



£50
VANGO
STEALTH 40+8

TRAILRATING *****

It's good Vango has always been a brand that you can rely on for coming up with superb-value products – and the Stealth is no exception. You get a well-padded back system that can also be adjusted for length. This has good stiffness to make packing easier. The body is a simple single compartment with a useful front pocket that is large enough to take a water bottle or small jacket. The stretch wand pockets and side compression straps are ideal for stowing trekking poles for example. There is a good snow-lock extension. The lid is conventional with a large pocket and a removable rain cover fitted to a second pocket. The fabric is lightweight but heavier materials are used in areas that are particularly vulnerable to abrasion. At this price it is a winner and ideal for most walkers.

But The rain cover stuffed in the lid gets in the way (but it can be removed, and that's what I would do). The materials don't feel quite so 'nice' as higher-priced packs, and there are more durable options. The hipbelt is perhaps too wide and padded, and it just feels a little too bulky for this capacity. Also you can get lighter sacks.

Verdict A superb, low-priced rucksack that most walkers will find ideal for valley, hill and mountain walking at home or abroad.

VITAL STATS

Capacity 40+8 litres
Fabric 70D Excel Lite polyester
Features padded, adjustable-length back system; top tensioning straps; one main compartment; stretch wand pockets; compression straps; lid with external lid pocket; rain cover in second lid pocket; front pocket; twin ice axe/pole attachment points; hydration system-compatible
Weight 1200g
Made in China
Stores in the UK 372



£50
BERGHAUS
ARÊTE 45

TRAILRATING *****

It's good The Arête 45 is a wonderfully simple and functional sack, and at only 1045g it deserves to be high on the wants list of anyone heading to the hills. The sack has a simple padded back system, hipbelt and shoulder straps that allow you to throw it on your back and forget about it. The back is stiff enough to allow easier packing without fear of objects poking into your back. The profile of the sack is quite narrow, so it is ideal for scrambling. There is a main compartment with compression straps and wand pockets, which is all you really need for general hill-walking and scrambling. The lid is again equally simple as it has just a single-clasp buckle that is faster and easier to use, rather than twin buckles. There is a lid pocket, and that is about it. Better still it is only £50, which is amazing for what it offers.

But Other rucksacks have more airflow around the back and offer a more cushioned carry. Some may prefer a rucksack with more pockets than the single lid pocket you get here. Finally, the higher-priced sacks offer more features in general including adjustable back lengths if you need one.

Verdict This sack is perfect for those who want to tackle hill and mountain walks plus some scrambles throughout the year, but others have more features.

VITAL STATS

Capacity 45 litres
Fabric Esdura 600 D RS/ Esdura 600 D/ Ardura 100 D
Features Fushoc 2 back system; top tensioning straps; wand pockets; compression straps; lid with single-clasp buckle closure; external lid pocket; twin ice axe/pole attachment points; hydration system-compatible
Weight 1045g
Made in China
Stores in the UK no info provided



£80
BLACK DIAMOND
SPEED 40

TRAILRATING *****

It's good A simple sack that's been primarily designed for mountaineers, but hill-walkers will benefit from its no-frills design. At just 1205g it is ideal for lightweight backpacking as well as day trips. The back system is a simple padded affair that is great for scrambling or walking. There is enough padding to make bigger loads comfortable too. I also like the level of stiffness in the back as this makes packing easier. The body of the sack involves a main compartment and little else. There are compression straps on the sides so the load can be stabilised and you could stash extra gear on the front if needed. You get a good snow lock extension to main compartment and the lid can be removed if not required. Like other Black Diamond sacks, this feels a little bigger in capacity than its stated 40 litres suggests.

But There are no frills, not even wand pockets, so it's not easy to stash trekking poles to the sides. There is not much airflow around the back system, and there are even lighter options. The removable lid design may not keep water out quite as well as some other lids either. Some sacks are made from more durable materials too.

Verdict Use this for scrambling and mountaineering and it could be ideal, but some may want more features.

VITAL STATS

Capacity 40 litres
Fabric 420d nylon, 210d nylon ripstop
Features Lite suspension back system; removable padded hip belt; removable lid; top tensioning straps; compression straps; internal and external lid pockets; twin ice axe/pole attachment points; hydration system-compatible
Weight 1205g
Made in Philippines
Stores in the UK no info provided



£95
LIGHTWAVE
FASTPACK 50

TRAILRATING *****

It's good For my money this provides pretty much everything that most hill-walkers will want. It weighs in at a respectable 1165g. The material is a little lighter than others, but it's still good and tough. The seams are welded and taped to make them waterproof, so there is less need for a waterproof liner. There is a good snow-lock on the main compartment to further keep out the elements. The lid is a conventional design with a good deep pocket in the top. The back system is pretty basic with just a padded foam panel. It works great though if you are content with a simpler design. The hip fins are unusual, as they have cut-away areas to reduce weight and improve the fit. The body has a set of compression straps to stabilise the load as well as stretch wand pockets to make stowing trekking poles a breeze.

But Some sacks offer more airflow around the back, while others use tougher fabrics. Others have a lot more pockets and features too. If you are short on cash, then there are lower-priced options available. A single-lock closure on the lid would be even better in my view.

Verdict A simple, effective, clutter-free option, which is ideal for those who want a sack that carries well and performs superbly on the hill without frills.

VITAL STATS

Capacity 40 litres
Fabric 300d mini-ripestop polyester, 420d nylon on wear areas
Features padded back system; top tensioning straps, external and internal lid pocket, wand pockets, compression straps, twin ice axe/pole attachment points
Weight 1165g
Made in China
Stores in the UK 30



£95
HAGLOFS
LIM 45

TRAILRATING *****

It's good A very unusual sack that's extremely light (just 1035g). The main compartment closure is a roll-top design that saves weight and makes this closure waterproof if it is closed properly – although you still need a liner as the seams can leak. There is a main compartment with compression adjustment to stabilise the load. A large stretch front stash pocket is great for stowing a jacket, while the stretch side wand pockets are also ideal for water bottles. The back system is unusual too as the shoulder straps attach to the base of the sack to really pull in the bottom of the sack and stabilise the load. You can adjust the back length, while a more conventional wide hipbelt finishes the back system. The carry is very stable and comfortable, and if you like the lid this is a great sack for lightweight backpacking or general walking.

But You'll either love or hate the roll-top closure. I'd prefer a conventional lid as I find this top a bit of a pain to use. The zip pocket on the front of the sack is too small to be as useful as other lid pockets, which is annoying. The material will not be as durable as some heavier sacks so this would not be the best for scrambling.

Verdict This is a superb walking and lightweight backpacking sack if you like the unusual roll-top closure (this feature is the deal-breaker here).

VITAL STATS

Capacity 45 litres
Fabric 50D ripstop polyamide, 420D polyamide
Features padded adjustable back system; top tensioning straps, external and internal lid pocket, wand pockets, compression straps, twin ice axe/pole attachment points
Weight 1035g
Made in Vietnam
Stores in the UK 10



£100
OSPREY
TALON 44

TRAILRATING *****

It's good A very popular modern sack from a brand with a wealth of innovative and lightweight yet functional designs. The Talon 44 is very lightweight with a good capacity for a variety of uses. The back system has a ridge-moulded foam panel to provide better air flow, and the hipbelt and shoulder straps have perforated foam padding, to reduce sweat. The fit is close and comfy, and ideal for hill-walking. The sack has a main compartment with top and base access, which can be useful. You also get stretch wand pockets and a stretch front stash pocket plus compression straps, all ideal for stowing gear yet giving a clean profile. The lid can be extended and benefits from an internal and external pocket. A very useful set of features that make this useful for weekend lightweight backpacking as well as general walking.

But The lower main compartment is not essential and some people may never use it. The lid is one of those floating designs that I find annoying, because I've known them to allow water into the main compartment if they are not fitted properly when the main sack is partly empty... so I never trust them.

Verdict The weight and back system are superb for hill-walking and light backpacking but some may prefer a different lid and may not find the base entry necessary.

VITAL STATS

Capacity 44 litres
Fabric 70Dx100D nylon, stretch nylon Lycra, 160Dx330D nylon (Magnesium colour is not available until January 2009)
Features Aircscape back system; top tensioning straps; padded hipbelt; extending lid; main and base compartments; external and internal lid pocket; stretch wand pockets, compression straps, twin ice axe/pole attachment points; hydration system-compatible
Weight 1165g
Made in Vietnam
Stores in the UK 8



£100
OMM
VILLAIN MSC 45+10

TRAILRATING *****

It's good It's very lightweight with plenty of capacity (and this can be stripped down to 710g by removing various parts the sack). The back system is very simple with an internal removable stiffener and some padding in the lumbar area and shoulder straps. The sack is nice and stable and narrow, making it ideal for scramblers. The compression straps and wand pockets are ideal for stowing trekking poles too. The front compressor panel is good for stashing a waterproof, while its pocket stores smaller items. The side zip on the main compartment is useful to access items stowed outside a waterproof rucksack liner, but inside the pack. The lid has a single buckle so it is fast to use, while a good snow-lock extension keeps the elements out. A very useful sack for hill-walkers, scramblers and lightweight backpacking.

But The back system does not allow as much airflow as others, so this tends to feel a little sweeter than some alternatives. Other heavier sacks may prove to be more durable over time and benefit from additional features. Some may prefer webbing top tensioning straps rather than the light cord used on this sack.

Verdict A superb modern classic lightweight rucksack that is at home when hill-walking, scrambling or lightweight backpacking, but some may want extra comfort.

VITAL STATS

Capacity 45+10 litres
Fabric Dyneema
Features Lightweight chassis back system; removable lumbar pad; removable internal back stiffener; removable front compressor; top tensioning straps; compression straps; wand pockets; external lid pocket; twin ice axe/pole attachment points; hydration system-compatible
Weight 1160g (710g stripped)
Made in China
Stores in the UK 40



£100
KARRIMOR
ALPINISTE 45+10

TRAILRATING *****

It's good The Alpiniste has been a classic pack for about 20 years. This latest incarnation is as good as it ever was. The pack has a stiff "Format" padded back system with airflow chimney that takes a little of the heat out of the carry. The shoulder straps are just wide enough and padded enough to make the carry comfy without unnecessary weight and bulk. It is a single compartment sack, with a snow-lock extension and a lid that can extend to add 10 litres of extra capacity. There is also a bellows panel linking the lid to the body to help keep water out of the main compartment. On the sides you get wand pockets and side compression straps, a system which is ideal for stowing trekking poles. The fabric is very durable. All that at a reasonable weight makes this ideal for mountain walking, scrambling and mountaineering.

But There are lighter options, while other sacks have more airflow around the back, so this model is not for everyone. If you prefer side pockets then this will not be ideal either. I'd be keen to see this sack with a single-clasp closure on the lid rather than the twin buckles provided.

Verdict This is a classic rucksack that is virtually as good as it ever was and ideal for hill and mountain walking, scrambling and mountaineering.

VITAL STATS

Capacity 45+10
Fabric nylon ripstop
Features Fformat back system; removable hipbelt; top tensioning straps; compression straps; external lid pocket; twin ice axe/pole attachment points; hydration system-compatible
Weight 1350g
Made in China
Stores in the UK 50