

Maria Elfe Weinmann

My name is Maria Elfe Weinmann. I am from South Germany (Baden-Württemberg) but at the moment I live further north in Germany in a little town called Welper. My passion is long distance hiking since 2010.

I never really was much into hiking before that. But at a point in my life – when I had to think about how to proceed (professionally as well as personally), but had no idea how – I just went for a ‘time out’, gave all of my unnecessary stuff away, gave up my apartment and just started walking from my former doorstep westwards. At that moment I had no destination. I just wanted to see how far I could go. So I ended up doing the St. James Way from Germany to Spain. It was such a wonderful time and I got hooked to long distance hiking.

Other trails followed like the Pacific Crest Trail (2012), the Continental Divide Trail (2015) and the north part of New Zealands Te Araroa (2016). All of those trails have been wonderful and every trail has its own charm, its own character, its own challenges. So I couldn't really say which one I prefer, or which would be my favorite trekking destination.

Looking around in this world, I can see so many trails in so many countries which are worth hiking but I know I will unfortunately not have the time to hike them all. So I just do one after another, travel back home, earn some money while dreaming about the next trail.

Since I couldn't finish the Te Araroa, because of an injury, this trail is still on my agenda.



I wouldn't call myself an ultralight hiker. I just try to keep the load on my back as small as possible. I see it more like a development, like an evolution. Like every time when I need new gear or I have to replace equipment, I try to find a better 'fitting' piece and if possible – a lighter one. So step by step I try to improve my gear.

Looking back on my first long distance hike, I just have to laugh about the stuff I was carrying with me. Having no clue about hiking or hiking gear I just went into an outdoor store and came out completely overloaded with a huge backpack, a pretty heavy sleeping bag, even heavier leather boots and a completely wrong choice of clothes.

Well, I didn't know better.

But you learn while you are hiking. You find out what you really need and what you might rather leave behind next time and what 'luxury' items you are willing to carry, even if they are not really necessary for the hike at all.

You talk to other hikers about their gear and experiences and you figure out which of this information is useful and which isn't, what might work out for you and what doesn't.



What top 3 things do you bring besides the common stuff all trekkers bring?

To complement the poor diet on a long distance trail I have vitamin and mineral tablets with me. Besides that I carry a camera because I like to have high quality pictures and I am willing to pay the price: More weight because of the camera and the batteries. Furthermore, I carry a satellite communicator and GPS navigator for my own safety and for my family's peace of mind.

The most useless things I saw people bring on a trail....mmmh... Well, that's difficult to say, because what's right and useful for one person, might be completely unnecessary for another person (see me and my camera). It's all depending where and which trail you are hiking and under which conditions and what your personal preferences are... but on the trails I hiked I saw:

- those little shovels (do they actually have a name for that?) for digging the hole for your private business
- weapons: I saw a guy hiking armed with a 'Rambo-style' knife plus a gun on the CDT
- wristwatches: I never had the need to know which time it is on the trail, and all the other functions (barometer, altimeter...), those watches might deliver, are covered by my GPS navigator. Actually, I found three high quality outdoor watches on the PCT.

But like I said. Everybody is carrying their own kind of 'feel good' item. This might be a book, a french press, a weapon or just a camera.



How do you bring things with you?

At the moment – and for the last two hikes – I carry still the same backpack an Osprey Exos with 55 liters of volume.

I am still looking for a lighter backpack (one of those nice frameless ones) but couldn't find one which fits my purpose: Carrying gear and food for up to 14 days while still being comfortable to carry. But I am searching and when my backpack is worn out I will try another one – if I find one that I like.

The size of your backpack is depending on the trail and the length of the sections you are hiking. My Osprey was pretty good for the CDT but I had a lot of room in it on the Te Araroa. And – that's the problem – if you still have room in your backpack YOU WILL FILL IT! Even if you don't need to.

I try to organize the things in my backpack after common rules like putting heavier stuff closer to your center (like your back) and arrange the lighter stuff around it. Other than that, I try to put the things – I will need at that day of hiking – in the outside pockets (like food) or handy right on top of the backpack (like rain gear) so I never need to unpack my backpack before nighttime.



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What are your top tips for other ultralight trekkers?

It's important that everybody has to make their own experiences with hiking, packing and choosing gear. Everybody has to find out what works best for them and what doesn't. If you are not experienced in hiking, just start slowly and safe!!! Don't go on a trail unprepared but with ultralight equipment. That might be cool but maybe soon you will find out what you left behind and what you should have packed.... but then it might be already too late.

All equipment – it doesn't matter if ultralight or not – works out fine as long as the trail conditions are fine. But what if the conditions aren't perfect anymore? Don't hike ultralight at the expense of safety!

So please be always prepared and well informed (as good as possible) about the trail and the current trail conditions. Adjust your gear and your skills to those terms.

Go out for some day hikes near civilization before you go on long distance trail far away in the wilderness.

Don't overestimate yourself.

Don't underestimate the trail, the nature or the weather.

Make sure you know how to use your gear BEFORE you are on a trail.

Listen to others but don't have blind faith. They are just hikers like you – more or less experienced and some of them like to show off. But you know your skills, limits and fears best!!! Don't take a risk!!!

It's your hike, it's your life, it's your responsibility!

Don't be afraid about hiking, but be prepared ... and you will have one of the most wonderful experiences in your life! It's hard to describe the feelings you will have on a long distance trail, it's hard to describe how a trail can change your whole life. Go and try it yourself!



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