

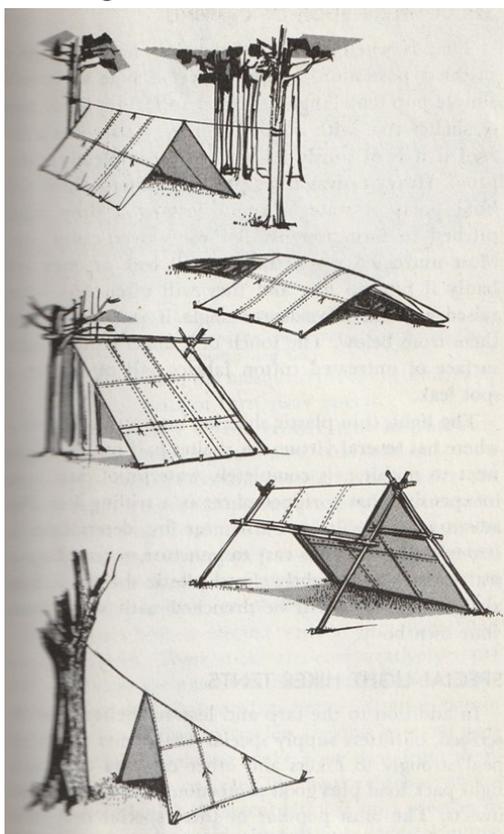
TENTS, TENTS, TENTS

By Dale Olson



I like tents. So many designs, so many choices. What's the right choice for you? My first recollection of a tent was when I was 3 or 4 years old. We had a fitted cloth that fit over a card table and was painted like a house complete with little flowers around the edges and a slot for a door. Sometimes it was in the house and sometimes we took it outdoors. I could take my stuffed toys and a blanket and spend what seemed like hours hidden away in this secret hiding place. Somewhere along the line this tent and Puff the Magic Dragon were cast aside.

By the time I reached 12, I was ready for a real tent. I saved up enough money from stacking hay for neighbors that I could now afford to buy a pup tent. Sears and Roebuck advertised a neat little pup tent for \$7.00. I barely had enough money for both it and postage. I hurriedly filled out the order form and sealed my money in an envelope and peddled my Hiawatha down to the mailbox. In about a week the package arrived. I remember thinking that sure is a small package. When I got it set up I was completely satisfied. The fact that it did not have a floor or a door did not dampen my excitement. I spent many nights sleeping in that little tent.



My folks were farmers, there was not time for camping. They could not understand why anyone would want to give up a nice soft bed to sleep on the hard ground with hoards of mosquitoes and other crawling things that could bite or sting you. I must have a gene that surfaced after many generations of being repressed by civilization marching forward to new and modern convenient things like houses and beds that begged me to come back to the days of old.

After a few years I once again turned to the good old Sears and Roebuck catalog. I needed a bigger tent, one that I could stand up in. There I found a green canvas wall tent, 6 foot by 8 foot. Just right for me and a couple of buddies. I scraped together my hard earned money from working for the neighbors and sent \$15.00 plus shipping of about one dollar off to them. Oh yah, this was the cat's meow. No floor but it had a door that you

could tie shut. The farm had a creek with trees and hills, a perfect place for boys to explore and camp in. There were a couple of summers I know I slept in the tent more than I did my bed.

Now of course once you buy a tent you must purchase gear for camping. So, you guessed it, back to good old Sears. They made a lot of money off me. I already had an army surplus mess kit and canteen, but now I needed something to cook in. They had a great cook kit that nestled into each other with aluminum plates and plastic cups included. I think this cost me somewhere around \$7.00. My buddy bought one from Montgomery Ward's for about a dollar less. We quickly realized mine was the better quality one. This was back around 1960, I still have mine intact minus the cups and still use the coffee pot on nearly every campout. Good stuff.

As the years passed and work and family became the main focus, my camping gear became play things for my kids. My tent was soon in shreds, the mess kit and canteen left outside in the trees, air mattress and sleeping bag succumbed to the elements. That was alright though, as they needed to be upgraded.

My next tent was a lean-to. This was alright, the kids were small enough that they fit next to the roof and kept it up off me. I found however, that it was hard to get dressed inside of this tent. The roof was probably only 4 or 5 feet high at the peak.

Next I bought a tepee. I was into the mountain man rendezvous at this time. Kids didn't need sleeping bags just throw a hide or two over them and they were happy. Lots of room but bulky to pack around and then there is the matter of poles. You had to drive to where you were going to erect it. There were times I went to the opposite extreme and slept many nights under a tarp or just under the stars.

Soon I had an 8x12 wall tent, an umbrella tent and an assortment of back packing tents of all sorts of shapes and sizes. Two man back packing tents are like sleeping in a jail cell, and breaking out of them is about the same. Try to unzip the door and bug screen in a hurry and you can almost count on the zipper getting caught in the material, and for some of us old folks that have to get up in the night, the urgency to escape this cocoon is immediate and patience is short. Oh, and the fact that you can't stand up in them adds to the frustration.



When I finally get settled down for the night in this compact little house, I remove my sheath knife, pistol and bear spray, it makes it a little lumpy to sleep with them on my belt. So I lay these all out in a row along with my flashlight. I place them within reach so I will be able to find them if necessary. Inevitably when I reach for the flashlight, it never is where you left it!

Oh foolish me! This got me thinking, most of my camping is within the Yellowstone Ecosystem, the home to the largest concentration of grizzly bears in the U.S. That's why the bear spray. Now if an old grizzly bear came snooping around my tent in the middle of the night just how in the world do I think I'm going to get up, fumble with the flashlight, try and find the zipper to open the door and shine the flashlight around. You know the zipper is going to get stuck. Then what? In all the excitement just hope you don't discharge the bear spray in the tent. So what's next? Bear comes and puts his humongous paw on your tent and collapses the thing with you wrapped up nice and snug like a bug in a rug. Can't shoot, might hit him in the butt or paw. Now he's extremely ticked off. What good is the knife with this big Teddy Bear lying upon your chest? Might just as well put these thoughts out of your mind and get some sleep.

Now this brings me to what I think is the ideal tent. Some of you may never have heard of the Baker Tent. This tent has been around for a long time, sometimes called the Hunter's Tent. This is simply a lean-to with straight sides and a 1 to 2 foot wall on the back side with an awning in the front that can be cooked under or dropped down sealing the front of the tent in inclement weather. Why seal yourself in when you can clearly see what is going on around you. If you have horses, you just have to prop yourself up on your elbow and see what is happening.

I believe the perfect size for 1 or 2 people is 6 foot deep by 8 foot long with a 2 foot wall and 6 foot at the ridge. High enough to stand up in to pull your pants on. I also think removable side curtains on the awning would be nice if it's raining or the wind switches directions making it almost like another room. With a fire built under the awning you can be snug and comfortable in most any weather. Be sure to always pitch your tent with the back facing the prevailing winds otherwise it might billow up like Aunt Bertha's dress. Happy camping.

