

# CONVERTIBLE PACKS AND STUFF

by Mike Deme

## Richard Jones Convertible Backpack (\$282-\$495, convertible backpacks.us, 970-222-4190)

Over the last two decades, each year I have traveled somewhere in the world for a two- or three-month bike trip. In 1994, my wife and I traveled with the Richard Jones Convertible Backpack. Over the last two decades, each year I have traveled somewhere in the world for a two- or three-month bike trip. In 1994, my wife and I traveled to Vietnam with two Bike Fridays outfitted with Convertible Backpacks by Richard Jones. Since then, Richard's red packs have traveled with me and my Bike Friday on wonderful adventures around the globe.

Years of use have demonstrated that the Richard Jones packs are ideal for extensive bicycle travel. They have gone with us on

every bicycle adventure we have taken and we've even let our friends borrow them for their bicycle trips.

Here's how we do it: We arrive wearing the backpacks and pulling suitcases containing our Bike Fridays. We assemble our bikes, put the wheels, axles, and tow bars on the suitcases, put the backpacks in the suitcases, hook the suitcases to the bicycles, and ride away from the airport. We frequently store the suitcases and use the backpacks as panniers, returning later to pack up the bikes for the next flight. When needed I fold up the bike and wear the backpack, for example in very small hotel elevators, when hitching a ride, or when riding a train that doesn't allow bicycles. I often leave the bike somewhere and just take the main part of the backpack. It



is a great combination which allows me a lot of flexibility.

Here's how it works:

Starting with the 3,975 cubic-inch backpack, I remove the side pockets by releasing four quick-release buckles and a hefty zipper. These pockets are then zipped together along one side and buckled on the other, and a small aluminum stiffener and bungee cord are installed, creating the 1,325 cubic-inch front pannier set. Without the side pockets (front pannier), the backpack is now 2,650 cubic inches, and still entirely functional as a 12-inch wide backpack (If you don't think you'll use the front pannier, the pack is available in "Classic" form without the zipper and buckles). To continue the conversion, remove the pack's internal frame and mount it horizontally between the bike's seatpost (about 8 inches above the crank axle) and the rear rack, using the hardware provided. Then remove the shoulder harness and waist belt, loosen the

vertical compression straps, and lay the pack over the rear rack. Finally, connect the bungee cord at the bottom of each pannier section to the rack or frame, cinch up the compression straps to put some tension on the bungee cord and, voila!, the panniers hug the rack whether empty or filled to capacity — including whatever gear you hold in place with the compression straps! The panniers are easy on, easy off, with no hardware to break. The "Elite" pack consists of three separate units with three compartments each. The main part goes across the back bike rack with one compartment on each side and the center compartment on top. The two smaller units combine to make the front panniers, or attach to the rear pannier set to make a larger pack. Check out the video at [convertiblebackpacks.us](http://convertiblebackpacks.us).

If I don't plan on extensive hiking with the backpack, then I leave the internal frame at home and leave the shoulder straps attached and under the pack on the back rack of the bicycle. I find it very easy to take off the pack, put it on my shoulders, fold up my Bike Friday, and carry it in my hand. Then, I'm ready to go by foot. I do not mount the internal frame on my Bike Friday because I want to be able to fold the bicycle and carry it in my hand. I always carefully put the pack on the bike rack in a manner to insure nothing gets caught in the back wheel.

The system works very well in both modes and stands up to heavy use. The backpack is comfortable and the panniers are very stable. At \$495, the price is quite reasonable. You could easily spend \$600 for a matched four-piece set of panniers and an internal-frame backpack, but you'd sacrifice versatility.

— Ron Enders



**Chrome Lower Southside Pro** (\$120, [chromebagsstore.com](http://chromebagsstore.com), 405-503-1221)

In the October/November 2011 issue of *Adventure Cyclist*, I reviewed the Chrome Midway Pro canvas riding shoe, which I liked (and still like) a lot. But now there's an upgraded version, the Lower Southside Pro, which is similar in many ways to the Midway but, instead of being constructed mostly of canvas, the Southside is a combination of full-grain leather and breathable polyester. Admittedly, it took a little longer to break the Southside in compared to the Midway, but there are a few reasons I like the Southside better: 1) The combination of a thicker sole and the leather construction provides quite a bit more support, especially side to side; 2) The overall feel is a bit stiffer and it took longer for my feet to get fatigued; and 3) If you drop a tool on your foot, the leather toe offers a bit more protection than canvas.

The Southside Pro doesn't look like a technical shoe but has all the earmarks of one. If you're interested in a cycling shoe with an old-school look, you might want to wander on over to the Southside.

**Upstand** (\$39, [upstandingbicycle.com](http://upstandingbicycle.com), 919-590-0328) Remember kickstands?

As a kid, I could launch myself off my banana seat and flick my kickstand open before I hit the ground. As an adult, it's unlikely I'd ever have a kickstand on any of my bikes.



Strange, especially because they sure are useful. So what to do? Employ an Upstand instead. The Upstand is a foldable carbon fiber/aluminum peg, much like a tent pole, that when extended has a rubber foot at one end and a magnet at the other and acts like a portable kickstand.

Before the Upstand will work, you need to install the 10-gram metal tab between your quick-release rear skewer and your dropout. Once you've done this, you extend the Upstand, insert the tab into the magnet end and your bike will, well, stand up.

The Upstand is about 11 inches folded, 20 inches extended, and weighs 1.4 ounces. It works great on unloaded bikes and it even propped up my loaded touring bike, although once I reached about 70 pounds, things got a bit sketchy. All in all, it's pretty darn handy.

**Detours Phinney** (\$59, [detours.us/index.php/handlebar-bags/the-phinney.html](http://detours.us/index.php/handlebar-bags/the-phinney.html), 877-489-5208)

The Phinney is another cycling accessory that offers more than meets the eye, depending



how you see it employed. You might see it on someone's handlebar or on a rear rack. Because it's designed to do both, there are buckles in just the right places to attach to a rack

or a handlebar. Open the top zipper and you'll see an internal zippered pocket and two open mesh pockets. The main compartment has plenty of room for your tools, a tube or two, a lock, a jacket, or just about anything else you'll need on a day ride. For touring, the handlebar option is best and it'll easily hold your camera too, unless you carry a DSLR with multiple lenses.

I showed the Phinney to some people in the Adventure Cycling office and the guys felt like it was designed for women because it has tuck-away straps and can be carried like a purse, but you don't have to carry it that way. I thought it looked like a mini brief case. Anyhow,

it's a versatile cycling bag and, if you're not insecure about your manliness, you might find it very useful.

**CamelBak All Clear** (\$99, [camelbak.com/Sports-Recreation/Purification/Intro.aspx](http://camelbak.com/Sports-Recreation/Purification/Intro.aspx), 877-767-8725 or 707-792-9700).

Finding potable drinking water is an issue all around the world, including places in the U.S. where you might not trust surface water, especially on the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route. While there have always been water filters and purification methods available to the enthusiastic traveler, in the last 10 years or so, UV treatment has become a viable option.



Enter the CamelBak All Clear. Consisting of a 24-ounce BPA-free bottle, a UV cap, a classic cap, a USB mini cable, and a pouch for the UV cap, the All Clear kit weighs in at just about one pound. It could hardly be simpler to use: You fill the bottle with questionable water, screw on the UV cap, and press the power button for two seconds to activate the UV cycle. The UV bulb will illuminate and the LCD screen will count down from 60 seconds. Meanwhile, you agitate the water by flipping the bottle upside down throughout the cycle. Once the LCD reads zero, you should have water that is 99.9999 percent free of bacteria, 99.99 percent free of Viruses, and 99.9 percent free of protozoan cysts. Remove the UV cap, replace it with the classic cap, and start drinking.

The All Clear is a very handy system that but there are some things to keep in mind: The All Clear is not meant to be used with murky water or water with a lot of sediment (a pre filter is available), water with ice in it or below 32 degrees F, or extremely hot water. There are very helpful videos online if you'd like to see the All Clear in action. **AC**