CAMP LIGHTS
Bill Rogers
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On the trail you will see all manner and kinds of camp lights ranging from a five and dime single AA or AAA cell light, to a $25 oil lantern. There is even a 'backpacking' white gas lantern available for those whose pack resembles one that might be carried by the Jolly Green Giant.

Flashlights are both handy and necessary. Candle and oil lanterns are only “nice to have” items for evening convenience and congeniality during long winter evenings.

Boots, clothing, and backpacks are bought to fit. Flashlights also must be bought to fit. Fit, you ask ??? Sooner or later you'll be in a situation where it's dark, both hands are busy, and you must have light. Does this sound like dinner preparation after dark, when you must both hold the pot and stir ? Does this sound like after-dark tent set-up time in the rain ? Yes flashlights are bought to fit, to fit between your teeth.

In recommending a flashlight I usually recommend a plastic, two AA cell or four AAA, hand-held flashlight. Whether it has a spot - wide angle beam adjustment is up to you. Get a light with an easy to change bulb, or with long lasting LED’s. Remember, the only time a flashlight fails to work is at night, when it's cold, and it's raining.

Some flashlight bulbs are the size of a small pea and are easy to handle. Others are the size of a grain of rice. Imagine trying to change a grain of rice sized bulb that has two itty-bitty, teeny-weeny wires for your tired old eyes to focus on, in the dark. Remember that it's dark and raining, also cold.

Make sure that the type of replacement bulb you need is carried in the store where you purchased the flashlight. If you can't find replacement bulbs, there is not much use in buying a flashlight. Always carry a replacement bulb and spare batteries. A spare bulb can be carried in a 35-mm film can. Some LEDs, on the other hand, can last almost a lifetime.

Any flashlight you purchase should have a place for a wrist or neck cord, very handy items. In order to hold the cord there is usually a ring or small hole in the frame of the flashlight. To this I add and secure a small 'S' hook. The 'S' hook is handy for hanging my flashlight on a twig, on a clothesline, from a line inside my tent, even from the collar of my "T" shirt.

Watch out for the flashlight switch. A press or slide-switch may press or slide inside your pack, rendering your batteries quite dead by the time you arrive at camp. A flashlight that twists to turn ON/OFF is much more reliable.

Some folks use and thoroughly enjoy miner type lights on a band around the forehead, a headlamp. These leave both hands free and provide light where you point your head. They vary from a few to over $50, and from fall-apart to really good quality. Ifyou get a head lamp with a battery pack behind the head, get one that has a band that goes over the head. The over-the-head band cuts down on the tightness required for the other band. Some headlamps have a spot - wide angle beam adjustment, others may have a bright/dim setting to preserve battery life. Newer lights have LEDs vice regular or halogen bulbs. Some of the small and very light LED types do not adjust up and down, and you’ll continually be blinding your former friends as you turn to talk to them.

Be considerate of where you point any camp light ! Please don’t blind another camper or hiker with your light.

There is an almost infinite variety, so be careful to look at and investigate everything available.

Micro lights the size of a quarter-dollar are handy in the tent, or in a strange motel, but are expensive for their size.

Carbide lights were at one time the lights of choice for spelunkers and miners. Water, dripping from the water chamber, mixes with carbide to produce acetylene gas. This burns to provide a very bright light which you can readily read by. Carbide lights are a bit bulky and sometimes finicky. The carbide-water byproduct is poisonous to wildlife. It must be safely carried out of the camping area, and be properly disposed of as toxic waste.

Candle lanterns, using 1 1/4 x 4 inch candles, provide a congenial atmosphere during long winter camp evenings, and are almost foolproof. Do remember to change the candle when it burns down to about 3/4-inch. If it burns much lower, the whole candle remnant will melt all over the bottom of the candle lantern. This provides a vocabulary testing mess to be remedied I attached an ‘S’ hook to mine so it can be hung. Oil lantern inserts are available for some candle lanterns. These replace the candle, and, from what little I've seen, are both oily and messy, and smelly in the pack.

At the high end of camp light equipments is the small backpacking oil lamp. This comes in a case about the same length and a wee bit thicker than a candle lantern. The lamp provides nice, stable light without the candle wax. I found the one I used to be much more susceptible to light wind than the candle lantern; it blew out very easily. Now it stays in the car for emergency winter use.

There are also small lanterns that fit on the same compressed gas canisters used with some backpacking stoves. They are relatively light, very bright, and a nice "extra," if you want to carry the bulk. The glass globes are easily broken if packed wrong in your pack. One such lantern is made with a metal screen instead of a glass globe. This would not break so easily, nor might it be quite as bright, and is more expensive.

These lanterns can be adjusted from very bright to very dim - a nice feature to save fuel.

Last in the camp light category are the numerous chemical lights available. I've used these to mark the campsite on a Merchant Mill Pond trip so that folks could enjoy a little night canoeing. I also very occasionally use one of these to mark the campsite on a beginner's trip. You might throw a couple in the car for emergency use. Other than this, they are of little value to the serious hiker and backpacker.

Remember to keep your camp light simple. They only time it will fail is after the sun goes down. Then you have to replace batteries or bulb, or do other maintenance work, in the dark, when it's cold, without light.

In cold weather, if your flashlight fails to work, try putting it in your inside pocket to warm those batteries back to life. The same is true for your camera battery. Keep that camera warm so it will operate.

This is where a flashlight neck lanyard is handy. Hang that flashlight down inside where it stays warm when not in use. The batteries stay warm and the flashlight does not slip out of your pocket onto the ground and get lost.