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Ask the Gear Guy

Internal or external frame?



I need a new backpack. What's better: Internal or external frame?

- Confused Carl, Aptos, Calif.

Dear Confused, you must be a mind reader because thousands of other guys are wondering this same thing. Then again, if you really were a mind reader you wouldn't need to ask me questions because you'd already know exactly what I was thinking, right?

I digress.

So, backpacking packs come in two types. External frames packs are those with a framework on the outside. These old-school-style packs are the best choice if you'll be hiking mostly on groomed trails carrying lots of weight. They're especially good at transferring the load so you can hike in a more comfortable upright stance. They're also about half the cost of an internal frame pack, which has its support hidden inside like a skeleton.

Internal frame packs are usually more form-fitting, so they are better for guys who'll be hiking rugged trails that require freedom of movement and balance. Most internal frame packs have one huge compartment with a couple of zippered access points, whereas external frame packs usually have lots of smaller compartments that make organization easier. You can also easily attach extra gear - such as a sleeping bag or fishing rod - to the frame.

Which type of pack is better is really up to you and your needs.

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1. *16 - cool backpacker 101* says:
[June 26th, 2008 at 9:34 pm](#)

i like the internal frame packs because they are more comfortable,, and they allow more movement

2. *15 - philmont 09 75* says:
[June 4th, 2008 at 4:01 pm](#)

I going to philmont in 2009 with scouts and I been backpacking and I use and exyernal framed kelty pack. One of my friends tells me how great internal frames are for philmont im not sure what to use

3. *14 - ret-sm* says:
[May 12th, 2008 at 9:31 pm](#)

Several of the perceptions of the internal frame pack "downsides" are no longer valid. Today's internal is more of a hybrid between the two styles than ever before. Osprey, Gregory, Kelty, Deuter, and most other brands are now producing internal frame packs capable of carrying a reasonable load with an eye to backpanel ventilation, external pockets, lash points, and other organizational perks. You only need to look at how

few external frames are on the market to see which way the trend is going.

I used an external in my 17+ year scout career and have now switched to an internal as I am active with the local Search and Rescue team. I prefer today's internal for weight to load bearing capacity, comfort, stability, and ease of use. While one of the primary reasons given for preferring an external frame is load capability. I think I would prefer to teach a scout to purchase gear and pack "smart" rather than heavy. There are several good internals that can be found for around the same cost as an external, including those with adjustable torsos that will grow with the scout.

4. *13 - dave* says:
[May 10th, 2008 at 2:49 pm](#)

From what I have read more like the internal frame.
internal-good for canoeing, rugged trails, you won't get snagged on things, have a lot of room, and LIGHT WEIGHT, but it's hard to strap things directly to the pack, and it's a BIT PRICY. It keeps in heat which could be good or bad depending on the weather.
The external frame is balanced out, well organized, and is durable, but it's bad for canoeing, it restricts movement, and it's HEAVY. it also lets the air flow.
Thanks for reading.

5. *12 - BSA Scout* says:
[May 8th, 2008 at 7:41 pm](#)

If you are looking at canoeing or going on rugged trails, I would recommend the internal frame. External frames tend to be heavier, but balance out better, and are good for the heat of Texas. I once went camping in northern Michigan, and I liked the way my friend's internal pack worked in that kind of weather.

6. *11 - camper* says:
[April 20th, 2008 at 9:37 pm](#)

I have an internal frame High Sierra Sentinel 65, it has served me well on my past few camping trips. I personally prefer an internal frame. but the problem is that it's harder to strap stuff to the pack itself. I got it on sale so it was only 80 bucks!

7. *10 - sup* says:
[April 3rd, 2008 at 8:41 pm](#)

INTERNAL FRAMES ARE BETTER THEY ARE EASY ACCESS YOU DO NOT GET SNAGGED ON SCRUFF AND LOTS OF ROOM
WORKED GREAT FOR ME ON PHILMONT IT WAS LIGHT WEIGHT AND HAS LOTS OF ROOM LOOK AT REI THEY HAVE GREAT
SERVICE AND FIT PACKS WELL THEY CAN BE A BIT PRICY THOUGH BUT THEY HAVE SALES AND THAT IS HOW I GOT MINE
FOR CHEAPER

8. *9 - matt123* says:
[April 3rd, 2008 at 12:41 pm](#)

I am going to Philmont in August 2009 it will help THANKS

9. *8 - Hiker* says:
[March 31st, 2008 at 12:43 am](#)

I had think it can be hard to strap and even fit certain external frame packs into canoes one boy in my troop had to strap it onto the gunnels which isn't very desirable just something to think about

10. *7 - T829* says:
[March 23rd, 2008 at 6:59 am](#)

I personally think Internal Frames are better

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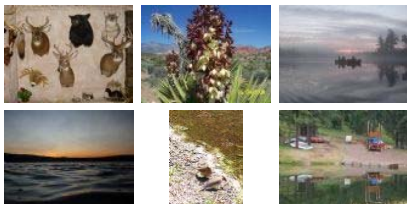
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