

By Randy Johnson

Leaders

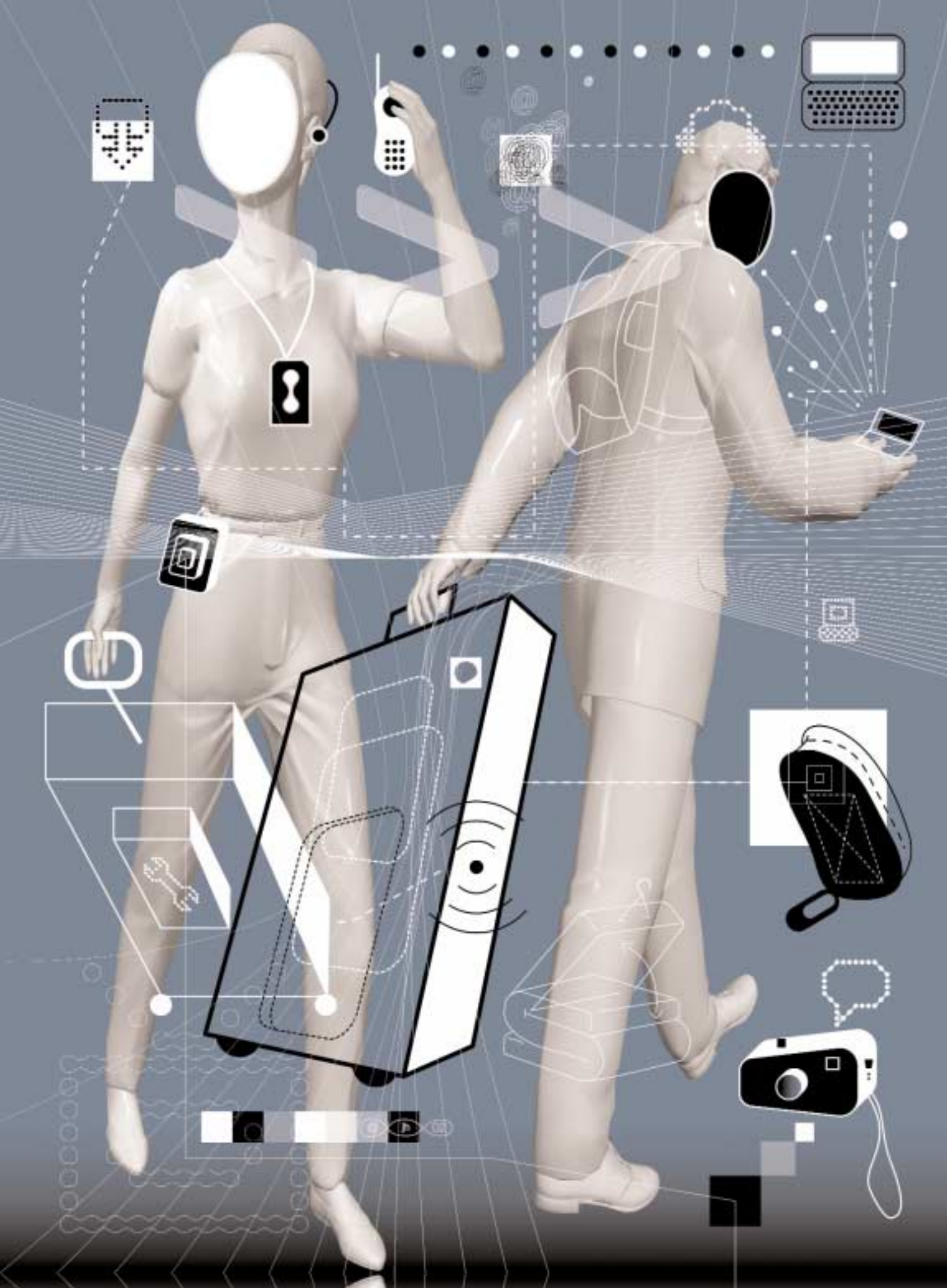


Tired of product roundups
full of tired products?
Here's our pick of the hottest
travel items about to hit the
market. This new generation
of on-the-go gear takes
innovation a step further,
making travel easier and
safer than ever.

Pack

Illustration by John Hersey

IT'S ALL COLIN FLETCHER'S fault. The guru of the '60s backpacking movement published his classic guide *The Complete Walker* in 1968, and before long the baby boom generation had departed en masse into the wilds, seeking solitude. Layered in the high-tech clothing of the time, they hoisted nylon homes onto their backs and hauled lightweight creature comforts into the wilderness. ¶ Fletcher's disciples are older now, but they're still out there—tromping through the corporate jungle instead of the woods. They travel a lot. In fact, for many, travel isn't just a part of life; it *is* life. But when they moved into the world of work, they were forced to put away their light and logically designed backpacks and pick up heavy, awkward suitcases, hung from one shoulder or one hand, which they lugged long distances through tight spaces, lifting and heaving and flailing. Ankles were turned, ►



bunions bludgeoned, elbows separated, and shoulders cuffed around the rotator by equipment not made for walking—much less for carrying across continents.

When backpacking went from hobby to lifestyle, manufacturers responded by designing equipment people could live with. The same thing happened when air travel became for many a monthly, even weekly, event and the proportion of the population crossing the globe on a regular basis skyrocketed.

The last decade has seen a world of specialty products invented for travelers, much of it devised by entrepreneurs who remember what it was like to head into the woods with equipment that did the job with maximum efficiency and minimum strain.

But 2002 is a landmark year in this ongoing process—a fact that comes into focus with even a brief look at the

It's increasingly obvious that the travel lifestyle embodies the aspirations we hold for ourselves, our children, and society on this shrinking planet. And innovations springing from this realization are bringing enticing new products to market. What the savvy traveler sees around him or her is a burgeoning world of choices to make travel lighter, smarter, and safer than it has ever been before.

BRAND-NEW BAGS / CIVILIZATION REALLY GOT ROLLING with the invention of the wheel, but it took until 1990 for somebody to put a couple of them onto a suitcase effectively. That's when an airline pilot invented the original Rollaboard and launched a company called Travelpro. More recently, these now-ubiquitous wheeled suitcases have inspired manufacturers to create handle attachments

HIGH SIERRA NORTH-SOUTH



SAMSONITE BAG WITH SEAT



TRAVELPRO PROGRIP HANDLE

innovative new products profiled here. Most were just launched a few weeks ago at the Travel Goods Association (TGA) annual trade show in New Orleans and won't appear in catalogs or stores until later this year.

"This is simply the most revolutionary period that's ever existed in the technology of gear designed to make travel easier," says Michele Marini Pittenger, vice president of the TGA. The rise of specialty travel catalogs amply reflects that assertion. Accessories-oriented Magellan's launched the trend in 1989, and clothing-focused TravelSmith followed in 1992. L.L. Bean, which turns 90 this year, launched its travel catalog in 1998, and today's top online luggage superstore, E-Bags, first appeared on the Web a year later. That's just the tip of a merchandising iceberg stretching from dedicated luggage shops in malls and airport concourses to travel specialty stores, leisure and business travel magazines, Web sites, and books.

that let the traveler pull the bag with greater ergonomic ease. Travelpro takes that idea one step further with **ProGrip**, a forward-projecting handle akin to those found on golf bag pull-carts. The grip swivels up from underneath the traditional telescoping luggage handle, and you choose which one to use. Dragging a bag just got easier.

In one of the year's best ideas, nearly century-old Samsonite will soon release the **Ultra 3000 Side Wheeler**. The bag rolls conventionally but also turns 90 degrees onto either side to roll easily where traditional wheeled bags can't. It runs the gauntlet of the airplane aisle and won't knock over the shelf of single malts on the narrow aisles of duty-free shops. Samsonite is also introducing a **hard-shell wheeled bag with a featherweight detachable pad** that turns the top of the bag into a rest seat during a long walk or a wait in line.

With its new Endeavor line, luggage manufacturer

High Sierra has re-conceptualized the suitcase. Instead of opening sideways like a book (and taking up half the bed to do it), the front side of the new line opens into two zippered compartments. The **North-South** opens above and below the bag, and the East-West model unzips left and right. These bags display everything at a glance, like the steamer trunks of old. Inspection and quick retrieval are a snap, and the bags expand with the pull of a zipper. They also become backpacks, with a pad that softens the base of the bag where it hits your back. The Endeavor bags each include a suit section, or “suiter.”

A backpack on wheels and zip-together piggyback bags debuted separately in 1996, but High Sierra’s new wheeled but backpackable Tri-Fold Garment Bag adds a zip-on day pack to the outside of a carry-on sized wheelie that includes a suiter. Another manufacturer,

zippered sleeve goes beyond padding to protect against moisture and the corrosive effects of pollution.

A briefcase by U.S. Luggage lets a computer slip out the end of the bag that faces you, a welcome feature for those who’ve ever strained their backs trying to free a computer case from beneath an airplane seat. Samsonite will introduce its own version this spring.

If you thought *micro* was the luggage mantra, there’s a new wave of mega bags for people who can’t pack light. And they’re as mobile as their smaller wheeled cousins. The Max system from U.S. Luggage rolls two ways: in the currently popular upright wheelie style and as a lie-flat wheeled case that’s able to carry a stack of other cases.

Even the smaller carry-on sized wheelies now unzip around the edge and expand 2 or 3 inches for the gift-laden trip home. The new Briggs & Riley NX Uprights

SAMSONITE SIDE WHEELER



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC HURRICANE 2



EAGLE CREEK PACK-IT

Lodis, tackles flexibility with its new Zipoff series. The Computer Brief separates into a briefcase and laptop case. The Overnighter features an exterior computer case that becomes a minibriefcase and another outside pouch that turns into a fanny pack (a trick backpacks have performed for years). The Sculptured Zipoff Overnighter does it all: It sports a briefcase and a separate padded computer compartment, both of which function separately or zip together into one bag.

Brenthaven has long specialized in executive bags and backpacks that include heavily padded computer sleeves. Its newest rolling briefcase, the Brenthaven Mobile Brief Computer Case, adds shock absorbers on the wheels. RoadWired’s Digital Daypack promises equal protection and a trail-quality strap and hip belt system. The company’s latest computer sleeve adds a shock-absorbing pouch to any existing pack or briefcase. The high-tech

may set the standard. They grow with the push of a button and have a clean look that’s free of zipper teeth in the open position.

WEAR AND TEAR / REMEMBER WHEN “TRAVEL WEAR” meant a raincoat that folded up into its own pocket? Like backpackers before them, today’s travelers are able to compress an entire wardrobe into an ever-smaller space. **Eagle Creek’s Pack-It** system exemplifies the approach and includes compressor bags that roll up to squeeze the air out of stored garments through one-way valves. More suitcases and toiletry bags that let you see what’s inside are being offered, as well.

Even stylish jackets and dresses are now available in new fabrics with the same comfort- and safety-enhancing capabilities of clothes once reserved for mountain climbers. From jackets to belts, everything is reversible and made

to be worn more than once. Some sweaters even sport a different knit pattern on each side.

A growing range of clothes is made of space-age fabrics that refuse to wrinkle. Bulky sweaters, jeans, and leather coats come in lighter, thinner materials that are attractive and pack in a fraction of the space. Most garments are made of fabrics like Supplex or CoolMax, which look better, dry faster, and are warmer or cooler than conventional clothing. There are odor-inhibiting, antimicrobial socks and shirts, clothes that screen the sun, and pants that lose their legs and let it in. The newest sun-blocking, waterproof hats from Tilley, such as the Endurable LT6, weigh only 4 ounces.

The latest player in the travel garment market is The National Geographic Society. The internationally known name in exploration has been selling travel and outdoor

Travel goods manufacturers also are providing new approaches to personal security. Some purses for women conceal a metal cable in the strap that prevents cutting. There are faux wedding bands that discourage unwanted advances. L.L. Bean's new Traveler day pack, which will debut in its fall 2002 catalog, has a pilfer-resistant main compartment that seals with two zippers—the outer one zipping in the opposite direction from the inner.

Some products make it easier to see inside your suitcase, especially useful at the airport. As the packing system approach gains ground—an inner cube for everything and everything packed in its color-coded cube—more bags are being made of mesh and see-through material for easy inspection. Besides keeping clothes unwrinkled and grouped logically, the bags can be inspected easily and without embarrassment.

McNETT MICROFIBER BEACH TOWEL



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC TEMPEST 2



ADVENTURE MEDICAL BACKCOUNTRY KIT

footwear for a while; backpacks and bags are starting to arrive in stores now. This summer the company will debut a 250-item fall line of Italian-designed travel and outdoor clothing—all of it field-tested by National Geo's pros.

Some of National Geographic's gear is designed to meet improbable challenges; one jacket for sailing is inflatable and even has a light beacon! But 80 percent of the offerings will bring that same level of technology—and security—to adventurers who won't get beyond Central Park. The wet-weather **Tempest 2 jacket** uses Entrant Dermizax-EV fabric to shed water while permitting perspiration to evaporate. Zippered chest flaps on each side conceal a variety of storage pockets and a waterproof, removable passport pouch. A waterproof, padded seat panel folds out for those times when there's simply no good place to sit. The **Hurricane 2 pile pullover** is made of Technopile for better heat retention, breathability, and less pilling.

ACCESSORIZE / WHEN THE CUMBERSOME SUITCASES of yesteryear gave way to roll-alongs, 70 percent of the travel merchandise market was baggage. No longer. Within the last few years, suitcases have slipped to 30 percent, and 70 percent of the market is a trove of gadgets and gizmos designed to make travel safer and easier.

Solingen's new manicure set passes all the airport security regulations. And there's a hotel room full of new travel gadgets available from various manufacturers to warn of intruders, tell you the time and temperature, illuminate your book, or keep you informed with a world-band short-wave radio the size of a Palm Pilot. Air too dry at the ski cabin? Pop an Evian into your 9-inch by 5-inch Personal Travel Humidifier from Magellan's and you might as well be at sea level.

Expect to see the see-through trend here, too. **Travelon's three-in-one ID wallet** clears security quickly by displaying

your boarding pass, driver's license, and passport. It hangs around your neck or slips into a jacket or briefcase pocket.

Some new luggage tags make bag identification easier; look for tags with classic art deco travel poster art and others in bright neon colors that wrap around luggage handles. A Magellan's tag encloses a report of your entire itinerary to help baggage agents route your luggage.

You can find luggage zipper locks activated by keys, combinations, or, in the case of the KeyCard Luggage Lock from RoadWired, hotel room-style cards. There are straps that completely surround your bag (and help identify it). Cable sacks from pac-safe look like fishing nets and make it nearly impossible for others to reach inside your luggage. And that huge bag that even the owner doesn't want to walk away with can become bearable with the new Soft-Grip gel shoulder strap.

The physician-designed **Adventure Medical first-aid kits** range from those for travelers heading to undeveloped countries to tiny units with amazingly advanced materials for all kinds of emergencies, including dental.

Magellan's new pill organizer holds a week's worth of prescriptions and features a timer that beeps to remind you when to take your pills—no matter which time zone you're in. Other products emulate items from the first-class amenity kit, from disposable toothbrush swabs to slipper socks. And if the amenities haven't been first-class, there's McNett's new Quick Fresh odor eliminator spray.

En-Route Travelware offers elastic arm and leg wallets that can be worn beneath clothing. The wallets have zippered pockets for IDs, credit cards, keys, and other small items. The company also produces a hanging toiletry organizer with sealable vinyl compartments and mesh

HYDRO-PHOTON STERI-PEN



BRUNTON SOLARPORT PANEL



TRAVEL ID WALLET

Refreezeable ice cubes help you avoid suspect water. And when you can't avoid it, the world of water purifying systems just got better. The newest is the **Hydro-Photon Steri-Pen**, which sterilizes a glass of water in less than a minute using UV rays.

Speaking of rays, **Brunton's Solarport 2.2 panel** is a compact, foldable solar panel that recharges computers, mobile phones, and PDAs and weighs only 11 ounces. While it's charging, you can lie on the sand with a full-size **McNett Microfiber beach towel** that dries in minutes and folds smaller than a Day-Timer.

RoadWired's Cable Stable organizes all your computer cords, cables, adapters, and batteries in one compact zippered case. And its Auto-Retract Travel Cords—about the size of a Zip disc—pack 7 feet of CAT5 computer network cable into one portable unit that converts for phone/modem use.

pockets that allow the contents to be seen without having to open a section. That approach to toiletries doesn't have to mean a stand-alone item, as First Class Baggage shows with its new Cosmo Traveler. The wheelie contains a foldout toiletry section with see-through pockets.

On the more memorable end of travel, as digital cameras get ever more travel friendly and sophisticated, some, like the new Epson PhotoPC 3100Z, are equally able to e-mail a snapshot or create photo-quality shots sans computer through a USB connection to a dedicated picture printer. Your prints can be circulating before you get home. /END/

For Web links to products mentioned in this article, visit hemispheres.com and click on **Cyber Sidebar**.

Randy Johnson is a frequent traveler who still prefers packing for the backcountry. He's the editor of HEMISPHERES.