

Tent in your pocket

I would venture to say, most every outdoor person has some type of tent camping in their past. Many of us have gone the whole gamut of tent camping, from a tarp in the woods to a full cabin tent, complete with a vestibule.

Many of us, especially those with some gray matter in their hair, no longer wish to camp outdoors and sleep on the hard ground. Other folks go the other direction, and purchase motorhomes and RVs for their camping adventure. I am sure each of us fall somewhere in these categories.

I built my first tent when I was 7, out of a section of well-used hay tarp and several long branches from a cottonwood tree. The tent was a small model of an outfitter wall tent I constructed in the high country, also known as our woodlot.

The camp was designed to provide shelter from the elements and predators. I added an outfitter stove, made from a discarded milk pail, and built a fire to ward off a chill in the air. Having failed to provide a chimney for smoke to escape, the tent soon filled with smoke.

Presently, my surly grandfather came strolling by, on his way back to the house, with probably nothing more than dinner on his mind. He noticed me standing outside the "tent" with smoke pouring out. It is a memorable experience for a small child to see his grandfather stomp out his "outfitter camp."

I am sure my grandfather had no idea what he stomped on, thinking I was just lighting up his hay tarp. He later remarked to my grandmother, "When we can scrape a few dollars together, we need to take that boy into town and get his screws tightened."

There is much discussion as to what a person stranded in the woods should seek first; food, water, fire or shelter. Obviously, if injured, tending to those injuries



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

should be first. Shelter should be first if you are uninjured, and a close second if you are injured.

By far, the major cause of death for victims lost in the mountains is exposure. Exposure is just another name for hypothermia. To put it simply, hypothermia is the loss of body heat faster than it is being produced, causing a drop in the body's inner-core temperature.

Some 1,300 people a year perish in the outdoors from exposure. It does not have to be below freezing to occur, as there have been deaths recorded when the temperature never dropped below the 50s.

Most cases of hypothermia involve the victim getting wet. Clothes lose up to 90 percent of their insulation value when wet. There are a few products, such as wool, that retain a fair amount of insulation value, but most become depleted.

Add wind to the mix and you have all the ingredients for a visit from old Murphy. Wind will drive cold air over, under and through wet clothes. The evaporating moisture quickly cools and refrigerates the wet skin.

When you feel that chill first coming on, you must act quickly, and this is where shelter comes into play. Shelter can be a stand of spruce trees in a pinch, out of the wind and some place to conserve heat.

Most of us have lugged around a space blanket in our packs, but if you have ever tried to spend a night wrapped around in one of them, you will take the stand

of spruce trees instead.

An easy solution is to carry a sleeping bag, but that can be a problem with weight and space. An emergency sleeping bag is the perfect solution. They weigh around 5 ounces, are about the size of a baseball when rolled up, and open to 7 feet long and 3 feet wide.

The actual term is a bivouac sack, but is called bivy sack for short. They are basically a personal tent, providing warmth and protection from wind, rain, snow and bugs. The bivy is made of two layers. The bottom layer is made from a waterproof nylon, similar to a tarp material.

The interior is made of a reflective material that traps and reflects 90 percent of your body heat back to you. The seams are all sealed to prevent moisture from entering and not allow any heat to escape. The heavier duty of these bags work well, even when the temperatures dip into the single digits.

I have found it best to remove your wet clothes, heavy coats and boots before climbing in. They are available in several sizes, including a large to accommodate the larger shoulder types and the claustrophobic.

The best feature of a bivy is the price, starting out at around 20 bucks. They are cheap enough that everyone should have one in their pack or pocket. Put a couple in your vehicle and ATV in case you find yourself stranded. There is an unlimited number of companies offering a survival bivy, including Tact Bivvy, Outdoor Research, Life Bivy, and Adventure Medical.

The majority of people lost or stranded in the woods are located by search and rescue in the first 36 hours. Having one of these can sure make the nights easier to survive and provide some warmth and security. I carry one on my trips now.

It is probably as close to tent camping as I want to get.

My grandfather went to his grave many years after that incident, still convinced that all I did was to burn up one of his hay tarps, and he kept a suspicious eye on me the rest of his life. My short-lived outfitter tent served me well for an afternoon, sheltering me from the cold and keeping away predators. Well, all except for one predator: my grandfather.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a director for the Montrose



Small, inexpensive, and lightweight, this is one of the best things to carry with you in the outdoors. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse, call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

For outdoors or survival related questions or comments, feel free to contact him directly at his email elkhunter77@icloud.com.

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