

Chapter 5 Camping Techniques

*There's lots of time, you say with smiles,
Let's try to do a few more miles.
But, as you'll find, it's not a lark
To make a bivouac in the dark.*

Site selection

Whatever equipment you are using, and whether you plan to sleep in tents, on beds which you have constructed, or hammocks, or on the ground — the selection of a suitable site is important.

Things to consider:

1. Protection from wind/rain/cold.
2. Reasonably level ground. Do you need to clear this ground beforehand by removing at least some of the undergrowth, thick grass, etc., which acts as a shelter for insects and other undesirable guests?

Remember that some areas, especially if low-lying and marshy, tend to encourage the presence of mosquitos. (See Page 37 for malaria-carrying mosquitos.)

In some countries, crevices in rock faces and cliffs offer a shelter for snakes, so don't camp close beneath these rock walls.

Leeches—which may be found in certain jungle areas—are unpleasant, but they are not dangerous. You will soon learn to regard them as a nuisance and nothing more. Elaborate precautions to deter leeches are useless and unnecessary. The leech will always outwit you.

3. You need to be fairly near a source of water, but not too near. In tropical countries, for instance, those who camp close to the banks of a pleasant little stream may wake to find themselves in the middle of a deep, raging torrent.

Give yourself plenty of time to make your sleeping arrangements and build your shelter, even if this means camping short of your originally chosen spot. Know the time at which it will be dark, and begin camping with this time in mind.

Capes, ponchos, or whatever they are called in your area, are not only of use during the daytime, but can be very helpful at night if you are not sleeping under canvas, or under a roof thatched by people who know how to thatch it (which should include you, if you're going to make this kind of shelter). Nevertheless, a single cape is not very large as a cover at night, and if it has a hole for your head to go through in the daytime, the rain will come through onto your head at night!

The possible types of overhead cover are numerous, ranging from permanent buildings to the open sky, the latter being wonderful if you know it isn't going to rain. Like everything else, this needs thinking about, planning, and practising beforehand.

CAMPING TECHNIQUES

Are you responsible only for your own sleeping arrangements, or are you making a shelter to accommodate several people? If it is the latter, plan the work, so that you don't have several people trying to do the same job, and getting in one another's way.

Various tasks might be:

- (a) Continuing the clearing of the site
- (b) Collecting materials
- (c) Working on the overhead cover, etc.
- (d) Preparing the platform, or whatever you are actually going to sleep on.

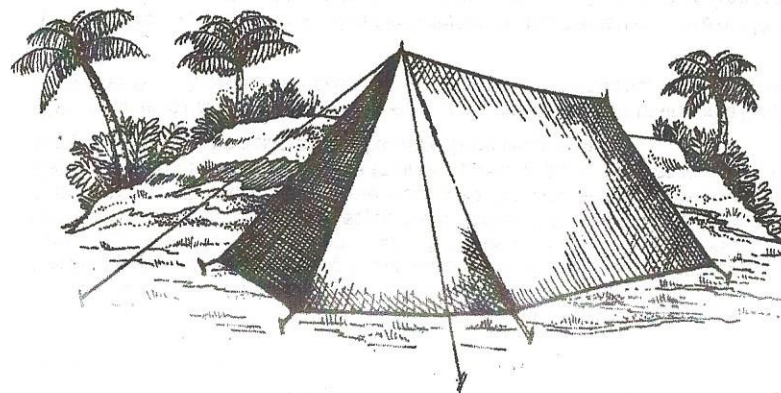
In almost all types of country, it is better if you can get something between your body and the ground at night. The something may be a bed or sleeping-platform you have made, in areas where suitable materials are plentiful, or it may be no more than a mattress of small branches, grasses and leaves, if nothing better can be found. This is again where you will need advice from people in your own country, but getting yourself off the ground — even a little way — is a good rule. It helps to insulate you from cold and damp ground, and remember that the time when you want to sleep is just when all the insects and creepy-crawlies like to get out to enjoy the nightlife.

Don't overlook the fact that in dry areas (like deserts) it is often possible to dig a shallow foxhole which will shield you from the cold winds which can blow at night. Don't waste time. You want your shelter ready before dark!

Tent Pitching

Just as your site should be selected on the basis of forthcoming bad weather, so should your tent be pitched with a storm in mind. All possible precautions should be taken to ensure that your tent stays secure and dry whatever the night's weather.

A well-pitched tent on a sheltered site.



CAMPING TECHNIQUES

The following method of pitching a tent has been well tried and gives good results for almost any type of small tent:

1. Ascertain the direction of the wind — if the weather is calm check the natural signs such as shaped trees, bent grass etc.
2. Lay the tent out with the rear pointing in the direction from which the wind is coming or expected to come. Insert the pole(s) and close the entrance so as to preserve the shape of the tent, and peg out the corners.
3. Erect the rear of the tent first, using the stronger pegs for the main guys. Pegs should be pushed into the ground at an angle of 45° away from the tent and the guys made as long as possible and secured low on the peg.
4. Secure corner guys and erect the front end of the tent. Guys should normally run out in line with the tent seams. There should be no kinks or folds in the roof or walls of the tent and, unless the guys are made of nylon, sufficient line should be available to enable the guys to be slackened in wet weather and at night.
5. Dig a drainage channel around your tent and if the weather is particularly wet, line the 'sod-cloth' with turfs or rocks.
6. When erecting a tent in the rain try to touch the guys only and keep the material as free from folds as possible.

Living in a Tent

The technique of living inside a tent is seldom learned yet it is of particular importance especially in bad weather. The two basic rules are:

1. Economy of Movement

Keep movement in and out of the tent to a minimum (remember that a tent without a fly sheet will leak if the wet canvas is touched from inside).

2. A Systematic Arrangement of Kit

- (a) Store each item of kit in the same place each time you pitch your tent so that you know where it is and you do not have to turn everything upside down to find it.
- (b) Remove wet clothes and boots in the shelter of the entrance of the tent. If they cannot be dried put them in a plastic bag or under the fly sheet.
- (c) Sleep head to tail — this gives more room and comfort. Try to acquire a small closed cell rubber foam mattress. This will give good insulation and is lightweight.
- (d) Tie your water container to a guy line close to the tent entrance.

Cooking

*You cannot walk, or even ride,
With no sustaining food inside.
Each day, however tired you feel,
You must have one, hot, proper meal.*

CAMPING TECHNIQUES

What you are going to eat and drink should be planned before the expedition begins. Remember that food, while being as easy to carry as possible, must be balanced and sustaining. It is not just something to eat, but the fuel on which your energy (and even safety) will depend. The evening meal will be the main, and most important, one. Beware of the danger of feeling that you are too tired to bother about cooking a proper meal. If you don't eat, you'll become more tired still. Hot, sweet tea can be a great lifegiver, and it may be a good idea to brew up some tea as soon as you reach the campsite. You can be doing other jobs while the water is boiling.

Will you have to carry all the food you need, or will you be able to obtain some locally? If the answer is: 'Obtain some locally', you must know you can do so, and not just hope you can.

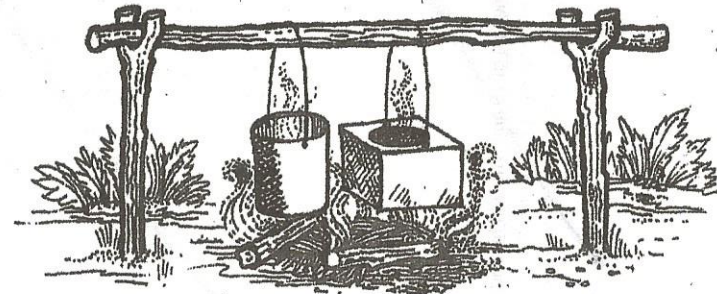
Muscles when at work use a lot of carbohydrates, so that it is sensible — even though the morning and midday meals may not be large — to try and eat at those times foods containing carbohydrates. You are then supplying the fuel at the times when it will be most needed.

Tablets, if approved by your expedition supervisor, can be useful in supplying vitamins such as C and B1.

A certain amount of roughage is a good thing, since constipation is not likely to help your physical well-being or your enjoyment of the expedition. But don't overdo the roughage or you will be holding up the expedition at frequent intervals, and that will not help your enjoyment either.

You may not be an expert cook, but try to cook your food properly, and make it as palatable as possible. Food not eaten because it is badly cooked or merely because people don't like it, is a waste of time, energy, and money, and means that they are going short of what they need. You must have at least one hot meal a day — preferably at night — and this must be a proper meal, and not a snack. What is going to be your source of heat? If it's to be a stove, do you know how to use it, and pack it, and carry it, and if it goes wrong (which, if it happens, you can bet will be at the worst possible time) are you going to be helpless, or will you know what else you can do? Do you appreciate the dangers of using a stove, and do you realise that larking about near a stove during cooking means burnt meat, and the burnt meat will be you?

Cooking over an open fire requires great care.



CAMPING TECHNIQUES

If you intend to light a fire built from materials found on the spot, consider these points:

1. Have you practised building and lighting a fire?
2. Do you realise that nature may supply the fuel, but it may be wet? If so, do you know that you can often keep chipping away at the outside (wet) wood until you reach the dry wood inside? But that this requires time and patience?
3. Have you tried lighting a fire in a strong wind? Do you know that placing your fire so that the smoke continues to blow over people all night will make you unpopular?
4. Getting a good cooking fire going well is not quite as easy as it looks in films, so practise beforehand.

Organise your cooking, and so save time. Water (for a hot drink) first. Then, while you enjoy the hot drink, soup can be getting ready, and then the soup can be kept hot on top of the hot water while the main course is prepared. After that, enjoy the soup while the main course keeps hot on top of the water. As with packing kit (page 15), so with cooking: go about the job in a sensible order.

Anyone, anywhere, who goes into an area is responsible for the effect his/her visit has on the area. If you're in the wilds, remember that more and more of it is being spoiled, or destroyed, every day, and the world is very small. There is no excuse — ever — for leaving any litter. Your aim should be to leave the area looking as if no one has ever been there. If you are near villages or settlements, the rule about 'no litter' still applies. If you don't want your rubbish, neither do the local people.