

Let's Go Ultralight

By Steve Dougherty

Schedule

7:00 PM – Introduction
7:15 PM – How to become an Ultralight Backpacker
8:15 PM – Refreshments
8:30 PM – Ultralight Skills Training Logistics
8:30 PM – Ultralight 3-Day Backpack Logistics
8:35 PM – How to Register for a Chemeketan Trip
8:40 PM – Club Membership
8:45 PM – Dismiss

7:00 PM - Introduction

Instructor

The instructor is Steve Dougherty. Steve joined the Chemeketans in 1992. He has served as a climb leader since 1999, club president for three years and also instructs the club's annual Route Finding School. Steve has led over fifty climbing trips for the club and has summited all 18 of the Northwest's major peaks.

Why offer an ultralight backpack training?

As I get older I have found myself striving to find ways to continue doing my outdoor pursuits with diminishing physical fitness. Reducing my pack weight is fundamental to this objective. I also saw a need for hands on camping skills training. I have titled this effort "Let's Go Ultralight" because I am looking at this as a cooperative effort. I encourage all participants to share their own ideas and strategies for reducing pack weight so we can learn from each other.

Who are the Chemeketans?

The Chemeketans were founded in 1928 following a climb of Mt Hood that was sponsored by the YMCA. We have over 800 members and we provide a wide variety of outdoor trips including hiking, backpacking, climbing, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, and canoeing.

The club has some note worthy annual events:

- Annual Route Finding School (February)
- Annual Climb School (April)
- Annual Two Week Outing (August)

The club maintains a large cabin on Forest Service land off Whitewater Road above the town of Detroit. It has no running water or electricity but can accommodate groups as large as 25.

Chemeketan Retail Discounts

Salem Summit Co., 246 State St., Salem. 503-378-0300. 10%.
Oregon Mountain Community, 2975 NE Sandy Blvd, Portland. 503.227.1038. 10%.
The Mountain Shop, 1510 NE 37th, Portland. 503.288.6768. 15%.
Next Adventure, 426 SE Grand, Portland. 503.233.0706. 10%.
US Outdoor Store, 219 SW Broadway, Portland. 503.223.5937. 10%.
Peak Sports, 207 NW 2nd, Corvallis. 541.754.6444. 10%.
Redpoint Climbers Supply, 8283 11th St, Terrebonne. 800.923.6207. 10%.
Sports Authority, 831 Lancaster Dr. NE, Salem. 503-378-0300 - \$10 off purchase of \$50 or more

What does Ultralight Mean?

To be considered “ultralight”, one must limit the pack’s base weight to less than ten pounds. The base weight does not include the items you will wear when hiking or any consumable items (food, water, and fuel).

Recommended Reading

Ultralight Backpackin Tips, by Mike Clelland

Trail Life, by Ray Jardine

The Ultimate Hiker’s Gear Guide, Andrew Skurka

I highly recommend all three of these books. But if your budget only allows for one book, then purchase Ultralight Backpackin Tips, by Mike Clelland. I enjoy his light hearted style and am a big fan of his art work. Much of this document was gleaned from Mike’s book.

Websites

<http://www.geargrams.com/>

<http://www.rayjardine.com>

<http://andrewskurka.com/>

<http://ultralightbackpackintips.blogspot.com/>

<http://gossamergear.com>

Let’s Go Ultralight has Three Parts

Introduction

This two hour presentation is the introduction. You will learn what the term ultralight backpacking means and some strategies for achieving it.

Ultralight Skills Practice

A day long field session is planned to practice ultralight camping skills, such as use of a tarp, lightweight stoves, meal preparation, water filtration/treatment, etc. The location of the field training will depend on the number of registered participants.

Three Day Backpack

A three day "ultralight" backpack in the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness Area is planned for late July. Participants will strive to carry a pack with a base weight of less than ten pounds. Group size is limited to two groups of 12. Preference will be given to those who did the day long ultralight skills practice.

7:15 PM – How to become an Ultralight Backpacker

Get a Scale and Weigh Everything

Purchase a 5-pound digital postal scale that is accurate to a tenth of an ounce. A good scale should cost about \$20-\$30 and can be purchased at an office supply store. Enter the weight of each gear item in a spreadsheet. Your initial gear list will likely be well over the ten pound maximum, but with a spreadsheet you can easily modify your gear list and the total weight is automatically recalculated.



Steve's Recommended Practice – Use www.geargrams.com.

You don't have to create your own spreadsheet, if you use www.geargrams.com. It is a free web application that allows you to create and store your own custom gear lists. It automatically calculates the weight of your gear list.

Comfortable and Safe

One must bring enough gear to be comfortable and safe. The challenge is knowing which gear is absolutely necessary to be comfortable and safe. Thoughtful pre-trip planning is critical when making decisions about what gear is necessary. For example, researching the average high and low temperature and amount of rain fall for that time of year will help guide one's gear choices. The more knowledge one has about the conditions that will be encountered, the easier it will be to make intelligent decisions about what minimum gear is necessary.

Scrutinize Everything

Don't put items in your pack just because you always bring it. Put some real thought into every item. Ask yourself:

1. Will I be fine without this?
2. Is there a lighter option?
3. Can this item serve more than one purpose; is it "multi-use"?
4. Can I use something else and get the same results?

We NEED very little. Don't be swayed by your WANTS. You either need it or you don't. If you don't need it, then it does not go into your pack.

Make Your Own Gear

Most retail outdoor gear is built extra sturdy and has lots of bells and whistles that add to its weight. For example, instead of using the standard Nalgene water bottle use a disposable plastic drink bottle; it is essentially free and weighs much less. This past year, I learned to sew by making my own backpack from a kit on www.rayjardine.com.

Modify Your Gear

Don't be afraid to use a pair of scissors to trim anything you can. The act of shaving off small extraneous stuff will reinforce the ultralight mindset.

The Big Three

1. Backpack
2. Shelter
3. Sleeping Bag

These are the heaviest items. Reducing the weight of these three items down to a minimum is critical to getting the base weight under ten pounds. Focus on these items before tweaking the rest of your ultralight "kit".

Think in Systems

Each piece of gear is part of a system and there is an interdependency between the components of the system. Examples:

1. We have all been taught to wear a heavy leather boot for backpacking. However, when we go ultralight, we may no longer need the support of the heavy boots.
2. We can't carry a large load in a lightweight backpack.

3. Sleeping with clothes on allows one to sleep in a lighter sleeping bag.

Take Care of Your Equipment

Having eliminated the heavy durable gear from our pack, we must use greater caution in caring for our gear. One merely needs to show greater care. Ultralight backpackers don't sit on their backpacks. Every item in the pack is important so we do not want to lose a single piece. Always scan your campsites and rest break locations before leaving.

Ultimate Hiker

By going ultralight we are less like campers and more like hikers. Andrew Skurka describes himself as an "Ultimate Hiker" (See his book in the reading recommendations). He carries as light a load as possible because he is trying to cover a maximum number of miles in a day. He contrasts his Ultimate Hiker mindset with what he calls the "Ultimate Camper". The Ultimate Camper carries a very heavy load and enjoys staying in camp (not carrying the heavy load). Ultimate Hikers will often stop along the trail whenever they like to take breaks or cook meals. They can travel at a comfortable pace with their light load and they can walk all day. Since they don't require a water source where they camp, they can choose to stop for the night just about anywhere. Skurka tries to be on the trail within 15 minutes of waking in the morning to maximize his trail time.

Ultralight First Aid Kit

- Band-Aids
- Wound Closures
- Ibuprofen (repackaged)
- Tylenol (repackaged)
- Tylenol PM (repackaged)
- Benadryl (single dose foil pack)
- Imodium AD (single dose foil pack)
- Blister Bandages
- Moleskin (2"x3" sheets)
- Antibiotic Ointment in mini Ziplock
- Tweezers
- BodyGlide (repackaged)
- Alcohol Prep Pads
- Tincture of Benzoin (single use ampule)
- Mini Ziplock, spare

Repair Kit

- Sewing Kit (darning Needle in chunk of closed cell foam wrapped with dental floss)
- Safety Pins
- Accessory Cord
- Duct Tape
- Emergency Reading Glasses

Wear Lightweight Shoes

One pound on the feet is equivalent to five pounds on the back. Ultralight backpackers can get by with lighter foot wear because they are carrying a light load. Choose a pair of synthetic running shoes. If they get wet, they will dry out fast.

Wear Lightweight Socks

No need for heavy wool socks when you wear running shoes. Wear thin merino wool socks. They are easy to wash and fast to dry. Carry a spare set that can hang and dry on your pack.

Wear Sleeping Socks

Your feet can be wet all day, but at night they need to be dry and warm. Change into your warm and dry sleeping socks when getting into your sleeping bag.

Use a Tarp Instead of a Tent

Tarps are a much lighter option than a tent. You will be hard pressed to keep your base weight under 10 pounds if you use a tent. Tarps require some practice to set them up well but they provide a lot more room than a cramped tent and ventilate very well; reducing the amount of moisture absorbed by the sleeping bag.

Use a Sleeping Quilt Instead of a Sleeping Bag

The “loft” of a sleeping bag is what determines its warmth rating. The insulating material under the user is compressed reducing its insulating ability dramatically. A sleeping pad is necessary to insulate the user from the ground. A sleeping quilt lacks a zipper and does not provide insulation under the user from the knees up. A sleeping quilt with a 40 degree comfort rating can weigh about half that of a 20 degree sleeping bag.

Use a Short Sleeping Pad

You don't need a full length sleeping pad if the pack is placed under your legs and an inflatable pillow under your head. Most true ultralighters get by with a short 3/8” closed cell foam pad and choose sleeping locations that have natural cushioning. Well known ultralight backpacker, Glenn Van Peski, recommends Tylenol PM for those who have trouble sleeping on the thin pads. My one luxury item is my short Thermarest Neoair inflatable sleeping pad. It weighs 9.3 ounces and it keeps my hips and shoulders from bottoming out.

Wear it All to Bed

When traveling “ultralight” you wear nearly all of your clothes to bed; especially the puffy jacket, hat and gloves. By wearing all of your clothes, you can afford a lighter sleeping bag; your clothes are part of the complete sleeping system. This simplifies the process of getting dressed in the morning ... you simply get up. Do NOT wear wet gear to bed.

Inflatable Pillow

If you are wearing all of your clothing to bed you may not have much left over for a pillow. In tip #100, Mike Clelland describes how to make a pillow using a very light stuff sack and several partially inflated baggies. He recommends the Ziploc sandwich style bags with a double zipper; the others he tried, deflated by morning. Total pillow weight: 1.8 ounces.

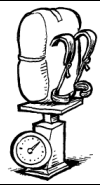
Carry Only the Water You Need

Carry only enough water to get you to your next water source. If water is prevalent in the area, then there is no need to carry water.

Aquamira is Lighter than a Water Filter

Aquamira is a Chlorine Dioxide chemical water treatment. It leaves very little noticeable taste in the water. It is a two bottle system of very stable A & B liquids, when mixed it creates a dependable solution for killing water-borne pathogens. Most ultralighters will repackage the chemical into smaller bottles.

Mike describes how he uses Aquamira in tip #106. He re-packages the A & B liquids into two smaller bottles and mixes the two in a third MIX bottle. He carries the MIX bottle in his pocket and uses it each time he refills his water bottle during the day. He hikes with the treated water for at least 20 minutes before taking a drink. If the MIX drops come out clear, it has lost its effectiveness, so he dumps it out and mixes a new batch.



Steve's Recommended Practice – Don't treat pristine water sources.

In the Boy Scout troop that I belonged to, we did a 50 mile backpack every summer on the Oregon Skyline Trail and we never treated or filtered any of the water we drank. In wilderness areas I don't give a second thought to drinking from pristine water sources such as springs or fast flowing glacial runoff.

Waterproof your Pack with a Hefty Trash Compactor Bag

In tip #108 Mike recommends using a Hefty Trash Compactor Bag as a pack liner rather than purchasing a heavier and more expensive external pack cover.

Make Your Own Cat Stove

In tip #120 Mike describes how to make an alcohol stove from a Fancy Feast cat food can. He also describes how to make your own wind screen using tin foil. It takes a little longer to heat water with this stove but it is the lightest and simplest stove around. This stove is NOT well suited for winter or extreme cold. Mike figures .06 liters of alcohol per person per day. A solo hiker hiking for ten days will need .6 liters of alcohol. It is OK if you run out of fuel because you can always build a small fire to heat your water.

Vaseline and Cotton Balls for Fire Starter

Coat several cotton balls with Vaseline and store them in a small plastic container. These can be lit for a dependable long burning fire starter.

Kitchen Cleanup

In tip #128 Mike describes how he cleans his cook pot. He does not use a scour pad or soap. He uses his spoon to eat every bit he can. He washes the pot with water and his fingers before scattering the dirty water on the ground. Stuck on food that does not come off with fingers is certain to come off with a little sand.

How much Food to Bring

In tip #133 Mike figures 1.4 pounds of food per person per day.

Checklist for a Summer Ultralight Backpack

Food & Water

- 1.4 lbs./day
- water bottle, 32oz.

Clothing

- running or compression shorts
- t-shirt (synthetic)
- pants (synthetic)
- long sleeve shirt (synthetic)
- hooded wind shirt (nylon)
- running shoes
- gloves, fleece
- hat, fleece
- jacket, rain
- pants, rain
- marathon socks and spares
- sleeping socks (thick wool)
- puffy jacket

Camping

- pack
- torso size sleeping pad
- sleeping quilt

- ground sheet
- tarp
- cook pot
- spoon
- stove
- fuel

Ditty Bag

- bandana
- camera (optional)
- duct tape
- first aid kit
- head lamp
- mini Bic lighter
- matches & fire starter
- pocket knife
- sunglasses/sunscreen
- tissue paper
- topo map & compass
- whistle
- repair kit
- Aquamira Kit

8:15 PM - Refreshments

Fifteen minute break to stretch, use the restrooms in the hallway or get a snack. Good time to ask questions about climb school or the route finding school.

8:30 PM – Ultralight Skills Practice Logistics

You don't have to bring anything except a lunch and yourself. A \$10 fee will cover the cost of supplies. You may bring your own camping equipment if you would like to try out your own gear or demonstrate it to the group.

Participants can sign-up on my website (www.cascadeadventures.net). Participants will meet at the State Motor Pool Park and Ride to arrange car pools. Arrive early, so that participants can depart by 8:30 a.m.

Skills Planned

1. Knot Tying (clove hitch, slippery half hitch, trucker's hitch, sheet bend)
2. Make a tripod for cooking over an open fire.
3. Set up your own tarp tent or make your own and set it up.
4. Make an alcohol burning "cat stove" and a tin foil wind screen.
5. Boil two cups of water with your "cat" stove.

6. Bake something (TBD).
7. Water Purification
8. Build a Cook Fire

I encourage participants to mark their gear to avoid mix-ups.

8:35 PM – Ultralight Backpack Logistics

A three day "ultralight" backpack in the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness Area is planned for late July. Participants will carry a pack with a base weight of less than ten pounds. Group size is limited to two groups of 12. Let me know if you would like to serve as a second leader. We will likely enter at the Duffy Lake trailhead and keep the mileage under 10 miles per day. Preference will be given to those who did the day long ultralight skills practice training earlier this month. Please register on line at www.cascadeadventures.net.

8:35 PM - How to Register for a Chemeketan Trip

The Chemeketans offer a wide variety of trips. The leaders are club members who volunteer their time. Trip leaders advertise their trips in the club's monthly bulletin. Pay particular attention to the trip's difficulty rating, the round trip distance and the elevation gain so that you know if the trip is a good fit for you.

If you find a trip that fits your schedule and your ability, then contact the leader by phone or email to request participation. Give the leader some background on what kind of trips you have done. The leader will accept or reject your request based on your experience, fitness level or space availability.

8:40 PM - Club Membership

Membership Application

One may apply for membership after completing two "qualifying trips" with the club. A qualifying trip is any Chemeketan-sponsored outdoor activity. One can download a membership application from the club's website at www.chemeketans.org/membership.htm. Return the application and fee to the Membership Secretary.

Dues

Annual membership dues are \$14 for each adult, (\$3 for those under 18), plus a \$12 per household subscription fee for the monthly bulletin. New members also pay a \$5 application fee.

Free Two Month Club Bulletin Subscription

Prospective members may request a free two month bulletin subscription on the membership page of the club's website (www.chemeketans.org).

8:45 PM – Dismiss