

# The BUSH BACKPACK

— LARRY’S SHORT STORIES #182 —

Backpacks are standard equipment for hunters and guides, in sheep and goat country, where the horse or truck is often hours from the kill site. Good backpacks are well-designed, well-constructed with quality materials, and expensive — to last through many years of hard use. That’s my experience; however, it doesn’t work that way for the native trackers in Africa’s equatorial rain forest; they make their own – on the spot. There are many lessons to learn, while on safari in Africa; this is one of the most amazing things I’ve seen there.

With a bongo down, deep in the jungle, one of the trackers helped the PH with the skinning and quartering, while the other four each made several

trips into the bush.

They don’t need five trackers to track the bongo, but they do need that many to carry out the meat, horns and hide (everything but the inside of the stomach and small intestines got packed out). Every few minutes the trackers would return with an armload of small limbs, bark

strips, vines, large leaves or small sticks – the makings of backpacks.

Skinning continued while the trackers sat down and made their packs. The frame was formed from two small tree limbs, bending each into an oval, then tying the ends together tightly with thin strips of bark. The two ovals were secured together, at the top and bottom, with more bark stripping — and spread into an “X” pattern. Pencil-



*This is a heavy, well-secured load of fresh meat; notice the strap across the top of the head, supported by his hands.*

sized green stick spacers, each tied to the frame on both ends, created the sides; and a very flexible small vine was weaved into a latticework to form the inside back of the pack. The result was a very solid pack frame, easily capable of carrying 75-100 pounds to the truck.

A single, thicker bark strip, tied securely to the frame, served as the carry strap; there was only one and it fit on the top of the head as the trackers leaned slightly forward, taking part of the weight on their back and the rest with the muscles in their necks.

**"...one of the most amazing things I've seen..."**

Large, banana tree-type leaves formed a blood proof liner; the meat was piled in, covered with leaves, then tied in place with more bark. Now, the load was ready to go, elapsed time about 45 minutes. The bush backpack is an amazing thing and it gave me a whole new perspective about living/survival skills in the outdoors.

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5 May 2017



*Choosing the correct raw materials, and tying them all together, are skills learned in the jungle. Every tracker has his own methods – no two are alike.*



*The backpacks are one-time use only; the trackers empty them into the back of the pickup truck and throw them on the ground.*