

# Kit

written by Marcus | 4 February, 2014

Touring by tandem presents some significant problems in luggage capacity compared to using two solo bikes as you effectively have the same number of panniers and bags as one bike but need to carry enough for two people.

Some people try to overcome this by using a trailer but this then makes an already long vehicle even longer and increases the number of moving and rolling parts that could go wrong. We prefer the simplicity of keeping everything on the bike which means that we need to pack light. Very light.

***“Don’t pack what you could do with, pack only what you can’t do without.”***

Here we list some of the major bits of kit that we take on our trips, but we’ll also include reviews of some bits and pieces in the blog as we go.

## ***The Bikes***

We bought our Thorn Discovery tandem second hand after it had already been used by its previous owners for several trips around Europe. It was chosen mainly as it had S&S couplings which have already proved invaluable for getting the bike onto trains in Italy, the States and Wales as well as into various hotel lifts and into cars. We also wanted a sturdy steel frame and the Thorn is constructed using oversize Reynolds 531 tandem specific tubing. It is very unlikely to break but if it does then it can be welded. The other deciding factor was that the Thorn comes with 26” wheels. Although these don’t look as good as a 700c machine, nor do they roll as well, it is a much more universal size around the world so spares should be easier to find. Both front and back use 48h ceramic rims which make for super strong wheels and show absolutely no sign of

wear despite several 1000km use already (they do munch through brake pads more quickly though).

If a Rohloff hub gear equipped bike had been for sale at the same time then we may well have gone for that but so far running a standard derailleur gear system has proved reasonably reliable, apart from breaking chains. We seem to break a chain at least once on every trip we've been on so far! The search continues to find a 9-speed chain that can handle the abuse of a fully laden tandem but in the meantime we'll always carry a spare along with some quicklinks.



Bike in 2 Bits at Aberdeen Station

## ***Saddles***

Brooks B17, of course. The saddle of choice for the vast majority of cyclists



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## ***Panniers***

Ortlieb roll tops are by far and away the most common panniers we have seen on our travels so far. They are simple, durable, full waterproof, very well made and can accommodate various sized loads by rolling the top down as far as you need to.

We choose to use Vaude Aquabacks instead. They are very similar in design to the Ortliebs and with the same benefits but with the addition of a stiff backplate that makes them more secure on the bike and more robust when being chucked around a campsite, internal pockets for keeping small things separated and, to our minds, a better strap and buckle system. However it's as much personal preference as anything else between Ortlieb and Vaude and I suspect most people wouldn't go far wrong with either.

UPDATE: In Thessaoniki we added a Medium Ortlieb Rack Bag. This gives us more capacity for food and water when we need to carry a few days of supplies. It integrates really well with the Vaude panniers along with a couple of bungies for security and gives easy access to our biscuits.





The posh new biscuit carrier



# ***Tent***

After the bike, this is our most important piece of kit and one that has been deliberated over for quite some time. As we usually camp as much as possible our accommodation needs to be built to withstand repeated abuse and all four seasons of weather. Like just about everything else we carry, it also needs to be small and light.

We used a Quechua T3 Ultralight Pro for all of our early trips and it proved remarkably robust despite it's bargain price tag. It has enough room for 2 people and kit, it's very quick to pitch yet only weighs 3kg. However it was starting to show signs of wear so we thought it may not survive a longer trip. It's also a little vulnerable in high winds and heavy rain so we needed something more sturdy.

We eventually decided on the Hilleberg Kaitum 3 supplied with help from the outdoors specialists Ellis Brigham. Hilleberg are renowned for building some of the finest expedition tents available and their attention to detail and the quality of the materials and workmanship are second to none. We really like the design of the Kaitum as it has a good sized porch and entrance at each end of the tent which allows gear to be stored at one end leaving access and shelter for cooking at the other. In hot weather both ends can be opened up to allow a nice breeze through the living quarters but in foul weather the whole thing can be battened down and made cosy.



Our last campsite in Poland

At 3.3kg it's not the lightest tent we considered and it's nowhere near the cheapest but these compromises appear to be worthwhile to get a very well made and very versatile home from home.

## ***Sleeping Bags and Liners***

Warm sleeping bags are very bulky and heavy so we haven't got any. We do need to keep warm though so we have a layered sleeping system. The main component is a Thermorest Vela double quilt. This is a down filled quilt that clips onto our mats covering both of us. It weights the same as one sleeping bag, packs very small and is rated to keep you warm down to 7 degrees centigrade. A down filling was the obvious choice so that it could be packed down small and our Exped Telecompression bags help to squeeze as much air out as possible. We are also taking Sea to Summit Thermolite sleeping

bag liners that are claimed to add 8 -10°C to the comfort rating of a bag so these get used under the quilt for cold nights or as sheets over the mats on warmer nights. These are also handy used on their own during the much warmer months. If it gets really cold we put on all our clothes and down jackets too! The whole sleep system (quilt, liners and pillows) fits into a single 10l compression bag so its a very compact solution.

UPDATE: After far too many nights wearing everything we own within the Thermolite liners and under the Vela quilt and still being cold we decided to upgrade the quilt. In Istanbul we took delivery of an Enlightened Equipment Acomplice double quilt. Longer, wider and thicker than the Vela it's rated to -12 degrees C and is amazingly warm. Still only 1.1kg and packs to the size of a single sleeping bag so is ideal for space restricted travelling couples like us.

## ***Sleeping Mats***

We have Exped Synmat UL mats to sleep on which are an air filled mattress that includes a synthetic fibre insulation. At 7cm thick they are incredibly comfortable, the pack size of both together is less than one of our old, foam filled mattresses and of course they are very light. In conjunction with the ingenious Schnozzle and one of our sleeping bag compression bags they can be inflated very quickly with no need to use exhausted lungs at the end of a long day. They come with their own puncture repair kit and time will tell how durable they end up being.

We use them with Thermarest chair kits but due to their thickness it takes some manhandling to get them to fit. Exped do make specific chair kits but these are heavier and several times more expensive than the Thermarest version that we already had.



## ***Stove***

Another vital bit of kit, we use the ubiquitous MSR Whisperlite International on very long term loan from Marcus's brother who used it for his own round the world adventure in 1992. Fill it with whatever fuel you can get your hands on (usually petrol) and you'll have a cup of tea in hand within minutes. Almost indestructible and easily serviced on the road, there's a good reason these are taken up Everest.



Brewing up, Lofoton

## ***Electrics***

Although we want to keep things simple, inevitably there are a few gadgets that we'll be taking with us and they'll all need power.



The Plug USB charging port running off the dynamo hub

We have two 'free' power sources that we can use. At the front of the tandem we have a Schmidt SON 28 Klassic dynamo hub coupled to a Tout Terrain Plug 2+ USB charger. The German built SON hub is widely recognised as one of the best for touring due to its inherent reliability but regardless of this it's also the only dynamo hub available that is both rated for tandems and available for 48 spoke rims so we had no other choices. The Plug is a neat device that replaces the stem cap and provides a USB socket for tapping into the power generated by the hub. We liked the integrated design which means it's very difficult to steal and it includes a module that maximises power output over typical touring speeds (slow). Although we don't expect to do much night riding we have an Exposure Revo front light that also runs off the hub.

Sitting on the back of the bike is a Powertraveller Powermonkey Extreme solar panel. This happily collects



sunlight over the course of the day and tops up a large battery back that can then be drained into whichever gadget is thirsty overnight. The battery pack also gets charged from the mains whenever we're staying with people, in a café, on a ferry or spot an unattended power socket.

## ***Cameras***

We both enjoy capturing our travels on camera and we are very keen to document the trip in pictures. The tandem offers a great opportunity to take in-flight snaps and Kirsty has become adept at using the camera while pedalling so we hope to get some great photos from this unique perspective.

We have a Panasonic Lumix DMC FT5 tough, waterproof yet compact camera that lives in Marcus' back pocket for Kirsty to use while riding and for simple point and shoot photography then a larger, Sony Alpha 3000 with more manual adjustment features for off the bike shots.

## ***Clothes***

With just one pannier each for all our clothes, anything we take needs to be able to justify its place in the bag in several ways: It needs to be light, dry easily, be multipurpose (e.g. useful on and an off the bike) and able to pack down small. Merino fabrics are ideal for bike touring as they tick all these boxes but with the overriding benefit of being (mostly) odour free! For the comfort of each other and everyone we meet this is very important as we may have to go several weeks before seeing a launderette.

Vulpine make some lovely merino cycle tops that don't look too sporty but have enough useful cycle specific features so have made their way into our panniers.

Icebreaker make some the finest merino baselayers available

and have kindly supplied a few items for us to use. We use Exped Shrinkbag compression sacks that include a valve to allow you to squeeze everything down very small.

## ***Water Filter***

We have 5 water bottle cages on the bike(s) but one of these is used for the fuel bottle. This gives 4 litres of water which doesn't last long if we are away from a tap when we set up camp. In some countries this isn't be a problem as public toilets and cafes are in abundance for topping up but in more remote areas we have to collect water where we can from boreholes, streams, rivers and lakes. Initially we had a Katadyn Mini which is compact and robust but not fast (0.5 litres/minute) and hard work. After a nasty dose of Delhi Belly in India we invested in a Camelbak All Clear. Sadly this is no longer made, but it's a bottle with a UV light in the lid. You fill the bottle, screw the lid on, press a button and shake the bottle as light glows and a digital counter ticks from 60 seconds to 0. Job done! The Camelbak only works on clear water so we also have a Sawyer squeeze filter for water with sediment.



### Camelbak All Clear UV Filter

We've also got a 10 litre Ortlieb water bag that we don't use all that often if only because it's an extra 10 kg strapped to the bike when it's full!

## Packrafts

Our packrafts are from Frontier packrafts. We needed longer boats to fit the bikes and panniers in, so Marcus's is a double, and Kirsty's is a custom length partway between single and double. Frontier make the boats to order and you can choose the colours you want on each section – a very difficult



decision!









