

Choosing A Sleeping Bag

Troop 518 Training

The basic device for sleeping and overnight thermal protection for all Troop 518 outings is the sleeping bag. The sleeping bag is one of the most important pieces of camping equipment the Scout uses. It represents a major expenditure and great care should be used in its purchase. Like shoes, the sleeping bag needs to be chosen with care.

The following guidelines should help in your selection of a sleeping bag. Keep in mind that selecting a sleeping bag will involve some compromise. No one sleeping bag will meet all the needs of an active Scout. Cost will always be a major factor, but a carefully selected sleeping bag is an investment in future adventures and enjoyment. A good sleeping bag will last for years with just a little care. In our opinion the following features are generally accepted as mandatory:

- We suggest a 20 degree or better rating, insulated with DuPont Hollofil or fowl down
- Also purchase a weatherproof carrying bag or "stuff sack"
- Should have a heavy-duty zipper with an easy to find pull-tab
- Should be sized for your Scout's height
- Total weight should be less than 4 pounds
- Should be machine washable for easy care and cleaning
- Should have loop(s) at the foot to allow easy storage hanging

There are three different designs for different uses and weather conditions.

Rectangular

The basic rectangular sleeping bag is the most commonly found and comes in a variety of sizes, colors and temperature ranges. Those that fully unzip so that the bag can lay completely flat have many advantages. These can be used as mattresses when sleeping only under a sheet. Identical bags can usually be zipped together to make one double sleeping bag. Pinning a bed sheet liner into this type bag is also easier due to the greater access. These bags are roomy and very comfortable for people who kick or move in their sleep. However, the greater material usage means these bags weigh and cost more for the same temperature range.

Mummy

The "mummy" bag is a minimum material and minimum weight bag designed for use by one person. A mummy bag has an internal drawstring that gathers a section of material around the sleeper's head, which greatly adds to the temperature rating of the bag. As such, the thermal ratings on the mummy bags will always be the lowest available. However, because these bags are generally purchased for very cold environments the zippers usually do not run the full length making them hard to enter and exit. The tapered design and tight cut of the material can also restrict nighttime movement. However, they will fit into the smallest possible backpack space.

Modified Mummy

The "modified mummy" uses the best features of the rectangular bag and the true mummy bag. Most modified mummies feature the internal draw string for enclosing the user's head. They usually feature better than average temperature ratings and lower weight, which are pluses. However, the taper is not as pronounced as in a full mummy and so a great deal of sleeping comfort is retained. Adding to the comfort is a longer zipper than on the full mummy. All this means these type bags are *generally* a better value for the type camping and temperature ranges our scouts will encounter.

Recommendations

Peak1 and **Slumberjack** make very nice bags in this weight, temperature and price range. These are available at Sports Authority and other local stores for about \$75. They are durable, easy to care for bags. The storage loops are somewhat delicate on the Peak1 and care must be used when hanging.

Sources

Sports Authority and **REI** are two good local sources for new sleeping bags. There is a **Coleman** store at the Commerce Outlet Mall (I-85 @ exit 50). You can order anything on-line from **Campmor** (www.campmor.com).

Occasionally, sleeping bags can be found at **Play It Again Sports**, garage sales or from friends. However, never buy a bag unless the manufacturers tag for temperature rating is still attached. A night of 20 degree weather is not the time to find out you got a great deal on a 50 degree bag. Also, sleeping bags tend to collect a lot of personal odors. Buying a used bag is like buying used pajamas.

Sizing Hints

There are a limited number of 3/4-sized children's bags available. If your son is 5' 2" and not likely to grow much in the next two years these may be a great way to save you money and your son the back packing weight. However, the bag still needs to meet the necessary temperature requirements.

Storage Hints

At home, all sleeping bags worth buying should be stored hanging from the storage loops, unzipped and open in a dry place. The stuff sack or compression sack should only be used for transport to and from the campsite. A bag stored rolled up will develop mold spores from the captured water and may never regain its full thermal characteristics.

At the campsite during the day the bag should be loosely stuffed into a large garbage bag to guard against rain.

Advanced Tips

- Remember: It has to go on a backpack! Think small. Think lightweight.
- To reduce the overall size of a sleeping bag a \$20 device is available from **REI** called a "sleeping bag compression sack". These can progressively compress the bag to 1/2 its normal storage size.
- To restore a compressed bag's thermal capability the bag should be unpacked an hour before use and the insulation filling fluffed up by shaking the bag.
- The scout should not sleep with bare skin against the inside the bag. We suggest a cotton sweat suit. Cotton and synthetic sleeping bag liners are also available. These will reduce the odor and the use of a common sweat suit will greatly increase the thermal rating.

More than anything else, remember this: the Troop staff is always happy to talk to you about equipment purchases. Please do not hesitate to call any or all of us if you have any questions.

Rev 1-17-99