



Setting Up in the Rain

By John Walters, BPX Chair and Veteran Trip Leader Who Loves Learning...but not necessarily on a cold and stormy night

Here, John shares some lessons from a camping trip in Staunton State Park where it was raining when he arrived at the Park.

Background

Staunton State Park was opening its new campground and I wanted to check it out. Thinking day one would have a lot of campers, I booked weeks ahead to assure a spot. Another reason for a local overnight was to check out my new, "Cold Never Again," minus 20-degree sleeping bag--for camping, not backpacking. Expecting a full house I wanted to be as far from the parking lot as possible. It was raining when I arrived and didn't let up for most of the night. From the parking lot, I packed my backpack and lugged the duffle bag containing the huge sleeping bag, a two-person camping tent, and some other camping gear several hundred yards to my reserved campsite. Turned out I was the only one who showed up for opening day.

Be Prepared

I had full rain gear--rain shell with hood, rain pants, waterproof hiking boots, backpack cover, and waterproof gloves. My backpack was lined with a compactor bag to protect my sleeping bag, extra clothes and puffy. All my other rain-sensitive gear was secured in waterproof dry sacks or double-sealed freezer baggies. I had waterproofed my well-worn rain jacket for an earlier trip, so it was ready for action. The rain shell wetted out, but moisture never seeped through to my clothing. I also carry a ball cap to wear when it rains, to keep the front of my hood from dropping into my face, and to shield my glasses from the rain.

Tent SetUp.

Practice setting up in the rain at home, in fair weather

Arriving at the campsite, I stopped and looked around. No shelter. The ponderosa branches were too thin to offer any protection. My first thought was, I should have thought through how to set up my tent in the rain at home, in fair weather..

If I had someone to help with setup, it might be faster. But no matter how fast, some rain will get inside the tent. However, if you are intimately familiar with your tent, a helper might actually slow you down. Think it through. Had I brought my tarp, I could hang it, set up under the tarp, then move the tent and stake it down. But with no tarp and no help, I just dug in and set it up as fast as I could. There may be better ways, but that will take thought and practice. There is no standard. Every tent is different.

Mop Up

Use a sponge or tent towel to mop up

Getting rain on the tent floor is nearly inevitable. I had a camp towel for mopping up, but it was in the bottom of my duffel bag. The stuff inside the duffel got wet just looking for the camp towel. I gave up pawing through the duffel until I could move it inside the tent. Now I keep a tent towel at the top of my backpack or duffel for quick access.

Padded Tent Entrance

Use a Foam Pad for Kneeling at the Entrance to Your Tent.

I carry a 40% length of Z-Pad strapped to my backpack to use as a sitting pad, emergency ground insulation, and as a kneeling pad at my tent entrance. This time I really needed the kneeling pad because I spent a lot of time on my knees mopping the floor and arranging my gear. The other 60% of the foam pad is carried on camping trips in my duffel bag to place under my sleeping pad for additional insulation and as a backup in case my sleeping pad fails.

What About the new, “Never Cold Again,” Minus-20-degree Bag?

What You Sleep [On](#) Is As Important as What You Sleep [In](#)

My bag was a new-fangled idea with no bag insulation underneath, to save weight and expense. The system relies on an insulated sleeping pad to keep the cold ground from sapping your body heat. My Insulated sleeping pad, plus the 60% Z-Pad under that, should have kept me warm. But I still got cold from the ground.

I slept in merino wool long johns and my topside was as warm as toast. But even when hot on top I could feel the cold ground in my shoulders, back, hips, and legs. The innovative sleeping system did not work for me, even though the low temp was a mild, high-30s. I returned the bag for a zero degree mummy, which was much warmer, even on the same sleeping pad with the same overnight temps.

Conclusion:

So I'm now an expert on setting up in the rain. But you can be, too. The next time a monsoon comes our way, just head to your local campground. Practice makes perfect.

Lots of details? Yes. Because it is the minutiae that makes or breaks a great trip.