

# Backpacks

For a Philmont trek you need a rugged backpack with plenty of capacity for carrying your personal gear as well as food, water and your share of the crew gear. Good packs weighing about 5 pounds or less are available in the price range of \$140 to \$250. When selecting a backpack, weight of the backpack itself is very important and often overlooked. Also, you need enough capacity - between 4,000 cubic inches and 4,600 cubic inches (66 liters to 75 liters). For external frame packs the capacity tends to be lower as a number of items can also be attached or strapped to the frame, while everything will be inside an internal frame pack. Some packs have inside compartments for sorting your gear. Others have none. There might be exterior pockets for stowing water bottles, a map and compass, a first-aid kit, or other items you'll want in a hurry. Think about how you like to organize the contents of a pack, then choose one which has pockets that match your needs.

The choice of external or internal frame is yours - either is suitable for Philmont. An external frame pack is terrific for most backpacking, especially on open trails. In hot weather, air movement between the pack and your back can help you keep cool. An internal frame pack features a frame structure stitched inside the fabric bag. The pack will ride closer to your back for better balance while scrambling on mountains, and traveling over rough ground.

You wouldn't buy hiking boots without trying them on - that's also good advice when shopping for backpacks. Make sure you get a pack that fits you. Hoist the backpacks of other Scouts during troop hikes and campouts, and notice how each pack feels. If you're borrowing one, get it from someone your size. At the store, put weight in the packs that interest you (clerks might allow you to use rolled up tents for ballast), then swing each onto your shoulders and tighten the hip belt. The right pack should rest easily on your hips. Backpacks maybe should really be called "hippacks", because that's where the weight belongs.

Once you've selected a backpack, have an experienced backpacker help you adjust the myriad straps and buckles until it feels right. Any backpack you consider should have a padded waist belt. If you're thin, a more heavily padded hip belt helps, too. When you put the pack on, be sure to shift it up high enough so that all the weight is on your hips, not your back and shoulders. The shoulder straps are to hold the pack tight to your body, not to carry the weight. Each time you put the pack on, you should tighten the straps, in order - hip belt, shoulder straps, hip adjusters (on the hip belt), load levelers (if present, on the shoulder straps), sternum strap. When it comes time to take off the pack, first loosen the straps in the reverse order of tightening them and then remove the pack from your back. The process of adjusting the straps each time you put the pack on will assure that it will be comfortable on your back.

Check out the videos on the [Equipment](#) tab of the [Training Videos](#) page of the [Watchu Experience](#) Web site ([www.watchu.org](http://www.watchu.org)) to see the differences between internal and external frame backpacks, pointers on how to pack either type of backpack, and how to safely get a pack on and off of your back.

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**Tip:** Philmont rents very good internal and external frame packs for about \$20. If you don't have one that is large enough and don't care to buy another pack, consider borrowing one from a friend for training and then renting one when you get to Philmont.

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**Phil Fact:** Charles Springer owned the Eagle Nest Reservoir west of Philmont until selling it in 2005 to the state of New Mexico.

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With my pack sack a creakin' (from the Philmont *Ranger Song*)

Charles Springer

CS Cattle Company, Springer, New Mexico