



## ASK ANDREW ?

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**Q: How do you maintain gear on long trips? How do you keep your sleeping bag from accumulating moisture? How you dry out boot liners, etc?**

**—"Light Skier" via [backcountrymagazine.com](http://backcountrymagazine.com) forum**

Gear is meant to be used and abused, but a little TLC goes a long way toward prolonging its life. I wouldn't think twice about skiing over rocks, logs, roads, and creek beds on a day tour near home, but on an expedition where a blown edge could end the trip, it's worth taking the time to love your gear.

Shovel handles may *look* like hammers, but they tend to disintegrate when used to pound in a picket. With a big enough boot, you *can* probably drive your shovel blade through blue ice, but you are going to feel like a beyotch when it snaps, and you have to dig a snow cave with a credit card. The moral of the story is, be patient, use the right tools for the job, and think about the consequences of breaking an important piece of gear. I also try to select field maintainable gear, like MSR XGK stoves, Dynafit bindings, and foam sleeping pads rather than inflatable. Simple and repairable gear works for the military, so it's good enough for me.

On long trips, planning and gear maintenance is essential. You *could* carry spare skis, boots, poles and stoves, but you'd have such a heavy load you wouldn't be going very far. Ultralight backpacking pioneer Ray Jardine says, "If you need something and you don't have it, then you don't need it." In other words, *make do*. Slovenian alpinist Tomas Humar lost his sunglasses and replaced them by cutting the ends off of two film canisters, then clamping them onto his eye sockets with the elastic waistband from his underwear. He contracted stink-eye, but at least he looked cool.\*

For tent camping, a good drying routine is important. The bulk of this can be done by sleeping with gene-power—as in Nalgene. Keeping your water bottles inside your sleeping bag keeps them from freezing, but if you fill them with hot water first, they're like little ovens that keep you warm and help dry your socks, boot and glove liners, and spare clothes. A size large or XL sleeping bag is great for holding all the extra stuff, although at times it can be like sleeping with a herd of turtles. It's not as great as it sounds.

After prolonged tent time, drying your gear out on "laundry day" makes a big difference. Use your skis to create a stretcher for your sleeping bag and let it air out. Stick your socks on crevasse wands and let them bask in the sun. Use a cord inside your tent as a clothesline, to at least get your clothes out of the tent-floor cesspool. Hanging gear in a well-vented tent, especially on sunny days when you are gone, will help dry it out and restore loft and warmth.

My favorite expedition-drying tool, however, is a Backpackers Pantry "Pot Parka." These little flameproof cozies fit over pots, and funnel hot stove exhaust gases through a hole in the top. It won't immediately dry out a pair of socks or boot liners, but it makes a difference. Plus, *ze boot liner zest makes ze best zoup seasoning*. The Canadian alternative (Greg Hill, specifically) is to just stick your foot directly into boot liners with half-inch hoar frost crystals growing in them. "They'll thaw out eventually, eh?"