

# Dragonsfoot - 1st Edition AD&D - Articles

By Tony Reeves.

Choosing your equipment is not only fun, but can also mean the difference between having a good adventure, and having one go sour. Often new players don't realize how important their equipment really is, this is generally because they haven't experience all the nuances of the game, or some of the things that a wily Dungeon Master can throw their way. Even my own players fail to ask what equipment to choose, which leads to a good chuckle from me sometimes. Let's face it. It isn't always easy to choose your PC's stuff. Often players will just choose a few items, and leave out the most important things! This being the case most often with new players, I decided to write this article to see if I could help a bit. In here, I hope to provide a list of standard equipment that you should never be without, give some useful tips on choosing "special" items, and give you a couple of veteran "tricks." I also hope to address a few of the rules, which were not well defined, or are difficult to locate.

All of the information contained herein came strictly from the 1<sup>st</sup> edition rules, specifically from the PHB, DMG, UA, WG, and DG. My researches into theses subjects delved even further than that though, since the information was so scattered, or non-existent! I even found myself perusing Dragon magazine articles, the second edition books, (which differ significantly I might add, particularly where encumbrance is involve. IF you're curious just compare the strength charts between 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> editions), and also from the cover of the player character sheets released in the 1980's. I sifted through all this data with an eye on reality, before I even began to engage my calculator. I found the bulk density of Gold, made some calculations, conferred with a fellow engineer, and

started writing. Specifically this had to do with the sizes, I used for small sacks, large sacks, and backpacks, and I found later after my calculations had been done that my numbers tied in quite nicely with what little is stated in the original books. The things I found have cleared up several gray areas in my own game, and I hope the data contained herein will help some of you too!

### **In the beginning....**

You should always try to choose your characters' equipment based on several criteria. Your DM will nearly always allow you to be in a place to make purchases from the various shops, and vendors. Before picking up your stuff, though, you should spend some time gathering as much information as you can. You should know where you're going, and try figure out what type of creatures you're likely to be facing. You should pay close attention to the weather, and know what the weather is going to be like wherever it is you're going. Pay very close attention to this! If you're going to a desert area, then you need to make sure you carry extra water for you, and your mount, or you could risk dehydration, starvation, or worse! Carry extra food too! If you're going someplace cold, then make sure you carry a winter cloak, extra blankets, boots, water, (even though you can potentially melt snow!), and maybe even some extra firewood in case there isn't any nearby, or the wood is frozen. If you don't take these things into consideration, and do the "little things", then things will go hard for you later. Believe me, many DM's enjoy making life difficult for players that don't prepare. Always know how far you have to go too, because if you don't you may run out of food, or water, and could find yourself walking! As far as monsters go, if you know you are going to meet lycanthropes, then adjust your equipment accordingly! Buy Holy water, wolfs bane, silver weapons, or seek magical items, which you expect will affect the creature(s) in question. Don't forget scrolls for protection, death's door, or resurrection for the cleric, or spells for the mage! Be prepared! You should always purchase a few healing potions at the very

least! Your cleric isn't going to be right beside you every second! Besides, why should the cleric or druid have to pay for all the healing potions? What if your cleric dies? Surely you know the Gods don't always answer prayers! If you don't know what is effective against certain creatures then ask other PC's, clergymen, sages, magic users or even shopkeepers! Often benign information can come from the strangest places! Being prepared will leave you with a lot less trouble and who knows might even save your neck some time!

You have to have a place to carry all those items, right? Right! So to start with, the first thing you have to consider is the strength of your character. In first edition, all weights *and volumes* are combined together, and this is called encumbrance. Encumbrance is a major part of knowing how much weight (and volume) your character, his mount, and items can carry. You must know how much you can carry, before you can carry it! Strength is the prime requisite that helps determine how much you are allowed to lug around. On page 9 of the PHB (Players Hand Book) is the strength attribute chart. If you peruse it, you'll see a column titled weight allowance. Weight allowance is always measured in gold pieces. Note that anytime weight is mentioned, you keep in mind that 10 g.p. are equivalent to 1 pound. The strength chart shows basically that the higher your strength, the more you can carry. Conversely, the weaker you are, the less you can carry. Also there's a portion of this chart that says that you can carry the "normal" amount. What is the normal amount? Well, for a fellow with an average strength of 8-11, it references 500 g.p (50 lbs) as being the average amount you can carry, without suffering any encumbrance penalties. If you look at the bottom of pg. 225 in the DMG (Dungeon Masters Guide), at the bottom left side of the page, you'll see that there's a note that says the maximum weight an average person can carry is 1500 g.p. (150 lbs) with full movement & encumbrance penalties! This person can barely move. The number in the strength chart is to be added to or subtracted from the base (500g.p. or 50 lbs) and this will give you your min/max scores. For instance, a PC with 17 strength has a carrying

capacity of 1000 g.p. (100 lbs) without suffering any encumbrance penalties, and his total maximum is 2000 g.p. (200 lbs) One other thing to remember it to exclude from total encumbrance are the following items: clothing worn, material components (as long as they're not too bulky!), thieves' tools, and even helms (up to the size of a great helm). These things are not to be included while figuring up your encumbrance and while you can carry more than your minimum, if you want to make a fast getaway from that red dragon that's began chasing you at full speed, then you'd better consider dropping something quick! So, this all being said, you really have to keep a sharp eye on the weight of what all you're carrying, and it also makes it even more important to look for and obtain items such as bags of holding, Hewards' Handy Haversack, etc.

Your backpack, how much it can contain, its appearance, special features, and its material of construction become even more important when you become fully aware of the effects of encumbrance. Getting the data, so you that know more about your backpack isn't very easy either! I searched extensively through the 1<sup>st</sup> edition rules and found nothing that gives the amount a backpack can carry, its volume, or what its even comprised of! I kind of like this in a way, because every backpack I ever saw was different anyway! That leaves it up to the Dungeon Master (and/or his players) to decide what it is and how to make it fit in. If you are using encumbrances then I guarantee this will come up, if it hasn't already! In the case of a backpack for example, it may hold 750 gold pieces, but it is not overly full, and there is still space inside it. It might be on the point of ripping out the seams! In other words, if you don't know how big your backpack is by volume, then you really don't know how much it holds! In this case, for the sake of ease, I'll describe what I consider to be a "standard" backpack. I've used this same description in my games for the last 20 years. I don't generally utilize small, medium or large backpacks, because these are things that should be purchased directly from a leather worker, if they are wanted. I consider a backpack to be one of those things that's specifically

designed to be carried by a normal or average person, (with a base Strength 10). Remember your min/max encumbrance? This being the case, in my game, a backpack will hold exactly 750 g.p. (75 lbs) maximum. Note that this number also includes the volume, and that is important! It's not too likely that the average person living in medieval times would be carrying 750 g.p. inside a backpack anyhow, much less be able to carry it! However a person could carry a few potions, a small hand axe, pitons, lantern, or other items that may not weigh much but are bulky, weigh little, or do take up quite a bit of space without weighing much. You'll need to consult your Dungeon Master to confirm exactly what your backpack can hold, as many items are quite bulky, may take up space that has not been considered. He should be able to tell you exactly what you can put in your backpack. To that end, I've detailed the area of the standard backpack in a list below as well as some other items that I thought might be handy as a quick reference.

When you design or purchase a backpack, consider its material of construction carefully. For some DM's the standard backpack is made of cloth, others use leather. Consult your DM regarding this because as you adventure, you'll find that leather is much more sturdy than cloth, and it can take the outside elements much better. Technically, leather just gets a better saving throw than cloth does. Take advantage of this. There are also many different types of leather, such as alligator skin, cowhide, dragon hide, etc. and this too may help your saving throws. Another consideration is what features the backpack has. For instance, does it have external straps, hooks, or external pockets? If so, that's to your advantage. Remember you need a place to put your shield, crossbow, rope, etc, if you want to get to them quickly. In a melee, it can take anywhere from 5-10 segments *just to get into your backpack, and find what your looking for!* Now imagine your crossbow buried beneath potions, gold, bed-roll, extra clothes, or even tangled up in your rope! Wouldn't it be humiliating to be killed by a lowly goblin while rummaging around in your backpack? How much would your companions laugh? Make sure to get information from

your DM. Sorry I got a bit carried away, so now back to my standard backpack. Mine are always comprised of sturdy, thick bull's hide to resist the elements. It's also been treated with waterproof, non-flammable oil. Each one has 2 (12" x 1" long) leather straps, 2 " brass rings, or hooks on each side, bottom, and on top. There's also a strap (or again a hook) just below the two brass buckles, specifically designed for holding a shield or lantern. It also has a small leather loop, or ring on the very top so it can easily be hung on Milord's coat rack, or Sea Biscuits' saddle horn. Colors are optional. One last word about backpacks, what you put into one, a good thief, or sneaky old hobgoblin can take out! Many veteran adventurers go out of their way to protect their belongings from others. Special locks, protective spells, and many other means can be purchased if an imaginative fellow looks or asks around. All I can say to this is, be inventive it's more fun, and oh yeah, just because that dead fellow's lying there beside the road, doesn't mean you can just go up and ransack his backpack! You may find yourself standing in the nearest local jail cell sharing it with the town drunk, or wishing that fireball hadn't gone off!

There are some other places where you can carry goods. I want to go over a few things first though to set up a kind of basis for some basic items. I'm not changing anything, only doing a bit of clarification. Note that there might be some things you or your DM disagree with. Starting out, it is clear that one gold piece equals  $1/10^{\text{th}}$  pound. This is mentioned several places throughout the books. However no mention is made of how large, or small a gold piece is! For all intents and purposes, I computed that a gold piece is 1-1/4" diameter and  $1/8^{\text{th}}$  inch thick since gold is quite heavy in its pure form. Gold weighs approximately 1210 pounds a cubic foot, in other words a block of gold 1 foot by 1 foot by 1 foot would weigh roughly 1210 lbs! That said, a small sack would be 8 in. diameter and 12 in. tall and would hold exactly 112 gold pieces, a large sack would be 24 in. diameter and 36 inches tall, and it would hold exactly 336 gold pieces. This is as close as I could get to the wide ranges of numbers in first edition while

maintaining the size of the gold piece. To further clarify, if one were to fill a bag to this extent it would be on the verge of ripping. Considering the density of pure gold, (remember that in medieval times there were very few pockets of pure gold and there were few methods of removing the impurities, unlike there are today). For the record, based on the coin size above I say a small sack will hold 100 g.p. and a large sack 300 g.p. maximum. Following these figures, I have included a small list below of common items, their capacity in pounds, and gold pieces, as well as the area of each. Note: Again just because an item will hold the amount of weight, does not mean it will fit inside it! For instance the weight of a quarterstaff is 2 g.p and a small sack is capable of holding 2 g.p. easily, however the staff is much too long to go into the sack! Another rule of mine is that if the weight exceeds the maximum amount an object can hold, then the seams will rip, the object will become unwieldy (thus severely penalizing movement & dexterity), will cause faster exhaustion, will cause the straps to break, material to tear, and will cause severe, moderate or mild chafing, caused by straps or strings. DM's are encouraged to use these, or any other problems they see fit when excessive weights are being handled. I encourage you to use your imagination.

Item	Capacity	Capacity in	Dimensions
	In pounds	Gold Pieces	WEIGHT X HEIGHT X THICKNESS
Backpack	75 lbs.	750*	16"W X 18"H X 12"T
Belt pouch, large	3 lbs	30	10"W X 5"H X 8"T
Belt pouch, small	2 lbs	20	6"W X 4"H X 6"T
Sack, large	30 lbs.	300	24"dia. X 36"T

Sack, small	10 lbs.	100	8" dia. X 12"T
Small chest	1210 lbs	12,100	1' X 1' x 1' CUBE
Large chest	2420 lbs	24,200	2' x 2' x 2' CUBE
Saddle bags (Each side)	25 lbs	250	1'x 16" x 8"

## Animals and their carrying capacities in Gold Pieces (From the Wilderness Survival Guide)

	<b>Unencumbered</b>	<b>Maximum</b>
Lt War horse	3000	5000
Med War horse	4000	6500
Heavy Warhorse	5000	7500
Pony	2000	3000
Mule	5000	7500
Pack ape	2000	4000
Elephant	5000	10000

One forgotten place to carry items is the saddlebags on your horse, or riding beast. I generally consider that each set of saddlebags can carry at the very least as much as a backpack, and every horse should have a set. A pannier is used with stronger pack animals such as mules. Basically these are frames that fit comfortably over the mules back, so that large leather

sacks, wooden boxes or baskets can be tied and carried with the contents safe. Each single pannier such as one used for a mule can carry up to 2000 g.p. without the mule being discomforted, or encumbered! The maximum weight for a mule is a whopping 7500 g.p, though the mule will fight and not want to move! At this weight it most certainly would have some movement penalties! Since a large sack can hold 300 gold pieces, and a small sack 100 gold pieces, either of these could easily be tied to your mule, or horse unless your riding beast is wearing heavy barding, or you had no rope to tie it on with. I suggest you carry your horses' food and water, as well as any bulky items in your saddlebags. Carry the things you won't need in the dungeon, but might otherwise be of use!

Usually, there are some standard items I place in every backpack. I use this same list if a character needs items really quickly, or for an NPC whenever I DM. These items should always be carried and include:

- water skin
- Iron rations for 2 weeks
- 6 torches (or lantern)
- Flint, steel, and tinderbox
- 2 small sacks, (for treasure)
- Sharpening stone, (For fighters & thieves only!)
- Oil for armor, and weapons, (For fighters & thieves only!)
- Lantern oil.

Also I include 2 healing potions, or more whenever I can get them. Pretty short list isn't it? Remember these are just basic necessities, and should never be overlooked anytime you adventure. If you're going out with less than this, then you can expect the DM to have some fun with your character! Needless to say this might not be "fun" for you!

Other things you may want to consider are personal items. Some items should be chosen because of your characters' personality traits, or even

class. For instance, every thief should have 2 sets of lock picks. After all what happens if one set gets broken or damaged? What about acid for those reluctant locks, or blinding powder? Now granted, these are not powerful items, and may be costly, but if they help just one time, or save your characters life, then what's a few gold pieces? Other considerations for items might come from your alignment, or even personal tastes. Take a lawful character for instance. He may decide to carry a comb, or brush, not because he is vain, but because they believe in being orderly, and thus cares for his appearance. The same character might also choose to carry a small silver cup, plate and spoon, which would be mighty useful at supper when you camp! Not to mention the fact that this character would likely be quite civilized, and such a fellow would never consider eating with his fingers when not appropriate! The small items like these only help to further establish your PC, and help give him character! They also provide some fun role-playing opportunities. Now that you see this, use your imagination and see what other things you can come up with! Just remember not to overload yourself. To keep from doing this, write down the minimum and maximum weight you can carry next to strength or someplace near your backpack where it's visible!