**Going solo: the call of wild camping**

Posted by [Tina Gardner](http://community.thebmc.co.uk/Profile.aspx?id=4) on 24/07/2014



A camp beside mountain lakes and tarns can offer spectacular views but beware of midges and mozzies and be mindful of rising water levels. Respect the water source - dispose of any soapy water well away from water courses and toilet areas must be at least 30 metres from water. Also if you're likely to disturb lakeside flora and fauna then choose another spot.

Once you start wild camping alone you'll never want to wait for an adventure again. And you won't need to – it's right there and ready for you. Sarah Ryan encourages you to discover the beauty of wild camping, but make sure you know the legalities – whereas wild camping is legal in Scotland, it is a civil offence in England and Wales unless you get the landowner's permission.

It's possible to let fear get in the way of heading out alone on the hills, especially when that fear is graphically informed by horror movie images. Even more so when those images parade through your mind in the darkest hours of the night as the tent rustles and the wind blows. Far from being dangerous though, assuming that you're adequately prepared, discovering new places alone can be as refreshing as a fortnight away and incredibly liberating. Here's why you should pack your tent and do it:

**1. It'll skill you up**

Almost every time you wild camp alone you'll come back with a shortlist of things you could have done better: food you didn't need but dragged 1,000m uphill and back again and kit you definitely did need and didn't have. It's harder to notice this stuff when there's two of you because there's double the chance you'll have it, but it's a brilliant way of highlighting areas where your skills are a little lower. The same applies for navigation and camp craft. You'll come back with a much clearer idea of what you could develop and after a few trips you will have fine-tuned your kit and navigation to an impressive degree.

**2. It sharpens your intuition**

It's much easier to hear that little voice when there's only you around and it's an important one to listen to. Your intuition could well be informed by something you hadn't consciously clocked. This can be really important when it comes to decision making in poor weather or in hairy situations. It's also useful to know how to differentiate between a subconsciously informed sense that something isn't right and simple, garden-variety fear. It's a subtle but important difference. Fear can stop you doing something but intuition is information.

**3. The freedom to do what you want, when you want**

It's fantastic to go away with friends; to share a breathtaking view, pool your food at the end of the day and chat late into the night. But don't let everyone else's busyness stand in the way of your awesome weekend. If you've got time to get away and a plan for where you want to go, then pack your rucksack, dubbin your boots, and do it. It's too easy to let perfect weekends slide away. After you've done it once, you'll find yourself eyeing up every vacant diary space.

**4. Look impressive**

You'll find yourself with some cracking pub stories and can absolutely use it on your CV. “Independently organised several multi-day expeditions,”? Why, yes. Yes, I have.

**5. It's brilliant**

These are all quite considered reasons to go out camping alone but the real thing, the real reason, is that it's just fantastic and never stops being so. Having the mountain to yourself as the late day's sun drops below the horizon creates an unmatchable feeling of freedom and elation. Waking up in the night with a desperate need to pee is horrible until you clamber out of the tent to see the darkened night sky glimmering with stars. And waking up, alone, looking out across the hillside as the sky glows from dawn red to pale morning blue and the mist lifts from the valleys below. Well, it's frankly just amazing.

All of this assumes of course that you're properly prepared, you have the right kit and you know how to use it. Don't venture out unless you feel confident in all of these areas. Check the weather and always leave a note detailing your route and plans. [Check out this essential hill walking know-how](https://www.thebmc.co.uk/essential-hill-walking-knowhow).

And now a quick reminder from the BMC...

**Know before you go!**

**The legal status of wild camping**

Under [CROW](http://www.naturalengland.gov.uk/ourwork/access/openaccess/default.aspx) wild camping in England and Wales is prohibited but this has yet to be tested in law. When land is [common land](https://www.gov.uk/common-land-village-greens) it does not mean there is a right to camp on it. Some National Parks do welcome wild camping, as long as you act responsibly and leave no trace of your visit behind you. For instance, [Dartmoor National Park](http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/visiting/vi-enjoyingdartmoor/camping) has a map of areas where you can camp on common land. If in doubt, find an official campsite and do some preliminary research.

Wild camping is permitted in Scotland on the proviso that you follow the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/) (SOAC) and provided that you do so responsibly.

**Minimise your impact on the environment**

If you do choose to go wild camping, or experience something close to wild camping, think carefully about your impact – both physically and visually. Whenever you wild camp (aka ‘no trace camping’) leave the site as you find it. For instance, respect water sources, carry out all your litter, avoid trampling sensitive habitats and only camp in one place for one or two nights on dry/well-drained ground that won't be easily damaged.

The Mountain Bothies Association deliberately don’t advertise where bothies are located for good reason; it retains the wild experience and minimises environmental impact.

# Hill skills: how to go lightweight camping

Posted by [Alex Messenger](http://community.thebmc.co.uk/Profile.aspx?id=2) on 22/08/2013



Photo: James Maddison

Lightweight camping always seems like a great idea – especially when slogging uphill strapped to a 90-litre monster. But packing light is a dark art – some mountaineers can squeeze all their gear for a multi-day mission into a day sack, whilst others almost need Sherpas for a single overnight camp. What can you do to lose a few pounds?

### What is lightweight?

We’ll dispense with ultra-lightweight tips as this is not an article on bivvying and we’ll assume a modicum of comfort is required. Start with your thinking – to go lightweight needs a paradigm shift in your approach. You need to forget what you’ve done previously and start again. Set a weight limit (mine is 15kgs) and stick to it. In order to be lightweight you should purchase the lightest bits of kit that meet your requirements – this takes a bit of trolling around shops but can be worth it. As a rule, climbing equipment is lighter than walking equipment and does the same job.

### Rucksack

Buy a climbing sack, not a walking sack. You don’t want unnecessary pockets or heavy back systems, just something generally tough with lots of straps to attach things to. For example, the Lowe Alpine Peak Attack weighs just 1,400g. Often people use rucksack liners to avoid kit getting wet but just check the weather – if it’s going to rain then wrap your dry stuff in your tent when packing.

### Sleeping

We Brits have a fondness for the Terra Nova Quasar (4,300g) but there are lighter tents. For comfort, check the ground area against the weight and take your pick. The Terra Nova Voyager 2.2 is a spacious two-man tent weighing just 2,400g. Sleeping well is essential so don’t shirk on warmth but remember you’re camping, not bivvying, so are unlikely to get your sleeping bag wet; buy one with a down ﬁlling and no zips. The Helium series from Mountain Equipment is very good indeed, at just 600g. Use the lightest sleeping bag you can get away with and take a down jacket for the evenings and to sleep in if need be – such as the Mountain Equipment Xero (430g). Using a three-quarter-length self-inﬂating Thermarest with honeycomb foam contributes just 300g to your total. Use your rucksack, clothes or ropes to insulate your legs from the ground.

### Food and drink

Ok, so we’re on 5,130g so far. For cooking I use a 100g Pocket Rocket but a quick trawl of the internet reveals that stoves can be as light as 50g! A gas canister is 250g. Use a titanium pot and one spoon: weight 150g. Food is essential but careful planning will tell you exactly what you need. Use dehydrated foods that cook quickly. Rice is a good energy source but will use a lot of gas to cook. Noodles have more energy gram-for- gram than pasta (346Kcals per 100g versus 175Kcals). A packet of Supanoodles weighs 150g. They’re good for breakfast too, so let’s call it four packets per night: 600g.

Hopefully you’ve planned your route so you should have a good idea whether you’ll ﬁnd water. Puriﬁcation tablets weigh less than water, and in Britain you’re not likely to be far from water or help so don’t panic. Use collapsible water bottles or buy some water from the supermarket. Avoid metal water bottles – these are very heavy indeed and use up space even when empty.

### Clothes

What you wear contributes to your fatigue but, personally, I hate being cold. To save weight I tend to carry my thermals and wear my heavier shell layers when walking. My spare clothes weigh about 1,000g. Obviously you’ll also need a few essentials, which could include a torch (30g), compass (20g), map (10g), phone (100g – incredible, I know) and First Aid (200g-ish but be sensible – don’t be tempted to use your ﬂeeces as bandages should the worst come to worst, they do not absorb liquid, that’s the point).

### Shave those extra ounces

Every ounce counts. A few little tips to shave off those extra ounces could include:

* Cut your map to size
* Use thinner gloves and put your hands in your pockets more often
* Avoid the ‘Russian Doll’ effect. I’ve seen so many ‘organised’ people hefting out stuff-sack after stuff-sack. Six stuff-sacks weigh 200g. You’re camping – what else are you going to do in the evening? Liven things up by trying to ﬁnd your missing items! This also applies to your sleeping bag and tent – just shove them in
* Don’t wash – I’m serious. Who cares? Soap, spare socks and toothpaste all add up
* Don’t be tempted to put in an emergency bivvy bag – you have a tent

### Don’t look back

So, by my reckoning all camping equipment required for one night should weigh a maximum of 7540g – call it 8000g with luxuries such as chocolate, tea or coffee and maybe a mug. If you’re going walking you’ll have a spring in your step and if you’re heading off climbing you’ve got 7kg spare for your climbing gear.

The most important thing is a shift in your thinking. Yes, you do have to think it’s important enough to weigh all your possessions but the reward is worth it. Your experience in the hills will be signiﬁcantly enhanced without hefting around huge amounts of excess weight. Since becoming lightweight, I've never looked back.

Danny John Brown has been an instructor since 1990, now he is splits his time between physiotherapy and delivering coaching and training courses. Contact him at *dannyjohnbrown@yahoo.co.uk*

## Expert Q & A

This issue's expert is **Steve Holmes** – a qualiﬁed Mountain Leader and Aspirant Mountaineering Instructor based in Scotland. Steve works as a freelance instructor delivering a wide variety of courses and group charity events. He can regularly be found leading expeditions overseas. Find out more at [www.verticalfever.co.uk](http://www.verticalfever.co.uk)

**Q. What's your top lightweight tip?
A.** Don't forget your body weight. You may save 3kg buying expensive state-of-the-art gear but you could still be carrying an excess load after too many mince pies! It costs nothing to lose a few inches around the waist.

**Q. Ever had a lightweight disaster?
A.** Yep, I was camping at 4,500m on Mount Kenya and got a puncture in my Thermarest. I’d sacrificed my puncture kit to save weight and the gaffer tape I’d wrapped around my water bottle for such an eventually turned out to be too old to be sticky. Needless to say the following five nights were pretty cold.

**Q. Do I really need to chop my toothbrush down?
A.** Yes why not, it all counts. Let’s face it, if you’re paying an extra £40 for a specific lightweight piece of equipment to save 100g then every bit of weight counts. For me that includes cutting toothbrushes down, squeezing out toothpaste and even cutting out labels and unnecessary oversized tabs on clothing. Every gram counts.

**Q. Is it worth splashing out on ultra-lightweight gear?
A.** If you intend on using your gear regularly then yes, you’ll certainly feel the benefits. But if you’re just planning a couple of lightweight trips each year then there are cheaper options. Chopping unnecessary straps off rucksacks, discarding heavy stuff sacks and emptying your food out of bulky packaging are just a few ideas.

**Wild camping worries**

Posted by Cath Flitcroft on 22/09/2010



Camping ‘wild’ is a different way of spending the night outdoors but it isn't allowed everywhere - with a responsible approach however, there are many remote areas where you can still rest your weary head under a star filled sky.

***The law***

Camping ‘wild’, snowholing and bivvying are very different ways of spending the night outdoors than staying at an established campsite. Contrary to popular belief, wild camping is not permitted by right on [open access land](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/places/openaccess/default.aspx) in England and Wales without express permission of the landowner. However it is permitted in Scotland on the proviso that you follow the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](http://www.outdooraccess-scotland.com/) (SOAC) and provided that you do so responsibly.

When land is [common land](https://www.gov.uk/common-land-village-greens), like a lot of the New Forest, it does not mean there is a right to camp on it, especially as this could conflict with commoners’ rights to graze animals. Some farmers and landowners may allow camping if you ask them but if in doubt try and find an official campsite.

Some National Parks do welcome wild camping, as long as you act responsibly and leave no trace of your visit behind you. For instance, [Dartmoor National Park](http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/visiting/vi-enjoyingdartmoor/camping) has a map of areas where you can camp on common land. If in doubt, find an official campsite and do some preliminary research – there are some websites that recommend ‘[remote’ camp sites](http://www.thehappycampers.co.uk/campsites/wildcamping/) and the [National Parks website](http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk/visiting/camping.htm) gives details of camp sites and camping barns in each of our National Parks.

***The do’s and don’ts***

If you do choose to go wild camping, or experience something close to wild camping, think carefully about your impact – both physically and visually. Here are some suggestions;

* Whenever you wild camp (aka ‘no trace camping’) leave the site as you find it.
* Keep your group small and as discreet as possible.
* Camp away from popular areas – your presence may attract other campers to your unofficial ‘site’.
* Be inconspicuous. A green tent may blend into the landscape whereas a brightly coloured tent can spoil the view. It is best to remove your tent during the day, especially where other walkers are likely to pass by.
* Camp in one place for only one or two nights and on dry / well-drained ground that won’t be easily damaged.
* Pitch the tent in a way that avoids having to cut drainage ditches or move boulders. If you do have to move large stones replace them later - these are likely to be the homes of small insects and plants.
* Try to avoid picking a site that means you have to cross sensitive areas to collect water or go to the toilet. If the campsite is on soft or boggy ground pitch the tents further away from each other, this will minimise trampling between tents.
* Litter – plan ahead. If you brought it all in you should be able to take it all out! Carry out all litter – even biodegradable material is slow to decompose in the mountain environment and may be scattered by animals. Do not dig rubbish into the ground or try to hide it under boulders. Try to take away any other litter left by people less considerate than you.
* Fires can be highly destructive. Apart from the risks to you, wild fires can be very damaging to vegetation. Heathland fires on blanket bog can burn into the peat and destroy the habitat. The limited amounts of dead wood in the uplands are also essential habitats for the insects on which birds and other animals feed. Charred fire sites are also unattractive. Use a stove for cooking and put on more clothes, or snuggle down in your sleeping bag to keep warm.
* Clean, pure water is a valuable resource relied upon by many people living in the mountain regions. The nutrient content of streams in most upland areas is low, and altering this by adding pollutants and soap could kill local insect and plant life. If you have to wash, dispose of soapy water well away from water courses. All toilet areas must be at least 30 metres from water. Always consider your impact downstream.

Don’t always head for the most obvious sites: they can suffer from overuse. If a site looks well used then try to find an alternative and let it recover. When choosing a location, remember that it’s not just humans that are attracted to water. Your lakeside spot might be a great place to spend the night, but it’s also a natural habitat for some pretty specialised flora and fauna. If you’re likely to disturb them, choose another spot.

***Keeping warm and dry***

Be ruthless when planning what to take. Identify what you won’t need and leave it all behind. When packing, the knack is to minimise the weight of each individual item, so that together there is an appreciable saving. For wild camping, ideally take a one-man tent, a three-quarter-length lightweight self-inflating mat, a summer-weight down sleeping bag, a Jetboil stove plus small canister, a plastic mug and spoon, some boil-in-the-bag rice and some dehydrated or boil-in-the-foil food.

These days boots and waterproofs are watertight, so there is little need for spare clothing and your tent should keeps you dry in the rain, so there’s no need for an additional bivi bag. You can of course take even less than this, and bed down in the open under a foil blanket, nibbling dried fruit for tea. It all depends upon the type of ‘memorable experience’ you want to have.

Finally, think about what you’re carrying all your kit in. Whatever size your rucksack, you’ll fill it and larger sacks are heavier, especially when incorporating adjustable back systems. For a three-day trip, take a simple 45-litre sack, weighing about ten kilos when full.

Finally, and most importantly, check the weather and pack accordingly. A cold and wet forecast could see you taking extra food and another drybag containing spare thermals etc. Enjoy!!