

Flashlight test

Don't get caught out in the dark! We test eight great torches ready for winter...

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Hardcore night-walkers, cavers and mountaineers will happily extol the virtues of a headtorch – hands-free illumination in a compact, lightweight package. But as good as they are, they've not got the versatility or power that I want. My night walks tend to consist of a day out that has overrun, or a late stroll with the dog.

For this test, I compared eight similar-sized flashlights with the excellent Petzl Tikka Plus 2 headtorch (£40). While the

Petzl gives a superb spread of light, and is great for map-reading, it doesn't have the reach (or 'throw') of any of these flashlights. Its lower power means it has a great battery life, but if a hand-held torch has a 'low' mode, it can offer a runtime which is more than adequate for general walking.

While the beam ('spread') of a torch isn't as wide as the Petzl, I found that these gave superb illumination, and can be switched to high power to pick out signs, wayward dogs

and distant reference points. Also, some can feel self-conscious wearing a headtorch; a hand-held unit can feel more 'normal'.

While they're not all rated as waterproof, I left the torches in a sink full of water for five minutes with no problems. I also dropped them all from one metre on to a stone surface on their front, side and tail.

Whether you carry a torch on every trip, keep it in your car, or head out for a night trek, one of these will be for you...

THROW

If you're trying to pick out distant objects, a good beam length, or 'throw' is helpful.

- 1 LED Lenser L7
- 2 Maglight XL50
- 3 Nextorch MyTorch
- 4 Silverpoint EX2
- 5 Leatherman Monarch
- 6 Klarus P2A
- 7 Primus Primetorch
- 8 Inova X2

SPREAD

For walking, a good spread of light is generally more important than a long beam.

- 1 Klarus P2A
- 2 Inova X2
- 3 Nextorch MyTorch
- 4 Primus Primetorch
- 5 Leatherman Monarch
- 6 Maglight XL50
- 7 LED Lenser L7
- 8 Silverpoint EX2

LOW MODE

All but three of the torches feature a low mode, which extends battery life by reducing output. As you generally only need full power for short periods of time, and in low mode the paths were still well-defined, we'd recommend this as the best way to enjoy a typical night walk.

- 1 Klarus P2A
- 2 Nextorch MyTorch
- 3 Primus Primetorch
- 4 Maglite XL50
- 5 Silverpoint EX2

WANT IT SMALLER?

If you need a more compact torch, consider different power supplies. Many single-AA flashlights still offer great performance, or for high power and small size, take a look at those using the more expensive CR123A cells like the Klarus PIC.



£49.95 LEATHERMAN MONARCH 500

www.whitbyandco.co.uk
100 Lumens Weight 102g
Stated runtime at max 1hr
Powered by 2xAA

Leatherman have been very pessimistic with their runtime – we went for an hour-and-a-half in full power before the torch shut itself down, but this cut-off can be frustrating on a walk, giving no warning of a black-out. While most of these torches are regulated, the others tended to clearly dim before shutting down. A pleasingly tough, utilitarian torch – just a shame there's no low mode. No lanyard supplied, though there is a hole.

Simple and tough

£34.95 LED LENSER L7

www.ledlenser.co.uk
115 Lumens Weight 138g
Stated runtime (down to one lumen output) 42hrs
Powered by 3xAAA

By far the best 'throw' of all the torches on test. Can spread very wide, but doesn't pick out paths quite as well as others. No happy medium available by adjusting the (very stiff) focus. High runtime, but this is an unregulated torch, meaning it gradually gets dimmer and dimmer. No low mode. The plastic body is very resilient, but not as nice to hold as the others on test. A lanyard is included.

Great if you need to see a long way

£39.95 INOVA X2

www.whitbyandco.co.uk
107 Lumens Weight 155g
Stated runtime at max 3.6hrs
Powered by 2xAA

In full-power mode this gave a good spread of light but had the shortest throw. No low mode means battery life is more limited, and while it's clearly a tough design, we didn't like the switch operation, which requires the battery cap to be screwed shut to turn on, or undone by half a turn for momentary use. A good-sized hole is cast in for a lanyard, but none supplied. Would be a good flashlight for workmen, but not the best all-rounder for walkers.

A rugged torch

£20 SILVERPOINT EXTREME PRO EX2

www.cotswoldoutdoor.com
180/80 Lumens Weight 106g
Stated runtime at max 3hrs
Stated runtime in low 6hrs
Powered by 2xAA

A bargain flashlight, let down by the poorest spread results. Paths were clear enough, but peripheral vision was the worst on offer. It's still far better than nothing, and if money is tight this is a good option. Low mode is accessed by tapping the tail switch when turned on, though this is a little too easy to do accidentally. A lanyard is supplied.

A good choice if you're on a budget

£46 PRIMUS PRIMETORCH 701

www.primus.eu
176/65 Lumens Weight 117g
Stated runtime at max 1.5hrs
Stated runtime in low 7hrs
Powered by 2xAA

Reasonable results for the spread test, the Primus comes with a belt pouch and a (too loose) pocket clip. The torch turns on in low mode, which is a good option for walking, then a gentle tap cycles through high, strobe then back to low mode, although changes are a little too easy to make by accident. The anodised body marked a little more easily than some of the others, but nothing beyond some light scuffs.

Turns on in low mode

£44.99 MAGLITE XL50

www.maglite.com
104/26 Lumens Weight 113g
Stated runtime at max 8.75hrs
Stated runtime in low 36hrs
Powered by 3xAAA

Very good throw, but disappointing results in the spread test. This is a nicely pocketable torch, but it's a shame not to have any way to attach a lanyard. Double-tap the switch to enter low mode, or triple-tap for a strobe to disorientate hoodies and looters. The torch is focussable, but we found no benefit to this. The head can be fully removed, giving a good spread of light for use in a tent.

A compact torch with a good throw

£39.95 NEXTORCH MYTORCH

www.nextorch.com
150/7 Lumens Weight 179g
Stated runtime at max 5.5hrs
Stated runtime in low 93hrs
Powered by 3xAAA

By hooking up to a PC (no Mac support), the MyTorch can be programmed to give the output and runtimes you want, making it a great choice if you want to tailor your light to your needs. The beam pattern was damaged in the drop-test, but the torch was replaced without a problem under warranty. No hole for a lanyard. Second only to the Klarus for quality of walking beam in low mode.

A good balance of spread and throw

£32.95 KLARUS P2A

www.klaruslight.co.uk
245/20 Lumens Weight 119g
Stated runtime at max 1.6hrs
Stated runtime in low 33hrs
Powered by 2xAA

An excellent all-round torch that gives a superb spread of light in low and high modes. Perfect for walking, offering clearly defined paths with good peripheral vision. High-power mode is battery-hungry, but really useful to have when you need it. Very well made, with a tough pocket clip and a supplied lanyard. The finish was very resilient. A headband is also available for hands-free use.

Our favourite torch for walking

HIGHLY COMMENDED for walking

BEST IN TEST for walking

100 LUMENS
1 HOURS MAX RUN
102 GRAMS
2AA

115 LUMENS
42 HOURS MAX RUN
138 GRAMS
3AAA

107 LUMENS
3.6 HOURS MAX RUN
155 GRAMS
2AA

180 LUMENS 80
6 HOURS MAX RUN
106 GRAMS
2AA

176 LUMENS 65
7 HOURS MAX RUN
117 GRAMS
2AA

104 LUMENS 26
36 HOURS MAX RUN
113 GRAMS
3AAA

150 LUMENS 7
93 HOURS MAX RUN
179 GRAMS
3AAA

245 LUMENS 20
33 HOURS MAX RUN
119 GRAMS
2AA