

H3O



Watering up with a Nalgene bottle and Platypus container

H3O is not a typo, I purposely selected the scientific designator for heavy water instead of normal water (H₂O), as the water in your pack is going to feel unnaturally heavy.

As with food, there is always a balance between what you want to carry and what you need. Food on one hand is more of a long term balancing act, where as water management is more acute.

The first step to water management is trying to secure some inside knowledge on the location you plan on hunting. However, even securing information on the area doesn't mean it will always be correct. One year can be a wet year with water at every turn, and the next year, you may need to carefully plan every day around water management and hydration. In other words "plan for the worst and hope for the best. " Regardless of the amount of rainfall that has fallen, in my experience, there is generally a lack of water when you reach the top of the ridge or mountain, so plan accordingly.

From past mistakes, I can assure you, that you will be very disappointed with yourself, if you grind your way to the top of that mountain range, with the intention of spending a few hours or days and then realize you need to drop down early, to secure more water. If I am climbing up a significant amount of vertical with the intention of spending the day or a number of hours glassing, I will endeavour to haul at least 2 liters of water up with me. While hiking with a heavy pack in warm weather, I will hydrate at almost every opportunity, while crossing streams or taking a break. The last thing you will want to do is add weight to an already heavy pack, but if you don't know where the next water source is, it may be prudent to carry a couple of liters at all times.

How to carry that water is another question that needs to be asked. I carry a one liter Nalgene bottle with fluid measurement indications on the side. In addition I carry 3 platypus containers, two 2 liter bags and one 1 liter bag. This gives me the potential to carry 6 liters, which has been more than adequate for my purposes. The platypus bags weigh almost nothing as well.

When it comes to water sterilization I use a Steripen. This is an instrument that you place in your water bottle (Nalgene) and swirl around for a minute or so. The Steripen emits an ultraviolet wavelength of light that destroys the pathogens at their DNA level. This technology has never let me down. The other three forms of sterilization are mechanical filtration, boiling (self explanatory), and chemical. Chemical would not be my first choice, as I don't want to be consuming chemicals on a daily basis but they are great for your emergency kit.



There are numerous mechanical filter devices, such as the MSR-SweetWater that utilizes a pump to force water through a filter. These devices work well but tend to take longer to achieve the same amount of sterilized water as opposed to the Steripen. The easier it is to sterilize water, the more I drink, which is always beneficial. If the Steripen becomes your choice, bring an extra battery because they burn through the batteries quickly.

Another matter that needs to be addressed is when to sterilize water. Sometimes this question is clear and other times, not so much. Experience will tell you when it is safe to drink directly from the stream or river. Generally a spring and a fast running river are both safe to drink directly from. The harder source to evaluate are small streams. For example; on a sheep hunt a few years back, my partner and I had just filled up from a very small stream on the side of a mountain, with the intention of treating the water when we reached our new spike camp. Well we hadn't travelled another 50' upstream, when we looked down and saw a pile of bear crap in the stream, complete with wriggling worms! Some mountain creeks appear to be very safe upon first assessment but aren't. The creek may appear fine, but travel further upstream or to a higher vantage point, and many times you will see evidence of beavers. Beavers can live at higher altitudes than you would believe. I have had giardia before and I don't recommend it, unless you want to go through your two week supply of toilet paper in one afternoon. Always boil or treat lake water.

How much water to drink, is a tough question. Obviously drink when you are thirsty but I try to drink more water than my body tells me to. If I am hiking past my last water source for the day, I will quickly down a liter of water and fill up my containers.

I add an Emergen-c package or two to my Nalgene container daily, to encourage me to drink more, as it adds flavor. Dehydration is a serious concern in the mountains and not only when it is hot and dry. A few years back, I went hunting with three others, with the intention of splitting up into two groups and meeting up every couple of days. Myself and my hunting partner were experienced and the other two had hunting experience but not a lot of mountain time. The other two underestimated the physical and mental challenges and as a result their trip ended early.

One individual despite our prompting wasn't eating or drinking enough. We told him that regardless of being hungry or not, you need to consume calories and your body needs water as well. For days we badgered him to eat more and drink at every opportunity, he didn't listen. Our two groups split up for 5 days and when we returned to the meeting point, there was a message for us, that one of our companions had been medevaced out. Apparently he went to the tent and crawled into his sleeping bag, because he was cold, despite the temperatures being moderate. Fast forward a couple of hours and he is shivering uncontrollably and feeling nauseous. His partner encouraged him to come out and drink something warm, but at that point he couldn't even stand. Advanced hypothermia had set in and a quick call on the satellite phone had a helicopter whisking him away to a medical clinic in Dease Lake. Two hours of intravenous fluids had him feeling 100 % again. He had become severely dehydrated and undernourished, and as a result his body stopped being able to regulate its temperature appropriately. Moral of the story, if he had just listened and hydrated as directed, the story would of had a more positive outcome.

If your pee is yellow or the consistency of jello :) your not drinking enough.

Happy Trails,

M. Kirk