

## Camera Equipment Review...

### Lowepro Bags for the Nature Photographer

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I have a confession to make. Those of you who know me probably are already aware of this, but I am afflicted by a serious condition - I am a serious, and most likely incurable "bagaholic". I have tried everything to cure myself of this affliction. I have seen therapists, I have gone "cold turkey" and not bought a bag for up to six months (bagaholic "withdrawal" is not a pretty sight). I have even attended twelve-step programs for "bagaholics". My only solace comes from the knowledge that many other photographers are afflicted with the same problem - an irrational love of photographic bags that defies rationality.

For those of you who are not familiar with the "twelve-step" programs, they are commonly used, and have been very successful, for individuals afflicted with addictions to alcohol, drugs, etc. Picture a dimly lit room filled with downcast individuals who are chain-smoking cigarettes and swilling stale coffee (no "Starbucks" to be found here). One by one, these individuals stand up and confess their misdeeds and how their afflictions have taken over their lives. My turn comes at the Saturday night BA (Bagaholic) meeting and I slowly rise and words of despair and self-disgust pour from my lips as I confess that this week I broke down and bought yet another bag. I can feel the stare of the blood-shot eyes in the room as they burn through me - partially out of disgust and partially out of sympathy. For each of them in the BA meeting room know of the incredibly strong force that comes from those bags. A force that says, "You need me. You don't know why you need me, but you do".

I even have a "bag room" in my home - it is really the furnace room, but I have attached many hooks to the ceiling and hanging from these hooks are my bags. Bags of many colors, shapes and sizes. Some are dust covered, but I love them just the same. They are my bags and in times of deep despair, I can go into my bag room, shut the door and feel the strange calmness that comes over me as I just stand there and enjoy the company of my bags.

But, there is good news - I may have found a remedy to my affliction of "BA". As with many afflictions, you may not be able to totally cure the affliction but you can come to grips with it in a form of symbiosis. I have learned to accept my affliction and to be happy with it - and the word "Lowepro" was the key.

Now, being the consummate "bagaholic", I know what I want in a photography bag - namely I want durability, flexibility, carrying ease, value for my money and "spiffy colors" don't hurt. The series of Lowepro bags fits these needs to perfection.



As you may have guessed by this point, I have a lot of Lowepro bags. But I have settled on a system that works great for me in all types of outdoor conditions. The foundation for my Lowepro photographic bag system is the extremely well thought out Lowepro "ProTrekker" backpack. My good friend, Moose Peterson, designed this bag and since the consummate outdoor and nature photographer designed it, you know it will fit the demands of a nature photographer.

The heart of the ProTrekker is its size. It is the perfect size to fit as a carry-on into the overhead compartment of most airlines and yet large enough to hold my 600mm f/4 lens along with several camera bodies and lenses. All the equipment you might need for a photo trip to Alaska or other photographic destination can be placed into this bag.

Inside of the bag are multiple compartments. Remember my demand for "versatility" in a bag - well this one screams "versatility". The dividers in this bag can be changed and manipulated into an endless variety of compartments to fit your particular needs. A protective, and removable, lid covers the top of the inside compartment and zippered pouches can be found within this lid to hold your filters, cable releases, extra batteries, etc. I now actually own two ProTrekkers (here comes that "BA" part again) - one for my Digital system and one for my F5, F-100 Nikon transparency systems.

Rounding out the ProTrekker's package is the most comfortable and adjustable harness system that I have ever used. Two, removable outside pouches allow for even more equipment storage and the most functional tripod carrying system I have ever seen is included. Two weeks ago, I traveled to Grand Island, Nebraska to photograph the 350,000 Sandhill Cranes migrating through the area. A friend and I rented a blind

on the banks of the Platte River. We had to be in the blind by 5 AM. The hike to the blind was around a half a mile and my ProTrekker containing a D1 body, an F5, a Tokina 80-200 f2.8, Nikon 600 f/4, and Tokina 300 f/2.8 with teleconverters, film and Gitzo 1538 with Arca-Swiss B2 head were a breeze to carry in on my back.

The second component of my Lowepro system is the Lowepro NatureTrekker, which is a smaller version of the ProTrekker. I use this in two ways. First, I use it when I need to carry a smaller amount of equipment into the field. It contains all of the fine features of its larger cousin and is perfect for that excursion into the field when a 600 f.4 isn't needed. Secondly, when shooting from my vehicle, I will have my ProTrekker sitting behind me on the rear passengers' seat and I will have my NatureTrekker on the passengers seat beside me. In the Nature Trekker will be found the camera-lens combination I am using at the time such as a Nikon F-100 on a Tokina 300 f2.8 plus a D1 on a Tokina 400 f5.6.



The third component of my "general use" Lowepro system is a Lowepro Nova 4. This case is much smaller and is an "over the shoulder" bag that holds a camera body on a lens and one or two other smaller lenses. I utilize the Nova 4 as either a carry along case with an F5 or F-100 on a Tokina 80-200 f2.8 Pro plus a Nikon 28-70 AF-S while I venture into the field with my 600 mm f/4 and F5 combination on my Gitzo tripod over my shoulder. It also makes a great case to sit on the passenger's seat holding a Nikon body plus the Tokina 80-200 f2.8 Pro for those quick "grab shots" that come up as you travel along.



But wait, there is more to my Lowepro system. (You knew there would be since I am a confessed "bagaholic").

With the arrival of the wildlife photographer's digital age in the "form of the Nikon D1, a laptop computer is the newest piece of "photographic" equipment you may need in the field. Leave it to Lowepro to come up with the perfect solution with the recent introduction of their "Madison" series of bags.

The Madison bags look like briefcases but are perfect for the digital photographer. The Madison 1100 and 1200 are very similar with the 1200 having a few more compartments for Zip Drives, etc. I am using the Madison 1100 to carry my laptop and Lexar USB enabled "jumpshot" flashcard reader into the field. When my digital flashcard is full, I simply fire up my laptop and download in minutes my images

into a newly created file in my laptop and I am ready to continue shooting with a fresh flashcard. The laptop computer compartment is well padded to protect my ARM computer.

I will be using my Madison 1200 for longer trips. Like the Madison 1100, there are well protected and ample pockets for my laptop, charger, mouse, etc. In addition, the 1200 has more pockets for Zip Drives and an AC-DC converter that I can plug into the cigarette lighter of my vehicle so I can recharge either camera or computer batteries as I drive along. There is even room enough for a D1 body if I want to have it with me. The Madison 1200 will be one of my carry-on items along with the ProTrekker when I am flying to photographic destinations.

Whatever your photographic needs may be, the Lowepro series of bags most likely has the perfect bag for you. These bags are extremely well made and durable. In all my photographic trips, I have never had a zipper or buckle fail me. No rips or tears and the versatility and comfort of use have proven themselves to this "bagaholic" time after time.

So, have I been cured of my "bagaholism"? - Not completely. But my wife, Cheryl feels much more comfortable allowing me to go into a "bag store" without the fear of me "falling off the wagon". However, she cringes and becomes somewhat sullen every year when the new Lowepro catalog appears. I no longer have to attend those meetings in smoke-filled rooms with those dreaded cups of stale coffee and, of course, those piercing eyes. And if all else fails, I can always retire to my "bag room" for a few moments of quiet serenity!



Good Shooting!

JH-NPN

