

*"A good tent is a luxury, a poor tent an abomination."*

—Francis H. Buzzacott, *Complete Campers Manual: Or How to Camp Out and What to Do*, 1903 (His expeditions as an outdoor guide for 40 years included treks to the Arctic Circle and Antarctica.)

## Shelter

Desert campers need shelters that are open and airy yet will shade them from the sun. Long-distance hikers, kayakers, and cyclists need shelters that are lightweight yet appropriate for many variations in the weather. The safety of mountaineers and winter campers can depend largely on tight, strong tents that will withstand the force of wind-driven snow and sleet.

Fortunately, there are shelters available for almost every traveler. Among the options for modern outdoor adventurers are tarps, bivouac bags, and tents.

### Tarp

A tarp is the simplest of outdoor shelters; it weighs just a few pounds and can be set up in dozens of ways. Use it as your primary shelter or as a dining fly to protect your group's gear or cooking area from sun and storm. Rig it the way you want with lengths of parachute cord at the corners and as a ridgeline. A tarp has no floor, which can pose challenges in soggy terrain, nor does it have netting to keep insects at bay. Still, for a flexible shelter in mild or hot climates, a tarp is hard to beat.



## Bivouac Bag

The *bivouac bag*, originally intended as an emergency refuge for mountain climbers forced to spend nights on cliffs far from their camps, is a waterproof envelope that slips over a sleeping bag. Most bivouac bags are made of fabrics that shed rain, dew, and snowmelt, yet allow body moisture to pass through into the night air.

Bivouac bags are very light, but they also are confining. That's something to consider if you intend to travel where you might need to stay inside for a day or two waiting out a storm.



## Tent

Most campers rely on tents for their shelters. The great variety of tents on the market allows you to select one matched to your adventures. In addition to noting a tent's weight, among the factors to consider when comparing tents are *season*, *size*, and *shape*.



### Season

**Three-season tents** are intended for use in the spring, summer, and autumn. Many have mosquito-netting panels to allow plenty of warm-weather ventilation.

**Four-season tents** are built to withstand the strong winds and snow loads of winter. Some have extra poles for added stability, and they tend to be heavier than three-season tents.

**Convertible tents** have panels that can be zipped closed over mosquito-netting vents. Leave them open for ventilation on warm nights, then close them to block the wind and spindrifts of snow during cold-weather trips.

### Size

Tents are marketed as suitable for one, two, three, or four sleepers. Consider the way you will most often travel and the sort of group with whom you will camp.

### Shape

The *A-frame* tent, essentially a pup tent made light and strong with modern materials and engineering, is roomy and usually has a waterproof floor and mosquito-netting vents and doors. Breathable fabric allows moisture to escape from inside the shelter, while a waterproof rain fly protects the tent from exterior moisture. A two-person A-frame tent weighs 5 to 9 pounds and will keep a couple of hikers and their gear dry.

Flexible poles have allowed tent makers to develop *dome*-shaped tents. These tents stand up well in rain, wind, and snow, and the spaciousness of their interiors makes them great for two to four campers. A dome tent can be flipped upside down in the morning to dry the bottom of the tent floor.

Tent designers are constantly trying to improve their products by altering or combining basic tent shapes, adding features, and even removing basic features. The resulting *hybrid* tents sometimes look odd, but occasionally there are real advances that make tents lighter, roomier, stronger, and more functional. One of these tents might be exactly what you need.



*A-frame tent*



*Dome tent*



### **Choosing a Tent**

With so many tents on the market, you'll want to shop around until you find the shelter that is just right for you. If you can, borrow or rent different tents and use them on overnight treks to see what they are like. Ask a salesperson to help you pitch tents in the showroom, then crawl inside and check them for size, comfort, quality of construction, and ease in setting up and taking down.

If possible, choose a tent that will blend in with the outdoor surroundings. Earth-toned shades of green, brown, gray, or blue help reduce the visual impact of a campsite.

#### **Guidelines for Choosing a Tent**

Answer the following questions before you shop for a tent to help you think through your needs:

1. In what weather extremes will you be using your tent?
2. How will you transport your tent? (Carry it yourself, split the load with others, haul it by pack animal or watercraft, etc.)
3. Do your adventures involve a base camp or do you plan to move to a new campsite every day or two?
4. How many people will share the tent?

### **Ground Cloth**

A sheet of plastic under your tent will protect the floor from rocks and twigs and keep moisture from seeping through. Prevent rain from running between the tent floor and the ground cloth by placing the cloth so that it doesn't extend beyond the area covered by the tent, or by using the cloth to line the interior of the tent.

