



AFTER RETURNING HOME

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When you return home from a long, extensive, and arduous 2½-day backpacking trip, do you fall into a stupor on the bed Sunday evening, limp out of bed Monday at oh-dark-thirty, and travel off to work in order to earn the means with which to do it all over again? Not! Or, do you protect the investment made in backpacking equipment and your back? Naturally you do the latter.

All your gear has been crammed back into your pack for the drive home and now must be properly cared for. Even after a dry weekend, things should be aired. Your body has given off moisture through your nose, mouth and skin. Some of this will be in your sleeping bag and tent. The ground has given off moisture to your ground cloth, and mayhap there's a bit of dew on the outside of your tent. Your pot scrubber is damp, your boots are sweaty.

All your gear should be properly aired before being properly stored.

If at all possible, hang your sleeping bag by the loops provided, or by zipping a sturdy clothes hanger into the sleeping bag foot. Leave the bag as loose as possible. Many of the modern day synthetics are great materials, but many of these do have a memory and, if stored in the stuff sack for any period of time, may remember the 'stuffed' configuration and, thereby, lose loft. Do not store a sleeping bag in your 140° or hotter attic.

Air your tent and the ground cloth thoroughly. Brush as much dirt as possible from the tent and, if needed, wash the ground cloth. Pack the tent away loosely, not crammed in its stuff sack. Mine goes in a bureau drawer in the garage. My tent poles are uncollapsed to ease the tension on the shock cords, and go behind a door in the computer room, not in the hot attic.

Boots go on a rack in the garage with garden shoes, and have shoe trees installed. As soon as possible the boots get a good warm water wipe out, then a general cleaning and a new waterproofing-conditioner workup. It's much easier, and there is more time, to work on boots immediately after, rather than immediately before, a trip. Besides, then they are in good shape for storage between trips, and the leather will last longer. While you are at it, check those boot laces for fraying and weak spots, and all seams for security.

Rain gear comes out of the stuff sack and goes in the coat closet ready for anytime use. After you air your self-inflating sleeping pad, store it away with the valve open. Lay it full out, preferably, or just folded once under your bed.

Refill your stove liquid fuel bottle. Remember to leave that air space at the top of the bottle. If needed, add compressed gas cylinders, or other items, to your shopping list.

As you unpack the rest of your gear and clothing, take a good look at the 'stuff' you have been carrying. If the 'stuff' in your pack is not an emergency item, and has not been used for a trip or two - leave it home next time. The only way to put your backpack on a diet is to force the issue yourself. No matter what you or your backpack weigh, you have to carry it.

If you store your pack itself in the attic, make sure to remove deteriorables (like a closed cell sleeping pad), freezables, heatables, meltables.

Take care of your equipment and it will take care of you for years to come. Youse paid for it so now youse gotta takes care of it!