

On the trail of Kit Man

Gadgets that bring home comforts to the great outdoors have given rise to a new breed of outdoor adventurer. But purists are unconvinced.

A

Up there, in the clear fresh air, it isn't just the stars that are glowing. You can climb a mountain and find at the top of it a bleeping nightmare of hi-tech gadgetry and hardship-avoidance devices. Worried about getting lost? Relax with a handheld GPS unit, featuring 3D and aerial display, plus built-in compass and barometric altimeter. Even the sacred covenant between outdoor types and wet socks has come unravelled with the development of 'hydrophobic' fabrics which repel all moisture. At next month's Outdoors Show in Birmingham, all this kit and more will be on display for an audience which seemingly can't get enough of it. 'When we ask people what they come to the show for, they list two things,' says the event's sales manager, Mike Simmonds. 'One is the inspiration to get outdoors in the first place, and the other is to see the new gear, the gadgets, the breakthroughs. That's what they love.' The event, the showcase of Britain's booming adventure business shows everything the tech-savvy adventurer could wish for, from solar-heated sleeping bags to remote-controlled lanterns.

B

The rise of Kit Man, as the gizmo-fixated menace of the 21st-century mountains has been christened, reflects both changing social trends and the dizzying speed of scientific advance. Modern hikers have moved on from the Spartan routines of 50 years ago, when discomfort, bad food and danger were seen as part of the authentic outdoor experience. They also have more money and a conditioned attachment to life's luxuries. However, basic pioneering disciplines – map-reading, camp-laying, First Aid – have declined, to be shakily replaced by the virtual skills offered by technology. With so much gear now available, Kit Man and his kind stand accused by the old-schoolers of being interested only in reaching the summits of gadgetry.

C

'I think these people are completely missing the point,' huffs author and TV presenter Guy Grieve, who spent a year living alone in the Alaskan wilderness. 'The whole idea of going into the wild is to get away from the things that tie you in knots at home. I'd prefer to take as little as possible – a tent, a rifle, and a few pots and pans. All this technology, I mean, it might look fantastic on paper, but when there's a real problem, it's almost certainly going to let you down. What will see you through is the old stuff, the maps and the bits of rope. There are times when you need that kind of dependability. Who'd want to be stranded out in the wild with a gadget freak?' Travel and adventure writer Clive Tully agrees. 'Be suspicious of anything that claims to make your life easier,' he warns. 'My experience is that people who depend on technology are woefully ill-prepared in other ways. You still need to be able to read a map and do the basic stuff.'

D

None of which is enough to keep Kit Man from his toys. The mountains and hills are alive with the sound of ringing mobiles, beeping biometric pressure metres, clicking ultra-violet radiation sensors and the whirring of the current ultimate in gadget chic – a micro-helicopter which can be controlled from an iPod to send back live pictures of the route ahead. Thus toolled up, Kit Man must consider what he is to wear. And as any visit to a contemporary outdoor store shows, this involves not only acquiring new clobber, but new jargon. When he asks about a pair of pants, he will learn about Moisture Vapour Transfer Rate, Hydrostatic Heat Resistance and Wickability. It is tempting to scoff at Kit Man, but not everyone sides with the romantics. Many in the adventure business say gadgets have encouraged thousands who would otherwise not have ventured into the great outdoors. Evidence from the American market also suggests that technology has had a positive environmental impact, and increased safety standards.

Part 8

You are going to read a magazine article about the use of gadgets by people doing outdoor activities. For questions 47–56, choose from the sections of the article (A–D). The sections may be chosen more than once.

In the exam, mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.

In which section of the article are the following mentioned?

why people were willing to suffer outdoors in the past

47

48

the need to understand certain terminology

49

a belief about what the reason for doing outdoor activities should be

50

a feeling of reassurance provided by a certain gadget

51

how many people have taken up outdoor activities because of gadgets

52

a criticism of the motivation of people who get a lot of gadgets for outdoor activities

53

a belief that gadgets may prove not to be useful

54

a belief that someone with gadgets would not be a good companion in certain circumstances

55

the high level of demand for gadgets connected with outdoor activities

56

an advantage of outdoor gadgets in addition to the benefits for users

Part 3: Customer Reviews

- 17 accompanied (noun to verb)
18 arguably (verb to adverb)
19 professional (noun to adjective)
20 unedited (verb to negative adjective)
21 analysis (verb to noun)
22 reliable (verb to adjective)
23 feedback (verb to compound noun)
24 recommendation (verb to noun)

Part 4

- 25 had no choice but to (fixed expression)
26 the race was about to (direct to indirect speech with 'about to')
27 led to the singer being ('led' + passive form)
28 sooner had Alex finished his homework (negative head inversion)
29 bored if I spend ('boring' to 'bored' + condition phrase)
30 doesn't approve of her (reporting verb)

Part 5

- 31 B: The last sentence of the paragraph means: There was nobody better than an American to 'document' (record, in this case with photographs) the way society in Ireland was changing and becoming more like American society. People in Ireland were happy to employ an American to take pictures that looked like the images in 'an expensive American advertising campaign'.
32 D: She had previously 'harboured higher aspirations' (aimed to do work that was more artistic and creative) but she 'didn't mind' doing wedding and portrait photography and compared her situation with that of Dutch painters who did similar kinds of work to make money in the past.
33 D: She preferred analogue cameras, which were 'the old-fashioned method'. It is implied that she spent a lot of time in the darkroom following this 'old-fashioned' method to produce the wedding photographs.
34 C: He asked her 'What's up?' (What's the problem?) and she decided that 'she would tell him' (= tell him what the problem was) 'eventually, but not yet'.
35 A: She describes feeling a connection with the past when she visited the cairns and he says 'You Americans and your history', meaning that she was talking in a way typical of Americans and their attitude to the history of places like that.
36 D: When she said 'I know it' she was agreeing with him that, because they were both photographers, they were only interested in things they could see, their area of interest was limited to 'surface' (only what is visible).

Part 6: Do computer games have educational value?

- 37 B: 'it seems perverse to suggest that such an individualistic pastime, that takes the player off into a world of complete fantasy, could ever promote interpersonal skills in the real world' contrasts with A: 'Gamers may not reflect on how the characters and scenarios they engage with could help them to interact with others in the real world, but recent research at the State University suggests that the games do perform such a function.'
38 D: 'the accusation frequently heard that gaming is both addictive and harmful has always smacked of prejudice' contrasts with B: 'The evidence that gaming can become compulsive behaviour ... is quite convincing.'

- 39 D: 'The fact that only a small geographical area was studied detracts a little from the findings.' matches C: 'The current study would benefit from further work, however, as the researchers seem to be making quite sweeping claims on the basis of relatively thin evidence.'
40 B: 'this conclusion seems to be a step too far, and I can't see too many people taking it very seriously'. The others have a positive view:
A: 'this meticulous study adds more weight to the growing consensus that gaming may be good for us'
C: 'the idea put forward here that social skills may develop as a result of gaming is an intriguing one, that's sure to spark some lively debate.'
D: 'it is sure to attract quite a bit of attention'

Part 7: The 'Britain in Bloom' competition

- 41 D: link between 'do a lot' and 'too much'. D contains an example of a place that did something to please him that in fact didn't please him.
42 G: link between what the competition was like 'In the early days' and what it is like now (it's now 'much more sophisticated' and 'much more competitive' than it was when it started).
43 E: link between the criticisms of the competition in E and 'such criticisms' after the gap.
44 A: link between the statement that the 'old tricks' no longer work and 'This' at the beginning of A; what people used to do in order to win doesn't enable them to win any more and A explains that this is because of changes to the judging criteria; link between 'these developments' after the gap and the changes described in A.
45 F: link between one place that regards the competition as important (Stockton-on-Tees) and a place that has won the competition (Aberdeen); link between 'With so much at stake' after the gap and the description of what is 'at stake' (the fact that winning gives a place a very good image) in F.
46 C: link between 'Some of this' at the beginning of C and the stories of 'dirty tricks' before the gap; Jim is saying in C that some of the stories about rivals doing damage to the flowers of other competitors are 'exaggerated' and not completely true.

Part 8: On the trail of Kit Man

- 47 B: 'discomfort, bad food and danger were seen as part of the authentic outdoor experience'.
48 D: 'this involves not only acquiring new clobber, but new jargon'.
49 C: 'The whole idea of going into the wild is to get away from the things that tie you in knots at home.'
50 A: 'Worried about getting lost? Relax with a handheld GPS unit, featuring 3D and aerial display, plus built-in compass and barometric altimeter.'
51 D: 'Many in the adventure business say gadgets have encouraged thousands who would otherwise not have ventured into the great outdoors.'
52 B: 'Kit Man and his kind stand accused by the old-schoolers of being interested only in reaching the summits of gadgetry.'
53 C: 'All this technology, I mean, it might look fantastic on paper, but when there's a real problem, it's almost certainly going to let you down.'
54 C: 'Who'd want to be stranded out in the wild with a gadget freak?'

