

RAVEN TARP EX



The Raven Pack Family

By Greg Churchman



pic 1



pic 2



pic 3



pic 4



pic 5



pic 6

For several years I have been using, and recommending, a particular equipment bag because I hadn't come across anything better. Finally, it seems, I have. Raven Technical Systems has designed three packs that will satisfy the needs of most teams or individuals. I generally recommend that teams try to get by with as few bags as possible. Less to store, carry, forget, look for or leave behind. Raven has done a really, really good job of researching what was needed and then manufacturing three basic packs, (for now), to meet those needs, the TARP EX, ACCESS and HighAngle.

My favourite for team gear, is the TARP EX, which stands for Technical Access Rescue Pack. No, the TARP does not come with a tarp but there is a pack in the range that does - the HighAngle I always keep one in the kit anyway to place gear on, (handy on catwalks) or to use as edge protection. I like the TARP because it

MANUFACTURER: Raven Technical Systems
ORIGIN: USA
MATERIAL: Cordura & Nylon Mesh
HIGH ANGLE
COST: \$137
DIMENSIONS: 21x12x7.5"
WEIGHT: 3.6lbs
CAPACITY: 1900in³
ACCESS
COST: \$183
DIMENSIONS: 23x17x8"
WEIGHT: 4.2lbs
CAPACITY: 3100in³
TARP EX
COST: \$254
DIMENSIONS: 27x17x10"
WEIGHT: 6.3lbs
CAPACITY: 5000in³

satisfies my desire to carry as much of my basic systems gear as is reasonable, in one pack. Such as, pulleys, carabiners, webbing, accessory cord, prusiks and so on. This coupled with the personal equipment each team member carries should satisfy most of the gear needs, most of the time. When I first opened the TARP I thought hmmm, this ain't gonna do

it. I didn't realize that when the shoulder straps were unclipped at the top, there was another full storage section available. With three large zippered mesh pockets and various straps, you can store a plethora of gear. (pic 2). The other side of the pack (pic 3) has two more very large zippered mesh pockets, and a cavernous main compartment, nearly 20cm (8") deep. The main compartment is sectioned using dividers with Velcro which you can orient any way you like. (Much like a modern camera bag). I stuck with the four sections it came with, and use it for most of my soft gear. But you could easily add more dividers, or completely remove them and use it as a rope compartment, or any combination. This is the first equipment pack I've used which allows me to customize the layout, and I like it. I've used yellow tape to mark the mesh pockets. Stored gear is usually easy to see through the mesh, but since I'm not the only one taking

equipment out and putting it back, designating where it belongs, makes locating equipment, and doing inventory, simpler.

One of the things I really like about the 'TARP' and the 'Access' packs is the way they open. When closed, the top flap or hood is secured with 'one' plastic 'fastex'-type clasp. To open you just squeeze and it unlocks. Sounds silly but I was really tired of having to fight with two overly large clasps on the old bag. It doesn't seem like much, but it really is better. It's actually one of the first things that I noticed. The clasp is attached to the bag with an adjustable lead, so you can vary the length and place a helmet, rope, or bedroll underneath. Inside the top are two webbing loops with adjustable buckles. So you can size them but you can't undo them. Whatever you secure with them will have to slide through. I wish they were a little longer and had bayonet clasps.

The brilliant part comes after you have unclipped and opened the top. The main compartment is secured with a zipper on either side of the bag. The bag sides are stiff by the way, maintaining the shape and integrity of the compartment. To open, you don't need to grapple with each zipper separately. You simply grasp the plastic handle at the top of the compartment and pull smoothly. The zippers slide open like silk. It's like peeling a banana. Yes, you do have to close the zippers one at a time. I also really like the fact that my main storage area is so accessible. No more digging to try and find the item I'm looking for, or dumping the whole lot to locate one piece of gear. (The item we want is invariably on the bottom). Now I can see everything as soon as I peel back the cover. (pic 3). What you put where, is of course, up to you. These photos just present a few of the possibilities. And we're not done yet. The top flap or hood, has an access zipper, and can hold a fair amount of gear. And each side has a very large zippered pocket, with mesh inside, to allow separation of items, and mesh on the outside to store whatever you may need quickly. A roll of gaffer's tape is visible in the side mesh pocket, in pic 6. In pic 4 the side pocket is open, and you can see that it easily holds a complete Aztek kit, a Rocker, and a few other odds and ends. Pic 1 reveals a sleeve created by the side pocket, which is holding some red rope protectors, and there is enough space to hold more. At the bottom of the sleeve is an ice-axe style stirrup which allows you to secure whatever is placed in it. The side pocket, with

all its attributes, is accessible whether the pack is open or closed. The front of the pack turned out to be a convenient place to carry some Ultra-Pro edge protection (pic 1). To give you some idea of the overall size of the TARP EX, in pic 6, Lt. Bouchard is wearing the pack and he stands at 186cm, just over six foot one. (It looks larger when I carry it.) The size and capacity are generous, allowing you to pack what you need. Amazingly, all the compartments for storing gear are easily accessible. I am used to having some that are, and more that are not. This is a dream in comparison, very efficient engineering.

Carrying the pack is a breeze. The suspension system is state of the art and very comfortable, it is easily sized and well padded. The shoulder straps and waist band are lined with mesh to keep you cool. Empty, the pack only weighs 2.8kg (6.3lbs). It feels light as a feather when I pick it up. The adverts say it has a capacity of 5000 cubic inches. This translates to 2.9 cubic feet, or 82 cubic centimeters, or .08 cubic meters. Suffice to say it's a lot of space. These are tough, well thought out packs. With ballistic nylon bottoms they will wear well. All are comfortable to carry and a pleasure to use. The Raven range are available in black/yellow or black/red with reflective piping (pic 5), and in all-black without the piping, for tactical use.

The more I use these packs the more I like them. Raven really did their homework and I am confident in saying that if you purchase any one of the three models you won't be disappointed. Ade and his team in the UK have been reviewing the excellent Raven High Angle pack with built in tarpaulin and numerous zipped pocket options. See issue 54 for the full review. Contact Raven Packs at: www.ravenrescuepacks.com.

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