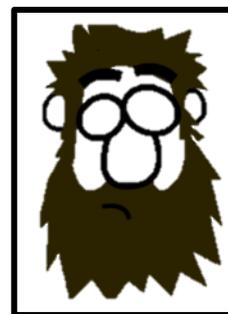


Uncle Wacko's Gear Corner



TRAMPING GEAR ADVICE FROM THE EXPERT

Big 3 wrap up

So if you've been paying attention you'll know we've now dealt to your big 3 items of tramping kit. We've steered you towards some stunningly good lightweight gear that'll stand up to the rigours of NZ tramping.

But there are a bunch of options for each bit of kit and Uncle Wacko knows that when it comes to making decisions, some of you have a less than stellar track record. So he's gonna make it even easier for you.

Here are 4 cracker gear combinations, each with a different focus. Pick your combo based on how fanatical you are about weight and quality, and how willing you are to part with your hard-earned dosh.

Prices aren't included as they aren't set in concrete and some would be in USD anyway. Weights are approximate.

The gram counter combo

For those who want the lightest kit no matter what, to hell with the price.

Item	Kit	grams	
Pack	ZPacks Arc Blast	680	
Bag	ZPacks 20F Classic	560	
Pad	Thermarest NeoAir X-Lite S	230	
DS Shelter	Vaude Lizard GUL 1P	690	
SS Shelter	ZPacks Plexamid		420
Total weight	(with double skin shelter)	2160	
Total weight	(with single skin shelter)		1890

The perfectionist's combo

Where you simply want the best – the most feature-filled, comfortable, durable – and are happy to pay for it.

Item	Kit	grams	
Pack	Granite Gear Crown 2	1070	
Bag	WM TerraLite	820	
Pad	Thermarest NeoAir X-Lite R	350	
DS Shelter	Hilleberg Enan	1200	
SS Shelter	TarpTent Aeon Li		500
Total weight	(with double skin shelter)	3440	
Total weight	(with single skin shelter)		2740

The Scrooge McDuck combo

If price is key and you want the cheapest kit that'll still do the job.

Item	Kit	grams	
Pack	Osprey Levity/Lumina	890	
Bag	MacPac Epic 400	810	
Pad	Thermarest NeoAir X-Lite S	230	
DS Shelter	Terra Nova Laser Competition 1	970	
SS Shelter	6 Moons Designs Lunar Solo		740
Total weight	(with double skin shelter)	2900	
Total weight	(with single skin shelter)		2670

The compromise combo

Where you want value for money – you'll happily pay a bit more for better quality or less weight, but not heaps more for a small gain.

Item	Kit	grams	
Pack	6 Moons Designs Minimalist	960	
Bag	Sea to Summit Spark/Flame III	650	
Pad	Thermarest NeoAir X-Lite S	230	
DS Shelter	Terra Nova Laser Competition 2	1230	
SS Shelter	6 Moons Designs Lunar Solo		740
Total weight	(with double skin shelter)	3070	
Total weight	(with single skin shelter)		2580

Feedback

This column has a confirmed readership of 4.

There could be others, but Uncle Wacko hasn't exactly been swamped with book advances or celebrity speaking engagements, so maybe not.

Reader 1 tootled down to Bivouac and bought an Osprey Lumina. And Uncle Wacko thought he'd done enough to put youz all off those flappy, strappy, crappy Ospreys. Maybe she missed the first page of that column.

Oh well, at least she didn't buy a bloody Aarn.

Reader 2 politely hinted that Uncle Wacko was a prize prat for not recommending Feathered Friends sleeping bags. The warmest, fluffiest, cutest things since the Chinese bred the Pekinese, apparently.

Now Uncle Wacko agrees Feathered Friends bags are a fine option at the quality end of the market, alongside Western Mountaineering. And our reader pointed out they make a women's cut, which not all brands do. If you fancy a Feathered Friend, you've got Uncle Wacko's blessing, they're excellent bags.

Reader 3 met some resistance from a knobbly-kneed sales kid when she went to buy a NeoAir X-Lite. They're a bit of a pain to inflate, he confided. So let's get this straight. By the time you hit camp you've probably taken what, 3 or 4 thousand breaths that day. And most people do continue breathing for some time after they reach camp – although it's not compulsory. So the kid is saying that dedicating 20 odd of your next few thousand breaths to inflating your air mattress is a huge burden?

You've charged up hills, forded raging torrents, battled malicious bush lawyer, yet don't have the energy to breathe into your mattress? If that's you, stick to huts. And maybe swap tramping for needlework.

The kid's other objection was they can get mouldy and a bit smelly. Now Uncle Wacko reckons that's a pretty decent description of trampers in general, but that's beside the point. And trampers do get rather accustomed to the odd wee smelliness. Ever caught a whiff of four day old trampers' socks or used a fly-infested long drop, kid?

Now it's feasible that moist air blown into a mattress could cause mould. Let's just say that Uncle Wacko has been using his NeoAir for donkey's and never had a hint of mustiness. Of course he sure ain't gonna slice it open to check and if it did have a touch of mould it wouldn't bother him anyway.

This 'problem' is on a par with the concern that leads people to eat kale, take a water bottle to a 12 minute yoga session, stumble over what pronoun to use for beings of indeterminate gender. It's a non-issue. The kid needs to get out more.

Reader 4 suggested Uncle Wacko may have been too hasty dismissing self-inflating pads. He says he found it damn near impossible staying dry and blowing up an inflatable in his tiny tent in the hissing rain.

So he switched to a Thermarest ProLite, and problem solved. Fair enough.

The ProLite has an R-value of 2.4 and the small weighs 350 grams. That's 120g or almost 50% more than the NeoAir X-Lite, but get this ... it's also about 50% cheaper. You'll save yourself a hundy at the very least. Which Uncle Wacko reckons makes it a good cheaper option after all.

But stay away from the thicker and warmer ProLite Plus (R-Value 3.4). At 450 g it's way too heavy to be lugging around the hills.

Geez, Uncle Wacko doesn't reckon he's written three pages since primary school. Bloody exhausting!

Time to put the feet up and perhaps try a medicinal brew or two.

Spot ya.

Uncle Wacko