

At noon, a large yellow backpack sat in the front hallway. Badger jogged over to examine it. External frame. *Extremely adjustable*. Thick straps with brass buckles held the lid in place. Two water bottle pockets, an ice ax loop, *and* a pocket in the lid flap! He rubbed a claw over the label and let out a low whistle. The

backpack was paw-crafted and paw-sewn by the badger geniuses at SunSett Adventures—a backpack made by badgers *for* badgers.

Huh, Badger thought.

Badger found Skunk in the kitchen with an Orpington. Skunk sat at the table twirling a pencil in his claws. The chicken stood on the tabletop. They studied Skunk’s chart. The Orpington right-eyed the chart, left-eyed the chart, then tilted her head in Skunk’s direction. “Bock, bock-bock.” She pecked the chart. The paper jumped.

“Excuse me.” Badger gestured toward the hallway. “That backpack—”

“Badger! Good!” Skunk jabbed the air with the pencil. “Do you have plates, cups, and two sporks? I need your equipment list. Also, you said you had an extra sleeping bag. I will use it.”

“Sleeping bag. Equipment list. Got it. Now about that backpack in the hallway . . .” Badger paused as his eyes snagged on the sight of a cast-iron frying pan and a cast-iron stewpot. Neither had been in the kitchen earlier. *Cast iron? Isn’t cast iron heavy?* A hefty fire grate leaned against cabinetry. It looked weighty.

He felt eyes upon him, and found Skunk and the Orpington (left eye, right eye, blink) watching.

Badger got to the point. "Skunk, is that *your* yellow backpack? The *big* one? In the hallway?"

Skunk nodded. "Innes, at the Veg & Egger, said I could have it. She said, 'Skunk, take it off my paws. All it does is take up space!' Her idea of a vacation is a view, a bed, and a good book."

Badger blurted, "Innes is an American *badger*. Skunk, that is a *big* backpack."

"The bigger the better! Who needs a small backpack?" Skunk's eyes flashed. "And it is yellow! With three pockets! It is perfect."

"You put it on?"

"Oh yes! It is the best backpack ever."

Badger gaped open-mouthed and decided it was none of his business.

On Thursday, Badger laid out everything he planned to take on the floor of his rock room and began paring down the weight of his load. If the item was needed, he would take it. Multiple uses would further reduce the number of items. Finally, he would whittle away weight. "No one needs the handle on a toothbrush!"
Snap!

Needed: his Go-Burrow tent with tent fly, poles, and stakes. Also needed: his Lava Bed sleeping bag with orange interior and repeating volcano-and-lava-field exterior. And he was taking the sleeping pad! Without a good night's sleep what use would he be? Badger preferred objects made with titanium (*Strong and light!*) and silicone (*Light and squashy!*). He felt genuine affection for aluminum (*Light!*) but thought it a risk. (*A shame it is so fragile.*)