

Wilderness Gear Notes: Sleeping pads and sleeping bags

Sleeping Pads – Needed for warmth, not just comfort

- There are two kinds: foam and inflatable
 - Foam: be sure it is **closed cell foam**. Otherwise, you will be sleeping on a sponge. “Egg crate” pads are open cell, don’t get them. The original closed cell brand was Ensolite, but there are others out there now. Two very popular ones are Ridge Rest and Z-Rest.
 - Inflatable: The major brand is Therm-a-Rest, but there are now imitators on the market that seem to do about as well. Don’t get the full-length model, $\frac{3}{4}$ works just fine and is lighter, less bulky and cheaper. You can optionally get a cover that turns the Therm-a-Rest into a camp chair – not a necessity, but a nice luxury. Do not store an inflatable pad rolled up - it will lose its cushioning. Store it flat; I keep mine under a bed. Do not confuse self-inflatables with conventional air mattresses that you blow up. Those are heavy, bulky and always leak in the middle of the night.

Sleeping bags

- Get mummy style. They are warmer, less bulky, and weigh less for a comparable amount of warmth
- Get synthetic fill. There are many brand names like Quallofill, Hollowfill, etc. They are variations on Dacron. Do not get down fill. Down is a great insulator, is very light, and compresses the best of anything, but it is useless if it gets wet. Dacron is a good second choice.
- For our trips, a bag rated to 30 degrees should be good enough, but if you tend to be cold when you sleep you may want to go down to a 20 degree bag.
- The bag should stuff to no more than 10” diameter by 18” long, less if possible.
- Do not store the bag in its stuff sack, it will lose its compressibility and no longer keep you warm. Loosely stuffed in a breathable bag is OK. An example of a breathable bag would be a cotton laundry bag. A plastic trash bag is not OK, you will start to breed exotic life forms in your sleeping bag.
- Some examples are the North Face Cat’s Meow, and Slumberjack Thermolite Extreme. There are many others to choose from.

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