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Gear Review: Perfect Weekend Backpacks

Featuring: Kestrel 48

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I'm going to admit right up front that I've never reached a state of zen hiking up 4,000 feet of switchbacks with a pack on my pack. Call me unenlightened. I'm okay with it. Yes, there are a lot of places I want to go that I can only access with a backpack and I will gladly accept the tradeoff of that load in exchange for where I want to be. But...how to put it? I'm more excited by pack comfort than zippered compartments and ice axe loops and fancy suspensions. Comfort, above all else. And that's the main measuring stick used in this review.

Features: We think someone in special ops designs Osprey's packs — their organizational setup is incomparable. With the Kestrel 48 there are dual side zip compartments, a large central hold that has access at both the top and bottom, a gusseted lid with three zippered compartments, and dual tie-on points for sleeping pads. In fact the central back tie-off could easily be used for skis or snowshoes instead, but the same straps that let you anchor something big to the back of the pack will also unclip and loop around both sides of the pack and latch on tent poles. Climbers will dig the addition of dual gear loops and myriad daisy chains.

Fit: The Kestrel was one of the most comfortable packs we tested. Two reasons: Precurved dual stays arc from the shoulder in semi-circles down to the hips, giving the load both balance and a sort of dynamic springiness, so even rock-hopping or stairstep descents seem to get absorbed by the pack before the full brunt of the load falls back against your body. The back panel also helps: The Airspeed netting is something like a hybrid between the "trampoline" backs of the North Face and REI packs we tested and a more traditional foam setup, so the pack rides far enough off the body to allow some breathability but snugs up close for vertical assaults. It also can't be stressed enough that the Kestrel, like only a few packs here, has an adjustable torso length for a more precise fit. The system is also dead-simple to use on the fly, so you can fiddle during break-in hikes and even mark your fit with a Sharpie so you always know you like it. **Best For:** Folks who like precise organization, steep terrain, and comfort in equal doses. \$159 [LINK](#)