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Why You Should Consider A Portable Power Supply For Next Camping Trip

~by James Loram

There's nothing like the great outdoors. Fresh air, beautiful views, and solitude are some attractive features of camping, but there is one thing that is typically lacking: A power supply. It's true, the old school way of camping seemed to work out just fine for families, but in today's climate, having the best supply of power can make or break your trip. A power supply can be used to run the electric air pump to blow up your mattresses. It can power your radio, your camping fridge and coffee maker, and it can keep you and your family safe by keeping your devices charged so you do not lose communication with the outside world. Think about it: With no way of recharging your devices, a dead phone is simply an expensive paperweight. Since being able to power items makes the camping experience all the more pleasurable, there is no reason to neglect having the convenience of a power supply on your next trip. Let's talk about the different ways to get set up with power.

How to get a power supply on your next camping trip

Here are some of the most popular ways people bring power along on their camping trip.

Campsites With Electricity

This option works well, but it also comes at an extra cost. Campsites charge for use of their electrical outlet. You'll probably need to bring anywhere from 100 to 200 feet of extension cords and a power strip or two, just in case. These power cables can be unsightly, can take away from the scenery, and may end up being a tripping hazard. Trust me, I speak from experience!

Power Banks

In this case you'll be bringing pre-charged batteries as your power supply. The obvious and biggest limitation is, if you run out of power, you're out of power. You might need to add some equipment so you can recharge your power bank when it runs low. Any kind of extended trip of 3 or more days and you might be stuck with an even larger and heavier "paperweight" with you.

Portable Power Stations

These devices are similar to power banks, but typically come with a little more battery capacity. Again, this might not be the best option if you're heading out for a standard week-long trip so you may need to recharge somehow, perhaps by

plugging into your car's outlet and running the engine for a few hours. Some might come with solar panels, which might fit better with your needs and desires.

12-Volt Car/RV Batteries

No, you can't just pull your car battery out from under your hood and run your refrigerator with it! You'll need to get a special deep-cycle battery, along with a few other things, such as a way to convert the power for use with an outlet and some way of recharging the battery. Although thought to be a low-cost alternative, this power supply might end up costing more with what you need to purchase if you want a longer lasting power supply.

Gas Generators

This seems like the tried and true way of supplying power to your campsite, but it comes with some issues. First, many gas generators are noisy, and that's the last thing most people want on or around their campsite. You'll need to transport and store gasoline, too. Storing the gas can in the hot sun or in the hot car could be dangerous. And let's not even bring up the fumes from the fuel.

Solar Generators

Saving the best for last, the solar generator is an excellent option when it comes to endless and worry-free power. Once purchased, you don't need to spend extra on fuel—the sun will take care of charging your unit. They tend to run extremely quiet (or completely silent), just what your group and the campers around you desire. Finally, they are lighter than traditional generators making them easy to transport and move around.

Why should you choose a portable power for camping?

The incredible conveniences of having electric power for your campsite are many and having portable power instead of being tethered to a rented outlet or a huge generator are just the start. Here are the three main reasons why you should have a portable power supply with you on your next camping excursion.

1. Portable

We all know the hassle of shifting things around once you've set up your campsite. Imagine having to reroute 100 foot extension cords or repositioning your vehicle to "plug" in your electronics. Having portable power means moving the power, not everything else.

2. Quick and Easy

Another great feature of portable power is how fast you can get power to wherever you need it. Instead of blowing up your air mattress in the dirt, you can bring your solar generator right up to the tent and get the air flowing cleanly. Having power always ready to go at a moment's notice could be critical, especially at night in the event of an emergency.

3. Connecting Multiple Devices

Powering the mini-fridge, running the radio, and charging multiple phones all at the same time is a time-saving convenience to big to ignore. Instead of waiting around for everyone's devices to charge, doing them in one fell swoop leaves more time for fishing, hiking, and making s'mores by the fire.

Factors To Consider When Choosing A Portable Power For Camping

Now that you know there is no way you'll be camping without some kind of portable power, what should you look for when selecting the best power supply for you? Here are the 5 main questions you need to answer first.

What type of devices will you be using/charging?

If you plan on simply charging 1 or 2 phones, your power needs will be minimal and easily sustainable—if you have a way to recharge your supply. If you have a big family, each with a phone, a couple tablets, a coffee maker and a fridge with a motor that kicks on periodically, you'll definitely need something with more output. Determine what electronic equipment will be using your power supply. It is important to note that the total output power of your solar generator or power pack must be greater than the total power of all devices you plan on using with your power supply. Also, consider how long you will be running all your devices. Odds are, you'll never want to unplug a refrigerator keeping your eggs cool. Also, the sudden power draw from an air "compressor" to fill your air mattresses could have a big impact on your power longevity.

How often do you go camping?

Do you escape the city a few times over the summer or are you barely unrolling your tent and sleeping bags but once per year? Frequent campers means your power supply device will get used a lot and will stay in great working shape, if maintained properly. Any device that sits for years without use could lose the ability to hold a charge. In either case, proper maintenance is key to protecting your investment. If you've settle on a solar generator, be sure to keep your solar panels clean, place the battery in maintenance mode, and double check that cables and such are not degraded. Besides level of maintenance, choosing the proper device matters. If you camp infrequently, the inconvenience of charging a power bank is minimal. If you're an outdoorsman extraordinaire, your best option would be a solar generator. Set it up and let the sun do the work, not your car during your camping excursion or your home before you leave.

Where's the "sweet spot" when it comes to power capacity?

During your camping trip, if you find yourself unable to charge your power bank for a period of time, you'll need to make sure your battery capacity is up to par. A quick rule of thumb is the actual capacity of your power bank is going to be around 65% to 7-% of the capacity promised. So if you have a 10,000 mAH power bank, you could squeeze 2 full charges on a newer model iPhone. If you're running larger electrical devices for extended periods of time, a power pack will most likely not suffice. Since a solar generator can recharge all day (all while being used by your devices), you should be able to make it through the night. A little math will go a long way to keep you flush with power on your camping trip.

What kind of portability do you really need?

This can not be stressed enough, but portability is key to having a successful camping trip with a power supply. Suppose you set your generator up a little too close to your tent. Perhaps you didn't calculate correctly and your power supply encroaches on your neighbors camping site. Having the ability to reorient your portable generator will make life easier and less stressful—which is the whole point of camping with a power supply, isn't it?

What power output would be optimal for my situation?

Simply put, the best way to determine your power output needs is to take an account of what devices will need power on your camping trip. A fridge, for example, will surge and will need a lot of power to get going. Small devices will not. Plan on using a hair dryer? Make sure your output can handle it. Here are a few steps to take to help you with this predicament:

1. **Set up your generator/power supply at home.**
2. **Make sure your supply is fully charged and ready to go.**
3. **Spend a few hours performing a mock camping trip by plugging in devices, charging phones, etc.**
4. **Decide if your generator or power supply matches with your use.**

Camping with portable power opens a world of fun possibilities

With a portable power supply on hand for your next camping trip, your ability to enjoy the vacation grows exponentially. You won't have to worry about losing your phone's charge, making it impossible to take photos of the beauty around you. Cold food storage will always be available, which means less trips away from your solitude and into civilization for ice, eggs, and other perishables. Adding never thought of extras become a reality, like charging a drone for aerial footage of your trip, a small heater in case of temperature drops, and even a laptop to edit video or broadcast live to your friends and family who couldn't make it (and making them just that much more envious). Endless power with a solar generator means you're more likely to have the best camping trip ever.