



SLOVENIA OUTDOOR

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Equipment reviews 2020

Slovenia Outdoor TEST:

SALOMON HIKING GEAR

This time 'round, we tested a hiking gear selection from Salomon. It included hiking shoes, hiking trousers, sports shirt, a hat and, just in case of a bad weather, light shell. In this review, we will go over the specifics of each item, and look at how they work on the field.



For our feet, Salomon low hiking shoes OUTline GTX. On the first glance, you might think they are trail running shoe, due to their low profile and design similarities with running models, but when you look closely, a bit more robust edges here and there, with fewer ventilation meshes give it away, as a hiking shoe. ContaGrip outsole with 5mm tread, combined with EVA foam cushioning and glued, seamless, stitching promise safety and comfort. GTX means they feature a Gore-Tex membrane. The only thing that looks dirt cheap, is shoe tongue.

Next on the list were hiking trousers Salomon Wayfarer (straight). Even when still in the bag, the pants are extremely light, and the feeling is confirmed, when you put them on. Made out of technical material, that stretches in 4 ways while offering some wind and rain protection, the pants also boast the »BLUESIGN« label, that guarantees sustainable manufacturing process. Your conscience lays at rest. The Wayfarers feature 4 pockets, 2 classical, 1 just above right knee and 1 back-pocket. They are closed by the way of the zipper, and have mesh interior.



The sport's shirt is....bright 😊. You protect your head with a XA Pro hat, which wraps your head nicely, is light and keeps its form even after you will squish it in every way imaginable. Ours is black, which does not have positive effects on the hikers head in hot summer days, but is other ways nice colour choice. The XA Pro comes with mesh air vents, but do not expect miracles.

»There is no bad weather, only bad gear«, ever heard of this saying? The weather in the mountains changes rapidly, as you know, and

that is why, we always keep additional protection layers in the backpack, namely, rain and wind

protection. Salomon's answer to this requirement is wind and rainproof jacket La Cote Flex 2.5L. The latter number marks Salomon's technical material, that combines moisture vapor escape membrane with rain protection fabric in one material. The technology they call »AdvancedSkin Dry 20K/20K« as it provides 20 000 mm waterproofness and breathability of 20 000 g/m²/24h. The jacket features adjustable hood, glued stitching and waterproof zippers. All in all it comes in at 300g dry weight.



ON THE TEST

We conducted the testing partly in Vipava Valley and partly in the hills around Polhov Gradec. The timing of the test was stretched between February to May, so almost three months,. The conditions included wind, snow, rain and hot spring, summer-ish, days.

To keep the order, lets comment on the shoes first. As we are used to Salomon's

small sizes, we ordered one size bigger, but still, the shoes where tight. But after first use, we found them quite comfortable, the only problem was on the down hill. So, half a size or even one full size more would be better. The quality of the build looks good, so far there is no visible damage on them. ContaGrip outsole provides enough grip on variety of terrains, while the Gore Tex, as we are used to, needs a bit of help in the form of protective spray in really wet/winter conditions.

The sports shirt, provides the basic upper layer for sporting activities, its main purpose is fast drying while maintaining high level of comfort. The cut of the Salomon's shirt is a bit specific in the shoulders area, if you have wide constitution, it may feel a bit tight, as it does not stretch to much. The shirt is not intended as a slim fit. Otherwise, comfort level is good, as expected.



The La Cote Flex2.5L jacket was always with us in the backpack, and came in handy on a couple of occasions, especially in the winter months. We didn't test it in the heavy rain, only light, and some light snow conditions. The jacket is light, therefore easy to carry and store. It gives good protection against wind and light rain. If/when you do fast ascends, the membrane will not cope with the amount of heat your body will generate, and you will get some condensation. This is the price you pay for waterproofness. When hiking normally, it is OK.



For us, the best part of the package were the Wayferer pants. Extremely light and breathable, while having very, dare we say, elegant cut. This means you will wear it all the time, at home, in the great outdoors, in town...almost everywhere. The only concern we have, is that mesh pocket interior. It likes to grab on keys, nails or other stuff with sharp edges, meaning that it will probably tear faster, if you will not be careful.

All in all, a really nice setup from Salomon, that you will be comfortable with. As always with Salomon, mind the sizes.



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Slovenia Outdoor Longterm Test:

HIKING SHOES SCARPA MOJITO

When we were looking for everyday shoes, 5 years ago, we found and bought low hiking shoes Scarpa Mojito. After 5 years of use and abuse, we can tell you this...

Ever noticed how, when you are in sports and outdoor for some time, you begin to wear sports oriented clothes and shoes, that mark you as an outdoor enthusiast from afar but are also, oh so comfortable and useful. But because sometimes you have to go to the office, bank, city folk or the like....it is nice if they don't really stand out too much. So we were looking for the shoes that could do all that, be comfortable and useful in every possible scenario. To be honest, there isn't much choice to begin with, either the design being too aggressive, available colours too shiny or the outsole too aggressive. So the decision to take Mojitos from Scarpa was not that difficult, especially since it was recommended by the proverbial friend. They come in many shiny colours, but luckily in some not so shiny as well like black, blue and blue-gray. We took the latter.

So the first impressions? Well, the shoes look minimalistic, with little cushioning, with Vibram outsole. And upper from semi-type leather with rubber protective cap front / thick leather back. The overall look is nicely laid back, casual, but still goes well with jeans and polo shirt, when you have to look a bit more serious and grown up.

For the past 5 years we have used them round the clock, all seasons, all weather, all circumstances. From the city pavements, shady forest trails, unforgiving rocky Croatian islands, vast Australian deserts, Julian Alps or 7th floor offices...we hiked them all.

So, what can we report?

The grip on these hiking shoes is good, especially on rocky terrain, as long as you do not find yourself in mud. The low-profile outsole profile isn't really good there. The outsole is not really stiff, so they tend to twist and bend over rocks or roots. We didn't test them climbing though, but since they do not offer much support anyhow, they are probably not very useful there.

As mentioned above, there is not much cushioning in the midsole. That means that you feel the ground beneath you (and pebbles, rocks, roots, whatever), but your feet may hurt after a while. It also means that they are light. The upper and inside of these hiking shoes are great. With time, they form to the shape of your foot and become very comfortable...and the comfort only gets better with age. It almost feels like putting on a pair of slippers putting them on these days.

Scarpa Mojitos have a long tongue, almost reaching the tip of this hiking shoe. We found that at this particular spot, during a step, the material likes to fold, pressing down on your thumb. It is not really an issue, but you can feel it when you stand on your toes. The outsole is obviously low, so no fun in the (deep) puddles or snow slush. But for that, you can choose a model with Gore Tex, which is also available.

King and queen of tests....Wear and Tear?

The answer is: Yes, there are both present! But not structural and only on expected spots. For instance, the leather has lost colour on the exposed parts, like the spot you grab when you are putting the shoes on, or the parts on the sides. But this depends on the specific use. The seams are intact and the outsole is still connected to the upper like the first day. We are starting to see some splitting on the cap of the shoe, but there is still some time left, before that will become a serious issue...the outsole will be gone long before this happens. The upper shows no tears, ruptures or other damage.

The opening of the shoe, shows some tear. We heard reports that this happens often, which shows that this may be the weak link of the shoe. On the soft sides of the outsole, we can spot only two cuts on one shoe- specific damage from the unknown source 😊 The outsole held well, it has remained compact with even wear. There have not been any chunks of material falling off, just a nice, even wear. The grip remains (except on the heel, where the outsole is gone).

The Scarpa Mojitos insides also aged well. Lining along the opening has started to tear on one shoe, and there is obvious wear noticed on the insole of the hiking shoe, but everything still holds together perfectly.

The model itself has some age now, but it doesn't really show, not in the price or in the selling numbers. Luckily, you can find some discounts around the internet, but getting the black colour will be difficult.

Anyhow, after our experience we can only recommend Scarpa Mojitos and we will most likely change the existing ones with the new pair.....ofcourse in black.

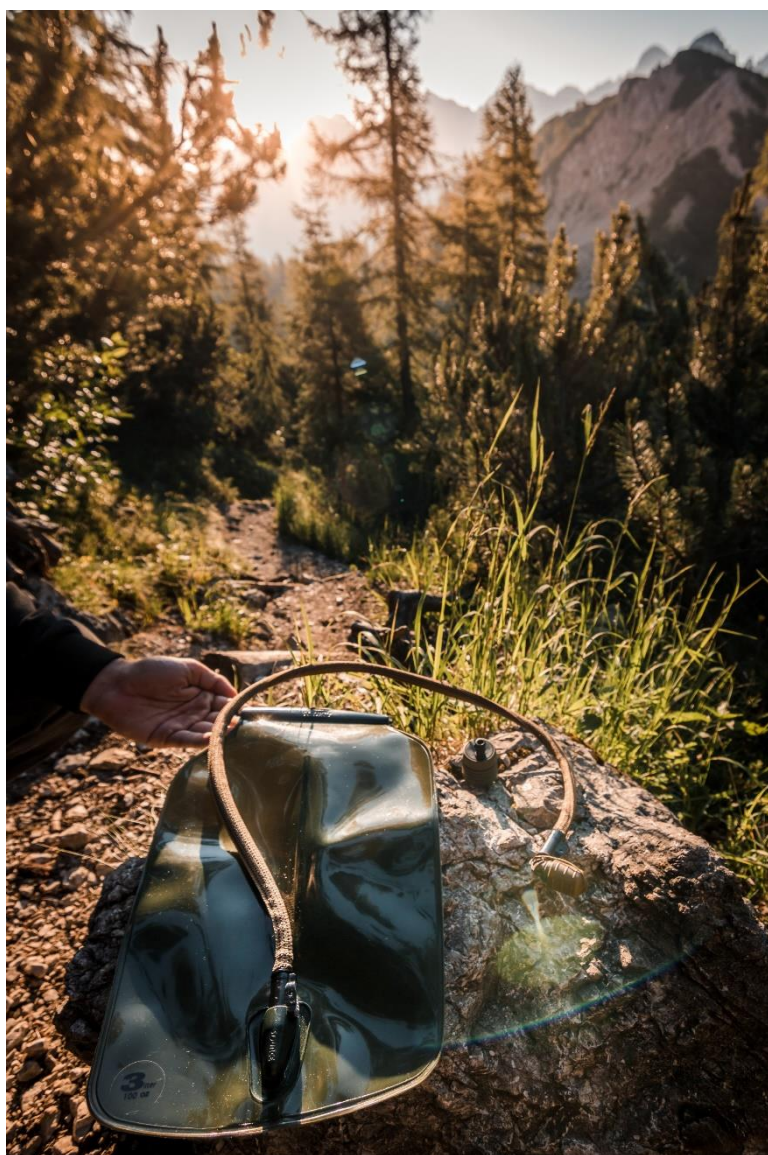


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Slovenia Outdoor TEST

Water Bladder Source WLPS 3l

Relentless summer sun burns the jagged rocks, you are on the way in to the mountain heights for a few hours and thirst starts to occupy your mind more and more. Big water bottle, that you were carrying is getting close to empty, and a morning decision that two bottles are really too much to carry, looks evermore stupid.



If you are just a bit serious about your time spent in the mountains/nature, then you know what dehydration is, and you will probably run in to it again. Because we have had some sun here, under the Alps, in the recent months, we have decided to look at how we could quench our thirst this/next season on those long mountain hikes. Because the review of the bottle of water is pointless, we have looked into the »hightech« versions of bottles-hydration bladders. The market today is filled with hydration bladders of shapes and sizes, and we are sure, that you have some in your closet. Hands down, they all look quite the same, differences show on just some points. Like the way you fill them for instance (bag-like opening or a hole on the backside), sizes (usually from 1 to 3l) and the way you get water in your mouth.

While searching something, that is somewhat different than standard, we got help from, again, guys at Perunika. They have

recommended us to take a step outside the normal »sport« frame, and lend us 3l water bladder **WLPS** (**W**idepac **L**ow **P**rofile **S**ystem) from **Source**, that was primarily developed for bulletproof vest carry.

So why on earth, would that interest us, your everyday hikers? Read on.



The primary function of the military vest is to keep, despite the endless gear it carries in/on it, the soldier's maneuverability on the field. And that is something we, hikers and mountaineers, wish to keep as well. Tightly fitting equipment that does not twist, move around or is uncomfortable, is second condition (the first is, of course, knowledge) for safe and joyful navigation in the mountains.

The water bladder in question is, as we can see from the name itself, very interesting from this point of view, as it is thin, and it stays that way even when we fill it up. Low-profile you could say. Yes- it is wider because of that, so you do have to check if it will fit in your backpack pocket. Technology used also prevents formation of water balloon at the bottom of the bladder, which then presses on the lumbar part or creates issues when packing/unpacking the gear during a tour. It is also better spread across your back, which means the weight-spread is better, ergo your balance on technically demanding trails will be better. Very practical, comfortable and safer.

Source is, as we read, very proud of its »Glass Like« technology- a special film, 2000% smoother than normal plastic, which together with »Grundge Guard« stops bacteria formations inside the bladder and feeding pipe. The materials used are BPA and phthalate free. In theory all of this means no odor.

In practice?

Military versions of water bladders are usually made from thicker, more resilient materials, since it is expected that they will endure harsh conditions- but the price you pay is a few grams more on your back. Another »additional« equipment of this bladder, is braided feeding tube, which protects and insulates the tube, preventing damage and warming/freezing of the water in the tube.

While talking about tube, let's mention SQC (**S**ource **Q**uick **C**onnect) technology, which enables fast and watertight »click« connection between the tube, the bladder and the mouthpiece (this is interchangeable, and you can buy them separately). The joints are watertight even if they are not connected, meaning that you can place the bladder in the backpack with less fiddle, since you can

just keep the tube in backpack- removing just the bladder. This also means you can change parts when they get damaged, prolonging the lifespan of the bladder.

Let's stop for a moment at the mouthpiece, named the Storm valve. It is covered with a protection cap to keep the dirt out, and it works with a twist and pull operation, than can be executed with your mouth. We had some problems with this, since the surface to grab with your mouth is relatively small and covered with »squishy« rubber, which is quite difficult to operate only with your mouth, so we just use our hands all the time. Perhaps a bit more effort than with a usual »squeeze and suck« mouthpiece, but once opened you get a constant water flow....you can even use it as shower ☺ You can disassemble the mouthpiece into three pieces, for easier maintenance.

You fill the bladder through the opening on the top, which we think is a better choice than systems with a cap- it just makes the drying and cleaning much easier.



We took on the test, on parallel, also the so called **UTA**- Universal Tube Adapter. This is a universal nozzle that, thanks to the **SQC** system, is easily connected to the tube, instead of the mouthpiece. This adapter is then used to fill the bladder without removing it from the backpack, and the backpack itself does not even need to be removed from the shoulder. You can simply attach a plastic bottle, a tap, etc... to the adapter and pour the contents into the bladder. A brilliant and easy solution that we would also like to see elsewhere (like on trail running packs for instance), and is definitely worth your money, since it works very well in practice.

The disadvantage of the Source WLPS bladder is, that it is only available in a 3l size, and although it can be filled with less water (as needed), it is still slightly larger than we would like for most hikes ... well, we nevertheless managed to pack it into a small hiking backpack, with some twisting of the edges. Also, it takes a little more effort to clean due to the internal barrier, that keeps the low profile of the bladder and prevents excessive splashing.

IN CONCLUSION

Source WLPS water bladder is definitely worth you looking at it, if you are considering buying a water bladder. The first reason is definitely the price, it costs **€38.90**, which is the same as the "civilian" version, but for that price it gives you a more durable material, a braided tube with **SQC** system and a lower profile of the bladder, that is not commonly found on the market. As such, it represents an interesting alternative to the classic bladders.

If you really use your water bladder, it is definitely worth considering to buy a **UTA** attachment as well, which is perfect for replenishing supplies while on the hike. This costs additional **€18.90**, which is in all honesty a bit much, but if you will be frequently using it, an investment that will make you forget the price.



Slovenia Outdoor TEST:

INOV8-Race Elite Vest

We have attended, in one way or the other, quite a few Trail running competitions. Enough for a man to feel the need to purchase some specialized equipment that would, like in cars, give runner some of that extra boost (although imaginary). Because we already have good running shoes (look at the Inov8- Trail Talon 250 test), the next step to look like a professional, is a tight running vest. Because the brand Inov8 is not so popular around here, and we like that, we chose their Race Elite Vest.



So let's get the air clear, we have bought this vest with our own money (yes, it was a sale 😊) and we now use it regularly, so this review expresses what we think of it.

As the name implies it is a minimalistic vest, that however boasts three main pockets intended mainly for liquids storage and 4 secondary ones, for everything else. Besides those, you will find strapping cords at the back as well. To yourself, you tight it with two chest straps. It is Unisex and only comes in black, like Fords did back in the day. The whole vest is made out of mesh and stretch material, with no zippers. For those pro's out there, it weighs in at 210g (empty). Total capacity of the vest is 4l (max 3l of liquids).

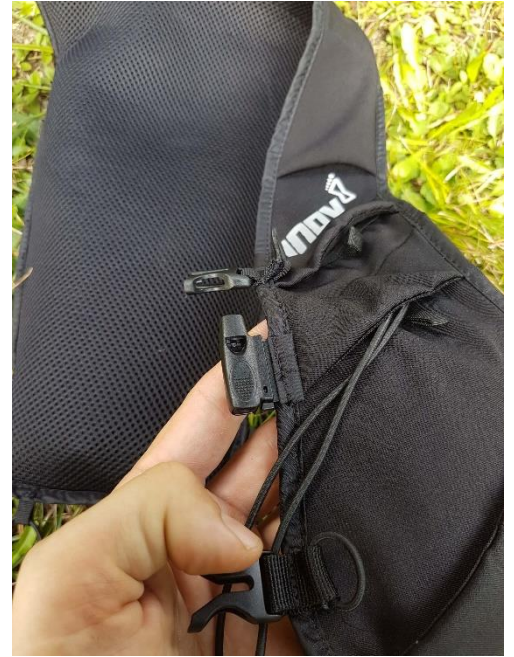
The vest fits, as you would expect, tightly around your body, with two adjustable shoulder straps to make it just right, so that it will hold you like obsessive lover. It is made out of mesh and stretch material and there are no zippers. Pockets keep things inside via tight fit and, on the back, overlapping material.

HYDRATION AND STORAGE

Manufacturer provides the vest with two 500ml hard water bottles of unusual shape, but is kind enough to let you buy the vest without them. And since we are just like you right now, we go on the internet before buying something. And the internet suggested, that the bottles are not very practical, so we bought the vest without them, and now use it with 1l hydration bladder (you can fit 2l). Some use soft bottles, but we find them to unstable. The main problem with hard bottles is that they are a bit difficult to reach, and even more difficult to put them back in the pocket during running. You can

perhaps use the long straws, and that might work OK. The other issue some runners find, is placement of the bottles. They are located under the armpits, and you might hit them with elbows when running.

Water bladder on the back, means that the front pockets are free for all the necessary things you might need in the wild. Like your phone, for that all important instagram picture, fits perfectly in water bottle compartment, and is thus always at hand. The other stays available for the first aid kit, or some other »big« object. In the smaller pockets on the shoulder straps, there is enough room for your food supplies- read candies and other sins. This pockets are quite deep, so reaching something at the bottom is a challenge, ergo fit only long things in it. And do not worry about the whistle, it is already incorporated in the shoulder straps, so you will never lose or forget it.



ISSUES

We have already mentioned the possible issues in regard to hydration, let's just add, that you have to install the tube from water bladder through the shoulder strap, which takes a bit of effort and is a pain in the neck if you have to do it quickly. But it looks nice, and that counts for something, and it also keeps the tube fixed a bit more.

The other issue is storage of running poles. It is not really there, albeit there are straps intended for this purpose at the back, so you will have to improvise or put the vest down in order to secure them, which is not really good on a racing vest.



CONCLUSION

Well, we will not sell it. All though it has some faults, it is still a very good vest, light, comfortable, and black (don't like the big sign though). Can we recomend it? Well yes, when you realise its downsides and are willing to accept them (like with every thing you buy), you will not be dissapointed. The vest is well made, it looks like it will last (durability) and carries enough gear for our need, so distances up to 100km max.



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Slovenia Outdoor TEST: Alpina Breeze X-MID

A legendary slovenian sports & hiking shoes manufacturer Alpina has an interesting path behind them, with many ups and downs. In the past few years they have made strong efforts to freshen up the existing designs, thus making their products interesting to the modern day user. Sadly, the quality of the brand has dropped quite a bit, after moving a part of the manufacturing to China, becoming the major issue with Alpina brand. Last year, however, the new collection has seen the light of day, named BREEZE, so we went into the store and grabbed a pair to see what's what...

The Breeze collection features 3 models: R-MID, X-MID and LOW. The first two are half-ankle hiking shoes while the last is, obviously, a low hiking shoe. Price drops somewhat along this line, as well. They all feature the same design that, in our eyes at least, looks like the look of some futuristic prototype. Hectagon, or perhaps rhombus, is the prevailing shape of this designs, nicely complemented by the prominent Vibram outsole and underlined with colour combinations like grey-blue, green-black-white or even pink. Colour schemes vary from model to model. However, all models have an insole made out of Ortholite foam and Vibram outsole (XStrek for LOW and Megagrip for others). The most expensive model R-MID is equipped with eVent membrane, while the other two models feature a bit cheaper Alpitex membrane. R-MID also features a lace system similar to »QuickLace«, while other models use normal laces.

Faced with those choices we found ourself standing in front of the shelf, trying to decide which one to take with us. LOW falls out of the equation almost immediately, as we rarely use low hiking shoes (we prefer trail running shoes for fast visits into the great outdoors). So, half ankle it is, but wich one? Of course we go for the more expensive R-MID version at first, since it has a better membrane and

looks quite nice in green with blue highlights. The box was already in our hands, when reason



prevailed and made us put them on for a try. Immediately a possible problem occurs. The lace system has two reinforcements, placed right where the »foot-toe« bend is. And when you walk, the material here squeezes and pushes into your feet. A rather uncomfortable feeling and a very likely durability issue – possible tears. So we walked from the store with X-MID model. Colour? In the end, gray won the match, as to us it looks the best fit for the shoe design (as mentioned, X-MID and R-MID do not have the same colour schemes available).

The shoes were tested mostly on forest trails with rocky sections (hills and mountains, some macadam and asphalt as well) in autumn / winter conditions.

FIT?

Just remarkable. Seriously one of the most comfortable hiking shoes we have ever wore. The author's foot is on the wide side up front, and this shoe is just made for it. It is also light, only 350g, which adds to the feeling that you are wearing slippers, not rugged hiking shoes. Normal laces tight the shoe quite well and we didn't miss the Quick Lace system.



ON THE TRAILS?

Being light and tight (comfortably tight!) they feel fast and very manageable on all sorts of terrain. However, they are still a bit too hard for running on asphalt or hard surface for longer periods of time, for hiking they are perfect. They offer great feel and precision when placing your foot right where you want, even on faster descends, when it is crucial to hit that spot of soil/rock that won't slide. The Vibram Megagrip outsole proved to be good enough, inspiring confidence even in slippery conditions, as they held ground like Spartans did, back in the day. When you push it too hard, the slides are mostly controllable and »safe«. Grip on the rocks/roots is good, as the combination of outsole and fit makes wonders.



Alpitex is not the best amongst membranes, but it does its job decently – meaning that it won't let the water from the first puddle to your feet, but long exposure to snow will be too much for it (use some protective spray, we didn't). It, however, never felt uncomfortable to our feet (too cold or too hot). In the warm environment-summer your feet might get sweaty though.

DURABILITY?

We didn't wear the Alpina's BREEZE long & hard enough to give you the right answer to this one. We, however, do have some friends, that abused them (X-MID as well) in slovenian mountains, Gran Canaria mountains and New Zealand mountains on fast trekkings (so pretty hard wear in the last months) and their report on durability is good. No visual damage so far, the stitching and glue held up nicely (check the photos bellow, sent just for you right from New Zealand, courtesy of Melita Brajkovec)



VERDICT

Well, it looks like Alpina has made it back with its BREEZE line. Hiking shoes that are comfortable, light and fast. And it seems, that they have also managed to sort out the quality control, so for now, it looks like the BREEZE products will stand the test of time (and abuse).

If you are looking for a hiking shoe that you can use on your daily walks and weekend mountain/outdoor getaway (not climbing or serious mountaineering), **Alpina BREEZE X-MID** are definitely well worth checking out.

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