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Gravel Canyon Gear Test

Featuring: Aether 60

Monthly Traffic: 38,400

URL: <http://tinyurl.com/88z9h64>

Into the Depths: Canyoneering 'Gravel Canyon'

Our route, a common descent through Gravel Canyon, was rated Canyon 3B III, meaning technical climbing skills are required. Fortunately, our visit in mid-April coincided with spectacular weather and little threat of rain, which can quickly add danger to a canyon descent, where flash floods can start, well, in a flash. On my back, I carried a 60-liter pack, the Aether 60 from Osprey, loaded with camping and canyoneering gear plus some photo equipment. Our guide also had me haul food and four liters of red wine for the group — we were balancing adventure with a bit of luxury on this trip, no doubt! Indeed, at the start my pack weighed a shoulder-burning 50 pounds. But as we hiked in, I cinched the pack tight and decided to try and forget about the load. That was easy, it turned out, with the Aether pack. A slick suspension system and comfortable shoulder harness distributed the weight across my back, shoulders and hips. The few hot spots that developed during the first day of hiking were easily fixed by adjusting the load lifters that night. Once dialed-in, the Aether pack kept my load snugly in place, wine and all. Even during rappels and technical stemming moves the pack did not noticeably shift. In the depths of a canyon, good gear is essential to moving with comfort and speed. I ended the Utah trip still with dry hair — no embarrassing slips! My pack was lighter, trimmed of food and drink, as we hiked the remaining miles out. A good trip and a solid equipment test in canyons so deep sometimes you can't see the sky.

