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Recommended Backpack Equipment List

General Considerations

The best gear you can bring is a pair of lungs and legs in the best shape possible. All the money in the world can't buy gear that will replace fitness. If you smoke, try your best to quit before your trip.

Use all your gear before your trip. This especially applies to boots, pack and safety equipment. New, not-worn-in boots can ruin a trip. Making sure your day pack fits well will make your trip more enjoyable.

If you are coming with a group that is hunting in the same camp, do not duplicate items. Work with each other to organize who brings what. Everywhere we hunt requires pack stock. We want to avoid packing unneeded weight.

We pack bows in hard cases on pack stock. Pack your archery and rifle tools/parts in your personal gear to be packed on stock.

The weather in September is unpredictable and any day can turn out to be a winter day up in the high country. A large portion of our hunting area is around 11,000ft and above. Days can be warm, into the 70's, and nights below freezing.

Stay away from cotton, i.e. Carhartt, blue jeans, cotton socks, etc... When cotton gets wet it is useless and it will exacerbate suboptimal weather's effect on your body. Focus on wool and synthetics. There is a lot of newer technology clothing that is lightweight, packable, warm and dries quickly.

For current model/brand recommendations and links for where to purchase items visit [Our Current Gear Recommendations Page](#). This page is not a gearlist but instead a centralized repository of up-to-date suggestions of model/brand. There are no longer specific model/brand recommendations in the below gearlist. With new items coming out and other items being discontinued continuously, it's become impossible to keep the individual hunt gearlists up-to-date with model/brands.

Your pack should weigh 45lbs or less for these backpack trips. Expect to carry an additional 5-10lbs of food and other gear at times during the hunt.

Don't hesitate to give us a call about any specific gear questions.



Boots and Footwear

1 Primary pair of waterproof hiking boots.

- If we have indicated to you that we will be hunting our high camps, a mountaineering type boot is best. Specific boot models [here](#).
- Try to visit a retail location where you can try on different boot models. Fit is essential.
- In steep terrain, the rigidity of the sole is more important than the boot height. Wearing boots that are uncomfortably high can cause “shin bump”, an uncomfortable sore spot on your shins.

2-4 Pair sock liners

- Thin liner socks will help you avoid blisters and allow you to pack fewer pairs of primary socks.
- We prefer ultra-thin, silk liners. Merino wool and synthetics will also work well.

2-3 Pair primary socks

- Even in September, the best option is heavy wool.
- If you tend to have warm feet, bring lightweight wool socks in place of your liner socks. If the weather is warm, you can just wear the lightweight socks.

Gators (Optional)

- Great in snow and/or rain. Also great when dealing with high, frosty or dewy vegetation
- Keep your boots and feet dryer

We keep an up-to-date [First Lite Layering Guide by Season](#) on our website.

Base Clothing

1-2 Pairs of long underwear

- Synthetics and merino wool are good options
- Get different weights so you have flexibility for temperatures
- You will not need heavy, wool long underwear
- You can substitute synthetic boxer shorts if you know you run warm

All clothing, except base clothing, should be camouflage. First Lite, Sitka and Kuiu patterns work well. Other patterns also work well.

Bring quiet gear. If it goes “swoosh” when you move, don’t bring it.

Daily Layers

1 Mid-weight hunting shirt

1 Pair hunting pants

3 Layer Outerwear System ([Recommendations](#))

(If you run cold, bring a Primaloft or down insulated jacket, vest or something similar in addition to these layers)

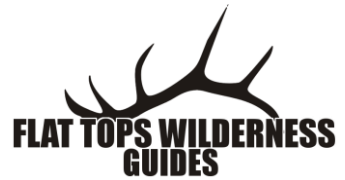
1 Lightweight fleece or soft-shell jacket

1 Hunting jacket for cold weather

- Wool or wool/synthetic is best.
- Needs to have wind stopping attributes.

1 Full set of rain gear

- Don’t forget rain pants!



Other Clothing

1-2 Pairs of Gloves

- We prefer glommits because they allow us to use our fingers. Several of us shoot recurves via finger release.
- You can also wear dark pig skin leather gloves with separate wool liners for insulation if needed.
- Some of our archers choose to not wear gloves so they are better ready for shooting opportunities.
- Learn to quickly remove or shoot your bow with your chosen gloves.

1 Warm hat and/or baclava

- We usually wear wool beanies, but this is personal preference
- Light fleece hats can be plenty warmth during archery season

Camo face paint

- The tube kind works and travels the best



Archery/Hunting Gear

Bow

Arrows with extra broadheads and fieldpoints (8-10 arrows)

- Work with an archery shop to setup a consistent set of arrows specifically geared towards elk and mule deer
- We do not make recommendations on arrow specifics because so much personal preference is involved. The important factor is that you have practiced and are confident at varying distances.
- You must safely pack your broad heads and arrows for packing on mules. Arrows must be in a hard tube. Large diameter pvc pipe with caps works well. Poster tubes also work. Broad heads must be packed off in a hard box or tin. No exceptions.

Release and an extra release

Spare parts for you bow

Elk calls (Guides will bring)

- Learn how to use a cow call well. Bull bugles used too frequently and aggressively save more elk than any conservation effort. If you want to bugle, learn how to do a non-aggressive bugle or understand how to get close and use an aggressive bugle.

Wind indicator

Do not bring a pistol. It is just added weight and will not protect you any better than your bow.

If you are rifle bear hunting, bring a .270 caliber rifle or larger with 20 bullets.



Tool Gear

1 Head lamp

- A light with both a red and white light is best. Having multiple bulbs is a good backup and red is better while riding because the horses/mules are more comfortable with it.

1 Small flashlight/backup lamp

1 Small GPS

- Simple GPS's are fine.

Extra batteries and bulbs for all equipment

Topo map and compass

- Check your compass to make sure it is pointing to North
- Do not store your compass near lead fishing weights or similar items. It is easy to reverse polarize today's cheaper compass. A reverse polarized compass will take you in the exact opposite direction.

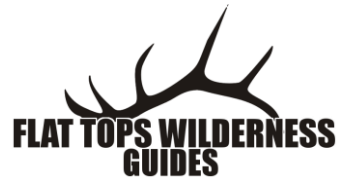
Binoculars

- Your optics are the second most important piece of gear, right behind boots.
- We have had good luck with the top models from Nikon. Swarovski and other euro glass optics are worth the money if you plan to use them for years of hunting.
- Low-light performance is the most important variable.
- Cliff guides use 8x42 ELs because he prefers the light gathering of a 5mm+ exit pupil.

One of the best high end optics dealers on the planet is Jaret Owens in Ojai, CA. Jaret has a lifetime of guiding under his belt, has unbeatable pricing and treats people well. Give him a call at 805-551-6815 and tell him Colorado Cliff sent you.

Binocular Harness

- [Harnesses we recommend](#)



Spotting Scope (optional) (Guides will bring)

- On hunts where we will be scoring animals, your guide will have a good scope
- When not scoring animals, tripod compatible binoculars are generally better than a big scope for finding animals. If going this route, 15x56 Swaros are a worthy lifetime investment.

Rangefinder (optional) (Guides will bring)

- The best thing you can do is practice with an elk-sized target at know distances
- Do not practice with a whitetail or smaller target. This will cause you to underestimate the distance of live elk and mule deer

Knives and game cleaning

- [Knives we can recommend](#)
- Some of us use axes for quartering, but your guide or drop camp will already be supplied with them.
- Small bone saws are not necessary. It's difficult to saw an elk pelvic bone with these small saws. Learn to short quarter elk (gutless method).

(Not needed on guided hunts. Having a good knife on you is always a good idea, but your guide will perform your field dressing for you.)

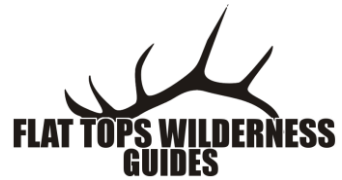
5 Game Bags (Guides will bring)

- We can hang your quarters in game bags at base camp in our cool cabin facility.
- Handful of surveyors tape to mark downed game, blood trails or signal your location

(Not needed on guided hunts. We provide game bags in our guided camp.)

Pack

- A comfortable pack
- A lot of mainstream backpacking companies make great internal frame options
- Make sure all your gear and water fit comfortably in your pack.
- Just like your boots, get use to your pack before you arrive.
- For backpack hunts, do not bring a day pack. You need a 5,000 cubic inch bag or larger.
- [List of Pack Recommendations](#)



Camera/Phone

- Bring your charger and a way to recharge (lightweight charge pack is best)

Water bottle and/or hydration bladder

- Sturdy bladders that go in your day pack are best
- A plastic bottle (Nalgene or Gatorade bottle) are light and useful in addition to a main bladder

Water purification tablets or water purifiers

- Many of our guides carry water purifiers, but you need a light weight personal purifying method.
- Steri-pens, gravity filters, and pump filters all work well. Learn how to use your choice safely before the trip.
- Electrolyte tablets improve the taste of purified water (tablet purified, filtered, or boiled) and add an energy boost.
- [Water purification gear recommendations](#)

A small hand stove

- An easy to use and light stove like the JetBoil are nice to have for quick water purification or making up a hot cup of tea or instant coffee in the field. You can also start a hell of a fire with them if you get into a bind.
- Bring fuel with the expectation of running the stove twice per day for 20 mins.
- Notify us if you are flying and we will make sure to have additional fuel cartridges here for you.

Walking Stick – I prefer a Black Diamond Whippet – Lots of options from mainstream outdoor companies. [Recommendations.](#)

Personal Gear

Sleeping bag

- For September season a 0-15 degree rated bag is best.
- Down, treated down, or synthetic is fine. If down, bring a waterproof stuff sack.
- Keep it under 3lbs

Lightweight sleeping pad – try at home and decide what works best for you – keep it light

Personal Hygiene and Medication Items

- Make sure you have enough of any prescriptions
- Keep your personal hygiene gear lightweight (no big tubes of toothpaste!)
- If you have had anaphylaxis (allergic reaction) to bees or other insects, please carry an Epi-Pen at all times.
- Pepto-Bismol and other routine medications can be helpful
- Altitude medication if you have a history of altitude sickness
- Carry personal Aspirin as an immediate treatment for heart attack or pain.
(We carry extensive first aid kits in our guided camps. These include basic medication like Ibuprofen, Aspirin, Pepto, Imodium)

Baby Wipes

- No better bathroom wipe around

Chapstick and Sunscreen

Bug spray

Couple pairs of latex or equivalent gloves for cleaning game or first aid

An extra pair of eye glasses or contacts if you wear them

Super absorbent personal towel

Tent (will be provided)

- Hilliberg Akto, Kifaru Super Tarp or similar model tents will be used.

Mess Kit

- Lightweight spork or similar eating utensil
- Lightweight coffee cup (aluminum or titanium)



Safety Gear

Design a method to carry the bare essential safety gear on your person at all times.

Fire starting capability

- Being able to start a fire quickly, without panic, can save your life.
- We use wax covered cotton balls or wax covered dryer lint as tinder that we always carry. These hold a flame for up to a minute in the worst conditions. Always carry tinder that you are confident using. **Do not depend on starting a fire from natural material.**
- Storm matches and water proof matches are good for starting fires here. High altitude can drastically affect the reliability of lighters.
- Have more than one way to start a fire on your person at all times

2 Heavy Duty Garbage Bags

- 2 mil+ 55 gallon contractor bags are best
- These bags work better than the thin, shiny safety blankets you find in first aid kits
- Cut a hole for your head and wear as a poncho to keep yourself warm and dry
- Heavy duty emergency bags (usually called emergencies bivys) are a good alternative

Extra Batteries and Bulbs for your Devices

Water purification tablets

Communication device (Guides will bring)

- In our contracts, we mandate that our hunters rent or we rent on their behalf, a satellite phone or satellite message system (Spot, InReach, etc...)

Parachute Cord 15-30ft

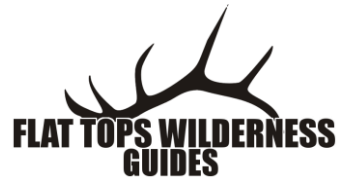
Whistle for signaling

Small 8x10 Tarp (optional)

- Can be bulky but great to put in the bottom of your day pack until the day you need it. Fantastic for extra warmth or a quick shelter from elements.

Zip ties

- Useful for a ton of different things from emergency shoe laces to making a quick shelter



First Aid Kit

Our guides carry first aid kits and our camps have first aid kits in them. Do not waste weight by carrying first aid items you won't use or do not know how to use. For example if you don't have any wilderness medicine training, a zip lock bag with Band-Aids, gauze, Neosporin, tweezers, Benadryl, Moleskin, soap and Ibuprofen is plenty.

If you are at risk of a heart attack, bring Aspirin.

Bring an Epi-Pen if you are allergic to any insects. You must get these via doctor's prescription.

Paper Work

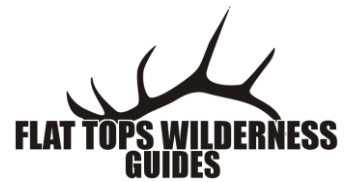
Hunting license and tag

Fishing license if you plan to fish

Anyone born after Jan. 1, 1949 MUST have a Hunter's Safety Card to buy a Colorado hunting license. You must also carry your card with you while hunting!

Any remaining payment for your trip

- **We will not pack in hunters who have not completely paid for their trip.**
- Cash preferred. Cashier's checks are OK. **We do not accept personal checks or credit cards for the remaining balance.**



Important Items Our Guides Carry (Consider these when you are trying to cut weight)

Knives

Radio or other communication

Fire starting capability

Tarp

Bivy bag or contractor's garbage bags

Rope or Parachute Cord

Compass

Surveyors' tape

Elk calls

Game bags

Garbage bags for trash

Game field dressing and quartering equipment

First Aid Kit:

Gauze pads, Combine dressing, Band-aids, Roller gauze, Occlusive dressings, Triangular bandage, Elastic wrap (Ace bandage), Sam splint or Wire splint, Exam gloves, 1 CPR Pocket mask, Blister kit (moleskin, second skin), Splinter tweezers, Medical tape