



# Gear For The Open Road

By David Wescott and Steve Watts

*Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road,  
Healthy, free, the world before me,  
The long brown path before me, leading wherever I choose.*

*Henceforth I ask not good-fortune - I myself am good fortune;  
Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing,  
Strong and content, I travel the open road.*

Walt Whitman, 1900

awaits you just beyond your doorstep or on an expedition to the back of beyond. *It could happen!*

Life on the road or the trail demands that you learn the ways of the folks who have mastered the art of “*making do*.” So pull down your J.B., shoulder that balloon and hit the cinder trail. Roll out in a jungle of vagabonds who will share their gaskets, punk and gut, fried up in a spider. Make the moon your cover, and get prepared to be regaled by a crusty old sagebrush philosopher on the ways

that will set you free.

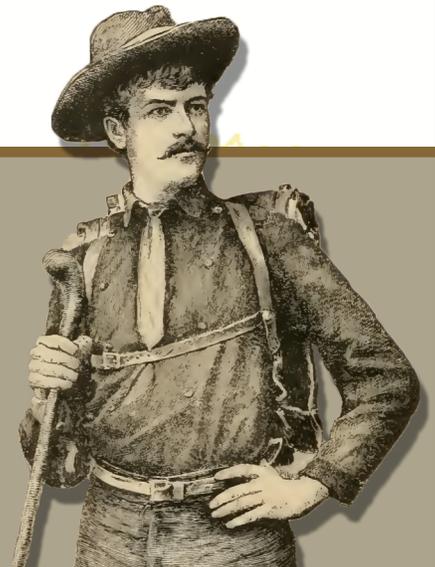
Whatever you want to call it, “hoboing”, “rambling”, “tramping”, “hiking”, “dirtbagging” or living the life of the vagabond, we forget that these ways of living in the open have a common thread that has been shared across generations. And many of the things we now call *bushcraft* are well seated in the

The grid goes down and the lights go out...The plastic in your wallet becomes just that – plastic... You lose everything in a nasty divorce...It’s simply time to make a break from it all and go for a ramble...You succumb to the sirens’ call – a life driven by wanderlust takes you over, and the adventure

## A Short History of Tramping

The *Golden Age of The Hobo* (essentially 1880-1930) has influenced a lot of what we know about lightweight camping, and crafting essentials from cast-offs or what nature provides. But even the life of these “Kings of the Road” had a genealogy of skills and traditions dating well back in time. In 1528 Martin Luther edited a treatise entitled, *The Book of Vagabonds and Beggars: With a Vocabulary of Their Language*. It’s been said that if it was important enough for Luther

to document these folks, then anything else that might be added was equally of value. So we have books like *The Fraternity of Vagabonds, In Gypsy Tents, Tramping With Tramps*, and *The Tramps Handbook*. “Vagabond” and “tramp” were commonly used way before the term “hobo” came along. In fact, the term “tramp” was used as both a noun and a verb to describe what we now know as “hiking.” The compound word “backpacking” never even enters the lingo until well into the 1950s or 60s, and many of the patron saints of this modern pastime were trampers



Lee Meriwether, author of *A Tramp Trip: How to see Europe on fifty cents a day* (1899) in his tramping attire.

themselves at one time – Thoreau, John Muir, Jack London, Charles Lummins. *It’s a noble heritage.*

histories of a variety of subcultures that have made it on the land. If you look at the kit that one should take when leaving the home hearth; it's basically all the same whether you call it a bindle or a bug-out bag. In fact, a few items still bear the name of their source – hobo stoves for example.

So let's start with the basics. If you know how to make do with what's at hand in order to assemble your "tramping essentials", then everything else that you add makes life that much more pleasurable. Before you go out the door, grab a few items that will make up the foundation of the kit and you'll be better off for it. Those 700 count Egyptian cotton sheets that you've been sleeping on are a good start. Add to that a can opener, your best pocket-knife, a few of your favorite items from your hiking stash, and you can make or scrounge the rest. Applying a knowledge of simple woodcraft tricks, good old Yankee ingenuity, and selective choices in things that will add quality to your plight, and you're good to go.

## Carrying Your Gear

The tramp was often called a *bindlestiff* or *swagman* – the bindle or swag being the container for their gear. The stiff – also staff or pike – was used to suspend the load over one shoulder just as the Roman legions did centuries before. Since then, we have devised lots of ways to carry loads on our backs – haversacks, rucksacks, knapsacks – with just as many suspension systems – harnesses, single straps, divided and double straps, breast bands, tumplines, etc.

The bedroll and shelter are the bulkiest items, and everything else can be wrapped inside them. They can be bundled – *ballooned* – together and wrapped in a canvas "*manty*" and then fastened to a pack board with a common packer's or diamond hitch. Add a tumpline to distribute the load from the shoulders to the entire skeleton, and tremendous loads can be managed.

If you plan to move along, the old hobo donut is an inefficient and troublesome affair. Take the best of what we've learned and get your gear on your back.

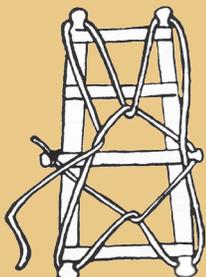
*Indeed, the "tenderfoot" in Tramp life, the beginner, is recognized by his ignorance of the "lingo." The way he carries himself, shakes hands, and begs are also signs by which a "professional" determines the newcomer's standing in the brotherhood; but they are not so unmistakable as his use of the tramp dialect, and it is seldom necessary to talk with him for more than a few minutes to discover how long he has been on the road. **Tramping With Tramps: Studies and Sketches of the Vagabond Life, Josiah Flynt -1899***

For a great vocabulary source visit - [angelfire.com/folk/famousoustramp/terminology.html](http://angelfire.com/folk/famousoustramp/terminology.html). To understand the hobo signs in the background be sure to look up Dan Beard's book – *American Boy's Book of Signs, Signals and Symbols* (1918) for one of the first modern collections of hobo glyphs.

## Assembling The Kit

*Go lite, and make what you can't find.*

**Cup** – tin, enameled or manufactured from an old tin can. **Canteen** – a hobo canteen uses a well-shaped glass bottle. **Spoon** – make a simple



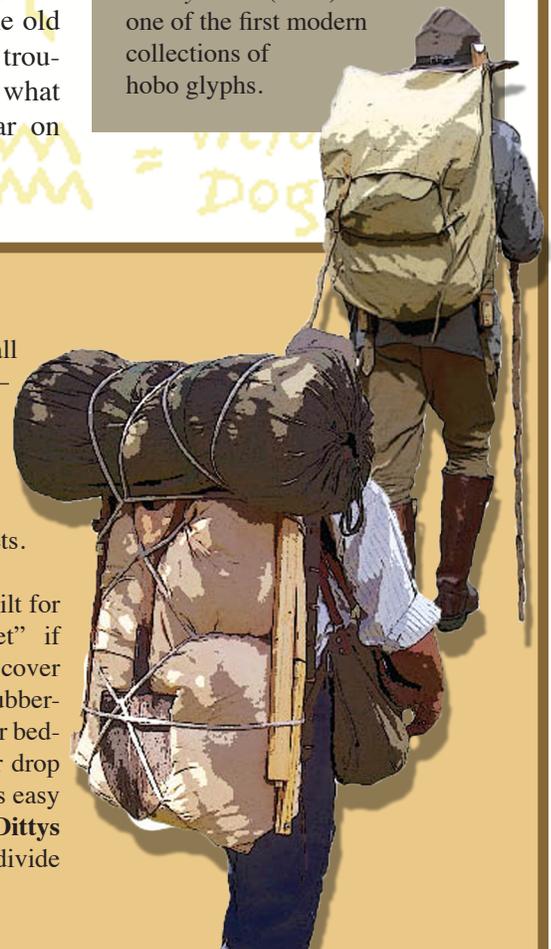
**The Diamond Hitch on a pack frame.**

belt spoon and keep it handy. **Stove** – a contained stove is great for reducing impact, and at night can't be seen at a distance. **Billy** – a #10 can or large soup

can with a wire billy. **Spider** – a small skillet that uses a branch as a handle – easy to pack. **Knife** – make it a good one. You may want a folder if traveling, as sheath knife laws vary from state to state. **Folding saw** – for working logs down to fuel-sized billets.

**Banjo** – a short handled shovel.

**Bedding** – good blankets, a down quilt for compactness, or a "California blanket" if you're in a pinch. **Bedroll** – a canvas cover for your bedding. **Ground tarp** – a rubberized cloth to keep moisture out of your bedding. **Shelter** – a good tarp, sheet or drop cloth will do. **Lamp** – a slut or bug is easy to make and cheap to fuel. **Assorted Dittys** – bindles are easy to organize if you divide things into little bags.



## Staying Fed

Cooking is one of the pleasures of the open road. Sharing a pot-luck Mulligan or frying up *gaskets and guts* (pancakes and sausage) or *graveyard stew* (milk and toast) can be as relaxing as anything you do while living under the stars. An open fire is the Cadillac of cooking hearths. Rig up a fire crane, dingle stick or sasters, and brew, boil, bake and fry whatever the larder holds. When firewood, time

and impact become a concern, there is nothing better than the *hobo stove* (right), or it's 21st century sibling – the *rocket stove* (left). Understanding how wood burns, finding the best materials available, and then tending the fire as if you planned not to burn everything to a crisp, will reward you with some of the finest trail cuisine to be found.

*Backwoodsman* has been a great source for finding numerous plans and articles on creating improvised tin-can stoves. Use your skill to create cups,



## The Bare Bones Kitchen

The experienced woodcrafter can cook and eat without any utensils at all. But, with the addition of a few simple items, the old time camper can prepare almost any meal with ease.



- Matches and an axe... provide the fire.
- A knife... prepares kindling and food.
- A pot or billy can.... for boiling.
- A skillet... sautés, fries and bakes bannock.
- A cup... serves up coffee, tea or soup.
- A deep plate or shallow bowl....  
for anything from steak to stew.

dough cutters, ladles, lanterns, billy pots and more from the “gold” that the rest of society just throws away. There are unlimited possibilities for the humble tin can. Use your imagination, practice your tinsmithing skills, and tinker your way to a cupboard full of useful utensils.



Laid out on a blue wool blanket – A canvas bedroll cover with ties, a pigment-dyed tick cover, a hobo canteen and sling, a floral ditty bag, a cartridge box repair kit, blanket pins, and a housewife (sewing kit).

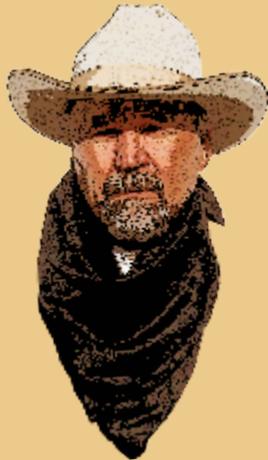
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Get the details on all the planned events at - <http://campantrailblog.blogspot.com>

## Staying Warm

Even after years of using the best mummy bags, there is still nothing that compares to sleeping in a pair of heavy wool blankets - that is except a folded eider down quilt. Ah! *The Freedom*.

The art of sleeping in a blanket is exactly that. It takes practice to get through a night without drafts, tangles and cold spots. Learn to select a good blanket. They're not all created equal. Get one large enough that you can fold over the foot and still cover your shoulders. Learn to pin them up correctly and layer them so that everything stays warm. If you get a lofty blanket, pair it with a good bedroll cover to reduce heat loss due to convection. It's worth far more than it's weight on snowy nights. And don't skimp on a good waterproof layer underneath - moisture will suck the heat

*Layering plans for a California - newspaper - blanket. Use tape to hold layers in place and adhere the folded-over edges. Use as many layers as you need to stay warm and roll out for a good nights sleep.... in Florida maybe.*

right out of you. And finally, the key to any good nights sleep is in the mattress. Stitch up a simple canvas bag that you can fill with straw or leaves. Use enough litter to make the tick at least 1" thick when compressed. This will slow the thermal transfer almost completely.

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Want to learn more? Check us out at <http://campantrailblog.blogspot.com>. We're adding tutorials and little tidbits to get you ready for the release of the *Watts and Wescott Guides to Classic Camping*. If you like to camp in the old style, you'll be rewarded by this view of the outdoor world that you can't get anywhere else.

