

From the drawing board to the outdoors

The making of High Coast Foldsack

So how does a backpack actually come about? What requirements, decisions and tests are behind the end product? Niklas Kull, designer at Fjällräven, tells us all about the popular High Coast Foldsack and the process it underwent from idea to finished backpack.

Text: Karin Wallén **Photos:** Fredrik Lewander



WHEN IT IS all packed and ready to accompany you out on an adventure, it's easy to take it for granted. But the truth is that the backpack in front of you is the result of a lot of serious consideration and countless decisions. Behind every seam, zipper and fabric choice are endless discussions on functionality, sustainability and that "feeling" that has to be just right.

So we asked *Niklas Kull*, one of Fjällräven's hardware designers, to tell us a little more about how a backpack is made. It all starts with an idea of course.

"If we take *High Coast Foldsack*, we already had a family of products that we wanted to develop further to meet the requirements of nearby everyday adventures and warmer climates. We had an idea about how we wanted the backpack to look and feel, and what features it should have."

But the creation of a Fjällräven backpack has to follow a few fixed principles – like timelessness and a simple design, durability, sustainability and functionality.

"We don't add any extra seams just to make it look good," says Niklas. "A seam is always to add volume or give more freedom of movement, or to increase functionality in some way. So we work within a framework. And for me personally, this makes my creativity actually increase. Instead of getting stuck in there, I get inspired to find solutions that make the product what we want it to be."

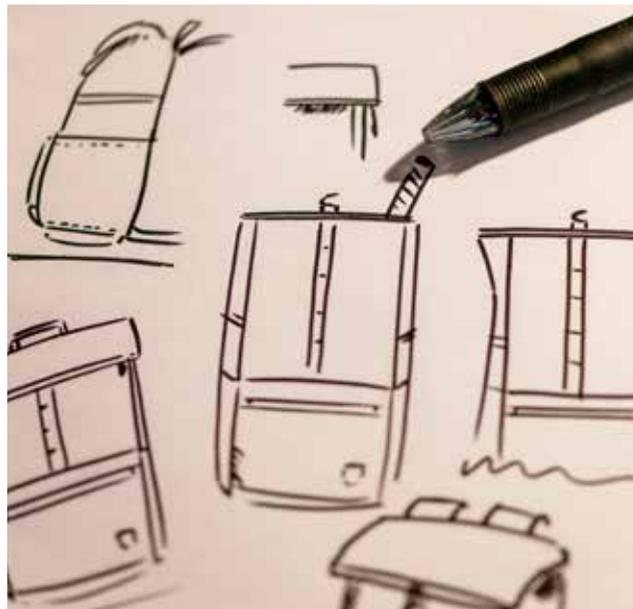
The importance of selecting the right fabric

Because the *High Coast family* has daypacks in its collection, the design team already had a base design that they liked and wanted to work further with. This is where the creativity really started flowing – to find improvements that felt important and feasible.

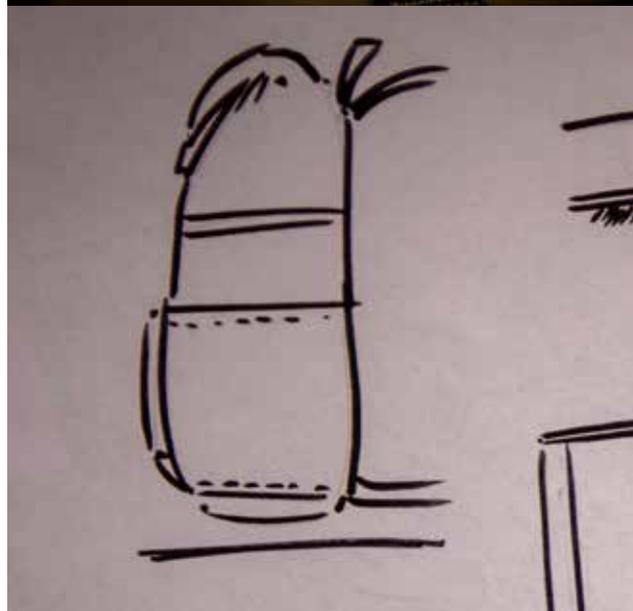
"We decided to work on the back panel and main closure, so we changed materials. We wanted it to be more water resistant and easy to use, and to give it a lighter feel," says Niklas.

The answer was a fabric made from 100% recycled nylon. The back panel got a so-called PU coating, with a 10,000 mm water column, to give the fabric structure and make it water proof. And then finally it was treated with a fluorocarbon-free impregnation.

"When new fabrics are used, we have to put them through several lab tests to see that they live up to Fjällräven's standards where wear and tear are concerned. Even where 'feeling and expression' are concerned, the materials chosen play a major role. We started with heavier fabrics with a courser structure, but they didn't really have that summer holiday feeling we were looking for. So we used fabric that was a little lighter but that was still up to standard. In the end it is a lightweight backpack, but certainly not the lightest on the market. For us, being lightweight isn't enough. It has to be durable and environmentally friendly as well. This is the basis of everything we do."



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Close partnership with the factory

The design part of the process starts with hand-drawn sketches, which are then moved onto a computer where the drawings get more technical. Already in the early stages we are working in close partnership with the factory's designers to ensure the absolutely best pattern.

"We often visit them already in the prototype stage so we can sit next to them and work together. This is partly to make sure we get the functionality we want, but also to see that there aren't any unnecessary complications in the production," says Niklas. He usually visits the factory in Vietnam for up to two weeks to get the production process underway.

"This saves both time and misunderstandings, and means you don't have to send samples back and forth before the most important details have been sorted out. When I'm at the factory, I sit with the designer and the person doing the actual sewing. And they are total professionals, so it's a really rewarding time. It is also good for relations and a way to check that everything looks good at the factory."

Prototypes and tests

For a daypack, it takes about two years from start to the finished product arriving in stores. As the process moves along, the backpack is step by step given the features and properties that are on the original wish list. In the end, everything is as it should be, from buckles and straps to colour and reinforcements.

"One adjustment we did with *High Coast Foldsack* was to use our own reinforcement fabric *Bergshell* for the base. It adds a little more weight but it is worth it to have a really durable base. We worked with the side panels that go up and become the back panel by the lid, to make it harder for water to get in," says Niklas.

The actual closure – a foldable lid – is an important factor both because it makes it more water proof and because it makes the backpack more versatile and easy to over pack. The solution was to place a zipper at the top of the opening and combine this with a hook.

"You can choose between closing it with the hook or with both the hook and the zipper. So it can be used as a school bag and a tennis bag, as it can be used to pack longer objects.

Daypacks are tested from an early stage by the office staff. They are all active people who love spending time outdoors. When the sales prototypes are ready, its time for the backpack to be tested on a larger scale by Fjällräven ambassadors and test-team members. After this, all feedback is collected and any last changes are made before the final version of the backpack is ready.

"In this case, we are so happy with the functionality and feel of the product that it was a little extra exciting to see it being launched. And today I can tell you that this is actually the product that I use the most myself," says Niklas.