

Camera Bags & Cases

by Jack and Sue Drafa

Now that you've read the sections on cameras, lenses, and electronic flash, let's assume you have purchased all the necessary photo equipment. What's next? Since you would rather be out taking picture than sitting home admiring your

Getting your stuff together

Will you need more than one bag in order to fulfill all your travel needs? So many unanswered questions and you've got choices to make. Not to worry, because we will help you with your buying decisions.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

To figure out exactly which bag to buy, you need to

purchases, we'd better go shopping for a camera bag. The quandary comes when deciding which one is right for you. Should it be big or small? Do you need it to comfortably fit on your back or smoothly roll through airport security?

analyze the type of photography you will be doing when you load up your equipment. Will you only need a camera and one lens? Are you planning an extensive hiking expedition and wanting to take all the equipment you own? Will you be battling crowds when taking pictures? Do you travel by airline? Do you use 35mm or larger format, or both? The more you can define your needs, the easier it will be to find the bag for you.

Don't be surprised to find you really need more than one camera bag to meet your demands. Keep in mind that your bag does not necessarily have to hold all your equipment. As an outdoor photographer, you may get a backpack that holds everything, and a day pack or hip hugger that will hold a flash, film and a couple of lenses. With several camera bags you can pick the bag to match the photo situation.

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 others in the bag? Is there a chance of an item falling out? Is the bag comfortable

AMBICO

Ambico features a full line of photo bags to accommodate most SLR 35mm camera systems. They also have bags for Advanced Photo System cameras, the popular 35mm point-and-shoot cameras, and video camcorders. Their products are functional, durable, weather-resistant, fully padded, and come in a variety of sizes to protect your photo equipment.



Ambico photo bags

BESELER

Beseler is a well-respected name in the photo industry with a catalog of products that range from darkroom



Beseler Contour bags

equipment to archival storage products. Now they feature the Diamond and Contour series camera bags, which offer enough variety to satisfy any photographer on the go.

The Diamond series features beautifully styled camera bags with high-density, closed-cell foam padding to make them lightweight, yet offer optimum protection for your equipment. The Diamond series of bags offers a wide variety of sizes and configurations to house your 35mm SLR and video equipment.

The Contour series offers three new-sized bags that incorporate function and fashion. The largest is 11x5½x5¼ inches, a perfect size for your 35mm camera system. The other two sizes, 5x3½x6 and 8x3¾x 5½ inches, are more for digital or compact cameras. Other bags in the Contour series consist of four shoulder bags and two top-load holster bags.

BILLINGHAM

Billingham products, handcrafted in England to precise quality standards, are distributed by Leica. Keeping the English weather in mind, their canvas bags are waterproof, feature anti-wicking lining, and the seams are bound with waterproof tape. Removable padded partitions make it easy to customize the bags for all your equipment. There are a variety of shoulder bags, rucksacks, photo vests, and larger rucksacks for backpacking.

Their new offering is the 206, the first of a new generation of computer-

to carry for a long period of time? Do you have adequate storage space for small items like batteries, model releases, cable release, film, filters and a clampod? Can the bag take the wear and tear of heavy usage and still protect the contents from the weather? Let's take a brief look at each type of bag so you can figure out which one, or ones, you need to purchase.

SHOULDER BAG

The shoulder bag is probably the most common type of camera bag. Although most are rectangular in shape, they come in hundreds of sizes to match every type of photographer and budget. The advantage of a shoulder bag is that you have immediate access to everything you carry.

The center of the bag is usually reserved for the more expensive lenses, camera bodies, and flash. Padded dividers are used to separate different pieces of equipment from touching each other. Some of these dividers attach to the walls of the bag with Velcro, which makes it easy to reconfigure the compartments. Other bags have a tray system stacked in the middle of the bag. It keeps everything organized, but makes it harder to access the equipment on the bottom row.

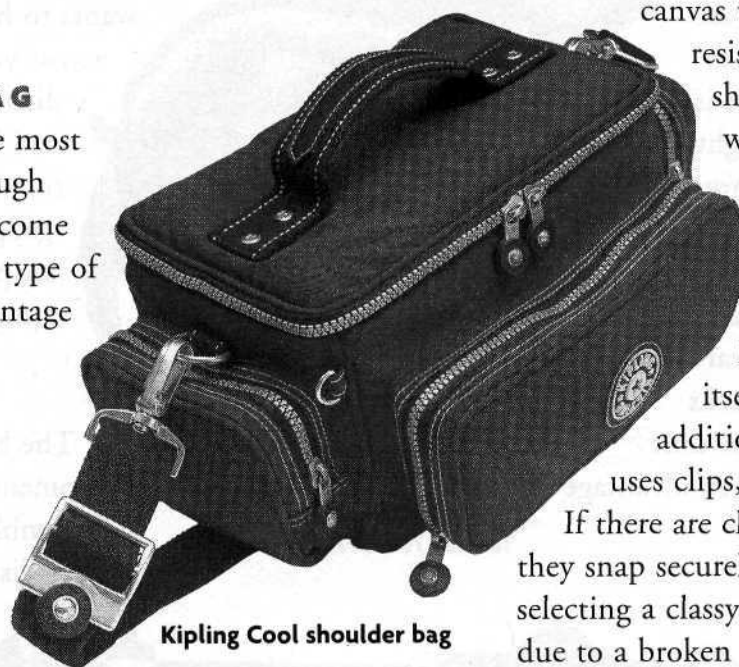
The outside pockets can take a flash, cords, batteries, and other small accessories. The top flap of the bag usually has

compartments for film, filters and model releases. Often you'll find additional straps on the top and bottom of the bag to attach a compact tripod. Some of the bags have an additional handle on the top of the bag to give your shoulder a break.

These bags come in a wide assortment of materials from canvas to durable nylon, and most are water resistant. The weak link in most shoulder bags is the strap, especially where it attaches to the bag. Look at this area very closely. The strap should be reinforced at the attachment points. And be sure to check the reinforcement if the bag has a top handle. The shoulder strap itself should be very wide and have additional padding for added comfort. If it uses clips, be sure to check them for strength.

If there are clasps to keep the bag closed, be sure they snap securely shut. There is nothing worse than selecting a classy bag and having the contents spill due to a broken strap, clasp or clip.

When making your bag selection, don't grab one too big. In this case, bigger isn't always better. Remember the bigger it is, the more you will put into it, and the more it will weigh. You will probably have to tote it quite some time and whether you use the shoulder strap or top handle, you may become exhausted. You would be better off buying different-sized bags to suit different photo situations. Your aching muscles will thank you later.



Kipling Cool shoulder bag



Billingham 206 bag in black

assisted-design bags. It features the Billingham PressTop opening that lets you access your camera equipment on the move. They also feature the padded Delta pockets that have a drawstring neck and snap in place on your belt. The heart of the new Billingham rucksack is the TorsoShell carrying system that transfers the bag's weight directly to the hips, minimizing back-to-bag contact. The design of the Agbag rucksack allows access into the sides of the bag while it is carried over one shoulder.

DOMKE

The Domke Shooter's Bags from Tiffen have become recognized throughout the world as the photojournalist's choice. The patented Padded Insert System organizes and protects your equipment yet allows you to custom-tailor your Domke bag to any situation.

Domke has it all—satchels, the ever popular Shooter's Bag, tripod bags, lens wraps and the new stylish PhoTOGS Vest.

After listening to what photographers wanted, Domke has made three new additions to its popular line. The Domke J-3 Shooter's Bag allows you to lighten your load, but still customize the bag to take just the right

gear. The new Belt Bag is a slim 7x7½x2½ inches and padded enough to carry your point-and-shoot camera or some other accessories. For photographing in cooler weather, the PhoTOGS vest now features sleeves and a total of 16 pockets to store everything you need within easy assess.

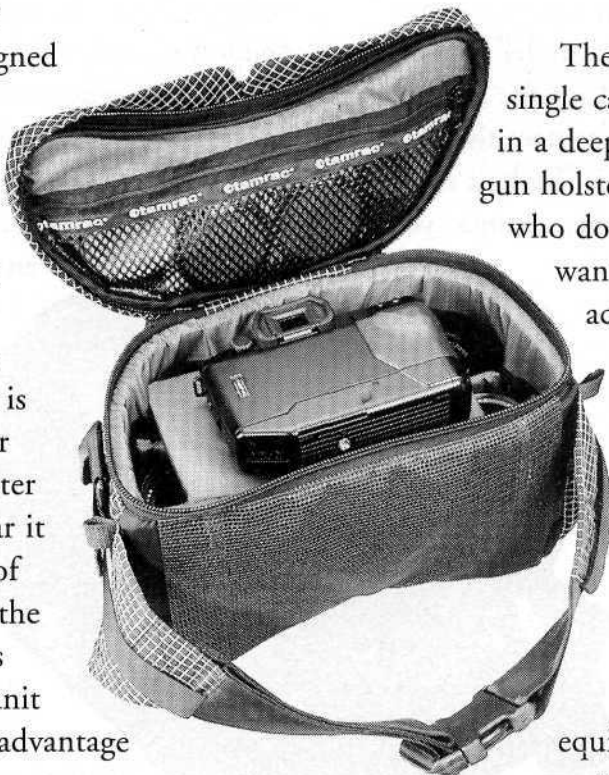


Domke J-3 Shooter's Bag

Domke's OutPack series is an innovative line of photo bags and accessories for the outdoor photographer. They feature daypacks, minipacks, photo backpacks and even a scopePACK to ease the bulk of a camera-mounted 800mm lens. All OutPack products are made of coated 420-denier nylon pack cloth which makes the bags lightweight, tough and water-resistant.

FANNY PACK

The fanny pack, or hip pack, is designed much like the shoulder bag, except that this compact pack straps around your waist. It has a center section for a camera and lens and additional pockets for accessories, and works great if you don't have a lot of equipment to carry. The biggest advantage is that it is comfortable to wear because the weight is distributed evenly across your hips. Your hips can usually bear camera weight better than your shoulders. You can either wear it so that the pack rests against the small of your back or swing it around and wear the pack on your front. Most of these packs have a quick-disconnect buckle so the unit is easy to put on and take off. Another advantage is that you don't have to remove it to access your equipment. The biggest disadvantage is that you must be sure that all the zippers are closed before you start moving to keep equipment from falling out. If you bend over and forgot to close any part of the bag, it could be disastrous.



Tamrac 705 OPN hip pack



Tamrac MBX 370 ACS belt pack

TOP LOAD

The top-load camera bag is dedicated to a single camera and lens setup nestled face down in a deeply padded pocket. This bag resembles a gun holster and is designed for the photographer who doesn't require a lot of equipment, but wants to have handy access. The bag straps across your waist for comfortable distribution of weight. Some of the top-load bags even have accessory pockets for storage of film, filters or other small gadgets. Again, you must remember to snap the lid shut to avoid accidental equipment spillage.

BELT PACK

The belt pack has several small equipment pouches that hang off a belt resembling an ammunition belt. It evenly distributes the weight across your hips and allows easy body movement.

Each piece of equipment has its own pouch and the camera and lens usually fit into a top-load bag. The belt has a quick-disconnect buckle for easy on and off.

KIPLING

A favorite in Europe for years, the Kipling photo bags have recently become



Kipling Traveller bag

available in the United States through Tiffen. Models range from compact bags for APS and point- and-shoot cameras up to roomy bags for telephotos. The outer shell of each bag is made of water-resistant 420-denier nylon with a double polyurethane backing. This makes the bags lightweight, yet strong. The Kipling line of camera bags is for those photographers who want practicality and protection but won't sacrifice fashion and style.

LOWEPRO

For years Lowepro has been a world leader in designing and manufacturing camera bags and packs. Their goal is to make camera bags with innovative designs that are stylish yet offer equipment protection from vibration, shock, moisture and dust. In addition to their ever-popular all-weather protection of the Trekker Backpacks and Professional Series, they feature the Pacific Collection, Nova Series, The Digital Resolution Series and The Street and Field System. For the airline travelers, they feature the Omni Series that features a soft camera bag inside a virtually indestructible hard case, and the popular Pro Roller Series.

Lowepro's latest offerings include two more additions to the Pacific Collection. The Berkeley looks like a designer briefcase, but easily carries a 35mm format system. The Monterey is the largest backpack in this collection of camera bags that don't scream "camera bag."

Two new members of the Street and

Field system are the versatile two-compartment backpack called the S&F Rover Light and its all-weather brother, the S&F Rover AW.

The Stealth is designed for the digital photojournalist with places to go and things to do. It is made to can carry your laptop, cell phone and digital camera and still have room to spare. It



Lowepro Pacific Collection Monterey (front) and Berkeley bags

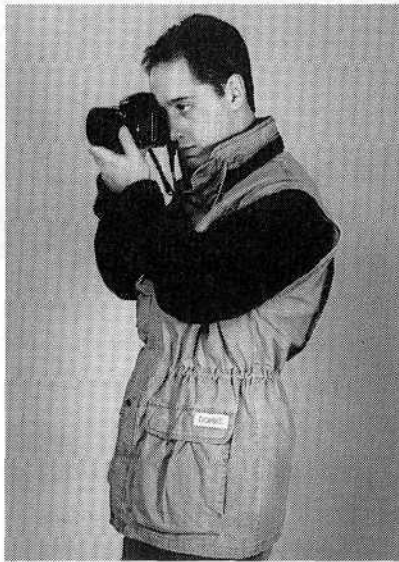
BACKPACK

For the nature photographer who makes extended visits in the great outdoors, the photo backpack is a must. These packs have molded frames designed to distribute the weight evenly across your shoulders and back. Most have adjustable, sturdy, padded shoulder straps to comfortably carry the load. Some even have lumbar and chest straps to keep the pack snug to your body and help limit movement.

These packs come in a variety of sizes, from the simple daypack to ones designed to carry extensive camera gear for miles. You can match the backpack size to the amount of equipment you need to transport. Because the bulk of the bag is behind you, it is easy to maneuver down narrow hiking trails.

The interior is heavily padded to protect all your valuable equipment. Most backpacks have Velcro dividers so you can easily reconfigure the interior compartment. Some have detachable pouches and even room for a sack lunch.

The down side to these backpacks is that they have to be removed to access the equipment. Of course, if you have one of



Domke PhoTOGS Jacket

the larger packs and have it full, you will be more than happy for the opportunity to stop and give your shoulders a rest.

PHOTO VEST

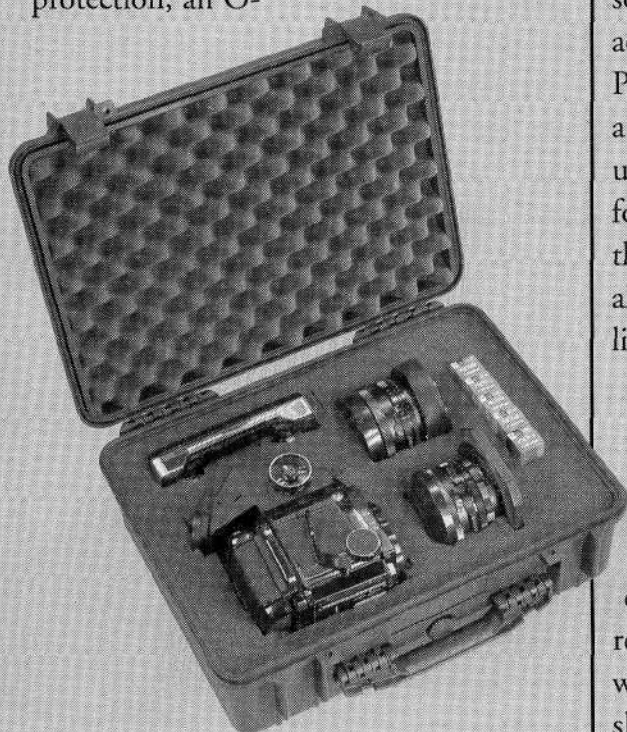
This popular camera-carrying device is not a bag at all, but a sleeveless jacket with lots of pockets. The photo vest looks very much like a fishing jacket, with pouches and pockets covering the entire vest. Instead of fishing lures, you will be carrying lenses and sundry accessories. Each item you carry in the photo vest has its own slightly padded pocket. The more pockets, the more gear you can carry, and the heavier it gets.

The big advantage to the photo vest is that the weight is distributed across both your shoulders and back. The photo vest is also very streamlined, which is why it has been a favorite of photojournalists for years. It enables easy movement through crowds without the fear of bumping into people as can happen with a camera bag or backpack. The disadvantage to the photo vest is that you have to remember which pocket has which lens, otherwise you have to open a few before you find what you are looking for.

features two removable air cushions to protect the equipment against impact.

PELICAN

Since 1975, Pelican Products has offered no-nonsense unbreakable, watertight, airtight and corrosion-proof cases. They offer a full 1/4-inch-thick wall protection, an O-



Pelican 1520 case

ring seal guaranteed to be watertight to 30 feet, and an E-Z purge valve to keep the cases absolutely airtight. These cases offer customized protection of all your equipment in 14 different sizes for all applications from 8 1/2 to 52 inches wide. The interiors are available with padded dividers or prescored pick 'n pluck foam so you can customize them to accommodate various equipment. Pelican even has a case designed to carry a soft camera bag inside. This offers the ultimate in protection and convenience for the traveling photographer. Their three largest cases come with wheels and all their cases have an unconditional lifetime guarantee.

PHOENIX

Phoenix (distributor of Phoenix lenses, tripods & flash units and Samyang lenses) offers a wide line of camera and tripod bags, all water-resistant and with a limited lifetime warranty. Included in the line are shoulder bags from small (for APS and compact 35mm cameras) to large (for

camera systems and VCRs), holsters, and backpacks. Adjustable removable shoulder straps, padded pockets and Velcro dividers to allow you to customize interior compartments are useful features.

PORTER CASE

The Porter Case is a cart and a case all in one. The Porter Case meets all the airline regulations for carry-on size so you can easily fit it under your seat or in the overhead compartment. If you have additional baggage to carry, simply pull



Porter Case

HARD CASES

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

The medium-size hard cases will hold more equipment, and the camera can remain attached to the lens, allowing quick access. These cases have become increasingly popular with photographers traveling by air. The case dimensions qualify as take-on luggage, ensuring that your camera gear will not be stolen or on a plane to a different location than you. The larger suitcase-size cases are often used by professional photographers for carrying studio lighting gear, large-format cameras, or video systems.

The interiors of the hard cases have either padded dividers or foam to help organize and protect your gear. The dividers make it easy to customize the case for each trip, while once the foam is cut to size it is permanent. Some of the hard cases even have waterproof seals, to protect gear from moisture and dust. Most recently several of the manufacturers are adding wheels and handles so that you can easily roll the case through the airports.

There are even companies that offer hard-shell cases with a shoulder bag inside. This offers the ultimate protection of the hard-shell case for travel and the ease of a regular camera bag once on location. For the photographer who has a lot of luggage to carry, one manufacturer makes a rolling hard case that converts to a versatile hand truck.

ACCESSORY CASES

You can be assured that if you have a specific type of photo gear there will be someone who makes a case for it. There are padded filter cases to prevent breakage and allow quick access to your more-popular filters. You will find cases to hold medium-format film magazines, 4x5 film holders and even studio lights. Tripod and light-stand cases not only offer protection, but make them easier to transport. You will find



Zing Extra Large Stuff Pouch

hard cases for the very large and heavy lenses that require added protection. There are even cases that attach to your belt so you can carry an extra telephoto lens with you.

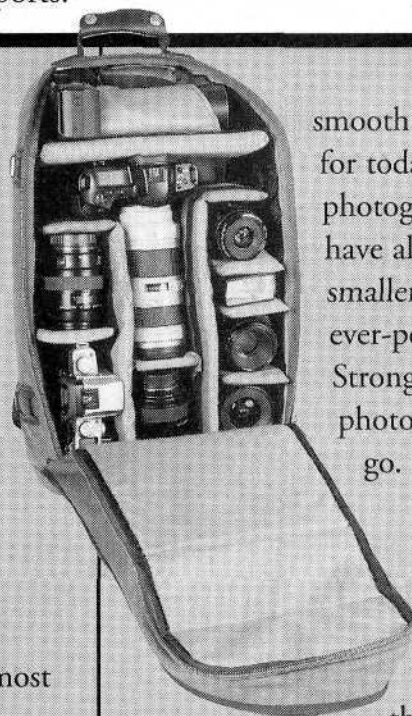
If you want additional protection for some of your equipment, you can purchase a photo wrap. Just wrap these padded cloths around your lens or camera body and it secure them in place using Velcro.

two latch pins, fold your Porter Case down and you can stack additional luggage on top. The cart features a 42-inch padded telescoping handle, and 4-inch ball-bearing wheels that can carry about 200 pounds of equipment. They only make one size case, but have six standard interiors to accommodate all your needs.

TAMRAC

Over the last 20 years Tamrac products have become among the most popular camera bags in the world. Tamrac has an extensive selection of camera bags to meet every photographers' needs, featuring photo vests, shoulder bags, daypacks, hip packs, backpacks, and strongboxes with wheels.

Their most recent additions include the all-new 5000 series of lightweight, durable bags offering a variety of functional designs and excellent protection for your photographic gear. Construction is of strong 900-denier water-proofed PolyTek and lined with



Tamrac Summit Photo Backpack

smooth nylon, designed for today's active photographers. They have also introduced a smaller version of their ever-popular Rolling StrongBox for photographers on the go.

Their Zoom Travelers are compact and light weight yet have many of the features of the professional-sized camera bags. They

are constructed with Tamrac's PowerGrid Cordura and feature the Speed Flat Top, Pop-Off film pockets, Zip Drop front pocket and Piggy-Back Pocket so you can slide the case over the handle of the Rolling StrongBoxes.

TENBA

Tenba offers a wide line of comfortable solutions for carrying photo

equipment on hiking and backpacking trips. The photo backpack models P252 through P257 incorporate an adjustable suspension system that allows custom fit for every element that affects your shoulders, hips and back. Tenba's Precision Life System transfers the pressure of the load onto the frame to prevent shoulder strain, and shoulder straps are independently adjustable.

Other features include a custom-fit waistbelt, stretch fabric that provides ventilation for your spinal area, and foam torso and lumbar pads for additional comfort.

For more casual treks, Tenba's new Walkabout Paks



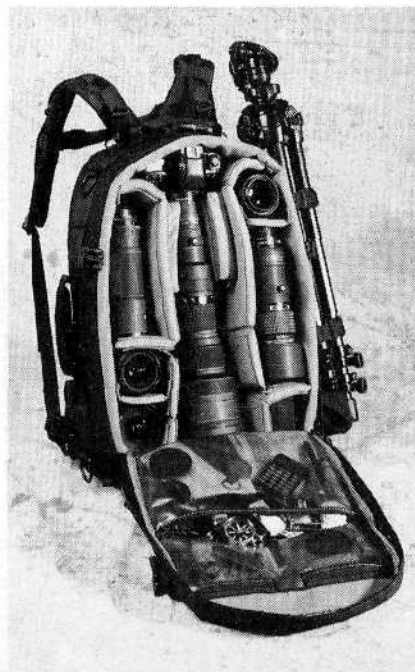
Tenba Photo Backpack

PLANNING YOUR PURCHASE

Now that we have explained the different styles of camera bags, it is time to go shopping. Before you head out, make a list of all the photo equipment you own and its approximate dimensions. Now think about what additions you might make to your camera system in the next couple of years. Since your camera bag is meant to last, you will be glad you planned ahead.

Once in the camera store, look at each type of camera bag and pick a style that you think might fit your photo needs.

Take your time and ask yourself some questions. Will it hold all the equipment that you think you might take on a photo excursion? Will the bag be too heavy? Will your shoulders hold out under the weight? Are the straps strong enough to carry the load? Would you be better taking less gear and choosing a smaller bag? Do you need more than one bag to satisfy your needs? Is there room for more equipment if you have a last-minute addition? Can you access your equipment easily? Is your favorite lens going to



Lowepro Trekker AW backpack



Pelican 1650 hard case

end up on the bottom shelf? Is there plenty of room for film and accessories? How is the workmanship? If you are going to be taking pictures in inclement weather, is the bag water-resistant? Will it survive airline travel? Most importantly, does it protect your equipment properly?

You have made a substantial investment in your photo equipment and you need a bag or case to protect your prized possessions. We have shown you that there are plenty of choices in every style and color, so take the time to analyze your needs and research your options. This will help avoid costly buying errors and provide you with a camera bag that is both stylish and functional.

provide protection for your camera essentials. Each of the two models includes a main compartment for your camera or binoculars, a zippered pocket, a padded pocket, a mesh pocket for accessories, and three outside pen pockets. You can carry the Walkabout Pak any of four ways—over your shoulder with a detachable strap, on your belt with a sewn-on loop, on your back with a Tenba backpack harness, or on your chest with the Tenba chest harness.

ZERO HALLIBURTON

Since 1938, Zero Halliburton has been a respected leader in the manufacture of aluminum photo cases. They offer a wide range of sizes to accommodate your photo equipment in style. High-density foam is standard in all cases, but a divided interior is also available to offer flexibility.

Their popular Zeroller Transport Case (21x13x7.5 inches) offers the ultimate protection for your photographic gear in a convenient



Zero Halliburton 110 Zeroller

wheels to assure smooth movement and maximum support even when transporting heavy loads.

Due to the overwhelming success of the original Zeroller, the Zero Halliburton Division of ToCAD America Inc. has introduced three new transport cases. These cases are larger in size to accommodate photographers requiring greater carrying capacity. The new sizes include 26x18x9, 24x18x7 and

rolling designed. An interlocking tongue-and-groove closure system provides an excellent seal against dust and moisture. They have heavy-duty rubber

the largest of them all at 29x20x10 inches. No interior case area is lost on any of the Zeroller transport cases, because the retractable carrier is mounted on the exterior of the cases.

ZING DESIGNS

Zing Designs (distributed by Tiffen) offers protective neoprene cases, covers and straps for camera equipment. The neoprene is very soft and stretches to form a custom fit around every object it covers. A unique latch system snugs the cover around an SLR camera to provide minimal bulk and maximum protection. ■



Zing Large SLR case