

# Camera Bags and Cases

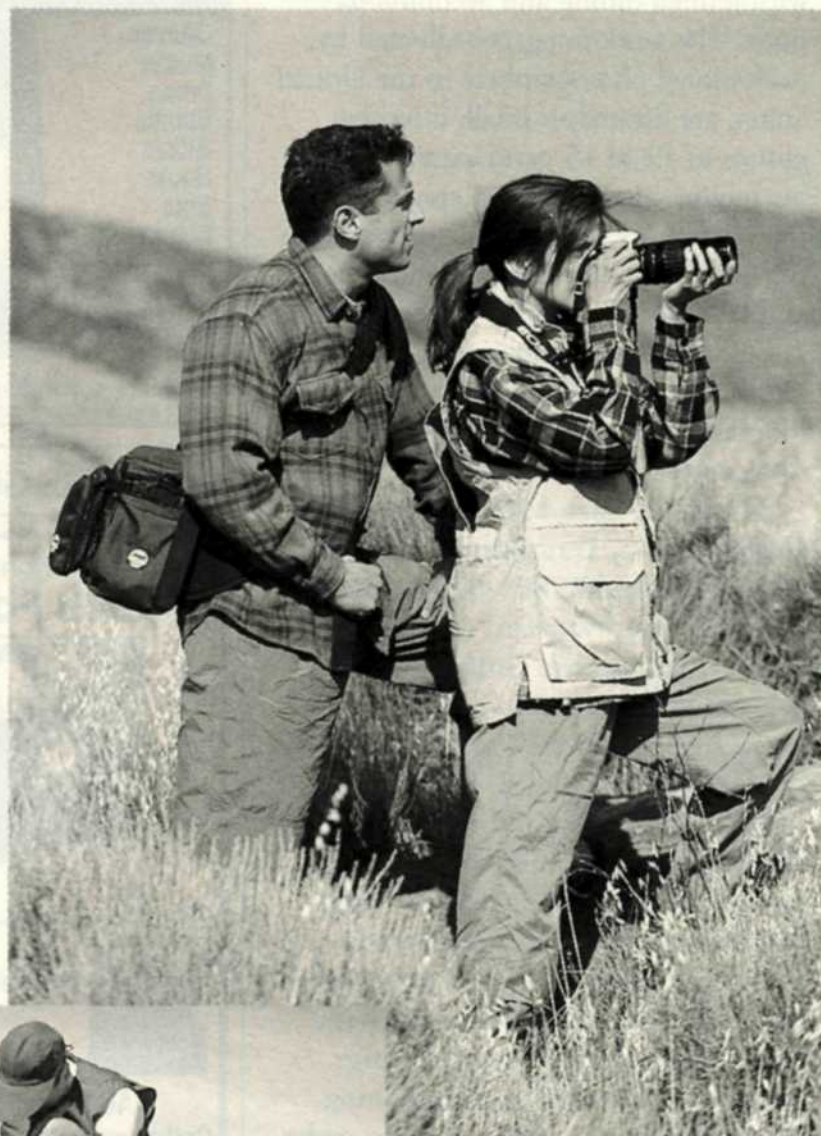
HOW TO CARRY ALL THAT GEAR EFFICIENTLY

by the Jack and Sue Drafahl

Thanks to all the technological advances, today's photographer has an endless choice of camera equipment. With all the possible combinations of cameras, lenses, flashes, and tripods, it's a job trying to match the correct equipment to the photographers' needs. Once a selection is made, you would think finding a camera bag to transport all the gear would be simple, right? Wrong! The choices for transporting this expensive and delicate gear are almost boundless. You can find a camera bag or case in most any size, configuration, material, color and some even have wheels to help you tote the load. So, how do you choose the right one? What makes you think that only one bag will do the job?

You need to analyze the photo equipment you will take with you before you can decide which camera bag to buy. This includes deciding which pieces of photo gear you really need to take with you, how much you plan on adding in the future, and the maximum weight you can transport comfortably. This may change in time, so you should consider several scenarios for transporting camera gear. Do you travel by airline? Are you a serious backpacker? Do you have to battle crowds when taking pictures or do find those secluded off road spots? Do you use 35mm or larger format, or both? If you are a serious photographer, you will probably find yourself purchasing several types of bags or cases to fit your different photo situations.

To ease the decision task, we will give you a head start by showing you the various groups of camera bags and cases and explain their usage. Keep in mind that in each group there are hundreds of possible configurations to match just about every possible situation.



### THE SHOULDER BAG

This is probably the most widely used camera bag, mainly because of its versatility. Most shoulder bags are rectangular in shape, have a large center compartment for camera bodies, lenses, and flash systems. Padded dividers are usually used to keep the different pieces of equipment from touching each other. Velcro is the most popular method for attaching dividers to the walls of the case. Extra dividers provide easy alternate configurations. The top flap of the bag usually has smaller compartments for film, filters, model releases, sync cords, and all the extras. Some bags have mid-sized pockets on either side and/or front of the case. These compartments can hold medium sized lenses, extra film, or a camera flash.

It is important to have a strong yet comfortable strap for holding the bag on your shoulder. Check the snaps, buckles, rings, and all devices that make up the shoulder strap. This can be the weakest link in the whole system. It makes no sense to protect all the expensive gear with a fancy bag, and lose it all because the strap gave way. It is also nice if you can find a bag with an alternate hand carrying strap. This will give your shoulder a break, and there are times when you



Domke J-series shoulder bag

Photoflex Galen Rowell Modular Shoulder Bag 2



will find the hand strap more practical.

When selecting a shoulder bag, don't pick one bigger than you can comfortably carry. Many photographers often take too much equipment with them on location. We hear it all the time, "I'm going to take that long lens and that extra flash, just in case." Generally photographers have an idea what they are going to shoot and are able to streamline their bags.

Don't be afraid to change the bag around every time you go on a photo excursion. We are always moving the dividers inside our bags to match the equipment and subjects we will be shooting for that day. You may also find that you need a small bag for small shoots, and a larger one for the all day affairs.

Lifestyle bags from Beseler



### AMBICO

Ambico has customized a line of photo cases to accommodate the latest Advanced Photo System cameras as well as the popular 35mm point-and-shoot cameras. They also feature larger camera bags that are SLR photo and video compatible in a variety of sizes, styles and materials.

### BESLER

Beseler features a wide variety of camera bags for the active photographer. The Diamond, Lifestyle and their most recent addition, the Contour series, offer the photographer and videographer enough choices to make their heads spin. The new Contour series consists of four shoulder bags and two top load holster bags that incorporate function and fashion while combining lightweight, durable materials for the 35mm shooter.

### BILLINGHAM

These camera bags have a different appearance than most because they are handcrafted in England. Designed to stand he English weather, these canvas bags are waterproof, and the lining anti-wicking. They feature a variety of shoulder bags, rucksacks, photovests, and larger rucksacks for backpacking. Their TorsoShell carrying system transfers the bag's weight directly to the hips to minimize back-to-bag contact. Removable padded partitions allow you to easily customize the bags for your equipment.

## DOMKE

Domke, a respected name in the camera bag industry for over 20 years, keeps thinking of innovative ideas for the photographer. From the ever popular Shooter's Bag, tripod bags, and lens wraps to the convertible PhoTOGS Vest, Domke has it all. Domke's OutPack series has everything for the outdoor shooter. They feature the scopePACK to ease the bulk of a camera-mounted 800mm lens, photo backpacks and even daypacks with comfort, versatility and durability in mind.

## DOSKOCIL

Doskocil offers economical cases in high-impact plastic. The Seal-Tight and Designer series have cubed foam interiors, lockable latches and come in black or metallic gray.

## LOWEPRO

Since 1972, Lowepro has been making camera bags that offer innovative designs, carrying comfort and protection from vibration, shock, moisture and dust. They offer all weather protection in their Trekking and Professional Series. The Omni Series features a soft bag nestled in a hard case for the ultimate airline protection. For convenience, they offer the Pro Rollers for photographers on the go. From the belt packs to the Street and Field system, Lowepro has thought of it all.

## FANNY OR HIP PACKS

This type of pack is very much like a shoulder camera bag except it is smaller and attaches to your waist via a belt. There eliminates the strain to the shoulders, while still providing easy access to the cameras and lenses inside. Most have one large center compartment for a camera, various accessories and 1-3 lenses. They often have small flat compartments in the top part or front of the pack. This is a great place to store film, filters, lens cleaner, and many of the small accessories. Most of these packs use a quick disconnect buckle to allow an easy exit from the pack. There is more movement to this bag since it moves with your hips. Be sure to check the zipper and buckles before you start moving to avoid any equipment accidentally falling out.



Tamrac 705 OPN hip pack

## TOPLOAD

This bag is a padded deep pocket, designed for a specific camera with the lens already attached. When you are ready to use this camera, simply lift the top flap and pull out the camera ready for action. They are much like a gun holster of varying sizes to accommodate short to telephoto lenses. This bag is popular with photographers who are partial to one camera and lens combination. The belt that holds this bag is usually a quick disconnect buckle for easy on and off. Some of the topload bags have smaller pockets along the sides or top for accessories and film.



Zing Extra Large Stuff Pouch

## BELTPACK

Another system that uses your waist for support is the beltpack. The weight is evenly distributed around your waist via several small equipment pouches much like a military ammunition belt. With this configuration each piece of equipment has its own pouch hanging off the belt. The camera and lens itself is usually in a topload camera bag. The beltpack allows body movement without the camera bag getting in the way. It is an ideal system for times when the photographer has to have both hands free, and the equipment weight is distributed low on the body.



Tamrac MBX 370 ACS beltpack



Lightware GripStrip



Lowepro Street and Field system beltpack and shoulder bag

## BACKPACK

If you want to minimize the strain on your shoulder and move the weight to your back, then the backpack is a great choice. These camera bags come in all sizes from those used as a simple daypack to ones designed to carry extensive camera gear for miles. With this type of case you will want to be very organized with the gear inside, since you must take the backpack off to access it. You will want to be able to find equipment easily and close it back up quickly. You should design the inside layout so that when one item is missing the rest will not fall into the hole it creates. There are many backpacks on the market especially designed for a specific size long lens and related accessories. These packs are designed to carry a lot of weight and are ideal for the serious big lens photographer.

When you are considering a backpack system, make sure you look at the harness configuration. The best type have shoulder straps, a waist strap and a chest strap. If you have the chance to try one on before you buy, you can play with these straps to see how well they fit. Comfort and stability is key when you carry heavy photo equipment for any length of time.



Saunders OutPack ScopePACK backpack



Lowepro Trekker AW backpack

## PELICAN

Pelican Products offers unbreakable, watertight, airtight and corrosion proof cases to fit almost any need imaginable. The cases are available in 13 different sizes for all applications from 8½ to 52" wide. The interiors are available with padded dividers or prescored pick 'n pluck foam. They even have a case that converts instantly from a hard case to a soft camera bag. All cases come with an unconditional lifetime guarantee.

## PERFECTED

Perfected Products features pouches that carry a variety of accessories like 4 x 5 film holders, extra roll film magazines, filters, Polaroid film backs, battery packs. These attach to a belt via a spring clip or belt-loop.

## PHOENIX

Phoenix features a stylish line of color coordinated camera bags. A zipper transforms their small and medium backpacks into rectangular shoulder bags with waist straps when the backpack is detached.

## PHOTOFLEX

Galen Rowell bags feature removable waist belts and straps in shoulder, waist and chest models. The Performance series includes the shock-absorbing Reporter, the Xtreme with Show-All tops, the Action with built-in waist belt and lumbar support; and the Event, which converts from shoulder to waist bag.

## PORTER CASE

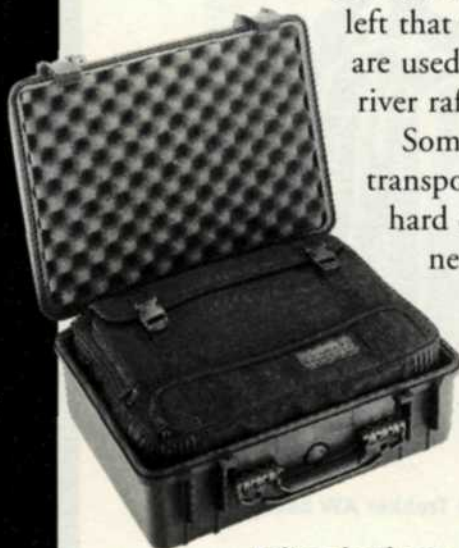
The Porter Case II quickly converts into a rolling tote or luggage cart. You can easily load additional equipment on top of the case to make transportation of equipment a breeze.

## SUNDOG

Sundog makes a complete line of protective camera cases, waterproof dry bags, and photo accessory cases to keep your gear safe. Designed and developed with world-renowned photographer, Art Wolfe, Sundog features convertible fanny packs, duffels and daypacks that are perfect for the mobile photographer. The River Runner series offers a padded case inside a seam-sealed roll-down dry bag to protect cameras, lens and videos from the elements.

## TAMRAC

Tamrac features camera bags to please everyone. They have an extensive selection of shoulder bags, hip packs, photovests, strongboxes, daypacks and photo backpacks, including some new ones that include wheels. The materials used for their camera bags are made of everything from waterproof PowerGrid Cordura to neoprene.



Pelican hard case

## PHOTOVEST

One of the most streamline methods for transporting camera gear is the photovest. This lightweight jacket is usually sleeveless and is full of pockets. Most have a large pocket on each side near the waist, and gradually smaller pockets as they reach the top of the vest. Many have pockets both inside and out, so you can separate each piece of equipment in a pocket. Typically you would carry a camera with lens around your neck and two or three lenses, a flash, several rolls of film, a spare camera body, filters, light meter, model releases, sync cords, and who knows what else in the pockets! It is truly amazing how much you can carry in a photovest. The weight of gear in the photovest is evenly distributed and supported mainly by the shoulders. The photovest is especially handy in crowds where the bulk of a camera bag might get in your way. The photovests are made of a variety of materials from solid heavy to lightweight and airy. Your material choice would depend on the climate in which you live and the time of year you would wear it.



Billingham 16-pocket photovest



Domke PhoTOGS jacket/vest

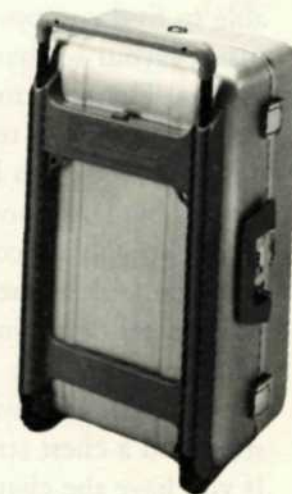
## HARD CASES

When you have to transport your gear via airlines or if your equipment is exposed to harsh environments, you might consider adding a hard case to you system. Most hard cases look like suitcases, but have padded dividers inside. Many of the hard shell cases use slots to hold the dividers in place or have pick and pluck foam. Quite often the layout inside a hard case is more permanent, and once setup usually is left that way. Some hard cases are waterproof and are used in harsh outdoor environments such as river rafting and on the boat for scuba diving.

Some outdoor photographers find it easier to transport all their gear to the main location in a hard case, and then transport only the necessary equipment in a shoulder bag or fanny pack. Some of the manufacturers of the hard cases even make a camera bag that fits snugly inside a hard-shell case for airline transport.

These hard cases come in all sizes, shapes and colors. Some cases are designed for camera systems, while other can carry portable studio flash systems, large format cameras, tripods or video systems. In the

last few years more of the manufacturers have been adding wheels to the cases. This sure makes it easier to make those tight airline confections! If you plan on getting a hard case for airline travel, make sure you take the weight of the case itself into consideration. With many of the new weight restrictions in effect today, you don't want to limit your camera gear because the case weighs too much.



Zero Halliburton Zeroller aluminum hard case



Portercase rolling hard case

## ACCESSORY CASES

There will be times when not everything will fit in a camera bag no matter what size bag you select. This is where the accessory case comes in handy. If there is a piece of photo equipment in existence, there is an accessory case to transport it. One of the most common examples is the big lens case. This allows you to keep the lens in its own case always ready for transport.

Other types of accessory cases include filter cases, filter holders, and clear bags for transporting film through airport security. Often these cases have their own straps or are made to attach to the side of your camera bag.

You might even have an item that is too fragile to fit directly in the camera bag. Most of the larger camera bag manufacturers have a variety of unusual methods for storing gear

demanding more than normal camera bag protection. The lens wrap is a thick piece of material that wraps around a lens and is secured in place using

Velcro. The wrapped up lens can then be placed in the camera bag or hard case.

The waterproof camera bag is designed for those photographers who venture over water with expensive cameras, and want to return safely. Some even have an inner shell that will stay dry even if the bag falls in the water.

Tripods are usually a pretty hardy item, but its life span can be increased by using a tripod case. The tripod carrying case may be a hard or soft depending on the environmental abuse it may encounter, especially when it is being shipped.

## PLANNING YOUR PURCHASE

Before heading out to buy a camera bag, you need to make a list of those items you will be carrying in the bag. Weigh them to see if you might be over doing it. Make outlines of each piece of gear and then make a visit to your local camera store. Look at each type of camera bag, and once you have picked a style you like, see how your equipment might fit into it. Remember that you don't have to find just one bag to do it all. Many photographers end up with several levels of camera bags to match specific shooting situations. In our equipment locker we have several hard cases for shipping equipment, fanny packs for short trips, a shoulder bags for general photography, photovests for crowds, and several accessory cases for some unique pieces of gear.

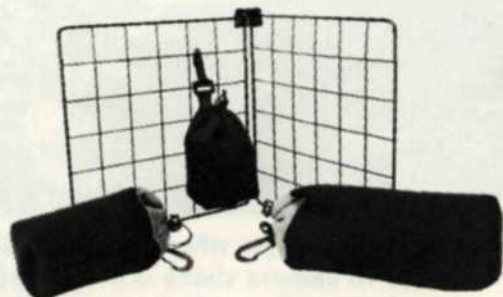
When you find a bag you like, ask yourself these questions. Does it feel comfortable? Will it hold all the gear I will be using? Is there room to spare if I decide to add something? Can it be modified from one photo trip to the next? Will it have room to accommodate all the new equipment I will be adding later? Can I get to my equipment easily? Does the bag protect my equipment properly? Is the strap secure enough to hold the bag when it is loaded? Will it survive airline travel? Does the bag need to be water resistant? The more questions you ask and the more right answers the salesperson gives, the better the chance you will make the right selection. ■



Tamrac MX 388 OPN filter case



Saunders OutPack Dri-safe weather-proof accessory cases



Zing neoprene lens & accessory pouches



SunDog bag



Ambico photo bags

## TENBA

Tenba pro-orientated bags feature a Lens Protector Divider System and stiff padded wooden bottom liner for maximum impact protection. Styles include hands-free Bear and Cub waist packs, Express Paks for small SLR systems and Car Cases for larger equipment.

## TUNDRA

Tundra Ruff Pack and Targa lines include camera holsters, a Pro Bag with built-in daypack, 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, a leader in the manufacture of aluminum photo cases since 1938, offers a wide variety of sizes that are sure to accommodate most any camera equipment. High density foam is standard in all cases, but a divided interior may also be available to offer flexibility. Their popular Zeroller Transport Case offers the ultimate protection for your photographic gear in a convenient rolling transport designed to meet airline carry-on criteria.