

VOTED! THE BEST HIKES NEAR YOU

# BACKPACKER

THE OUTDOORS AT YOUR DOORSTEP

## Readers' Choice Awards

A special issue by hikers, for hikers

### Your Favorite...

#### » TRAILS

**44** dayhikes, weekends, and life-list adventures

#### » SKILLS

**36** first-aid, cooking, wildlife, survival, and map secrets

#### » GEAR

**13** midsize packs and ultralight bags for every trip and budget

### Bears!

Are you unknowingly attracting them? Find out on page 40.



2009's BEST READER TIPS

PLUS: Your real-life survival stories



JANUARY 2010

\$4.99US



AMAZING READER PHOTOS: KEVIN MALLOUET NAILED THIS SHOT ON A FIVE-DAY HIKE IN UTAH'S HUCKSWIN GULCH. SEE MORE IMAGES FROM OUR READER CONTEST ON PAGE 54.



The extendable collar and floating top lid accommodate bulky items.

**CRITERIA** \$160 or less; enough capacity for a weekend load (or ultralight week); hydration compatible  
**TEST NUMBERS** Milesiked 927, average load carried 27 pounds  
**RATING SCALE** 5 = Perfect gear, 1 = Save your money (Overall rating is not an average of other scores.)

|         |        |        |        |        |
|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Overall | Tester | Tester | Tester | Tester |
|         | 3.0    | 2.5    | 4.0    | 1.5    |

**[best organization]**

**ALPS Mountaineering Orzaba**

If you like easy access and a dedicated spot to put everything, you'll love the Orzaba's pockets (two side, one front, one internal, and one hipbelt), U-shaped

- > **Capacity** 3,051 cu. in.
- > **Weight** 3 lbs. 14 oz.
- > **Sizes** One unisex
- > **Price** \$120
- > **Info** [alpsmountaineering.com](http://alpsmountaineering.com)

panel access zipper, separate sleeping bag compartment (also zippered), floating top lid, and bungee systems lining both sides. "It's a dream to pack," said Rochfort after a three-day trip in the Tetons, but don't overdo the weight. "It doesn't have the structure or support to handle loads of more than 25 pounds." The torso length adjusts

(from 17 to 20.5 inches) via a standard ladder system, and two parallel aluminum stays stiffen the suspension. But the stays don't attach directly to the padded hipbelt, so there's no direct weight transfer to the hips. Still, Trotter called the Orzaba his favorite pack after his partner tweaked her ankle and he had room to carry his gear and hers. Durability concern: After normal wear and tear, one of our samples suffered a (reparable) three-inch rip along the bottom corner of the main compartment. Best for: bulky (though not heavy) loads and mellow trails. Reader service #103

|         |        |        |        |        |
|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Overall | Tester | Tester | Tester | Tester |
|         | 3.0    | 3.5    | 3.0    | 2.5    |

**[best for winter]**

**Lowe Alpine Tour Attack 40**

This specialized pack split our testers, with some loving its performance for winter hiking and ski touring (and even climbing), and others having a tough time getting a good fit from the fixed suspension (18-inch torso length). Dax was a huge fan: "I bushwhacked through 20 miles of Sierra snow, and it stuck to me like glue." He also praised the secure and stable

- > **Capacity** 2,440 cu. in.
- > **Weight** 2 lbs. 14 oz.
- > **Sizes** One unisex
- > **Price** \$150
- > **Info** [lowealpine.com](http://lowealpine.com)

ski-carry system, while Rochfort appreciated the large, zippered front pocket with a drainage hole. "It let me segregate wet layers," he says. A single aluminum stay provides structure (and saves weight); combined with stiff padding in the backpack, the suspension comfortably supports loads of about 25 pounds (fittingly, the non-extendable top lid and limited capacity inhibit overpacking). Giant zipper pulls are mitten-friendly, and the hipbelt has a gear loop and stash pocket. Bummer: A buckle broke on the lid's compression strap. Reader service #104



The secure side-carry system—with pass-through slots at the bottom—lets you crank down on skis and poles.



|         |        |        |        |        |
|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Overall | Tester | Tester | Tester | Tester |
|         | 2.5    | 2.5    | 3.0    | 3.5    |

**[bargain]**

**High Sierra Summit**

For light loads (less than 25 pounds), you can't beat this pack's features-to-price ratio. "You get it all: sleeping bag access, a shoulder strap accessory pocket, a built-in rain cover, accessible mesh water bottle pockets, and even a gear checklist sewn into the lid," says Flowers. And the construction is not cheap. Bulky zippers held up to repeated yanking and "the Duralite fabric is tough enough to handle getting dragged around the crag," says Leak, who used the Summit on several rock climbing trips. "And like the floating top lid, which made it easy to stash my rope." Tradeoff: The suspension left testers sore when they hauled typical weekend loads, because the single aluminum stay didn't provide enough load transfer, resulting in excess weight on the shoulders and upper back. And there's no framesheet, so hard gear poked testers in the back. The fixed suspension works best for 10- to 18-inch torsos. Reader service #105

- > **Capacity** 2,746 cu. in.
- > **Sizes** One unisex
- > **Weight** 3 lbs. 10 oz.
- > **Price** \$80
- > **Info** [highsierrasport.com](http://highsierrasport.com)



**MATTHEW GREY, 34**  
 Lab instrument sales,  
 Perkasie, PA  
 5'11", 170 lbs.; 18-inch torso  
 Test Hikes White Mountains,  
 NH; Catskills, NY; Baxter SP,  
 ME; Mt. Rogers, VA



**MATT HEZELTON, 23**  
 Student, Knoxville, TN  
 5'11", 155 lbs.; 17.5-inch torso  
 Test Hikes San Juan  
 Mountains, CO; Great  
 Smoky Mountains NP;  
 Laurel Highlands, PA



**WIN!** Tell us the name of the trail and peak from which this photo was taken for a chance to win a High Sierra Summit 45 pack. Entries due by December 10. Contest rules at [backpacker.com/skiye](http://backpacker.com/skiye).



## High Road

On the last of 27 consecutive trail days last summer, reader Cheryl Norlin of Bishop, California, paused on the flank of a high peak to snap this shot. From here, she had 11 miles to go before the end of her thru-hike. Can you guess the name of the trail she was about to finish and the peak from which this photo was taken?

### 1 in 2

Chances of getting a permit to hike this peak via the standard route in the annual lottery. (Missed it? You can still reserve leftover permits.) The most sought-after trip: first weekend in August. Best time for weather and low crowds: midweek in mid-September.

### 8,189

Difference, in feet, between the elevation stamped on the summit plaque and the current (higher) official elevation. No, the mountain isn't growing—the National Geodetic Survey has just developed increasingly accurate ways to measure elevations since the plaque was installed in 1930.

### 3

Number of national parks that this trail traverses—in addition to two wilderness areas and one national monument

### 3:9:58

Time—in days, hours, minutes—it took the current record-holder to fastpack the entire trail, unsupported, in late summer 2009

### 89

Percent of hikers who summit the peak via the main trail, a 10.7-mile walk-up that requires ascending more than 95 switchbacks. The remaining visitors summit via several technical routes, including a classic class 3 scramble first climbed in 1873.