

Tents

Essentials

The ability to identify different types of tents is a useful Scouting skill that will ensure you select the best tent for a camp or expedition. It is also important to know how to pitch (put up), strike (take down), maintain and store tents properly.

Large Scout camps often employ heavyweight tents which sleep up to six people, while smaller camps and expeditions, which often demand lightweight or portable equipment, typically use one-, two- or three- person tents.

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Types of tents



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Features

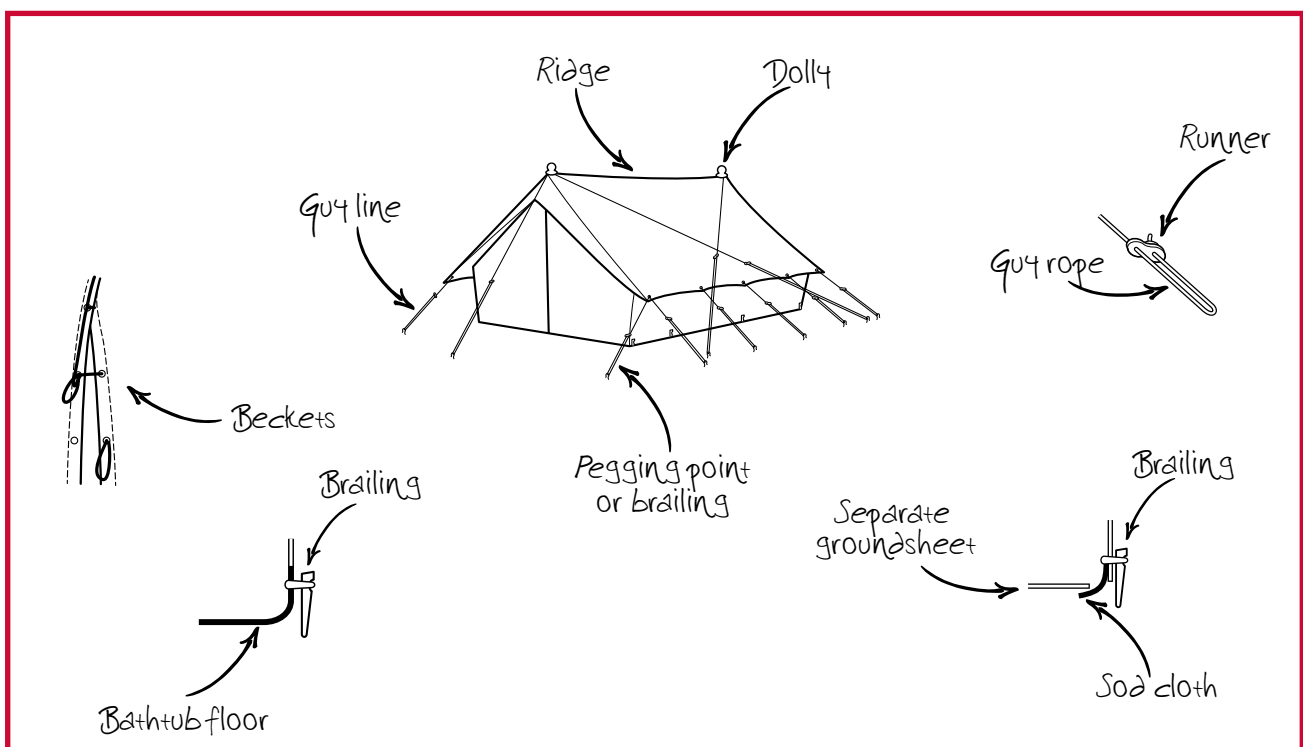
When selecting a tent, compare features to ensure that the type will suit all your needs. Think about the weight of the tent when packed, its dimensions, headroom and footprint (how much space it takes up on the ground). Key points to consider are:

- **Construction** – tents can be of single wall or double wall construction. Single wall tents feature one layer of waterproof but breathable fabric, which makes them lighter and often easier to set up. They can suffer from condensation problems, so open all vents and flaps to air the tent in dry weather. Double wall tents use an inner canopy and a separate flysheet to provide protection from the elements.
- **Groundsheets** – tents are available with sewn-in or separate groundsheets. Sewn-in groundsheets offer the best protection from draughts and insects but can suffer from condensation as they are less well ventilated. Separate groundsheets provide good ventilation inside the tent but do not offer the same level of protection.
- **Material** – common tent fabrics include canvas, nylon, polyester or polycotton (a polyester-cotton blend). Canvas is a traditional and hard-wearing tent fabric, but is relatively heavy. Man-made fabrics are lighter and are often treated to help resist tears (eg 'ripstop' nylon) or given a waterproof coating.
- **Season rating** – modern tents are often given a season rating to describe their suitability for different conditions. Three-season tents are suitable for general camping in

spring, summer and autumn, while four-season tents are suitable for year-round use. Expedition tents are sometimes given a 'five-season' rating, meaning they are suitable for extreme weather conditions.

- **Shape** – the shape of a tent dictates how much room there is inside. Different types of tent with similar footprints can vary greatly in shape. For example, high-roofed rectangular designs often make use of square profile poles to increase headroom, but this makes them more susceptible to wind. In addition, lightweight tents often feature a vestibule or sleeping pods. These increase useable space inside the tent to help keep the sleeping area dry. A vestibule is a good place to store boots and kit.
- **Structure** – tents can be freestanding or non-freestanding. Freestanding tents will retain their shape before pegging out, which makes them easier to pitch and move around camp. Non-freestanding tents must be held under tension to retain their shape, so guy lines must be well placed. However, they're often lighter than freestanding tents.
- **Poles** – traditional tents have wooden or steel poles, which are strong but heavy. They are now only common in older style tents. Lightweight tents make use of collapsible poles. These can be attached to the tent fabric by clips or sleeves. Sleeves create a very solid, windproof structure, but care should be taken during pitching to avoid snags or tears. Clips make pitching fast and easy, and promote airflow, but are less stable in windy weather.

Parts of a tent



Glossary

- **Bathtub floor** – describes a sewn-in groundsheet that curves a few inches up the sides of a tent to prevent leaks.
- **Beckets** – used on older and traditional style tents to close up doors, in place of a zip. They can be loops and toggles or loops and eyelets, which should be threaded through each other.
- **Dollies** – a wooden top that sits on top of an upright pole. It secures the tent fabric and provides an anchor point for storm guys, which take the strain of the tent in heavy weather. They are only common on older or traditional style tents.
- **Flysheet** – a waterproof outer layer, which is usually made from a heavier and more durable material than the inner. Some tents do not have a flysheet.
- **Groundsheet** – a heavy-duty waterproof sheet that forms the floor of the tent. The groundsheet may be separate or sewn-in.
- **Guy lines** – also known as guys or guy ropes. These lines are tied to the tent and secured in the ground with pegs. They pull the tent fabric tight to create its shape and anchor the tent to the ground. They should be kept taut to avoid sagging.
- **Guy-out loops** – fabric or rubber loops located along the edges of the tent, for securing guy lines.
- **Inner liner or canopy** – the inner part of a double-walled tent. In lightweight tents this is usually a lightweight and breathable layer. When the tent is pitched, it should not touch the flysheet – the air gap between the two layers stops water seeping through.
- **Pegs** – used to secure tents and guy lines. They can be made from plastic, wood, steel or aluminium.
- **Pegging points or brailings** are small loops at the bottom edge of a tent for placing tent pegs. The loops can be made of cord, fabric or rubber, and are usually located at strong points such as seams.
- **Poles** – are typically made from wood, steel, fibreglass, aluminium or carbon fibre. Wooden and steel poles are used for older and traditional style tents. They are strong and durable, but also heavy. Fibreglass poles are used for inexpensive, light-duty tents. They are light and cheap to replace but not very durable. Aluminium poles are strong, light and durable, and are commonly used for mid-range tents. Carbon fibre poles are found on high-end tents. They are super-light and very strong, but more expensive and slightly less durable than aluminium.
- **Ridge** – the top of an A-frame tent, from which the sides slope away. On a patrol tent, this is formed by a ridge pole. Do not place anything between this pole and the tent fabric, as this encourages water to seep through.
- **Runners** – wooden or plastic brackets that are attached to guy lines. They are used to tighten the line.

- **Sod cloth** – a piece of sacking that is attached to the bottom of a patrol tent. It is tucked under the groundsheet to prevent water getting inside the tent.

Good practice

- Tent sizes generally do not include allowances for equipment, so when buying a tent it is often necessary to subtract one person from the manufacturer's recommendations. A two-person tent will be comfortable for one with kit, while a three-person tent will be comfortable for two with kit. Always check dimensions and if possible view a pitched example of the tent before purchase.
- Practice pitching and striking a tent before taking it on camp.
- Make sure that the seams of your tent are taped. If not, apply seam sealer to prevent water entering via the stitch holes.
- Consider making a tarpaulin footprint to protect your groundsheet. Place your erected tent on top of a tarp, trace the outline with a marker and cut it out. Cut a few inches inside the line, as a footprint that is slightly smaller than the tent will prevent water from being channelled underneath.
- Avoid pitching tents under trees or on stony ground.
- Close tent flaps before pegging out. This maintains the shape of the tent and ensures that you'll be able to close tent flaps easily.
- Slacken the guy lines of canvas tents at night or if rain is expected, as water causes canvas shrinkage. This may result in pegs being pulled from the ground, broken ropes or torn tent fabric.
- If pitching a lightweight tent and a pole jams when being threaded into a sleeve, it is likely that one of the metal joints is caught. Check for snagging and release it.
- Tighten guy lines periodically to prevent sagging, but do not place them under excess tension.
- Prevent condensation forming inside tents by opening vents in mild weather and keeping storm flaps rolled unless needed.
- If staying on the same site for some time, move tents occasionally to aid grass recovery.

Safety guidelines

- Guy lines are a major trip hazard when using tents. Ensure that Scouts are aware of their positions. You may want to mark guys that present likely dangers with flags, or use reflective/high visibility guy lines.
- Don't obstruct campsite tracks or walkways with tents or guy lines.
- Avoid pitching tents under trees (in case of falling branches) or on the banks of a river or lake.
- Familiarise yourself with campsites shortly after you arrive. Ensure that you are aware of potential hazards such as lakes, rivers or ponds and that you know where the campsite exits are.

- Make sure tents are positioned well apart from each other to prevent the risk of a fire spreading. Check the specific rules at your campsite; some recommend that tents are pitched six metres apart.
- Devise an escape plan and be prepared to cut your way out of a tent if a fire breaks out. A fire can destroy a tent within 60 seconds.
- Never use naked flames inside a tent.
- Where possible, cook outside and away from tents. Even if cooking in a dedicated kitchen or mess tent, be on your guard. Keep all stoves away from the roof and walls of the tent and keep flammable material, such as gas canisters, away from the cooking area. Ensure all matches and lighters are stored safely.

Care of tents

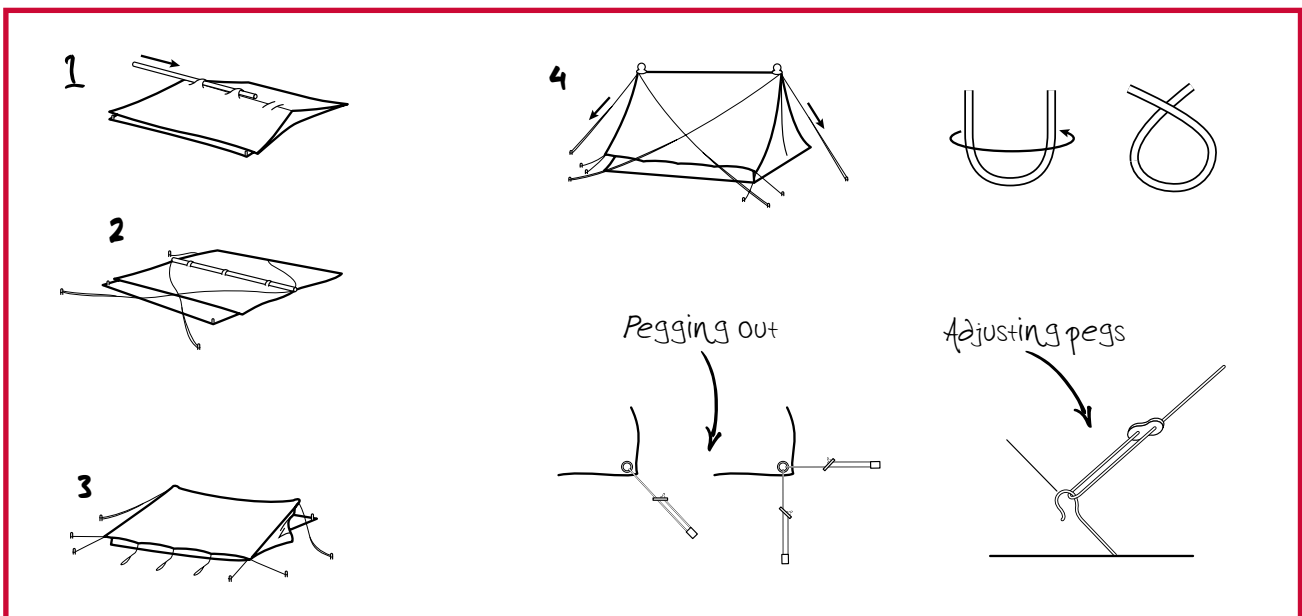
- Never let objects (or Scouts!) touch the inside of a tent in the rain, as water will seep through the fabric.
- Remove shoes and boots before entering a lightweight tent.
- Do not walk over the flysheet or inner liner of a tent when pitching or striking it, as this may damage the fabric.
- Do not cut corners – always pitch tents properly, and fold and pack them carefully for storage to avoid damage.

Pitching a patrol tent

A patrol tent is the traditional Scouting tent. It usually requires at least three people to pitch it.

Lightweight tents are designed to be easier to pitch than patrol tents, and pitching can usually be done by one or two people, depending on the size of the tent. However, individual types and models vary considerably, so refer to the manufacturers' instructions for help.

1. Find a clear, flat area of ground. Ensure that the door of the tent will not face into the prevailing wind.
2. Empty the tent bag and lay out the various parts of the tent. Ensure that you are not missing any vital parts.
3. Peg out the groundsheet in the intended position.



Pegging out

- Use a wooden mallet to hammer wooden pegs into the ground, and a rubber mallet to hammer in metal pegs.
- Pegs should go into the ground at a 45-degree angle. Guy lines should pull on them at a 90-degree angle.
- A tent peg is at the correct depth when the notch just keeps the guy line off the ground.
- To secure a peg in loose soil, sand or snow, employ holdfasts such as rocks or logs to brace the peg. You may even be able to bury these in the ground. Alternatively, use more than one peg for each guy line, or fasten guy lines to trees.

4. Open out the tent on the ground, inner side uppermost. Assemble the ridge pole and uprights, and feed the ridge pole through the loops attached to the ridge of the tent, taking care not to stand on or damage the canvas.
5. Put in four large pegs for the main guy lines. Don't anchor them too deeply – they will probably need to be adjusted later.
6. Place the spikes on the uprights through the holes in the ridge pole and the eyelets in the canvas. Then fold the canvas over to form the ridge of the tent.
7. Attach the main guy lines to the previously placed pegs and put the dollies over the spike of the uprights. Reposition the pegs as necessary.
8. Stand the tent upright, raising the uprights simultaneously to avoid bending the spikes. Hold the uprights until the main guy lines have been tightened. The tent should now be upright but unsteady. Ensure that the doors of the tent are done up. Peg out the door and corner brailings.
9. Peg out the other guy lines, starting in the middle and working towards the corners. This allows sag to be taken out and keeps walls taut. Generally, if a guy-out loop has one guy line it should be pitched straight out. If it has two guy lines, they should be placed in line with the seam they are supporting. Place pegs so that, when taut, the runner is about a third of the way up the guy line.
10. Loop and peg out the brailings to keep the tent walls straight. Looping the brailings helps prevent them slipping off the pegs.
11. Adjust the main guy lines as necessary, checking that the tent poles are upright. Do not move the poles when the guy lines are taut. A patrol tent can be storm set to provide extra protection against bad weather by

crossing the main guys diagonally backwards.

STRIKING A TENT

In general, a tent is 'struck' (taken down) in the reverse way to which it was pitched. However, there are a few useful points to consider.

- If your tent has a separate groundsheet, take this up first. Remove it from the tent and turn it over to dry the underside. Remove grass and dirt before packing away for storage.
- Remove tent pegs by slackening the guy line and using it as a handle, caught under the peg notch. Pull in line with the direction of entry by bending your knees and then standing up.
- Scrape dirt and soil from pegs before packing them away.
- Tie guy lines up by folding its length into thirds, then tie the whole bundle in an overhand knot. This means it will always come out straight and unknotted by simply undoing the overhand knot.
- When folding collapsible tent poles, start from the centre to prevent excess strain on the inner shockcord.
- Most tents can be easily packed back into their bags by simply folding the inner and flysheet into a long thin shape, the same width as the bag. Then roll the tent around the poles to expel the air.
- Try not to pack a wet tent. In some instances this is unavoidable, but ensure that tents are unpacked and dried as soon as possible. Damp tent fabric and guy lines are soon affected by mildew and will start to rot.

Find out more

You can often download pitching instructions from tent manufacturers' websites. For further guidance on tents and campsites, the Nights Away resource and the *Outdoor Adventure Manual* (Haynes, 2013) are useful references. A wide variety of tents and camping equipment is available from Scout Shops: scoutshops.com