

# Wild/Remote Camp Equipment

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You could spend a lifetime honing the equipment that you take camping, and you can spend extortionate amounts on the best of the best but there are a limited number of essentials and you can make do on a relatively low budget if you put in the legwork. If you'd like to know what I use and why, I've written another document entitled [The Camp Kit I Use](#)

We can divide wild or remote camping equipment into six primary categories:

-  [Carrying](#)
-  [Shelter](#)
-  [Cooking](#)
-  [Food/Drink](#)
-  [Sleeping](#)
-  [Lighting](#)
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## Carrying

**Rucksack** There really is no substitute for a rucksack unless you're on a horse, bike or in a canoe or kayak. The ideal size depends on how much you need to carry but 35 litres is usually too small and 75 is usually too large; some items, e.g. a synthetic sleeping bag, might increase the need for a larger rucksack, and the longer your adventure, the more kit you'll need to fit in; typically people with larger rucksacks carry more weight; people with smaller rucksacks borrow more off others. There's a balance that will become more important with every wild camping experience.

A padded waist belt and a chest strap are essential for the rucksack to be effective and comfortable under load. A top pocket, side compression straps and accessory cords are very useful.

**Liner** A rucksack liner can be useful to keep the contents of your rucksack dry; for years I successfully used an old fertiliser sack; caving tackle shops still sell them. Roll top drysacks are available in large enough sizes to line any rucksack and are very effective.

**Drybags** Keeping your kit in drybags might eliminate the need for a rucksack liner and also means that you can pack and empty your rucksack easily, even in the rain, without damp problems; they come in a wide range of shapes, price and sizes from ½ litre up to 120 litres. Avoid ultralight bags unless you are a very careful person; they're not especially robust. Different colour drybags can be useful. Some dry bags have a see-through window, also useful

## Shelter

**Tents** In the UK your tent will ideally pitch out first so that, in wet weather, you can get under shelter before you need to expose your inner tent or any other items to the rain and, with the inner absent, the space can also be a social area. If you're intending to camp regularly with another adventurer, having a tent with two entrances, one each side is a good idea, especially if each side has a reasonably sized vestibule (e.g. the [Exped Orion](#)); this gives personal storage area, personal access if conditions allow and the option to change the access in changing winds and to completely vent the tent in hot weather. The most modern impregnated silnylon tents are superlight and strong but are more costly than coated nylon tents. Any tent worth buying has a fully waterproof outer that won't leak if you look after it. Some are more waterproof than others! Avoid ultralight tents unless you're racing as they are less robust. The groundsheet of the tent *must* be waterproof. Small mountain/remote area tents need a vestibule for kit storage and cooking, large enough for your wet rucksack, boots, waterproofs, etc. so that you don't get your sleep kit wet. There will, ideally, be a ventilation system that allows air to flow between the inner and outer tent to help condensation evaporate from inside the tent. The tent should have a range of guy lines that allow it to be storm rigged, and pegs that are sufficiently robust to deal with a wide range of terrain.

Aim for a weight around 1-1.25kg per person if you're sharing and not much more than 2kg if you're going solo.

**Tarps** A tarp can be used instead of a tent and is usually lighter, but offers reduced shelter/protection and is much more prone to wind and so, in the UK, is usually a summer and shoulder-season shelter. Tarps are often supported with one or more tarp poles or walking poles. Small tarps (2-3mx1.5m) can be useful as a rain shelter when used in conjunction with a bivi bag or as an extension for a tent, and larger tarps work well over a hammock slung between trees, over a hammock or as an extension for a tent.

**Bivi Bags** Bivi bags and bivi shelters are less common nowadays as they offer less freedom and flexibility, especially in poor weather, but they are superb on high mountain perches and in dry weather. Bivi bags are also essential in snow holes. Breathability is essential!

## Cooking

**Stove** Cheap canister gas stoves from China found on eBay can be superb, but you only find out if they're poor at the wrong time; an investment of as little as £20, if you can afford it, will pay off: My go-to stove is an MSR Windpro bought in 1989 (I think?) and it performs superbly, it wasn't cheap then and isn't now; it's never gone wrong and works in any temperature that I can exist in. Gas stoves are by far the safest to use in a tent and many are exceptionally controllable; check the controls before buying as some offer very little control and others have no simmer function. There's a very good basic guide to canister gas stoves [here](#).

As another guide; look at the repair kit that comes with your stove: If it hasn't got one, you might ask why. If it's huge you might also ask why. Mine has a single small spanner that allows me to take it apart and clean the minimal parts.

Gas is cheap and comes in many different cartridges and there's an excellent guide written by Tim Moss [here](#) which includes information about the adapters that can be used to attach different cartridges. I suggest that you buy a stove that uses screw-fit cartridges and purchase an adapter for others.

Alcohol/methylated spirit stoves work well in warmer temperatures and the Trangia is one of the most popular stoves, albeit it now comes with a gas conversion. Eco-alcohol is relatively cheap and often widely available if meths isn't. The fuel is heavy compared with gas (g/kJ). Can be used with care in a tent. These burners will make the bottom of your pans sooty (less sooty if you add a little water but that also makes the fuel burn less hot). My opinion; unless you have a particular reason for using an alcohol stove, the extra weight, mucky pans, less commonly available fuel and fire risk (think spilled flammable liquid) aren't worth it. There are a few gel pots around that work in the same way but burn inflammable gel so the fire risk is reduced, but you pay for the specialism.

Pressurised liquid paraffin/petrol stoves are now rarely used in the UK as there are so many better options although if you're travelling in remote locations, petrol may be the only commonly available fuel. They can be used with extreme care in a tent. The MSR Whisperlite International is one of the best selling expedition stoves and has an admirable history. They are not especially fuel efficient, burning much more fuel than a gas stove per litre of boiling water and they are mucky, smelly things to manage. If you can only get hold of petrol this is your badger.

Wood and wood-gas stoves are good in some situations, though they are less flexible and poor in wet weather and can't be used in most tents.

**Fuel** Gas; always use gas, unless there is a compelling reason not to. Gas is cheap, clean, easy to store and very safe compared to anything else. The most commonly available are butane, propane/butane and isopropane/butane mixes and your choice will depend on what stove you have and the temperatures and altitudes you'll be cooking at. Butane boils (i.e. turns from liquid to the gas that you need to burn) at 0°C so it stops working well around 10 and becomes a nightmare as it gets colder. Isobutane boils at -11°C so it's better in cold UK weather (down to around 3-5°C) and propane boils at -42°C so unless you're going somewhere seriously cold, you'll not need anything else. Most gas cartridges contain butane but you can get butane/iso-butane/propane mixes in most good outdoor stores. If you have a liquid feed stove (i.e. one that has a pre-heater pipe) the ambient temperature won't matter too much as the liquid butane/propane is evaporated in the pre-heater and burns as a gas. If you have a stove-top or non-

liquid feed stove, it is worth knowing that if you use a gas mix containing any proportions of butane-propane-iso-butane in cold temperatures, the propane will boil off fastest, then the isobutane leaving the liquid butane behind. This is not stated on the cartridges so you may consider that your cartridge is empty when it runs out in cold weather, but it's simply run out of propane and isobutane leaving the butane behind: another reason to invest in a good quality stove that has a pre-heater pipe.

If you're intending to travel the globe go for petrol simply because cars are found everywhere, and so is petrol. Training and practice is absolutely necessary before using a pressurised petrol stove. Before you go anywhere with it, learn to strip it down, clean it and re-assemble it.

If you want another option, go for meths/alcohol, but be prepared for more work, longer cooking times, and dirty pans and be aware that meths/alcohol doesn't work well in cold temperatures.

Wood stoves and fires are rarely an option as they are so hard to use and, in the UK it rains so they lack flexibility. Landowner permission is almost always required in England, Ireland and Wales and the smoke can be highly destructive for kit (yours and others)

**Pans** One or more pans of an appropriate size plus lid, ideally aluminium, or stainless steel if you're an ox, but titanium pots are now widely available. Lids are essential unless you want to burn excess fuel (up to 50% extra fuel to boil 0.5l of water with no lid) and can ideally be used as frypans if required. Don't forget the pan-handle.

**Cutlery** Spork or knife fork n spoon (KFS); plastic, stainless or titanium, whichever you prefer. Also consider a cut-down wooden spatula and a teaspoon. I ordered a titanium spork from China (£2 on eBay) and it is superb (it sticks to a magnet but I didn't expect more for £2).

**Hand Gel** I carry a small bottle of antiseptic hand gel in my stove/pan set if I'm spending any length of time away from home; it means I know that, at least once a day, my hands are going to be hygienic.

## Food/Drink

Plastic food containers are superb; clip-lock, Tupperware? etc. whatever you use, make sure it's watertight; test it before you go out. If you have a habit of sitting on your rucksack, sit on your containers to test them.

Tiny salt-n-pepper shakers are available for a few quid and are another indispensable luxury, though they could be a lot smaller still; mine will easily carry salt and pepper for two for a fortnight.

Plate/bowl; plastic seems to be best but there are enamelled and stainless options and even titanium for the wealthy; beware hot metal against any part of your body! Consider eating out of your pan to save weight and washing, many adventurers do this.

Mug; plastic, enamel, stainless or titanium; plastic is the most common and least likely to result in burnt fingers or lips.

Flask; useful for carrying hot or cold liquid; I use a small 500ml Thermos flask for fresh milk and a 1l Aladdin Executive flask for hot water or tea

Bottle; for water, also can be used as a hot water bottle at night if it's sufficiently robust;

Bladder; for use on the move, a 2l bladder is great for drinking water.

## Sleeping

Your sleeping mat is, arguably, more important than your sleeping bag as it reduces heat loss to the ground and provides comfort; lying on your sleeping bag flattens the insulating material so, without a mat you lose more heat to the ground than the air, even in summer you can chill. Inflatable mats are worth the investment and will let you sleep soundly. Self-inflating mats are also pretty good. Closed cell foam mats are much cheaper and OK for half the year at least, and you could double up. Other mats give poor performance.

Your sleeping bag is a snug nest in which you recover from your days of adventure; it must be comfy and warm. There are two types; synthetic and down. Down bags are rubbish if wet, synthetic bags are still warm if wet but much bulkier and heavier for the same insulation. A good weight for a 3-season down bag would be 1kg or less, 1.8kg or less for synthetic.

Down bags are typically much more expensive than a synthetic bag and they can cost a fortune. You can pay £180 or £960 for a bag with similar performance and life expectancy so doing the research before you buy makes a lot of sense. 2018 -2019 brands worth looking at for excellent value down bags include Summiteer, Alpkit and Columbus.

A sleeping bag liner protects your bag from you; you're a sweaty, wriggly, smelly, oily, scratchy animal, and the liner absorbs some of that impact and prolongs the life of your bag. It's a lot easier to wash the liner than the bag and you can use light essential oils on your liner to ensure you stay friends with your adventure buddies. Silk is best for longevity and comfort and needn't be too expensive (£20-£25); polycotton is cool in summer but holds sweat and is a lot cheaper (£5-£7). Thermal liners (Meraklon is one type) increase the warmth retention properties of your bag system by as much as 10°C so you can use a 3-season bag in much colder conditions, but they can be smelly and add extra weight.

Pillows are more important than you might imagine; if you have a bad night you'll be grumpy and tired so you'll have a bad day, ad infinitum. Pillows are easy to create from a fleece or two or you can buy a £2 pillow off Ebay or be super nice to your friends and adventure buddies and go for the Gucci Exped Air Pillow.

## Lighting

A headtorch is an essential camping item and needs to be reliable in all conditions. There are cheap Chinese headtorches available on EBay but they will let you down sooner or later. There are many very good headtorches that will last a lifetime, all will now have an LED light source and will, ideally give several nights of light with 3 AAA batteries. If you work in the wet, go for an IP rated waterproof headtorch, from £20 upward, so that it doesn't conk out in the rain. In winter and on extended trips I will carry a spare headtorch with the same performances as my go-to. I also keep a small lower power headtorch in my first aid kit.

Using LSD (low self discharge) rechargeable batteries and carrying at least one pack of spares is a good strategy. Duracell or similar high power, single use batteries are the best emergency spares; they don't discharge for years. If you use rechargeable batteries as spares, check and recharge them regularly; most will discharge quite rapidly.

## Other Stuff

Loo roll is best carried in a Ziploc bag; cadge a half-used roll from somewhere, take out the cardboard inner tube, stuff the roll into the Ziploc bag so the hole in the middle is accessible and pull the paper from the middle of the tube when needed.

Trowel: If you're responsible and courteous, carry a trowel so you can dig a hole for your "compost". Supermarkets and pound shops sell £1 plastic trowels that can be sawn off to lose half the weight. Remember that you don't let the trowel touch your "compost", just use it to dig the hole into which you lay your golden egg!

Carry-out Bags: If you go into a pristine area, you may need to carry your "compost" out so you'll need a suitable carry out system. This usually involves a way of holding a bag open so that you can drop your bomb and then tie the bag so that it never sees the light of day again. The choice of bag is important as some are not vapour-proof and you will lose friends quickly and get eaten by bears with any luck; make the right choice! It would be wise to lock your parcels in a loudly-labelled airtight food box, which will also help ensure that you retain friends.

Cleanliness kit; depending on how long you go out for, you may want to carry a toothbrush, micro-flannel, micro-fibre towel, antiseptic gel, etc. If I go out overnight I'll not bother with anything other than the antiseptic gel which I keep in my stove. Any longer and I tend to take the least I can get away with and retain friends. In warm conditions I will swim myself clean and air dry if possible. In cold conditions personal hygiene tends to be limited to a pit-n-bits wash with a flannel.

Human beings have developed the unique combination of intelligence and idiocy that enables us to be more accident prone than any other animal, with the possible exception of the lemming. So take a first aid kit! It needn't be complex; a 50cm strip of gaffer tape, a couple of 10cm Melolin dressings, a few plasters and a conforming bandage will cope with most damage. First aid kits are like lingerie; very personal, occasionally shocking but only closest friends get to see them. There are many lists online that you can trawl through. One day I might list what I carry. If you're heading into tick country, get a tick remover!

Boots n waterproofs; essentials in any UK remote terrain. Make sure your waterproofs are waterproof and, ideally, breathable. Do not be fobbed off by the manufacturers twaddle. If they don't work, return them and get your cash back. Boots are like underpants, each of us has our own preferences; they need to be comfortable all the time and shouldn't get wet on the inside.

Clothing; ideally your favourites but synthetics or wool remain the go-to materials for functionality and performance unless it's hot in which case cotton rules but only for a day, then it needs washing. Merino wool has the advantage that you can wear it for weeks without it becoming overly smelly; some synthetic baselayers tend to need to be burned

after a couple of strenuous days. I bought expensive Patagonia baselayers 20+ years ago and the investment paid off; I still use them and they've become very comfortable.

Spare clothing; even if it's just spare socks. Spare sock are become spare mitts, something to hold a hot water bottle in, slippers, a present for a bestie with cold wet feet, a camp volleyball, a spaghetti strainer, etc. Just think what you can achieve with other spare items! Seriously though; a spare dry layer when you've been cold and damp is worth the few extra ounces.

Navigation aids; map and compass as a minimum. I recommend not using electronic navigation aids other than in an emergency. I have OS Locate and OS Maps on my phone but haven't ever used them in the field. A simple compass costs around £5 and the best, in my opinion, costs £25. It'll last forever if you look after it and will get you out and back if you learn how to use it. I print maps from the OS Map web site and put them into a small map case which I roll up and stick in my jacket pocket with my compass.

Sandwich bag or carrier bag for litter. Always pick up and bin more rubbish than you take out.

Contact; you do need to be able to contact the outside world; if you're an adult, you have responsibilities; carry a phone. You know how long your phone lasts so if you're out for longer, take an appropriate power-bank. I recommend switching your phone off when you're out on adventures; otherwise it's a distraction for you and a potential annoyance for others. At least silence it. If it's not waterproof, keep it in a waterproof bag, case or box.

### **The Author**

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