



A good night's kit!

PHILIP POND looks at ways to sleep well while camping

GOODNIGHT! THAT SUMS IT UP nicely. We all want a good night's sleep in camp, whatever type of unit we use. Whether we get one depends to a large extent on our bed.

Stating the obvious? Maybe. There are several possible combinations of features – much more than at home – that are essential for a bed giving a comfortable night's sleep in camp. And if you want to stay snug, they all need to work, and work well together.

Firstly, bedding. Take your duvet or sheets and blankets from home if you wish. But don't expect it to be very practical or even particularly warm, come to that.

A sleeping bag – or two zipped together in the case of a couple – makes much more sense and is essential for lightweight campers and backpackers. It will be warmer and cosier, have fewer (if any) draughts and be easier to handle when making the

bed, and breaking camp too.

Don't forget pillows. Those probably are best brought from home although you can buy travel versions – usually inflatable – designed especially for camping use.

Then consider the bed itself. For caravanners, motorhome fans, and devotees of trailer tents and folding campers, of course, that comes with the unit. But for campers and backpackers we're talking air mattresses, foam mats and folding camp cots here.

The biggest differences between these three are size and weight. Foam mats score for convenience en route as they are usually lighter and more compact. Folding camp cots, whether aluminium-alloy or steel framed, offer proper off-the-ground sleeping but are the heaviest and bulkiest to transport. Air beds offer a happy compromise, fitting somewhere in between.

FEATURES THAT COUNT

Synthetic sleeping bag fillings Usually made up of hollow fibres, these are the most popular type of sleeping bag filling because they are less expensive, work even when damp, are easier to clean and dry and don't cause allergy problems.

Natural sleeping bag fillings Compared with synthetic fillings, duck and, even more so, goose down are lighter, last longer, keep you warmer for a given weight of filling and compress more, making packing and transportation easier.

Air beds These inflatable mattresses arguably provide the most comfort when sleeping in camp. Shortcomings are limited insulation, the risk of punctures and the

chore of inflating them, although electric pumps get around that last problem.

Open-cell foam mats Inexpensive, comfortable, compact and lightweight, they are made of sponge foam with lots of tiny air cells that provide better insulation than air beds. The drawbacks are water absorption in wet conditions and lack of durability.

Closed-cell foam mats Durable and non-absorbent, they provide high levels of insulation but are quite stiff and firm and are therefore less comfortable than open-cell mats.

Self-inflating foam mats They are as comfortable as open-cell mats, provide better insulation and are waterproof

buyers' tips

Insulation The filling in a sleeping bag provides insulation by trapping air. It should be easily compressible (for packing) but with the loft springing quickly back into shape when shaken out.

Shape Choose between rectangular sleeping bags – roomier, more suitable for warmer-weather camping and usually less expensive – and body-hugging, mummy-shaped models that are much better for backpacking and cold-weather camping.

A good fit To make sure before buying that your chosen bag and bed are the right size, try them out first in the showroom (after removing your footwear of course). Yes, really.

Pack it in Weight and bulk are much more important for backpackers than car campers. So, when buying, take along your rucksack to see how well everything fits.

Construction On sleeping bags, sewn-through construction is suitable only for warm-weather models. Offset-quilt and (pricier/more efficient) shingle designs are best for synthetic bags used in winter, with baffles providing the most warmth in down-filled designs.

Temperature rating Also called season rating, it gives an indication of when and how well, during the year, a sleeping bag will keep you warm. Such ratings are only an indication and a rough one at that. The best advice is to choose a model suitable for colder weather than you'd ever expect to experience.

because of their nylon outer shell. But they are heavier than other types of foam mat, costlier too and subject to punctures. To inflate, simply open the captive, screw-type valve and the mat automatically 'breathes in'. You can give it a few puffs to help it along if you wish.

Folding cots The simplest and least-expensive type have several separate steel legs that are sprung into place on a frame supporting a length of polyester or canvas under tension. A concertina frame on which the steel legs fold out gives easier assembly, with aluminium-alloy adding a bit more sophistication and reducing the weight (but raising the price).>

PHILIP'S CHOICE

Campingaz Convertible Quickbed £30

This is a winning combination of comfort, versatility, practicality and value for money, although you need to allow an extra £30 for an electric pump. From a packed size of just 28 x 33 x 13cm, it inflates to produce a choice of beds. Choose between two 188 x 74 x 19cm singles or, using one clipped on top of the other, an extra-comfy single of that size but double thickness or, with them clipped side by side, a 188x148x19cm double. Electric inflation takes under two minutes. A two-year guarantee should allay doubts about the durability of its PVC construction. **Weight:** 3.8kg.

Easy Camp Self-Inflating Mat £45

Versatility is a strong point of this double-size, open-cell foam mat, which has two inflation valves. We rated it highly too for ease of use and a higher level of comfort than you might expect, given its slimness (3cm). It's not short on length, at 1.88m, and adequately wide at 1.3m. Sleeping alone? Then fold this bed in half and benefit from the extra comfort provided by a double-thick mattress. Either way, the 6cm-thick integral pillow does its job effectively. Packed into its drawcord stuff sack, this Easy Camp bed reduces in size to 67x23cm. **Weight:** 3.2kg.

Vango Large Alloy Campbed £55

'Large' says the name and large this single bed is – an expansive 2.1m long by 80cm wide. No shortage of sleeping space then. And, a plus point for those who like to snuggle up well away from any creepy crawlies, a good 47cm above ground. Unfortunately that also translates into a large packed size too: 103 x 20 x 11cm inside its zipped bag. Assembly takes a minute or so. You simply unfold the alloy, triple-leg body and locate two loose rods that are threaded into sleeves to tension the polyester fabric. No padding, mind, so no insulation either. **Weight** is a hefty 7.2kg.



ALSO CONSIDER...

**Coleman Elle +12 Sleeping Bag £35**

Mummy-shaped bag designed for women, that's roomier around the hips and chest area. Soft, comfy flannel lining, 150gsm of hollow-fibre insulation with extra 40gsm around chest and feet. Size: 205 x 59-82cm packed, 37 x 20cm. **Weight:** 1.25kg.

**Eurohike Electric Deluxe Airbed £40**

A built-in, battery-operated electric pump runs on four D cells (not supplied). That inflates this 180 x 135 x 21cm, flock-covered double air bed in two-and-a-half-minutes. Packed size in its stuff sack (after a struggle) is 37 x 25cm. **Weight:** 4.8kg.

**Sunnflair Baubles Super King Sleeping Bag £38**

Extra-large (203 x 92cm), rectangular sleeping bag containing a hefty 450gsm of hollow fibre insulation. Inner is a warm-to-the-touch polyester/cotton. Unzipped, it makes an excellent duvet. **Size packed:** 46 x 28cm. **Weight:** 3.1kg

**Vango High Rise Airbed £65**

A built-in 230V electric pump features on this extra-thick (40cm), flock-covered air bed, which measures 1.9 x 1.4m. Inflation took just over two-and-a-half-minutes. When it's packed away in its stuff sack it measures 35 x 27cm. **Weight:** 5.6kg.

**Gelert Freedom Lady Self-Inflating Mattress £40**

This lightweight, compact open-cell-foam 'ladies-design' sleeping mat comes in a tasteful shade of lilac. Designed for one person, it measures 180 x 50 x 3cm and has a single inflation valve. Packed size: 28 x 15cm. **Weight:** 7.5g.

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