

last stop



quick-draw mcalpin

When it comes to packin', this expert can't be beat by **David Volk**

Illustration by **John Linton Roberson**

AFTER SEVEN YEARS AS A TRAVEL WRITER, I have developed my own foolproof packing system that is equal to or better than any other out there. I call it "throwing stuff in a bag and hoping for the best," and I was eager to put it to the test, which is why I challenged nationally known packing expert and AAA's potentate of preparedness, Anne McAlpin, to a duel. A packing duel.

It was just the founder of Pack It Up and me in a room with nothing but a clock, two 22-inch carry-on cases, a week's worth of clothes stacked by our bags and our wits. We were going toe-to-toe. Mano a mano. Have bag, will travel.

Admittedly, seven days is a rather vague standard. Some folks consider it seven T-shirts and a pair of jeans, while Paris Hilton might think it means half a closet. Fortunately, McAlpin and I fall somewhere in between (to see our packing lists, go to www.AAAjourney.com).

Never one to show off, I said there was no need to rush, and she agreed. Once the second hand hit 12, we were off. At least, I was.

I quickly put down a layer of socks, shoes and underwear before going with pants and shorts as McAlpin looked on from the sidelines. Then I carefully wedged my shoes along the sides as she continued watching.

"Wow, I'm so good I've literally baffled her with my brilliance," I thought three minutes in when I noticed she'd only put in a layer of shoes. "Or stunned her by my stupidity."

As I toiled over the shirt layer, she picked up the Anne McAlpin Packing Board that she'd stacked her clothes on, put it in her suitcase and beat me without breaking a sweat. I finished two minutes later, but couldn't close my bag without expanding it, which she called cheating.

She not only got everything in her 22-inch suitcase with space to spare, but she'd put all her shirts in plastic to prevent wrinkles, folded pants over sweaters to avoid creases and used a board that allowed her to unpack all her clothes at once and put them in a drawer once she reaches her hotel.

After we were finished, she even pointed out that I really didn't need that third pair of pants, the flip-flops and that it would make more sense to put my books in my backpack, cutting my load by 5 pounds.

Maybe there is something to this organization stuff after all. **]]**

Humorist David Volk's column is a new addition to Journey magazine.

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