

WEATHER HAPPENS, SO BE PREPARED
or
Lessons Learned From a Stormy Camporee



Camping is not always a fair weather activity. Even if the weekend starts with clear skies and balmy temperatures, we do live in Texas where the climate changes frequently and often violently. In three years with Troop 870, I've been through a wicked nighttime dust storm that destroyed three or four tents (Buffalo

Trail, Summer Camp 2002) and two extremely violent thunderstorms (Camp Strake, Winter Camp 2002, and Camp Brosig, Camporee 2004) that left tents in disarray and some campers miserable. And it's just rained a few times too. The difference between a campout being a miserable experience or just part of the Troop folklore is being prepared.

TENTS: I twice mentioned tents as casualties because tents are important. Repeat – tents are important. Any tent will keep the dew off the camper and the mosquitoes somewhat at bay, but a good one, a serious tent, is vital if the Scout is to enjoy camping. A serious tent is not necessarily expensive, but it must be well designed and constructed. Cabin or wall tents are difficult to put up, easy to damage, tend to leak, likely to blow over in a storm and are much better left in the garage. Not my personal favorite and are pretty much relics these days, thankfully. A dome tent, A-frame or another double-wall design, that is, a tent that has an inner structure and is covered by a rain fly, is a much better choice.

The fly should adequately protect all windows and doors in case of wind-blown rain. The tent material should be a durable nylon, and the rain fly should either be a heavier nylon or polyester. Tents are often put up in low spots, so the “tub”, or the floor of the tent, should wrap up the sides for at least four inches before being stitched to the walls. Any seams in the tent floor should be waterproofed. Zippers should be a name brand (YKK or something else that's recognized) and operate smoothly.

The pole material is also important. Poles can be either fiberglass or aluminum. They should only be aluminum. Aluminum is good stuff. Virtually all serious tents have aluminum poles. Many good tents only use two poles, which are easier for a Scout to put up in the dark on Friday night, but then so do bad tents. Other tents use three or four. Rule of thumb: check out the stability. Regardless of the number of poles, go for the aluminum.

There are many serious tents on the market, and some very serious tents. Very serious tents are often labeled “Four Season”, and are useful when attempting to summit Mt. Everest. They can safely be avoided. Some models of serious tents by Eureka, Kelty, REI and one or two other manufacturers are quite reasonable in price.

So what tent should the Scout buy? Scoutmaster Aleshire is inclined to recommend the Eureka Timberline, an A-frame design, and rightfully so. He first used his Timberline when Scouting with Lewis and Clarke, and we still see it on every campout. I prefer a dome tent, and have a couple by Kelty. Either of these can be purchased for \$100 - \$150 and will last through a Scouting career, at least. Another word of advice: Avoid any tent that's sold only in high volume sporting goods stores.

TENT PEGS: Most tent pegs that come with tents should be replaced immediately or at least before the first campout, unless they pass the driveway test, which is...

- Take one tent peg.
- Hold it point down on a hard surface, such as a driveway, but at a slight angle.
- Push down. Hard.
- Throw it out if it bends. Throw it out if it doesn't bend.
- Buy a bag of those metal pegs that resemble 10-inch nails with plastic hooks.

GROUND CLOTH: The ground beneath the tent may get wet, and as a result water may push through the tent floor. A properly used ground cloth reduces the likelihood of damp sleeping bags. The best ground cloth is a piece of heavy duty plastic sheeting that's cut slightly smaller than the floor of the tent.



SLEEPING BAGS: Like tents, there are a lot of good and an awful lot of not-so-good sleeping bags. What's important is a synthetic fill, such as Hollofil or Polargard, that will retain heat even

if the bag gets damp, and the quality of the outer material (nylon preferred) and zippers. Weight is a factor if the Scout will eventually use it for backpacking. A temperature rating of about 30°, while not critical in Texas, should also be considered. Bag shapes are either rectangular or mummy, and whichever one is chosen is largely a matter of personal preference. Be sure to buy a stuff sack for the bag if it doesn't come with one, but don't store the bag in the stuff sack. The bag should be compressed for travel, but will lose its loft if it's stored that way. Avoid bags with cartoon characters, cotton filling and those sold only in...

SLEEPING PAD: A sleeping pad, such as a Thermo-Rest or Slumberjack self-inflating pad, provides insulation from the ground and also helps keep the sleeping bag dry in case the tent leaks. And it feels better than that root pushing into the small of the back. In general, a sleeping pad is a good idea. A beachy, floaty air mattress thingy isn't.



RAINGEAR: Dry is good. Plastic ponchos that come in bags smaller than a #10 envelope don't keep a Scout dry. Nor do Hefty trash bags. A rain suit (jacket and pants) or heavy poncho is a must on every campout. Rain suits come in a range of materials, from triple layer Gortex to rubber to vinyl.

Vinyl is heavy, sweaty but a good vinyl suit is sturdy (bad ones are not, and should be avoided) and keeps the rain out. Gortex and similar breathable, water repellent nylon materials are light and flexible, but can be expensive. It's likely the Scout will grow through three or four sizes so cost has to be considered. Raingear should be packed where it can be readily reached.

WARM STUFF.: 58° with wind and rain can be downright chilly. That's what it was on the afternoon of Saturday, May 1, 2004 in Sealy, Texas. I had a fleece. I had a rain suit. I was OK.

I've camped at Lake Somerville in July, had the temperature drop into the low 60s during a storm. Pack something warm. I recommend fleece because it retains heat even when it's wet, works well when layered with the raingear and most everybody already has something made from fleece. Warm is good.



SO, let's learn from the Camporee of 2004, add a couple of things to the camping checklist and ensure that our gear helps make the best of a bit of bad weather.



CN