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Free Basic to Advanced Alpine Mountain Climbing Information and Instruction

HAND DELIVERED

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Mr. Wayne Gregory
Gregory Mountain Products
27969 Jefferson Avenue
Temecula, CA 92590

Dear Wayne,

Thank you for inviting me to be part of the Gregory Mountain Products Team at the Outdoor Retail Summer Market in Salt Lake City. I have driven over from Bend Oregon and I have found a fine spot at the downtown KOA Campground. Mrs. Speik decided to stay at home with the dachshund, this time.

Thank you for making the pro price available to me for a lightweight well-suspended backpack for summer and winter use. I carefully measured my bod as you instructed and as detailed in the catalog, and got a second opinion from the young folks who carry Gregory in Bend. I ordered the Makalu Pro in the large size. The handling of the transaction was very pleasant and I was able to take care of it by credit card and email.

The pack came in a few days and exceeded my expectations. I have a five-year-old Adventure Series Wind River (6585 cu in) that I have used a lot for snow camping and short haul deluxe camping in the summer. I have used the Wild Things Andonista pack (a favorite of Mark Twight) for mountaineering weekends (Shasta) and I wanted a light weight pack sized for a weekend climb that would take the weight off my shoulders.

The suspension of my new Makalu Pro filled the requirement. It was scaled down from the heavier Gregory packs but fit like wearing a glove from the first steps with a full pack.

I packed and repacked it for winter and summer as I was concerned that it be large enough (4600 cu in) to be practical for me. For winter, I was able to pack a TNF 20 degree down bag and the TNF Soloist Bivy (Backpackers Choice) and an MSR Dragonfly, 1.5-quart pot and small teapot with weekend food as well as Packlite Gortex, belay jacket, extra fleece and other Essentials. There was no room to spare with the $\frac{3}{4}$ Cascades Designs stayteck ultralite pad inside. I put the Ridge Rest waffle pad on the outside for accessibility. This winter pack

weighed in at 32 pounds with a quart bag of water and without ice axe and crampons.

I packed the new bag for an overnight high on the slopes of Broken Top near Bend, two weeks ago. I used an ultralite bag and a large TNF 2 person, 3-season tent (5,12), used an MSR micro stove and teapot. I used the same deflated $\frac{3}{4}$ pad inside, placed in a circle above the stuffed sleeping bag. It helped stabilize the light pack cloth that otherwise bulged in and out as stuff was pushed down into the pack. (I do not use compression sacks, tight stuff sacks or fold anything – I stuff it.) The pack weighed 28 pounds with the big tent and a quart of water. It was just large enough; with the bivy it would be 24 pounds, before climbing gear.

The nice top pocket is billed as a summit fanny pack. I do not think so. Everyone I know grumbles about having to “pack” an empty summit pack. I think I could incorporate a real cloth summit pack into the design somehow. The pack needs to be big enough for two quarts of water, Gore-Tex, fleece or down and Essentials. The Andonista is designed as a summit pack (and bivy) at 3,4.3 but it has no suspension. I guess I will just summit with the Makalu, cinched down.

The top is not designed for crampons. That is OK with me. I do not like them that close to my neck and face and would never carry them on the top. In addition, a small thing, the ice axe loops are set for little short technical axes and not a real mountaineer’s axe. Does this reflect a mindset away from “real” mountaineering?

The Andonista has ice axe sleeves that hold the shaft or poles very well. I do not know how costly they are.

There is no consideration given for the new water bag technology. Three one-quart Nalgene bottles weigh 18 oz empty! Three quart Nalgene plastic bags weigh 3 oz empty! I decided to carry the water bags in the top pocket. I would rather carry the weight lower in the side pockets, but they are too short. The side pockets may be too short for Nalgene bottles too. I do not like the 2-pound Nalgene bottle banging my leg when it is hung in front on the belt as is suggested in the catalog.

Your catalog shows the MSR fuel bottle packed inside. I do not want to risk a leak. The fuel bottle does not seem to fit well in the side pocket.

Your catalog does not seem to confront the issue of the sitting and sleeping pad. Some of the illustrations show the pad across the bottom or top of the pack. Looks old-time to me and wide enough to scare a bear.

I have had several summit and backpacks modified with narrow straps to hold the Cascades Designs Ridge Rest pad vertically on one side of the back of the

pack. I pack the second ultralite (inflatable) pad inside the pack. This could be shown in the catalog. The crampons go in the center of the back of the pack. I think the stretch cord will be OK for this.

Light and Fast are the catchwords of today. Of course, they should be modified to read Light and Fast and Fit and Experienced. New companies such as Go-Lite and others are catering to this new ethic. Gregory could profit from a separate line dedicated to Light and Fast, but grounded in the traditions of good design and construction. Price does not matter. See how much of a premium a road or mountain bike rider will pay to shave a few ounces.

Life expectancy does not matter either. A Nalgene bottle may last a lifetime. A Nalgene bag will be discarded after a single summer's good use and a new bag purchased. The savings of a pound of dead empty weight and rib breaking bulk will pray on the minds of the informed but unconverted until they change to bags. Light is right.

Wayne, I promised to be candid; I will be happy to argue about my strong personal opinions if you like. I do like my new Makalu Pro – thank you very much!

Sincerely,

Robert Speik
www.TraditionalMountaineering.org

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