

CAMERA BAGS & CASES

How to take it with you

by Jack and Sue Drafa

One thing you'll find out about photography—it's addictive. Once you have made the decision to buy a specific camera system, you'll find yourself constantly adding more goodies to your collection. The camera stores are going to love you and before long you'll be on a first name basis.

Right from the start you'll realize that you are going need some type of storage case to hold and carry all your gear. The type of bag or case you select will depend on the type of photographer you are. Don't be surprised if one bag is not enough for all photo situations. The more diverse your lifestyle and shooting habits, the more bags you will need to cover specific situations. As professional photographers we have almost every type, and use them all at one time or another.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

As you look at the different types of bags, remember that you will want get one a little larger than you think you need. You never know when you will add a new piece of gear (We told you photography was addictive!). You may also need to add a lunch, drink, notebook, or windbreaker.

By purchasing a larger bag, you will not have to decide what piece of equipment to leave behind. You remember Murphy's Law don't you?

Keep in mind that your bag doesn't necessarily have to hold all your equipment. As an outdoor photographer, you may get a backpack that holds everything, but a daypack or hip hugger that will hold a flash, film and a couple of lenses.

This is why you want to consider several options. Then you are able to pick the camera bag to match the photo situation. There is an enormous array of camera bags on the market today so it is important to determine your needs before shopping.

Bags today are made of many different materials. They can be constructed of durable nylon or canvas as well as high-impact plastic and metal. Many use velcro as well as plastic or metal clips and some are even waterproof.

As you consider the purchase of a bag, you need to look closely at the versatility of the bag itself. Can you access each lens easily? Do you have to put the bag down to get into it? Is each item protected from the other items in the bag? Is there a chance of an item falling out and losing it? Is the bag comfortable to carry for a long period of time?

Is there storage space for small items like batteries, model releases, cable release, film, filters, clam-pods, extension cords, and other photo toys? Can the bag take the wear and tear of heavy usage and still protect the contents from the weather?

Price may also be a factor so shop wisely to be sure and get the best value for your dollar.



◀ **Left:** The new Beseler Lifestyle premium bag line features three waterproof bags with thick protective padding. They have cotton web straps and solid brass hardware. The larger bag (BB500) may be converted into a backpack using accessory straps.

FANNY/HIP PACK

The fanny/hip pack is designed to distribute the weight of the camera system on your hips. If you move around a lot when shooting and a shoulder bag swings too much, then this might be the solution.

The fanny/hip pack is similar to a shoulder bag, only smaller. It usually has a center section for the larger items, and smaller accessory pockets around the outside of the pack. The disadvantage to this pack is that it stays parallel with your hips. When using a pack like this, be careful not to bend down unless the bag is completely closed. Things could easily spill out.

The best advantages of Fanny/hip packs are that the weight is carried evenly by your hips instead of your shoulders and back and equipment is easy to get to.

DAYPACKS

Photo daypacks resemble school kids' book bags except there is some padding to protect your camera gear and lots more pockets to store your accessories. This type of camera bag is great for



short day trips, when you may not need to take all your equipment.

You would generally carry your camera and primary lens around your neck and the rest goes in the daypack. When you needed a change, you would have to have someone get it for you, or totally remove the daypack to get the equipment you need. That makes your equipment not nearly as accessible as with shoulder bags.

The big advantage of the daypack is that the weight is spread out over both shoulders and your back. This also keeps the bulk behind you which makes it easier to negotiate narrow hiking trails.

BACKPACK

For the true outdoor photographer who makes long trips with a lot of heavy gear, the photo backpack is a must. These packs are usually well designed to

◀ **Top Left:** Fanny or hip-packs are the hands-free alternative for active photographers, or people who want to lighten the load on their shoulder. Unlike the unpadded variety sold in general stores, photo fanny packs have protective compartments for cameras and accessories. The large Lowepro Orion AW model has a built-in waistbelt, lumbar support and shoulder strap. It holds one SLR with lens attached, two extra lenses, a flash and other accessories.

◀ **Bottom Left:** True photographer's backpacks are designed like a hiker/camper's backpack—in other words, for the comfortable carriage of heavy equipment through proper weight distribution. Once removed from your back, the Domke Outpack Photo Backpack is designed to be accessed while in an upright position.

▶ **Right:** If you use your camera in the workplace or want to blend in with the business world, consider a briefcase-style bag. The Billingham Hadley bags emphasize elegance and workmanship with brass fittings and leather trim, straps and patches.

▲ **Above Left and Right:** As an alternative to the hard-core backpack, daypacks offer an attractive option to more casual hikers and travelers. The Tamarac Photographer's Daypack Model 750 features a handle and shoulder straps. Its center-split design allows traditional access to the camera gear in the the bottom, while the the upper daypack portion is great for carrying extra gear, lunch or a windbreaker.

distribute the weight and protect all your equipment.

To access most parts of the backpack you must lay it down on its back. When you open the main section, you'll find it very much like a shoulder bag, except that it will be more rigid. The outside of the backpack usually has a variety of small pockets and pouches for all the necessary little stuff. The shoulder straps are sturdy, padded and adjustable. Most packs have lumbar support and waist belts to keep the pack snug to your body. Some have attachments for tripods or monopods.

Photo backpacks come in a variety of sizes designed to match the amount of equipment you need to carry.

PHOTOVEST

A popular camera carrying device is not a bag at all, but a jacket with lots of pockets. The photovest looks very much like a fishing/hunting jacket with pouches and pockets covering the entire jacket. Instead of fishing lures or ammunition, you will be carrying lenses. Each item



PERFECTED PHOTO PDTS.

● Perfected Photo Products offers accessory pouches that attach to belts by a steel spring belt-clip and belt-loop. Pouches are available for filters, battery packs and 4x5 film holders as well as new pouches for all medium format roll-film magazines (including the Mamiya 645 insert) and Polaroid backs. The pouches have a wide web strap along the bottom, instead of being completely closed.

PHOENIX

● The stylish Phoenix FS line now offers black with gold accents, hunter green/tan, black/pink and black/green bags. A zipper trans-forms their small and medium back-packs into rectangular shoulder bags (with waist straps) when the back-pack section is detached.

PHOTOFLEX

● Photoflex's Galen Rowell bags feature removable waist belts and shoulder straps in shoulder, waist and chest pack models. The Performance series includes the shock-ab-sorbing Reporter, the Xtreme with Show-All top, the Action with built-in waist belt and lumbar support; and the Event, which converts from shoulder to waist bag.

PORTER CASE

● The Porter Case II is a hard-shell padded case that quickly converts into a rolling tote or luggage cart. Other gear can be loaded on top of the case in its cart configuration (for a total weight of up to 200 pounds) for easy cartage. A great concept, executed well.

SUNDOG

● SunDog bags are available in backpack, shoulder and waist-fanny styles. The bags come in sizes that hold one 35mm SLR and film to much larger bags that hold 2 or 3 cameras and more than 6 lenses. The FieldBag starts at a narrow 3½-inch depth, but unzips to 6 inches.

TAMRAC

● From hard cases and photo vests to hip bags and backpacks, Tamrac has it. The new Rolling Strongbox Model 652 is a large camera-carrying case on wheels. The Photogra-pher's Daypack looks and functions like a fashionable daypack with shoulder straps, but the lower half hides a fully functional, padded camera bag.

TENBA

● Tenba pro-oriented bags feature their Lens Protector Divider System and stiff padded wooden bottom liners for maximum impact protection. New styles include hands-free Bear and Cub waist packs, Express Paks for small SLRs and Car Cases for larger equipment, such as lights, stands, umbrellas and reflectors.

TUNDRA

● Tundra Ruff Pack and Targa lines include camera holsters, a Pro Bag with built-in day-pack, padded tripod bags and versatile black-nylon shoulder bags with leather handles and attractive trim. Tundra Sea King ABS plastic hard cases are waterproof down to 30 feet.

ZERO HALLIBURTON

● Zero Halliburton now offers their popular Zeroller Transport Case in a pro textured black finish with a modular divider interior. Most other Zero Halliburton cases originally supplied with foam interiors can be fitted with the new modular divider. As with all Zero Halliburton cases, the Zeroller meets airline specs and can withstand just about anything.

you carry in the photovest has its own slightly padded pocket. The more pockets, the more gear you can carry. Some vests have large pockets in the back that can accommodate a monopod or smaller tripod.

You access each piece of equipment by simply opening one of the many pockets. You just have to remember which lens is where.

Photovests on the market today are usually lightweight cotton with mesh ventilation and come in a variety of colors in addition to the traditional khaki. They are functional as well as discreet attire for photographers who are carrying a lot of gear.

The big advantage of a photovest is that the weight of the contents is distributed on both shoulders and back. The photovest is also very streamlined, so that you can easily move through a



▲ Above: Periodically, manufacturers produce bags for special purposes or to commemorate special events or sponsorships. The sporty NASCAR series from Coast is perfect for the car enthusiast or sports photographer.

crowd without bumping into people as with a camera bag or backpack.

This is why photovests have always been popular with photojournalists. Of course, using a vest keeps your hands free, and you don't have to worry about gear slipping off your shoulder as you shoot.

TOPLOAD CAMERA BAG

The topload camera bag is dedicated to a single camera setup and looks like a gun holster. This type of setup is for the photographer who needs to access a camera fast, and doesn't need to carry a lot of equipment.

The bag is usually very well padded and has a deep pocket to snugly hold a camera and telephoto lens. The bag straps to your waist and has a top flap for quick and easy access. Some are equipped with optional chest harnesses for added stability and security. In addition, some may have a waterproof shell that can be stretched over the case.

Additional small pockets on the side of the topload bag serve as storage for filters, film, or smaller accessories.

These bags can be used with 35mm SLR set-ups as well as some medium format cameras and lenses.



▲ **Above:** The Roll-film magazine belt pouch from Perfected Photo Products has a steel spring belt clip to hold a roll-film camera back securely on a belt. A useful tool for photographers shooting medium or large format with more than one film type.



▲ **Above:** The photovest is useful because you can store gear in its numerous pockets without having to carry a camera bag—although some photographers wear a vest *and* carry a bag. Shown here is the new World Correspondent's Vest by Tamrac. It is made of 100% cotton and features 10 front pockets as well as mesh ventilation. There are additional pockets throughout the vest, making it easy to use.

► **Near Right:** Quick-Draw is one of many small companies that sell specialized photo equipment-carrying devices. This little item screws into the tripod socket and then attaches to your belt via a clip with a quick-release mechanism.

►► **Far Right:** The Pelican Convertible Travel Bag and Case is a combination hard case (Pelican Model 1520) and soft-sided shoulder bag. It provides airtight, hard-shell protection for travel and shipping, along with the convenience of a removable conventional softshell camera bag.

HARD CASES

Hard shell camera cases are quite varied in size, construction, and serve different purposes. The smaller, briefcase size cases are generally designed to hold a specific camera system. Many look like a business briefcase and are heavily padded but carry only a small amount of camera gear. To use these cases, you usually have to break down your system for transport.

The medium size hard cases are very popular with photographers needing to protect their gear especially when traveling by air. You usually have the choice of either foam padding or dividers to organize and protect your equipment. Which form of protection you select depends on how much gear you have and how often you are changing what you take in the case. The dividers make it easy to customize the case for each trip, but once the foam is cut to size, the set-up is permanent.

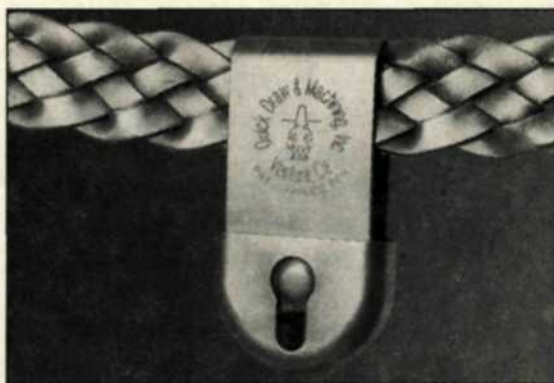
The larger suitcase size cases are often used by professional photographers for carrying studio lighting gear, large format camera systems, light meters, or underwater photography equipment. Some of the hard cases even have waterproof seals, so that you can protect your gear when proximity to water may be a problem.

Most recently, several of the manufacturers began adding wheels and handles so that you can easily roll the case through the airports. Hard cases offer superior protection for your gear during tough travel but are not suitable for easy and quick access to equipment.

ACCESSORY CASES

There are as many types of accessory cases as there are types of photo equipment. If you have a specific type of photo equipment, be assured there is someone who makes a case for it. For example, padded filter pocket cases are available to prevent breakage and hold from 1-6 filters.

These pocket cases can store in your larger camera bag or they can be strapped to the side of the main case. Pockets for filters and other accessories, such as camera backs, are also available with clips for attaching to a belt for easy access.



▲ **Above:** Topload bags are designed for "fast-shooters," since the camera is placed face down with the lens attached. The Lowepro Topload Zoom AW can fit an SLR camera with a long zoom lens, and accessories in an expandable exterior pocket, an interior mesh pocket and two film loops. This model features a removable chest harness and an All Weather cover that comes out of the front pocket to protect equipment. In addition, there is a reverse-open lid for easy camera access.



▲ **Above:** The Campack Combination Backpack/Carry Case features water resistant materials and a foam padded lower compartment. The two packs can be used together or apart. The shoulder straps detach making the bag a carry case or backpack.



Tripod and light stand cases not only protect the tripods and stands, but make them easier to carry from one location to the next.

Supertelephoto lenses come with one of two types of carrying cases. The hard case is for the very large and heavy lenses. They do protect the lens very well, but you may need to look for an alternate carrying method if you take the lens into the field. Other telephoto lenses may



▲ Above: Hard cases are great for transport, shipping and rough handling because of their metal or high-impact plastic shells. The well-known Zero Halliburton line has become part of the wheeled-luggage phenomenon by introducing the Zeroller Transport System—a hard-shell camera carrying case with built in luggage cart.



▲ Above: Filter pouches and filter wallets are an excellent way to keep your filters organized and handy in the field. This pouch by Perfected Photo Products has slots for five large rectangular filters (the type used for many modular systems). It attaches to your belt via a built-in clip or belt loop.

have a pouch-like carrying case that can be strapped to the side of your camera bag or hung from a belt. This type of case is better suited for field work.

If you want additional protection for some of your equipment, you can purchase a photo wrap. These padded cloths wrap around your lens or camera body and secure with a Velcro tab.

BUYING YOUR FIRST BAG

When you first buy a camera bag, you probably won't have a lot of gear, so you could bring equipment with you to the camera store. If you can't do this, you can set each piece of gear down on a piece of paper and draw around it. Cut these out and write height, width, and depth on each cutout.

Work with a salesperson and put your equipment or cutouts in different bags until you find a good fit. Take your time and find the right bag because the safety of your equipment depends on it.

Try the bag on, feel the fit. Is it comfortable? Make sure the bag is the right size for you to be carrying. A large bag may fit lots of gadgets, but it's no good if you can't lift it or carry it around when it's full.

If you don't have your own camera equipment with you, ask to load some of the display cameras into the bag. This will give you a chance to feel how the bag sits when it is full.

If you are going to be working in inclement weather conditions, check to see that any potential camera-bag purchase is waterproof or at least water-resistant.

Another thing to consider is that if you have a lot of equipment to carry with you, you might want to carry it in two bags or cases rather than overloading one. It's a lot more comfortable to carry two balanced loads, one on each side, than it is to try to cart one heavy load on one side.

In choosing the right container for your gear, your main considerations should be quality of workmanship and materials, so you don't have a structural failure; capacity—it should carry what you generally need on a shoot; and convenience—can you get at everything easily, or do you have to sort through everything to find an urgently needed item that's on the bottom? Aside from these considerations, the style of the container is up to your taste; all sorts of styles are available.

A camera bag is an important part of your gear. It will protect your equipment and organize the way you work when you take pictures. Eventually, each lens will have its own space and you will automatically know where to reach for it. You will use the bag as often as you take pictures so it's important to find the bag that's right for your needs. □



▲ Above: Zone VI 4x5 pouches let you keep cut-film holders and Polaroid backs handy when shooting with a large-format camera.



▲ Above: Although not technically a bag, equipment wraps can be quite handy for giving your gear extra protection inside a camera bag or when tossed into a suitcase, briefcase or purse. Domke Protective Wraps come in three sizes and are infinitely adjustable with their four Velcro tabs. Available in black, red and yellow for color-coding purposes.



▲ Above: This cutaway diagram of a Lowepro Magnum AW shows how equipment fits into the typical large shoulder bag. Note that on the top is an easily accessible SLR camera with zoom lens attached, probably already loaded with film so the photographer can react quickly if needed. Internal padded dividers are used to compartmentalize sections of the bag. The least-used lenses and accessories are placed in bottom compartments, above which the more sought-after equipment is placed. Mesh pockets allow quick surveillance of the contents. Removable pouches are handy for separating high-speed film from your equipment at airport x-ray stations.