



adventure journal

THE DEEPER YOU GET, THE DEEPER YOU GET

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Gear Review

Featuring: Variant 52

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The most I've ever hoped from a backpack is to not ache at the end of each day hauling to the next campsite. I get a lot more ups out of the journey, but the hauling part is never what I live for. This ode, though, is for a backpack that's actually comfortable — and comfortable whether light or jammed beyond the norm. I overloaded the Variant 52 more than once (recommended weight is a little over 50 pounds and I went on the heavier side) and it remained stable whether I was on foot or snowshoes, skinning like a slug uphill on skis or bombing down. So you know it's comfortable. I have narrow hips and the firm, closed-foam hip belt never created hot spots. The shoulder straps anchored down hard and close, as I needed for steep chugs uphill, but the load still concentrated low into my torso.



Before I go further, know that the Variant 52 is meant as a mountaineering pack, but I think any hiker would like the Variant 52 simply because it's cut narrower (to allow an overhand swing of an ice axe, for example). It has hydration reservoir compatibility with port opening and a hanger for any typical bladder system. There are three external anchors to turn the pack into a haul bag, which also work to hang the bag high in bear country. A huge rear pocket is big enough to swallow the scoop-end of a shovel, helmet, or crampons, and it has its own waterproof zippered enclosure for storing anything you want dry yet with easy access. Ice axe bungies are also useful for attaching other tools. Side straps are engineered for carrying skis or snow wands and double to cinch the load down tight. The hipbelt also has a unique system for quickly latching it behind the pack.

I'd argue that via two simple hacks to the Osprey Variant 52 you're getting a mountaineering pack that morphs to an ideal weekend camping pack, and in both cases you're buying something that fits slender peeps better — and is always supremely comfortable regardless of the load. \$199

