

Packing Lite

Recently I got two emails concerning the required equipment. One guy was thinking about doing the Everglades Challenge (EC) and the other was thinking about doing the Ultra Marathon (UM). Both of them thought that the required equipment was too much. And both of them were missing the point of all WaterTribe events. First they need to understand what we are about. And second, they need to be more creative in satisfying the requirements.

All WaterTribe Challenges and Ultra Marathons are Expedition-Style Adventure Races. What does that mean?

Expedition-Style means that we have to carry all the "stuff" that you would need for an expedition into the wild for a minimum of four weeks. We compress that into a shorter number of days so that people with responsibilities can live their dream and still have a career and a family. The time limit and the "any weather" format add the challenge and adventure to what would normally be just any old paddle or sail trip. Let's face it. Just about anyone can paddle through the Everglades. But can they do it at night, alone, after already doing 200 miles in three days? Can they face any weather? Can they overcome their own demons? No, not everyone can do that.

Adventure Race means that this is not an "around the buoys" sprint. Even if you are capable of paddling at over 6 knots for several hours you do not have any support available. You are on your own in a hostile environment. There is no safety net. There are no safety boats. Nobody is looking after you. Adventure means that bad stuff can happen at any time: foul weather, tricky currents, nasty critters, power boats, blisters, pulled muscles, mental anguish, sleep deprivation, and the list goes on. A sprint race over a controlled course is not adventure. WaterTribe Challenges and Ultra Marathons are adventure. The time limits make these Adventure Races.

So in the context of planning a four-week expedition the required equipment list begins to look rather minimalist. On an expedition you're going to camp out in the wilderness for weeks so you will need a shelter. You will need to cook food. You will need something to keep you warm while sleeping. You need to deal with any weather and you may be weather-bound for many days. Hypothermia is one of the biggest killers in the wild. Injuries and infections are common and no doctors are available. What items in the Required Equipment List (REL) can you get rid of? Nothing.

So you have to pack lite (yes, I know it is misspelled) and use synergistic systems to achieve a minimalist solution that satisfies the REL. Let's examine some of the items required and see how to use them together to satisfy other requirements when we want to go ultra light.

Hypothermia Recovery

Since hypothermia is one of the biggest killers and we are dealing with a cold, wet environment, the Hypothermia Recovery Kit is one of your most important pieces of gear. The best and most reliable system consists of the following:

- Mylar space blanket modified with a neck hole:
[http:// www.WaterTribe.com /Magazine/Y2002/M12/StevelsaacModifySpaceBlanket.aspx](http://www.WaterTribe.com/Magazine/Y2002/M12/StevelsaacModifySpaceBlanket.aspx)
- Hypothermia Kit:
[http:// www.WaterTribe.com/Magazine/Y2002/M12/StevelsaacMakeAHypothermiaKit.aspx](http://www.WaterTribe.com/Magazine/Y2002/M12/StevelsaacMakeAHypothermiaKit.aspx)
- Synthetic poncho liner with Ranger Rick neck zipper. This is similar to the modified space blanket but the neck hole is a YKK zipper. Unfortunately, the Ranger Rick kit is no longer sold. But all you need is a YKK zipper to sew in a neck hole.
- Silicon poncho with grommet points so it can be used as a tarp.
- Candle lantern with a fresh candle and storm proof matches
- Know how to use these items:
[http:// www.WaterTribe.com /Magazine/Y2002/M12/StevelsaacWhenGodsPlay.aspx](http://www.WaterTribe.com/Magazine/Y2002/M12/StevelsaacWhenGodsPlay.aspx)

Be careful when using the matches and candle lantern because some of the other items can be flammable. You may want other items as well: hand warmer packs, energy gel, etc. Note that a fire starting kit is a separate REL item.

Note that you need to dress properly for paddling and that base layer is maintained while recovering from hypothermia.

Sacrosanct Camp Clothes

You need a set of clothing that you never, under any circumstances use while paddling or sailing. These clothes must always be kept dry. Use on land only while camping.

- Long Johns using Morrino Wool or synthetic fibers
- Socks using Morrino Wool or synthetic fibers
- Hat using Morrino Wool or synthetic fibers
- Light weight trousers
- Light weight shirt
- Synthetic vest or jacket
- Optional - Crocs or some other kind of quick shoe or sandal

This list provides a base layer and a mid layer. In cold or rainy weather it is assumed you will use your foul weather paddling jacket and trousers as an outer layer.

Sleep System

Basically there are only two components to a sleep system.

- A closed cell pad or an inflatable pad will keep you off the cold ground and allow more comfortable sleep and recovery.
- A very light weight sleeping bag using synthetic materials. For the EC any bag rated for less than 40°F is probably too heavy. Remember that you will be using your sacrosanct camp clothes along with the bag. In extreme cold you can add your poncho liner and even your space blanket for additional warmth. And don't forget you have a candle lantern which adds considerable heat.
- Optional - pillow which will add to your comfort and allow better recovery to begin the next day.

Consider sleep as a recovery period that is essential to keep motivated and keep going day after day. Make sure you are comfortable. The longer the expedition the more comfort you need. Also, select the bag according to the conditions for your trip. A very light bag that works for the EC might not be appropriate if your expedition is above the arctic circle.

Shelter System

Here you have some choices and they all have pros and cons. The choice is yours.

- A 3 season tent - what if all you have is mangroves?
- A camping hammock - can it be pitched without trees? This is my choice.
- A bivy bag and a tarp - this can actually weigh almost as much as the other two choices and isn't as comfortable or even that quick to setup - highly over rated in my opinion.

Some folks carry all three, but that is a bit much. If you really are on a long expedition and the location has jungle, swamp, and mixed terrain, I'd carry both a tent and a camping hammock. Use the tent for longer camps in areas that have room. If the terrain is more jungle, get a Clark hammock. If the terrain is more open and the hammock is backing up the tent, get a very light Hennessy hammock. If you are doing the EC, pick a tent or hammock.

It's Still a Lot of Stuff

Those are your four main components of "expedition-style" gear that WaterTribe requires. If you are in the Everglades Challenge, North Carolina Challenge, or the Ultimate Florida Challenge, that is what I want to see at the equipment inspection. If you skimp too much on these items, you are not really prepared for our four week expedition compressed into a week. You are not really carrying an expedition load.

But what if you are an Olympic class paddler doing the Ultra Marathon and you know you will be done in 10-12 hours. You feel that you don't really need all this stuff and all it does is slow you down. What can you do to lighten the load and still comply with the REL?

Synergistic Systems

This is extreme light weight and still meets the requirements. I don't recommend this for a real expedition, but if you want to push the limits, this is one way to do it.

The hypothermia recovery kit is unchanged.

The shelter system is the silicon poncho and a ground cloth. You need to add enough stakes and parachute cord to use the poncho as a tarp.

The sleep system is your regular sacrosanct camp clothes and your poncho liner along with a sleeping pad. The sleeping pad can be closed cell foam (lightest) or self inflating (some newer ones are really light weight).

This approach saves a couple of pounds. Is it worth it? Not to me. I still want my hammock.

This system works really well if you just want to sit out a nasty storm for a couple of hours and get a bit of sleep. Depending on the weather just throw on your space blanket, poncho liner, and poncho over your paddling clothes and sit against a tree out of the wind and go to sleep. Make sure your neck is open a bit because your own body heat will dry synthetic layers and generate steam. Sit on your PFD for insulation from the ground.

Try this system In a controlled environment like your backyard before you try it for real.

I have done this many times in the jungle and once in my father-in-laws backyard in a snow bank.

This system even works while at anchor if you have a stable boat. I wouldn't recommend sleeping in a class 1 or class 2 kayak.