

Chair-E-it Backpack

Designed by Al Geist

Description: An external-frame backpack that folds into a sling-light camp chair with drink holders at your fingertips. Attach the headrest and convert it into a laid back lounge chair for that afternoon nap. At night reconfigure it into a sleeping cot. In the morning fold it back into a backpack and you are on your way. Configuring from one mode to the other takes less than 30 seconds thanks to a “buttonhole” switch design.

As a fifth mode, the padded hip belt detaches to become a 500 cu. in. fanny pack for those side hikes and peak bagging. The hip belt is modular, containing pockets that can be added or removed and folded away when not in use. These pockets hold those items you want quick access to on the trail such as water, snacks, rain gear, maps, compass, headlamp, etc. Pockets are sized to be able to hold a nalgene bottle and have elastic loops to keep bottles from flopping.

Shoulder straps are extra wide (3 ½ inches) with a high-vent design that reduces sweating around the chest and shoulders. The straps are made from 6mm hex mesh fabric that is bias-cut to provide stretch horizontally, but not stretch vertically. This allows the straps to lie flat and follow the shoulder contours, spreading the load evenly across the user.

The Chair-E-it weighs just 1 lb 15oz

The main pack has flexible volume – Chair-E-it holds a large dry sack (supply your own in the size you need) that also serves as the pack rain cover. I use 50L or 25L WX tex dry bags weighing 9 oz and 5 oz respectively depending on the length of the trip.

Pictures of Chair-E-it in each of its 5 configurations

1. Backpack showing front and back views. Dry bag is held in place by the “V” bar.



The string shown dangling from the “V” bar is actually two Kevlar cords tied together at 14”, 24”, and 31” to form “button holes” that can hook on a metal button at the bottom of the “V”. The three lengths correspond to the backpack mode, chair mode, and laid out cot mode.

2. Camp chair mode. You sit pretty low to the ground, which makes it easy to cook dinner on your backpacking stove as shown in the figure at the right. The drawback of being so low is it can be hard getting up out of the chair.



3. Lounge chair – attach the headrest and lay back to take an afternoon nap. The headrest sits behind the dry sack in backpack mode. Note water bottles at your fingertips in the right figure.



4. Cot mode lays the lounge chair back even further, forming a comfortable $\frac{3}{4}$ length cot with your feet propped up on the inflated dry sack that is the main backpack bag while hiking. Great if you are a back sleeper. If you are a side sleeper, you have to be careful not to put your shoulder up on the headrest or it will bend. If you like to do a little of both like me, then you have to be careful not to roll off the cot in the night.



5. Fanny pack showing a folded pocket and unfolded pockets holding liter water bottles stabilized with the elastic loops. Black rear pouch holds my Dri-Ducks rain jacket and pants, small items are held in the white elastic pockets sewn on the sides of the pouch (water purification tablets, sunscreen, bug repellent, hand cleaner, lighter)

Notes on Chair-e-it use at Philmont.

I used Chair-e-it on the 2009 Philmont Expedition 628-T1. It was very handy and I had call to use all five modes. I also used it in additional ways I had not considered such as holding gear off the ground at night under the dining tarp. One important example was toilet paper. A quick night shower can ruin a roll of toilet paper sitting on the ground under the tarp. Toilet paper is not something you want out of sight in a backpack under the tarp. Those early risers need to quickly put their hands on the roll and head for the nearest latrine.

One surprise I had at Philmont was that the lunches were incredibly bulky. Each contained a family size box of crackers. These boxes could not be compressed. The four days of food took up so much space that I ended up clipping my smellables bag with the food to the outside of my 50L main bag. I initially had all the food and smellables bag inside the 50L and the cook kit hanging outside, but decided it was more convenient to have the cook kit inside and the food (breakfast and lunch breaks on the trail) and first aid kit easy to get to. At Philmont my Chair-e-it had three bags attached to it – the 50L dry sack shown in the pictures above, a 20L ultrasil dry sack that was my food/smellables bag, and my bedroll which was my Big Agnes pad wrapped around a 5L dry sack with my sleeping bag stuffed into it.

I used the cot mode to take a nap under the tarp during a couple afternoon rains. Both times it was lucky I was there because the hard rain began to create streams of water running under the tarp. I was able to move the gear out of harm's way, preventing the streams from soaking the backpacks.

I was the medic on our crew. I used the chair mode to do “doctoring” on the boys feet. They would sit in the chair and I could work on blisters and hot spots. The chair mode was also used to hold gear up off the ground. This helped keep items away from mini-bears (chipmunks), keep dirt off the gear, and dryer (as in the case of the toilet paper).

I used the lounge chair mode for sitting in camp, naps, and sitting beside the trail guarding the backpacks from mini-bears when the crew did side hikes of trail peak and tooth-of-time peak.

I used the fanny pack to carry raingear and water with me to our conservation project at Apache Springs and used it on the side hike of Lookout peak. It would also have been handy in base camp but I took my chances and didn't carry rain gear as I walked around base camp

I used the backpack mode every day as we hiked from camp to camp. Having the smellables bag on the outside was handy, because it allowed quick access to the crew first aid kit it kept all smells out of my main bag, and it allowed easy access to trail lunches and breakfasts.

The backpack held up well to the wear and tear of the backcountry with no visible signs of wear. The wide, mesh shoulder straps did a great job of keeping cool during those hot afternoon hikes. Several days of our trek involved intermediate stops for program at staffed camps so we often found ourselves continuing on to trail camps during the heat of the day.