



## ▶▶ BACKPACKING - CLEVELAND WAY

# GOING IT ALONE

Camping editor **Iain Duff** is a dedicated family camper but hasn't gone on a solo trip for almost 20 years. As part of his quest for a healthier lifestyle he decided to tackle a lightweight camping trip for the first time. Here's how he got on.





**TRAVEL**  
**SITES**  
**GEAR**  
**SKILLS**



There comes a point in most people's lives when they have a "shop window reflection" moment. It's a moment of bewilderment

when they wonder who that fat, red-faced person is looking back at them from the glass. Followed quickly by the dreadful recognition that it is actually their own reflection. For some, this comes as something of an epiphany, a moment of realisation that it's time for a lifestyle change. For me it meant I stopped looking in shop windows.

However when you have young children it's not so easy to bury your head in the sand. So when my seven-year-old son decided to tell me on a recent trip that I was too heavy to sit on our camping chair I knew that it was time to make some changes. The trouble is I've never been the sort of person who can swim up and down a pool for an hour or go to the gym and plod away on a treadmill. This just seems pointless to me. If I'm going to take up an activity I want it to be more than just a means to an end.

Then, as I read lightweight camping guru Clive Tully's latest column on the pages of this very magazine, the solution came to me in a blinding moment of clarity. I could combine getting fitter with camping by taking up backpacking. Not only would I get to benefit from the health advantages of hiking but I'd also be outdoors rather than in a stuffy gym and able to enjoy seeing some of my favourite parts of the country. And on top of all that it would be the perfect excuse to try out some new camping gear.

The demands of family life meant it had been a long time since I'd been solo camping

and I was somewhat out of practice. These days a family camping trip involves the sort of planning normally reserved for invading a small country. We currently have a trailer packed to the brim with camping gear; a tent, sleeping mats and sleeping bags, tables, chairs, cooking gear, storage furniture, lighting. You name it, it's in there. Then we pack the boot with holdalls, bikes, coolboxes, food etc. By the time the car is packed half the day is gone, and you've still got to unpack at the other end.

Now don't get me wrong, I'm all in favour of taking as much equipment as I can to make camping as comfortable as possible for all the family. But at its heart, camping is supposed to be about simplicity and getting closer to nature so sometimes it's nice to be able to shed the tent carpet and electric hook-up and get back to basics. Or at least that was the plan...

I love planning. It's one of My Things. Few things make me happier than sitting down of an evening and working out which sites to stay at, which routes to take and what equipment will be needed. This was going to be a bit more tricky than usual as I had to find a campsite and a walking route that would suit each other, as well as factoring in where I'd leave my car. Initially I had notions of going wild camping in Scotland but circumstances conspired against that plan, so I had to aim for somewhere a bit closer to home.

I focused my attention instead on North Yorkshire and the Cleveland Way, a 110-mile-long National Trail that runs from Helmsley to Filey, skirting the North York Moors National Park. A good part of the trail is along the coast, which immediately appealed to me. North Yorkshire is also blessed with an abundance





## ▶▶ BACKPACKING FOR BEGINNERS



of campsites of all sizes and standards so I was certain I would be able to find the ideal spot to pitch.

Of course, as a novice walker (by which I mean novice recreational walker, obviously. General walking I've been doing for 39 years or so), I didn't want to tackle anything that was going to be too demanding, either in length or difficulty. In the end I decided on a six mile stretch of the National Trail along the coast between Whitby and Robins Hood Bay. The distance looked achievable and the coastal path didn't appear to be too challenging. I also knew Robin Hoods Bay was an attractive place to visit and that there were a couple of good campsites in the area to pitch.

I'll go into more detail about what equipment I took in later pages, but suffice to say lightweight camping is something of a misnomer. Essentially all you really need for a camping trip is a tent, a sleeping bag, a sleeping mat and some cooking equipment. Beyond that and you are getting into the realms of taking stuff that is unnecessary. But of course, some of the gear available is just far too tempting to ignore. Family camping trips these days tend to involve packing everything but the kitchen sink. This time the kitchen sink was included.

By the time the morning of departure came

around I'd packed, unpacked and re-packed my rucksack at least five times. You'll find any number of people prepared to give you advice on the best way to pack your rucksack, but in my experience there's no good or bad way. Some will tell you that you should always put heavy items at the bottom and lighter things at the top, but I've never really heard a satisfactory explanation for that. In the end I decided to put the heavier stuff at the top, but the best thing is trial and error and find out what works best for you. The one piece of advice I would offer is that you put important things like torches and toiletries somewhere you can access easily. You might also want to try to remember where you've put things as knowing where they are makes retrieving them an awful lot easier.

As I drove to Yorkshire in the August sunshine I began to ponder what I was about to embark on. Six miles might not seem like a lot but for an absolute beginner like me, it was a daunting thought, especially as I'd done little to prepare for it. I wondered about all the things that could potentially go wrong – exhaustion, getting lost, a twisted ankle, a slip over the edge of the cliff – and started to worry if I was doing the right thing. I had visions of being stranded in the wilderness, miles from civilisation, praying that someone would eventually stumble across me.

Of course the reality was that I was on one of the busiest walking routes in the country, would have a full mobile phone signal and would never really be more than a few hundred yards from a house. I reassured myself that other than a head-first plunge off the cliff I would probably be fine, no matter what happened.

One thing I hadn't considered was the possibility of sunstroke, which is why, despite the glorious sunshine, my bottle of Ambre Solaire remained buried at the bottom of the rucksack as I set off from Whitby Abbey, a ruined Benedictine abbey perched on the headland overlooking the seaside town and the North Sea. It was good couple of miles along the route before it occurred to me that I really should put some on, by which time I'd already developed a lobster-like complexion.

With the North Sea glistening in the sun on my left and golden fields of corn swaying gently in the breeze to my right, the first section of the walk really was about as idyllic as it gets. The terrain was undulating but by no means difficult and the conditions underfoot were easy to negotiate. I strode purposefully along the trail, feeling very good about myself, delivering a cheery "good morning!" to everyone I encountered en route. Any doubts I had about whether this was a good idea were





## STAY AT...

### MIDDLEWOOD FARM HOLIDAY PARK

Middlewood Lane, Fylingthorpe, Robin Hood's Bay, Whitby, North Yorkshire, Yorkshire YO22 4UF

☎ 01947 880414

🌐 [www.middlewoodfarm.com](http://www.middlewoodfarm.com)

**Open** 1 March - 31 October

**Cost** From £15 (two adults, pitch and electric)

Set on the edge of the village of Fylingthorpe in a farm setting, this is a friendly and quiet campsite. The site offers over 20 touring pitches and is level. It's surrounded by panoramic country, sea and moorland views. The site has electric hook ups and a modern shower / toilet block. There's also a baby change room, two dishwashing areas and a children's adventure play park. There's a take-away food van on site and the village has several shops and a pub. Nearby are Robin Hood's Bay and Whitby, as well as the North Yorkshire moors.

- 1 Whitby Abbey from the Cleveland Way
- 2 The view from the tent in the morning
- 3 The rugged North Yorkshire coastline
- 4 Picturesque Robin Hood's Bay

quickly forgotten.

After about 20 minutes I passed through a large caravan site (no tents allowed) and turned a corner to discover Saltwick Bay, a picture postcard sandy beach at the bottom of a steep and winding path. Apparently the beach is a great place to find fossils, although I decided not to venture down – mainly because I didn't fancy the climb back up to the trail. At low tide you can spot the remains of an ancient harbour built to service the local alum industry in the 17th Century.

Continuing along the path, the next landmark was the Whitby foghorn and the lighthouse, a reminder of the dangers still faced by those who venture out onto the sea. On a calm, sunny day like the one I was enjoying it was easy to forget just how hostile the North Sea can be. And for all that the path was relatively easy to walk along, it does get extremely close to the cliff edge at times. You would imagine in wet weather it might just need some extra care.

Having set off at a fairly steady pace, my general lack of fitness combined with the heat meant I slowed dramatically as the trail continued and I needed numerous rest-stops. The bonus was that I got to take in the dramatic coastal views, which never fail to impress along this stretch of the trail. To keep the weight

down I had considered just bringing one small bottle of water, but luckily I changed my mind at the last minute and took a large container instead. I was grateful for it as the sweat lashed off me in the afternoon sunshine.

After another couple of hours I rounded the headland to see Robin Hood's Bay in the distance. With my destination in sight I got a renewed sense of purpose and soon found myself in the village. It really is one of the most charming places on Britain's coast, full of quaint houses and cobbled streets although it also has one of the steepest roads I have ever encountered. The hike back up to the top of the village from the harbour was by far the toughest part of the day and the bench at the top of the hill was a godsend. As I sat there recovering, I felt an enormous sense of achievement, although the concerned looks from passers-by suggested I still had a long way to go in my fitness quest.

Unfortunately my walking wasn't quite over for the day. My campsite of choice, Middlewood Farm, was another 15 minute trek from the centre of the village. By now my rucksack was starting to really pull on my shoulders and my leg muscles were screaming in protest, but I soldiered on and eventually arrived at the site.

The good weather had obviously encouraged

lots of weekend campers and the site was bustling. My initial plan had been to go wild camping and this was about as far removed from that as you could imagine. As I pitched my little two man tent – it took five minutes – someone was playing 90s dance hits compilation at an extraordinary volume. Much as I enjoy hearing 'Killer' by Adamski, it wasn't part of the original "get away from it all" plan.

Having said that, I was so exhausted I knew that sleep would not be a problem, no matter the noise on site. Tent pitched and rucksacks emptied, I rustled up a pasta dish on my tiny Coleman stove and listened to the Olympics coverage on my tiny radio. Later I ventured outside to stare at the stars and watch the international space station pass over, before retiring to bed. There's nothing like watching spacemen fly over your tent to make you appreciate your place in the universe. But as evenings go, it was pretty damn good.

After a good night's sleep, the following day I pondered walking the trail back to Whitby to collect my car, but decided on public transport instead. It was undoubtedly the right decision. Within hours I was relaxing in the bath, resting my aching limbs. I was, frankly, knackered, but couldn't have been more pleased with myself. Now, time to plan the next trip...



# ▶▶ BACKPACKING FOR BEGINNERS

## MY KIT



## MSR NOOK 2 TENT

**VERY** easy to pitch and provides a lot more space than you might expect for such a light tent. Designed for two but much more comfortable for one. The porch has plenty of room to store a couple of backpacks but if you're camping alone you could easily have your pack in alongside you. The tent is stable in benign conditions but there are no guylines so in strong winds it might feel less so. There's also a good chance strong rain could get under the flysheet.



### VERDICT

Lightweight for a two-man tent and, as such, a good option for a solo camper. Stands up well in good weather but may be less suited to windy, wet conditions

### TECH SPEC



2 berth



1.42kg



Pitching time  
5 mins



Ridge hoop  
hybrid

### OTHER INFO

**Price** £320.00

**Dimensions** 127 x 307cm (including porch) Height: 96 cm

#### Materials

→ **Outer** 20D ripstop nylon 1000mm hydrostatic head Durashield polyurethane and silicone

→ **Inner** Nylon and no-see-um mesh

→ **Groundsheet** 40D ripstop nylon 3000mm DuraShield polyurethane

→ **Poles** Alloy

### GREGORY Z55 RUCKSACK

**AT** £139.99 this is not cheap, but it is the perfect size for a weekend lightweight camping. The straps are easily adjustable to give you maximum comfort.

### KATHMANDU COMET SLEEPING BAG

**PERSONALLY** I prefer rectangular shaped sleeping bags rather than 'mummy' bags like this. But most lightweight bags come in this style. The duck down fill makes it warm but very light - just 680g for the large model (£109.99)

### THERMAREST NEOAIR XLITE MATTRESS

**THIS** airbed is incredibly light and compact so is perfect for backpacking trip. Rolled up and packed away into its stuff sack it weighs less than a small bag of sugar.

### WILKINSON'S CAMPING PILLOW

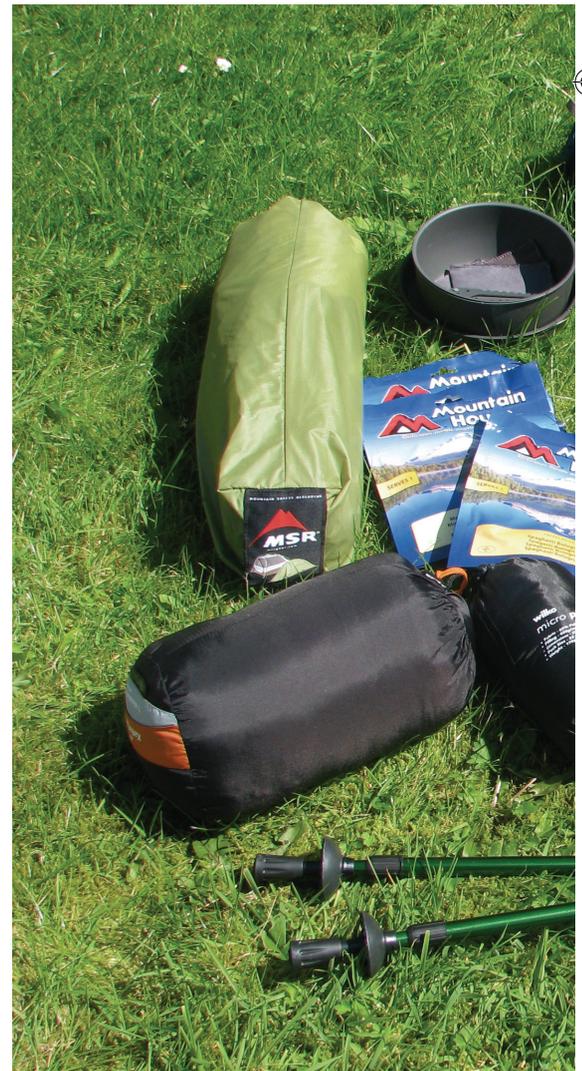
**HAVING** gone for the big ticket items above it's time for a bit of economising. This pillow cost £3.98 from the high street hardware store and is as good as any expensive equivalent

### KATHMANDU CUTLERY SET

**A MARVELLOUS** little set comprising a knife, fork and spoon that fold away into their own pouch. They even have built-in bottle and can openers

### KATHMANDU POLYCARBONATE DINNER SET

**THE** lightweight dinner set includes a plate, bowl cup





and cutlery but for my trip I only bothered with the bowl.

### SEA TO SUMMIT X-MUG

**A SILICONE** mug that folds flat and is perfect for lightweight camping.

### KATHMANDU POT SET

**LIGHTWEIGHT** and sturdy. The bowls and frying pan fit together and the handle, cup and cloth sit inside. The whole thing is held together with a mesh bag £34.99

### COLEMAN F1 LITE STOVE

**A TINY**, but relatively powerful, stove costing £25 that screws onto a gas canister and folds away into its own little bag. Doesn't have an ignition so don't forget the matches

### VICTORINOX MULTI-TOOL

**THE** classic multi-tool from the people behind the Swiss Army knife. Don't leave home without one.

### MOUNTAIN HOUSE DRY FOODS

**EASY** to cook and surprisingly tasty - just make sure you get the liquid quantity right or your breakfast scrambled egg will be a bit watery

### TESCO AM/FM RADIO

**I LOVE** listening to the radio at night in a tent and this, at just £4.99 from the local supermarket, did the trick perfectly. Keep the volume low for the sake of fellow campers though.

### SEA TO SUMMIT PACK TAP

**FILL** it up from a tap or even a stream and hang from a nearby tree for instant running water

### PACKTOWL ULTRALITE XL

**A MICROFIBRE** towel like this is considered an essential for lightweight camping rather than taking a 'real' towel

### SILVA SIJU HEAD TORCH

**ANOTHER** camping essential, the head torch frees up your hands around the tent and the campsite after dark

### GERBER BEAR GRYLLS SURVIVAL TORCH

**A TRADITIONAL** hand-held torch is also useful. This Bear Grylls endorsed LED model is encased in a water resistant rubber handle. There's also a 'secret' storage capsule which comes with waterproof matches and tinder.

### AQUAPAC BAG

**YOU** don't want to leave your phone hidden away in your rucksack, but equally you don't want it getting damaged by water. Pop it in this waterproof bag and it'll stay dry no matter the weather.

### SEA TO SUMMIT SINK

**TAKING** the kitchen sink might be a little extravagant but handy if you're wild camping and need somewhere to wash your pans. It has a 10 litre capacity but folds away to virtually nothing

### WILKINSON'S WALKING POLES

**AT** just £6 each these were an absolute bargain. Some experts say you only need one stick, while others recommend two - at this price go for the pair

### BOOK/NOTEBOOK

**TAKE** a book to while away the hours in the evening and a notebook to jot down your thoughts as you relax after a day on the trail.

## CLOTHING

### BRASHER FELLMASTER GTX BOOTS

**LIGHTWEIGHT** but hardy and provided plenty of grip on the coastal paths

### KARRIMOR HELIUM JACKET

**THANKFULLY**, and somewhat surprisingly, the weather meant this jacket didn't get much use on my trip but has previously passed the UK summer rain test with flying colours.

### HI-GEAR WATERPROOF TROUSERS

**BUDGET** waterproofs from Go Outdoors, that again remained in the rucksack for the duration. Came with their own stuff-sack

### BRASHER HILLMASTER SOCKS

**WALKING** socks can be expensive but if you're at all serious about walking you should invest in a couple of pairs at least. They really do make walking more comfortable and help avoid dreaded blisters. This pair cost £15 but are worth every penny.



## TOP TIPS

Alastair Bramwell



**AS** one of the owners of outdoor equipment distributors Bramwell International - and a keen lightweight camper himself - Alastair Bramwell is in a better position than most to offer some advice on the gear you need. First of all you need to identify the right backpack - and he reckons a 55 litre pack should be enough for a couple of nights' camping. He also suggests a two-man tent weighing in at between 1.5kg and 2kg, as well as a lightweight sleeping bag. And Alastair recommends a Thermarest self-inflating mat if you are packing light.

For cooking you'll require a small lightweight stove and pots and pans and a 4 litre water bladder that can be filled from a stream or a tap and hung from a tree. The tap lets you have running water. A lightweight torch is essential.

When it comes to eating, packets of dried food are very good but as an alternative, make your own spag bol at home, take it with you and heat it up at your tent. Another tip is to have a bowl of porridge in the morning as it can give you fuel for the whole day.

Alastair says clothing is all about layering, starting with base layers or thermals for sleeping. Clearly waterproof trousers and a jacket are very important. But don't forget a hat and gloves - you are going to be out of the tent a lot of the time. Finally, he asks, do you need boots rather than walking shoes? Walking poles will help give you balance and take the weight off your knees.

Alastair's suggestion is that once you've decided what you're going to take, look at it again and pare it all down. You'll certainly be able to get rid of some unnecessary stuff.

And his final piece of advice for the beginner? 'Don't go far away for the first time. Try about four or five miles - the important thing is that it is an enjoyable experience.'

