

“Power Snack...you gotta love the rich flavor, cold-temp, squeezability, and no-mess delivery of these single-serving all-natural spreads...”

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SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

BACKPACKER

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Editor's Note
BY ED SPINARDI, DORM

Stocking Stuffers

A FEW PIECES OF GEAR THAT DID ME RIGHT DURING THE LAST YEAR OF FIELD TESTING

OVER 15 YEARS OF REVIEWING OUTDOOR GEAR FOR BACKPACKER, I've slipped my feet into more than 200 pairs of trail shoes and cinched the hoods of nearly as many parkas, rain shells, and sleeping bags. The same goes for editors like Kristin Hostetter, Dennis Lewon, and Shannon Davis, who routinely spend 50-100 days a year in the field trying to separate good equipment from bad. For this gear guide, they led a crew of 100 veteran hikers and skiers in trail-testing hundreds of products that we ultimately narrowed to the year's 244 top innovations and values. They also joined me in highlighting a handful of personal picks—new products that captured their attention this year or worked just right for their unique blend of feature, size, and terrain or technology preferences.

[weight party]
Rab InFINITY Endurance Jacket
The warmth-to-weight ratio of this down hoody is off the charts. Even though it's not intended for deep-winter cold, the 870-fill down and shus, full hood kept me so warm that I only pulled out a burlier parka when nighttime temps dipped below zero. \$224/1 lb. (men's/medium); rab.us.com

[water to go]
Sawyer Squeeze Water Filter
Least-loved chore upon reaching camp: Squatting on some leeches over a stream to pump water. Now option: this lightweight (3 oz.) rig, in which the filter element screws onto a 32-, 32-, or 64-ounce bag that you can fill from all but the wilkiest trickles and cart to a comfortable seat. So leave the bag to force dirty water through the filter; it's faster than most pumps. \$60; sawyer.com

[socks]
SmartWool Graduated Compression Socks
Believe the hype: Compression socks really do reduce foot and calf swelling, and make your legs feel bouncier in the morning. I pull them on once I hit camp, sleep in them, then switch to cushioned socks for the day's pounding. With higher merino content (62 percent) than others I tested, these knee-highs put my sole to their natural feel and odor resistance. Great for long flights, too. \$40; smartwool.com

[all-purpose lens]
Tamron 18-270mm F/3.5-6.3 Di II VC P27
This might be the perfect DSLR lens for backpackers: A new autofocus motor using piezoelectric technology (a dot-matrix relative of the auto-igniter on your stove) helped Tamron shrink it, producing a very compact, 9.5-ounce lens that covers 95 percent of the shots I want, from wildflower macros to distant-park scenes. \$599 (street price); tamron.com

[down nest]
Feathered Friends Spoolbill
Yep, even after 20 years of marraige and hundreds of backpacking trips, the wife and I still love to snuggle. This two-hooded double-wide not only keeps us extra-cozy, it also packs small and weighs less than many single bags with the 100%-filling, folio-like 1500-fill down Spoolbill. (Note: There's no fill underneath, so pack insulated mattresses.) \$700-\$850; 2 lbs., 14 oz.; featheredfriends.com

[power snack]
Justin's Nut Butters
This primo peanut butter is silky, but you gotta love the rich flavor, cold-temp accessibility, and no-mess delivery of these single-serving, all-natural spreads. Chocolate Hazelnut adds kick to my oatmeal. Classic Peanut Butter goes on all-ways for lunch, and Maple Almond is a perfect salty/sweet afternoon pick-me-up. \$20 for 30 1.5-oz. packets; 6 flavors; justinsnutbutter.com

[multitool pack]
Out There! A5-1
New upgrading story: Highly decorated adventure racer Mike Kizer rolls from the sport to design packs. I love this midsize's pocket-friendly, for access, comfort, and stability under big loads, and ski-friendly testing. Nitpick: It's heavy. \$89; 2 lbs., 10 oz.; outthereusa.com

See more editor picks on pages 62, 107, and 136.