

Tents

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In my last article, we discussed sleeping bags. This month I want to talk about another of those indispensable articles....tents.

Tents are much like sweaters: If you have one, you may or may not use it. If you don't have one and you wind up needing it, you are in deep trouble.

Tents come in a bewildering variety of shapes, colors, and materials. A tent's basic purpose is to give you shelter from the elements. There are a number of considerations that should be addressed before you invest your hard-earned money.

Weight is of primary concern if you are going to be carrying it on your back. If you don't plan on carrying it, get the get the biggest, most comfortable one you can afford. If you plan on packing it, then you had better be concerned with weight.

Since I am a backpacker, I prefer a lightweight, igloo shaped tent with a rain fly. The igloo shapes are self-supporting and doesn't require guy ropes to support it. The rain fly keeps it waterproof and still allows the tent to "breathe". The igloo shape is also very good in windy situations because it doesn't offer a solid plane for the wind to push against. A good three-person tent can be purchased for as little as \$100.

Another style is the wedge-shaped "pup tent". These are relatively inexpensive and provide reasonable shelter for under \$50. These cheaper models usually don't have a rain fly but utilize a urethane coated fabric. They are completely waterproof, but they don't "breathe". Consequently, condensation will build up inside the tent and can make for some rather soggy conditions.

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All tents should have some provision for sealing out bugs. I have a real phobia about waking up and finding something moving around in my mouth besides my tongue.

A viable alternative to the tent is the Bivouac Bag or Bivy Sack. I recently purchased one on sale for \$49. It has a urethane coated bottom and a breathable Gore-Tex top and mosquito netting to seal the top. I can save about five pounds by leaving my tent behind. What I lose in privacy is more than compensated for by the weight saving.

In camping, as in life, everything is a series of trade-offs. If I were going up into the High Sierras for an extended period, I'd probably take the tent. On the other hand, for a three-day weekend, I'll use the Bivy Sack. I'll sleep just a comfortably and if the weather turns rotten, I usually head for home anyway.

In my next article, we'll talk about the various types of backpacks and the relative advantages and disadvantages of each.

Ron Blackwood just passed the Godan test at the 1995 Tai Kai. He has trained for 10 years under Kevin Millis, 9th Dan. His hobbies include technical rock climbing, Scuba Diving (1 more class to qualify as Master Diver) and competitive shooting. He's backpacked all over the country including Mt. Whitney.