

SLEEPING BAGS

Sleeping bags, like a lot of other technical outdoor equipment, come in a bewildering array of options. It is amazing that something as simple as a padded bag can be made so complicated. However, choosing the wrong sleeping bag can result in a very unpleasant night. Getting the choice right can mean the difference between loving the experience and never wanting to do it again.

The perfect sleeping bag would pack up to the size of an apple, not weigh much more and be completely waterproof. It would also have the unique property of keeping you warm in the winter without getting too hot in the summer. Sadly this bag does not exist. The sleeping bag you buy will be a compromise between, weight, temperature performance, pack size and cost.

“...man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore...”

Andre Gide 1869-1951



Down versus Synthetic

Down bags are warmer than synthetic for the same weight of bag and pack up much smaller. They also operate over a wider temperature range. But, and it is a big but, down bags will not work when they are wet. Synthetic bags will. You will also need deep pockets to buy a down bag but provided you look after it, it will last a lot longer.

Getting a good nights sleep

- * Be warm before you get into your bag—do some exercise to warm up if necessary
- * Be well fed and watered
- * Plump up your bag to maximum loft
- * Insulate your self from the ground
- * Wear dry clothes inside the bag
- * Use a stuff sack filled with clothes as a pillow
- * Lie still—if you move about you disturb the warm air insulating you
- * If you're getting cold—put on a hat, dry socks and gloves
- * If you feel cold don't just lie there, do something about it

For the Duke of Edinburgh expedition, you can expect temperatures close to or just above freezing overnight. You should therefore choose a sleeping bag that is comfortable down to zero degrees centigrade.

Guidelines for sleeping bags

- Get a 3 season mummy shaped bag that will keep you warm at 0°C;
- Keep your bag dry;
- Put an insulating mat between you and the ground.



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How warm is a bag

How long is a piece of string. All manufacturers rate their sleeping bags with temperature and season ratings. These use EU defined tests to act as a guide to how well a bag performs. They can only ever be guides, however, as no two people are the same.

The question to ask yourselves is are you a warm or a cold sleeper. This is determined by your own physiology but there are a few guidelines:

- * Girls feel more cold than boys;
- * Fatter people sleep warmer;
- * Hungry and very tired people sleep colder;
- * First time campers sleep colder than seasoned mountaineers.

If you are a cold sleeper or just hate being cold you might want to add a few degrees to the required comfort rating of the sleeping bag.

Looking after your bag

It is important to keep your bag clean. If you don't, it will start to smell and the filling will not loft as much. It will also be very cold when your mates evict you from the tent. Using a sleeping bag liner can help in this process. A liner also adds a couple of degrees to the bag's temperature rating. If you can afford it, get a silk liner as they pack up very small, weigh very little and add a touch of luxury. Cotton liners feel very cosy. They don't pack up as small, weigh a bit more but are much cheaper.

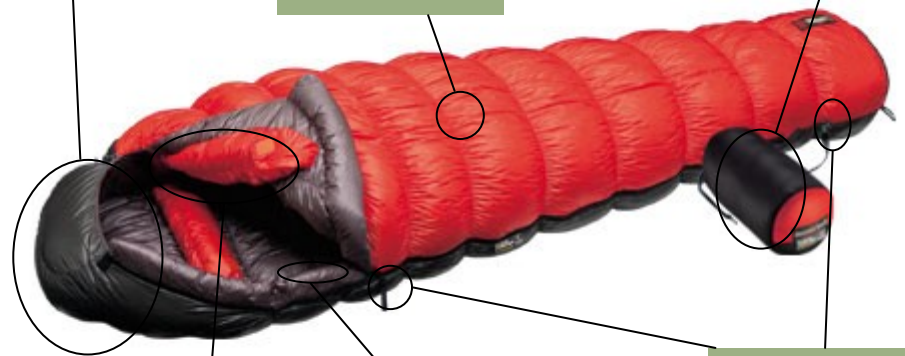
Cleaning a sleeping bag is not easy and must be done with care otherwise you can damage the filling and the internal baffles that keep the filling in place. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions. If you have a down bag it is better not to clean it at all. If you must clean it, take advice, use the correct cleaning products and be very very careful.

Store your bag in a large bag, not its stuff sack. If you store the bag compressed, it will not loft as well.

Hood—Make sure it fits snugly around your head and has a draw cord to pull it tight.

Outer Fabric—This should be light and if possible have a water resistant coating. The inside of a tent can be a damp place in the morning due to condensation. You want drips to run off not soak in.

Stuff sack—Don't roll your bag, stuff it in. Don't store your sleeping bag in its stuff sack, it compresses the loft. Hang it up or use a large bag.



Neck/Collar baffle—Enables the sleeping bag to be tightened around the neck and shoulders to keep the warmth in.

Zip baffle—Runs the length of the zip and stops drafts coming through it. Check the zip doesn't snag on it though.

Zip—Try and get a bag with a zip that opens at both ends. Good if you get too hot. A velcro flap at the top of the bag is useful to stop the bag unzipping while you sleep.

Keeping your bag dry

Do not underestimate the misery of sleeping in a wet sleeping bag. You only have to do this once to understand the importance of this advice. Hopefully, by following this advice, you will not have to experience it.

- * Stuff your sleeping bag into its stuff sack
- * Use the compression straps to compress the bag to as small a volume as possible. If your stuff sack does not have compression straps, it is worth investing in one.
- * Pack the compressed rucksack in either a heavy duty plastic bag, rucksack liner or a waterproof stuff sack
- * Ensure that the bag cannot come into contact with anything wet inside your rucksack.

When you get to camp, be organised. Make sure you are dry when you get into the tent, then unpack your bag. Lay it out and plump it up. It is best if one person does this for everyone in your group. If you are wet, stay out of the tent. During the night condensation may build up on the inside of the tent. Make sure that your sleeping bag does not come into contact with this. In the morning, if you can, air your sleeping bag before packing it away again as before.