A RACQUET IN THE BACK-COUNTRY

We all agree that the most elegant game of Badminton is best enjoyed in the wild freedom of nature. There's nothing quite like the satisfaction of the Shuttlecock pinging off a freshly strung Racquet, with nothing else around but goats and mosquitos. The fun that can be had launching a volley over a thorny bush, or seeing your opponent nosedive as a wind-gust takes the shuttle out of reach. It's unmatched by any other Olympic discipline.

The aim of this trip was to bring our match play team back to the roots of the sport, to explore the unknown and enjoy the minimal simplicity of life with just a 'bat and a bird'. We would plot a course through the Spanish Pyrenees, self-propelled and almost self-sufficient, in search of back-country courts, with no fixed destination and without the time limits of the leisure centre. If things went well, we planned to log some 'first plays' in un-charted locations. Perhaps even to spread the joy of Badminton with a local shepherd or rock-climber.

We spent several minutes on detailed logistics for the trip – we knew there would be limited availability of tournament standard nets, so we would take hammocks as something hit the shuttle over, it turned out there are also useful for sleeping in. We brought minimal food and supplies – confident that we could forage for nuts, berries and pizza along our route (perhaps a mistake).

If we were to pack in a solid tournament each day, we needed to move fast over unknown terrain, so we would travel by bicycle. Unfortunately, the latest frame-mounted Racquet bags were not available, so we would have to carry them strapped on, expedition style. A risky strategy, which would cost us later.

Obviously we would have liked to use UBI (Union Badminton International) regulation clothing of white shorts and singlet, with no black soled shoes, but our experience of rides to the café showed that this just looks stupid when riding a MTB.

"The modern game of Badminton developed in the mid-19th century among the British as a variant of the earlier game of battledore and Shuttlecock. ("Battledore" was an older term for "Racquet".) Its exact origin remains obscure. The name derives from the Duke of Beaufort's Badminton House in Gloucestershire" We know this to be true, as we copied it from Wikipedia.

Our two master-players for the trip are native to that same region of south west England (actually Wales, but lets not get into that). You could say they have badminton in their blood. To avoid possible UBI sanctions for black shoes, we will just call them 'John and Dave'. Their mate 'Trev' also came along to keep score and photograph things for a possible Guinness Record attempt. (turns out he falls over after only 3 pints)

JOHN (HOME TEAM)

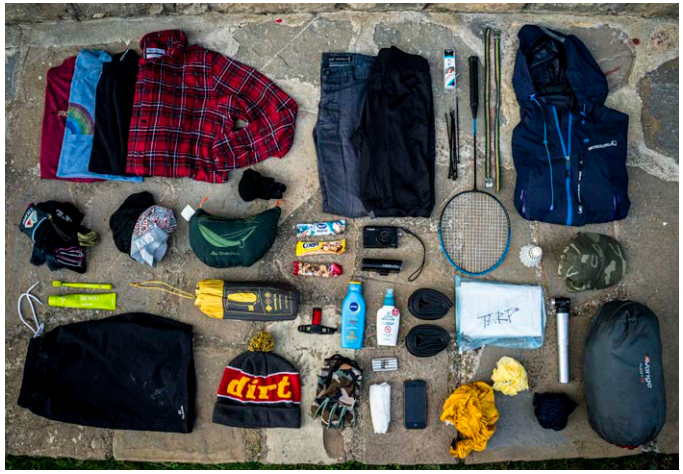
YEARS PLAYING: 17
FAVOURITE MATCH SURFACE: FRENCH LAWN
MOST CONSECUTIVE VOLLEYS: 12 ON A GOOD DAY
WORST BADMINTON GAFF: FELL OVER HEDGE
SIGNATURE MOVE: TANGENTIAL U-TURN
STRING TENSION: UNPREDICTABLE
HEADBAND: WEEKENDS ONLY
PACK WEIGHT: 18KG
BICYCLE: KINGDOM TI (BLACK TYRES)
MOST USELESS ITEM CARRIED: HAMMOCK (NON-BANANA TYPE)

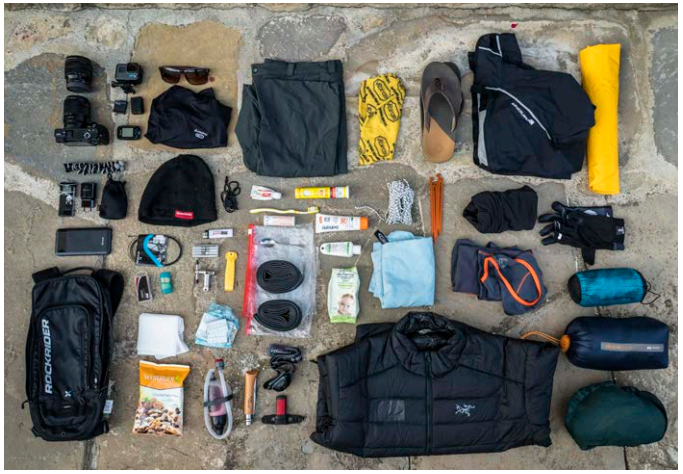
DAVE (AWAY WITH THE FAIRIES)

YEARS PLAYING: 5 ¾
FAVOURITE MATCH SURFACE: ITALIAN RIVIERA
MOST CONSECUTIVE VOLLEYS: WHATEVER JOHN SAID PLUS 1
WORST BADMINTON GAFF: LOST A GAME TO TREV ONCE
SIGNATURE MOVE: DEATHGRIP SMASH
STRING TENSION: LOOSEY GOOSEY
HEADBAND: WHEN HAIRCUT UNAVAILABLE
PACK WEIGHT: 15KG + 6 CANS OF LAGER
BICYCLE: GHOST, (RED = FAST)
MOST USELESS ITEM CARRIED: 6 CANS OF LAGER

TREV (UMPIRE)

YEARS PLAYING: 75 (DOG YEARS)
FAVOURITE MATCH SURFACE: SPANISH GRAVEL
MOST CONSECUTIVE VOLLEYS: 6 CHICKEN VOL-AU-VENTS
WORST BADMINTON GAFF: SUGGESTED IT WAS A BAD IDEA
SIGNATURE MOVE: SNAIL PACE
STRING TENSION: CAUSED BY ARGUMENTS
HEADBAND: WHEN HAIR AVAILABLE
PACK WEIGHT: 28KG (CLAIMED)
BICYCLE: ORANGE (GREEN) CONFUSED?
MOST USELESS ITEM CARRIED: GPS (NO CHARGER)





“SHOULD HAVE BROUGHT TABLE TENNIS BATS”

Left: Ancient table-tennis rock proves that the ‘Stone Age’ was pre-dated by the ‘Racquet-Age’

Right: Narrow rocky single track leading to unknown gaming zones

Below L: A Roman Road. Probably

Below M: Dave keeping his legs level in preparation for the next days sprightly tournament

Below R: John using a tarp to flatten the court area

THE MOST ELEGANT GAME

THIS IS THE SHUTTLECOCK.
NO LAUGHING

THIS IS OBVIOUSLY THE WRONG KIND OF RACQUET BUT I COULDNT FIND A FREE PICTURE OF THE RIGHT ONE SO YOU'LL HAVE TO IMAGINE.

IF YOU'RE SUPER PRO, YOU WEAR GLOVES. COS THATS HOW EXTREME BADMINTON CAN BE

THIS GUY HAS A 'TIN TIN' HAIR STYLE WITH LOTS OF PRODUCT, WHICH IS MANDATORY FOR CERTAIN TOURNAMENTS. ESPECIALLY IF YOU WANT A TOILETRY SPONSORSHIP.

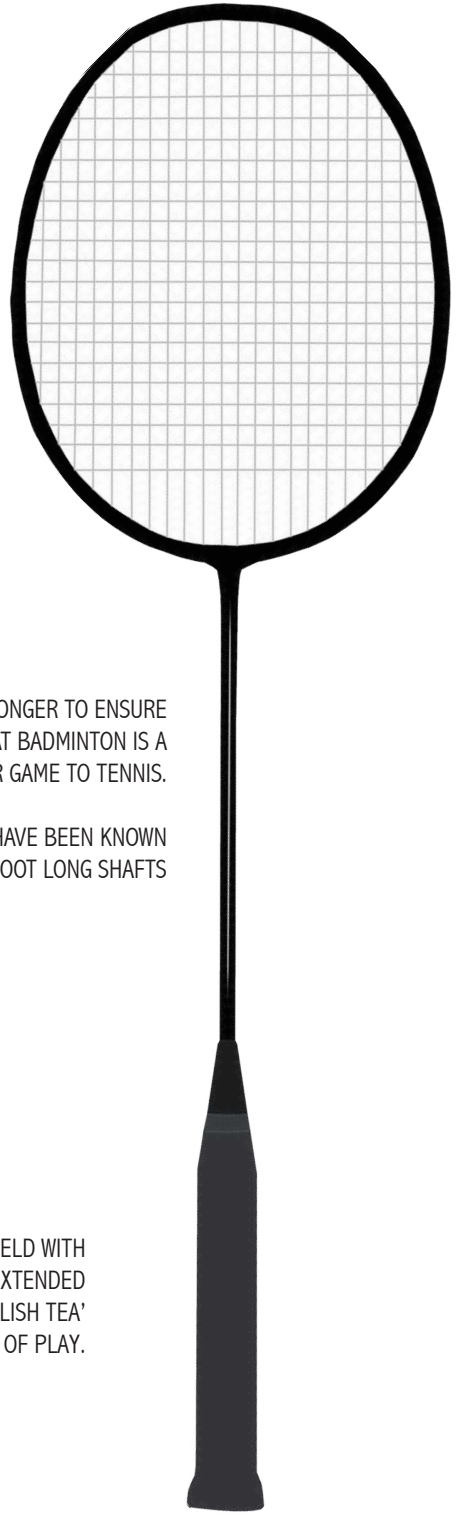
FOOTBALL SHORTS - NOOB

SOME PLAYERS SHAVE THEIR LEGS - THEY SAY IT'S FOR AERODYNAMICS BUT REALLY THEY JUST THINK IT LOOKS SEXY.

BLACK SOLED SHOES
"A BIIIG NON NON"

THIS IS THE NET.
(SIDE VIEW)

HIT THE SHUTTLECOCK WITH THIS END. STRINGS SHOULD IDEALLY BE MADE FROM SHETLAND PONY HAIR, TUNED TO E-FLAT ON THE PIANO. OR PERHAPS DROP-C IF YOU LIKE DJENT METAL



THE SHAFT IS MADE LONGER TO ENSURE SPECTATORS KNOW THAT BADMINTON IS A SUPERIOR GAME TO TENNIS.

SHORTER PLAYERS HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO USE 6 FOOT LONG SHAFTS

THE HANDLE MAY BE HELD WITH TWO FINGERS AND EXTENDED PINKY IN THE 'ENGLISH TEA' STYLE OF PLAY.