

Travel, Landscape, Nature Photography

By Photographer Garry Black

« [Greece Workshop – May 2012](#)

Tamrac Evolution 8 Backpack Review

This is Part II of the review for the [Tamrac Evolution 8](#) Backpack, [Part I](#) is the back story of how this review came about. My assistant and fellow contributing writer/reviewer for this article is Roxann Hickey. We both want to make it clear that we are not employees of Tamrac, did not receive any money nor are we spokespeople for any camera bag manufacturer. This review contains our honest opinions and judgments.

This was Roxann's 1st camera bag, if you don't count the one that she got when she bought her camera. This is my 101st camera bag, I also got a "free" bag with my first camera (Nikon FE) it was a navy blue canvas Nikon sack. It was a piece of junk! I got rid of that one quickly. Does anyone still use or even have their 1st bag?

In my experience there is no one right or perfect camera bag, that's why I have had 101 of them. I've had many different brands, different designs and every different type of bag imaginable, including photo vests. I still use some of these bags, but most of them are long gone, either given away or ended up at the curbside. The reason why I have and also use so many bags is because of the different types of travel or shoot that I am doing.

Just when you think you have the perfect bag, you go ahead and buy that new lens, another camera body or flash and all of a sudden everything doesn't fit in the bag anymore. Sound familiar?

So what do you look for when buying a bag, hopefully something that will carry your gear safely and comfortably. That sounds simple enough, but walk into any camera store and see the wall of bags and you know it's not that simple.

How did Roxann and I both end up getting exactly the same bag with so many to choose from? Roxann spent days, weeks maybe even months researching all the different bags on the Internet. For her this is what was important:

1. Backpack style
2. Separate compartments and plenty of pockets/storage
3. Space for 13" net book
4. Tripod holder for carrying tripod
5. Easy access to equipment
6. Rugged construction.....to quote her "I'm tough on stuff"
7. Colour option – didn't want black. Wanted something that would be different and stand out from all those black backpacks.

After doing all of that on-line research she had it narrowed down to a few possibilities. When she arrived at the camera store, the wall bags didn't look that daunting, it took her less than 10 minutes to select the Tamrac Evolution 8.

Why did I choose this bag? I didn't spend nearly as much time researching it as Roxann did, but like her, I also looked on-line to compare the different bags that are available. When I saw the line of Tamrac bags I

was surprised, for some reason I don't recall seeing or hearing very much about Tamrac bags in recent years from Canadian retailers. Back in the 80's and 90's I used a huge Tamrac bag for my Pentax 6×7 camera system. I do remember buying that bag. I had paid a fortune for the equipment so I wanted a bag that would protect it, the Tamrac (I don't remember the model, but I am sure it was long discontinued anyway) was perfect. It was well made, rugged and everything fit. It was a huge shoulder bag and unbelievably heavy with all the equipment. Even though I was much younger then, my shoulder, neck and back were killing me at the end of the day. Over the years, I have seriously tried to cut down on what I carry and also to carry it more sensibly.

While I still occasionally use shoulder bags for certain assignments or locations, I now prefer to use a backpack for most of my photography. It's funny, because up until recently I hated backpacks. They seemed great for carrying equipment around, but as soon as you wanted to get something out of them, it became difficult. Today there are a couple of manufacturers that make backpack bags that allow you to access the contents of the backpack without having to put it down on the ground. You slip it off one shoulder, slide the bag to your side and you can get to your camera via a side zippered flap. The Tamrac is the only one (that I know of) which has a side flap on both the right and left sides.

In selecting a new backpack, my two main criteria were - will it fit on a plane as a carry-on and can I fit everything that I have into it?

The dimensions of the Evolution 8 are: 12.5 in W x 8.8 in D x 19.0 in H. This is well within most airlines' carry-on allowance size. There is a slightly larger bag, the [Evolution 9](#) but it's depth dimension is two inches too large. You might get away with it using it as a carry-on, but I wouldn't want to risk it, especially since airlines are really clamping down on luggage restrictions.

The layout of this backpack really works, it enables me to carry alot of my gear very comfortably. I can easily fit one or two cameras, 3 -4 lenses as well as a set of extension tubes and various accessories (cable release, spare batteries, filters) as well as my 15" laptop.

Our separate comments appear as **R** for Roxann and **G** for Garry. All photos show Roxann's bag and gear.



Manfrotto 190X Pro B Tripod with 496RC2 Head

R: One of the first things I noticed about the bag was the high quality of manufacturing and materials. It is very sturdy and well padded to protect camera equipment. What amazed me is that the bag stands up, it doesn't flop over even with the tripod attached it. One of the features that this bag has, is that it can be used as a "sling type" bag, however neither Garry nor I have ever used it that way.

G: The overall construction of the bag is excellent, the attention to detail is something that caught my eye. Great idea to have 3-way to access photo equipment in the bottom compartment - through the front flap or through the left or right flaps/doors. To get inside the bag, you don't have to put the bag down on the ground. When you want to put it down, the bottom has 2 rubber feet so the material doesn't scuff or fray. There is a waterproof rain cover which completely fits over the bag, which is stored in it's own pocket when not in use.



Manfrotto 190X Pro B Tripod with 496RC2 Head

R: It is a very comfortable backpack, and has good padding along the back as well as straps which are extremely comfortable. The straps are also rubberized (non-slip). This provides a lot of adjust-ability and secure fit. All of the harness straps can be tucked away if you want to carry it by the rubberized top handle. One thing I did notice, when you carry the bag on your back, the ends of the straps dangle in mid air after they have been adjusted to a proper length. There is no way to secure them or tuck them away. All bags seem to have this problem.

R: One of the most important features I was looking for was the ability to attach and carry my tripod on the bag. It took a little adjusting to get it right, but it works. Another option which I haven't tried yet, is using the optional set of straps (S-113) that can be attached to the bottom of the bag to carry the tripod.



R: Place for tripod feet should be a little larger



R: I use the top strap to hold the tripod leg, which it isn't obviously designed for

R: The tripod foot pocket is too small to properly fit 2 legs of my Manfrotto 190. It would fit better if they could make it just a little larger, but my guess is that the holder is not designed to carry such a large tripod. With the tripod attached it is impractical to have anything stored in the front flap pockets, as it might get crushed.

G: Years ago I did try using several other bags with straps to carry a tripod and was never happy with the setup. It made the bag really heavy and it always felt lopsided. Since then I never considered using any other bag as a tripod carrier. What I use now is a [Kinesis Tripod Carrying Strap](#).



R: - Easily fits a 13" note book/laptop

R: I use the top compartment mainly for non-photographic gear such as purse, snacks, jacket, or even instruction manuals. There is lots of room here for everything!!

G: I use the top compartment for an extra camera body, flash, lens or sometimes a camera with a wide angle zoom attached. As Roxann said, there is lots of storage here. There is also a mesh pocket that runs along the back where I store extra batteries and memory cards. My old 15" laptop just fits in, however, it is a really tight fit. It's not the width that's a problem, it's the thickness. From what I understand this bag is a brand new design, so it is made for the newer thinner laptops. If you do have an older laptop, this is something you will want to check before buying. The large zippered pocket on the inside of the front flap is where I store my split neutral density filters.



Front flap opened on bottom compartment

R: The bottom compartment can be customized with the movable padded Velcro separators. I only have one lens and I always keep it attached to the camera. The zippers are good quality and most importantly they are really easy to find because of their large fabric and rubber tab pull. There is plenty of room for additional equipment....my birthday is coming up!

G: For me this is the perfect bag to carry my equipment around. I don't want a bag that is too large and bulky, or that is too small for my gear. Tamrac has thought about everyone - there are two other sizes; a smaller and a larger version, but for me this size is perfect.



Left and right side access allows you to get to your gear without having to fully take off the backpack

R & G: The left and right hand side access to the bag is one of this backpack's great features. You don't have to take the bag off to get to your equipment, all you do is slip it off either shoulder. This makes it easier, faster, safer and much cleaner as it isn't necessary to put the bag down on the ground.

CONCLUSION

R: Overall I am very happy with this bag, it checked all the boxes for features I was looking for and so far it seems to be standing up well to the daily use.

G: While there is no one perfect camera bag, this one comes pretty close.