

Lightweight
Strong

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Review by Scott B. Williams

Lightweight Compression Dry Bags

Anyone who has ever packed a narrow sea kayak for a multi-day trip or a longer expedition knows that fitting all the necessary gear and supplies inside the hull is a challenge even for those with the best organizational skills. Selection of the appropriate gear is the first step, of course, in packing a kayak for the long haul. With constantly developing technology, kayakers have more choices than ever when it comes to the necessities, such as shelter, sleeping systems, cooking gear and safety and navigation tools. Many of these items have gotten much more compact compared to the bulky equipment I used on my first longer trips. At the same time, however, many performance-minded paddlers are choosing lower-volume kayak designs even for extended touring, keeping the challenge of packing ever-present in the day-to-day life of a kayak traveler.

There have also been many new developments in dry storage systems. Reliable and durable dry bags are essential in the expedition environment, and never before have paddlers had so many options to choose from. Having relied on the older-style PVC dry bags with the roll-top closures for years, I was eager to try some new lightweight, coated nylon bags, especially those with built-in compression straps. These bags weigh next to nothing when empty, and the compression systems are designed to minimize the bulk of such voluminous items as clothing and sleeping bags. The manufacturers of the bags tested offer a wider range of sizes than is represented here. The bags selected for testing were among the smaller sizes available, as they are the easiest to get through standard kayak hatch openings.

Since a dry sleeping bag is one of



Outdoor Research's Hydroseal DryComp Sack, filled and compressed.



Sea Kayaker photos

the most important pieces of gear a kayak camper carries, I tested most of the sample bags by stuffing them with sleeping bags and immersing the sealed bags in water. Fiber-filled pillows were used to test the smaller compression bags.

Hydroseal DryComp Sack by Outdoor Research

The Outdoor Research bags are made of Hydroseal 200-coated Antron nylon fabric with taped seams. They appear to be well constructed, heavy-duty and full of unique features, including a small internal pocket with a zipper closure that can be used for keys or

Hydroseal DryComp Sack by Outdoor Research

Hydroseal DryComp AirX Sack by Outdoor Research

eVent Compression Dry Sack by Sea to Summit

AquaValve Drybag by Chinook Technical Outdoor

WXtex Pneumo LTW by Pacific Outdoor Equipment

a headlamp, or even to store the dry sack itself.

To compress a Hydroseal DryComp bag, tighten the interior sleeve using its drawstring, then pull on the bag's compression straps. Air is vented through the center of the gathered sleeve. The bag then gets its watertight seals from a roll-top and buckle closure that covers the interior sleeve. The four compression straps around the bag cinch it down to the smallest possible size. These straps are attached to a sturdy, reinforced round bottom panel, and at the top to an integrated, external, reinforced hem of fabric just below the internal drawstring closure. The Hydroseal DryComp bags also feature webbing loops on the side for tie-down and a webbing handle on the bottom.

The bags I tested were the #1 (27 1/2 x 7 inches) and the #3 (32 1/2 x 9 inches). With the air forced out and the bag fully compressed, the Hydroseal #1 bag filled with two fiberfill camp pillows compressed about the same size as one of the pillows stuffed in its own zippered sack—a significant volume reduction. After a full immersion test consisting of pushing the entire bag underwater, the contents were completely dry. The #3 size was just right for the test sleeping bag—large enough to allow easy stuffing with a good watertight closure.

The Outdoor Research Hydroseal DryComp Sacks are available in five sizes: #1 (11.6 liter), #2 (16.7 liter), #3 (23.2 liter), #4 (31.2 liter) and #5 (40.9 liter). There are two color choices: black and cayenne.



Outdoor Research's Hydroseal DryComp AirX Sack, filled and compressed.



Hydroseal DryComp Sack \$28-\$36

Outdoor Research
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Hydroseal DryComp AirX Sack by Outdoor Research

The Outdoor Research Hydroseal DryComp AirX Sacks are also constructed of heavy-duty materials with

features similar to the regular DryComp Sacks. They incorporate roll-top and buckle closure and four compression straps attached to a reinforced bottom panel, as well as the internal pocket with zipper closure. But rather than using a separate internal drawstring closure that must be cinched down before compressing the load, the DryComp AirX Sack is stuffed and closed like a regular dry bag. Compression is achieved with the four straps after closing the top, and excess air is forced out

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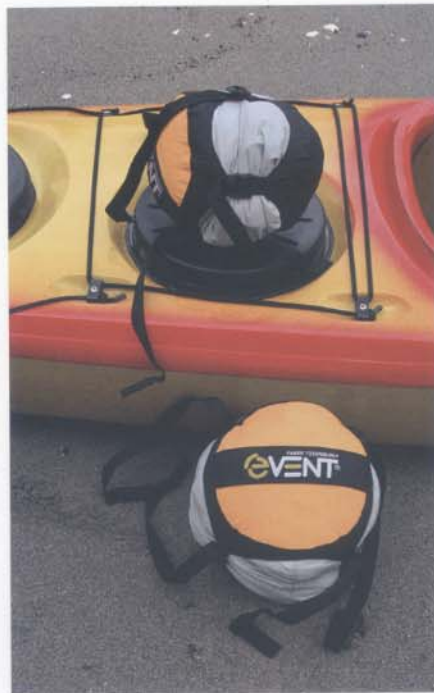
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Sea to Summit's eVent Compression Dry Sack, filled and compressed.

through a band of waterproof/breathable fabric integrated into the bag near the bottom. The pores in the fabric allow the air to be squeezed out but won't let water seep in. My test sleeping bag fit into the Hydroseal DryComp AirX Sack in the #3 size. The AirX Sack significantly compressed it and held up to a full immersion test, preventing water from entering the bag. The AirX Sacks come in four sizes: #1 (11.6 liter), #2 (16.7 liter), #3 (23.2 liter) and #4 (31.2 liter). Color choices include dark gray or black (both with orange stripe).

Hydroseal DryComp AirX Sack
\$34-\$41

Outdoor Research
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eVent Compression Dry Sack by Sea to Summit

The eVent bags have waterproof sides, sealed seams and a waterproof/breathable fabric bottom that allows air to be forced out. Its roll-top is lined with a pair of Hypalon strips to assure a smooth airtight closure. A lid attached to the four compression straps covers and compresses the roll-top closure.

The two sizes of the eVent Compression bags I had available for testing were the extra-small (6 x 14

inches) and the small (7 x 16 inches), both too small to accommodate the test sleeping bag, so I packed the small with two fiberfill camp pillows, which compressed nicely using the bag's four compression straps. The top panel hangs from the compression straps when it's not in use and must be positioned in place after the roll-top closure is sealed. It can be a bit awkward when the straps get twisted, but the buckle for the roll-top closure is securely covered by this panel, so it can't get snagged on something and won't unroll when the bag is compressed. The eVent bags proved waterproof. After my immersion test, the camp pillows were removed with no sign of moisture to be found.

The eVent Compression Dry Sack is available in five sizes: XS (6 liter), S (10 liter), M (14 liter), L (20 liter) and XL (30 liter). Colors are gray and gold, with black trim and straps.

eVent Compression Dry Sack
\$24-\$40

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AquaValve Drybag

by Chinook Technical Outdoor

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of tough, TPU-coated diamond ripstop nylon, with a reinforced roll-top closure and external welded corners with slots for webbing or rope tie-downs.

A purge valve located on one of the side seams allows the bag to compress bulky items. After filling the bag, seal the roll-top closure, then open the valve while pressing down on the bag to force all the excess air out. Sitting on the bag is an effective way to compress it. When the air is expelled, the valve is then closed and the compressed bag resembles a vacuum-packed bag. Unlike the bags that compress with a set of straps into a round shape, the AquaValve bag is comparatively flat and flexible and can adapt to some packing spaces that the other bags won't fit.

I tested the AquaValve Drybag in the smallest size (5 liter), and the compression method was quite effective in reducing the size of the camp pillow used to test the smaller bags. This bag passed the immersion test with no trouble, as it is obviously watertight as well as airtight.

The Chinook Technical Outdoor



Chinook Technical Outdoors' AquaValve Drybag, filled and compressed.



AquaValve Drybag is available in four sizes: S (5 liter), M (15 liter), L (25 liter) and XL (50 liter).

AquaValve Drybag \$16-\$32
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WXtex Pneumo LTW

by Pacific Outdoor Equipment

The WXtex Pneumo LTW is another flat-style dry bag made of coated ripstop nylon. This bag is almost identical in design and features to the AquaValve Drybag, except that the coated fabric of the Pneumo LTW is slightly translucent, allowing the contents to be seen when the bag is sealed. It has reinforced corner panels with slots for webbing tie-downs and features a reinforced roll-top closure as well as a purge valve located in one of the side seams.

The 15-liter size bag I tested was a perfect fit for the test sleeping bag, and when compressed, the total package was slightly smaller than any of the other bags with the same load. To get all the air out, I sealed the roll-top closure tightly, then opened the valve while putting most of my weight on the packed bag with one knee. This gets practically all the excess air out, and closing the valve prevents it from getting back in. Like the other bags in the lineup, Pneumo LTW passed the immersion test with no problems.



Pacific Outdoor Equipment's WXtEX PNEUMO LTW, filled and compressed.

The purge valve on the PNEUMO LTW (as well as the AquaValve Drybag) can also function as a fill valve if extra flotation is desired rather than compression. Simply open the valve and blow in it just as you would to top off a self-inflating mattress. The extra air will fill the bag to act as a cushion for breakable items or to add backup flotation to your kayak's cargo compartments.

The PNEUMO LTW is gold with black seams and is available in three sizes: 5 liter, 15 liter and 25 liter.

WXtEX PNEUMO LTW

\$20-\$30

Pacific Outdoor Equipment

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It's In the Bag

Lightweight, waterproof and rugged, these compression dry bags should prove their worth in protecting and minimizing the bulk of sleeping bags, camp pillows, clothing and other soft, bulky items. Every cubic inch of space saved on such items means more room for food and water to extend your paddling range or to add an extra measure of comfort on a trip that would normally allow you little space for packing a few luxury items. **SK**

Scott B. Williams has been sea kayaking since 1986 and has published numerous articles and books on paddling. He lives in Mississippi and enjoys sailing and building sea kayaks and other wooden boats. Scott can be reached via his website: scottbwilliams.com



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