

Synthetic sleeping bags dominate market

By DAVE STEINMAN
Of the Emerald

Buying a quality sleeping bag is not difficult, but there are a few things to know before making a purchase.

Insulative materials can be either synthetic or natural. Down is natural. It gives best loft per pound, but water-soaked down, at best, retains only 17% of its original loft, something to keep in mind for rainy Oregon. Goose down is the best quality, raising a bag's price to \$400. Duck down is used in less expensive bags, having about 40% less loft. The compromise is called prime goose, found in what most manufacturers consider their very good bags. In dollars this translates to \$200 to \$250.

Unfortunately, there have been scandals in the outdoors outfitting industry where cheap grades of down have been substituted for better grades. A buyer's best bet is to stick with a respected industry name such as North Face, Sierra Designs, Trailwise, Holubar or Sundown.

In Eugene, synthetic filled bags outsell down by 50 to one. Synthetics, when wet, retain at minimum 85% of original loft. Also, synthetics can

provide equivalent heat at same weights as a down bag even though twice as much material is needed.

"This is because synthetic fill doesn't need baffling like down does," says Bob Taube of Sundown Sleeping Bag Co. in Eugene. "But a down bag will outlast a synthetic twice as long. Also synthetics compress as easily as down and have about twice the volume."

The best synthetic material on the market is Polarguard, though Dacron 2 can be found in cheaper bags, says Taube. Polarguard filled bags can run anywhere from \$80 to \$150, depending on temperature rating.

Rip stop nylon and taffeta are commonly used for a bag's outer shell. Taffeta is found on less expensive equipment. Rip stop gives the highest tear strength per weight and can be distinguished by its little checkered patterns formed by using heavier threads. Only small manufacturers of

sleeping bags, such as Sundown, will take the time to "hot cut" their rip stop nylon. Hot cutting fuses fiber edges together to prevent fraying.

Sometimes an expensive down bag will have a Goretex outer shell. Tri-nyl is a new product used for an inner lining. It's soft as cotton for a more comfortable feeling on the inside. Expect to see it in specialty stores for the first time this summer. For the time being, an outer shell of rip stop is good enough.

The larger space of a rectangular (also known as barrel) bag means less warmth for the same amount of fill. They also don't have hoods, which are important since 30% of the body's heat is lost through the head. Mummy bags are the preferred choice for anyone planning to be outdoors in all kinds of weather.

A good mummy bag will have a zipper that goes within a few inches of the bag's foot, as well as double

zipper tubes or a wind flap.

People intending to share two bags zipped together should buy two-way separating zippers. Also, don't forget to buy a right and left handed bag. A right handed person should buy a left-handed bag as it is easier to zip across the body than down the same side. Two-way separating zippers can be distinguished by being able to be zipped from the top or bottom.

The best way to tell a bag's quality is to check the way zippers are sewn into a seam while the least expensive bags will have zippers that show both edges of the fabric away from the teeth. As for temperature ratings, manufacturers always overrate and synthetics like Polarguard lose a little loft after being used a few times.

To get a good bag go to a specialty shop whose business livelihood is dependent upon selling quality outdoor gear.

Seeking out experienced outdoors

people and asking their opinions of different manufacturers bags, as well as the different options available is usually better than taking advice from sales people, who, good intentioned they may be, tend to favor the equipment their store handles. Shopping around is a good idea and waiting for off-season sales can save a person about 20% off the price they might be paying during the middle of summer. Generally, the best time to buy a bag is around April or November.

Once a bag is bought be aware of how to clean it. Down bags should be cleaned professionally by a dry cleaner who will not use Perk cleaning fluid. Synthetic bags can be machine washed in cold water; too much heat will melt the bag. For drying, either hang a bag outside or use air-fluff dry. Use a front load machine when washing so the bag won't get wrapped around the agitator of a top loader which could destroy it.

Awareness preparation precludes accidents

By JACK CONDLIFFE
Of the Emerald

Editor's note: The information contained in this article on winter recreation safety was provided by Eugene Mountain Rescue.

Awareness is the key to safety in winter recreation, awareness of personal abilities and limitations and of the dangers presented by Mother Nature.

Through awareness of these factors, 80 percent of the risk involved in cross country ski trips, mountaineering or other slowly will disappear.

A number of basic precautions will help make any winter trip into the woods and country more safe and enjoyable.

Clothing — Clothing should be adequate to protect against all types of weather conditions. Raingear and windproof clothing are as important as clothing to protect against zero degree temperatures. Insulated underwear is a must.

Shelter — Winter tents should be able to bear the weight of heavy snowfall. If your group is large, a snow shovel should be taken to dig a snow cave or an igloo.

In especially cold weather, a snow cave is the best and warmest protection. Contrary to popular thinking, body warmth will not generate enough heat to melt the walls of a snow cave except for maybe a few droplets running down the sides. Small gas stoves can be used, with caution, inside these shelters.

Equipment — An essential item for any trip into the wilderness is a first aid kit, and the knowledge to use it. For ski trips, proper wax and a ski repair kit, including an emergency tip, should also be taken along.

Enough food should be taken for two or three more days than the trip is actually planned for, along with extra clothing. Also take and know how to use a map and compass.

Ten Cents — Some dimes should be taken for emergency phone calls.

Avalanches — Avalanches can occur under any conditions, though recent snowfall or a sudden rise in temperature are signs to look for.

Avalanches occur commonly on slopes of less than 100 feet, not just on larger hillsides.

Experience — Beginning outdoors adventurers should venture out with



Photo by Kurt Wojcik

Cross country skiers should be adequately dressed and prepared for emergencies before they go on extended trips, says Eugene Mountain Rescue. Up to 80 percent of the risk involved is due to the ignorance of ill-prepared participants.

someone with experience, especially for a longer trip. Experienced members of a party should check the equipment of inexperienced members to insure that no essential items have been forgotten.

Beginning winter mountaineers should have summer climbing experience and travel with people who have climbed before under winter conditions.

Leave Word — Always tell someone in town where you are going and any alternative plans you may have. Be sure to mention when you expect to be back.

In Case of Emergency — For an injury, give first aid to the victim and make them as comfortable as possible. Put up your tent or build a makeshift shelter if at all possible. Send for help. When calling for help call the county sheriff's office. Don't hang up until told to by the person taking down information on the other end of the line.

If you become lost, stay put. The easiest place for you to be found by searchers is where you are. Build a fire and put up a tent, or again, some kind of makeshift shelter.

Chicago bullies past Portland

CHICAGO (AP) — A key goal-tending call against Tom Owens with less than two minutes to go helped the Chicago Bulls to a 99-97 National Basketball Association victory over the Portland Trail Blazers Tuesday night.

With the Bulls leading 97-92, Mark Landsberger rebounded Artis Gilmore's missed shot and put the ball back up. Owens was tagged with the goaltending call and the Bulls had a six-point lead.

Portland came back with field goals by Maurice Lucas and Ron Brewer to cut the gap to 99-97 with 58 seconds to play.

John Brown then missed two free throws for the Bulls, giving Portland a chance to tie. But Brewer's jumps hot with two seconds to go bounced off the rim.

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