
There are many sleeping Bags currently on the market today and choosing the right one can be very difficult. Which style, insulation, and temperature rating do I need? These factors are important in order to purchase the bag needed for your intended use. Trying to decide what your needs are can be the most difficult part of the process. Here is where we come in! We will discuss some different types of bags and hopefully shed some light on this often frustrating process.

Temperature ratings play the most important role in the decision of purchasing a sleeping bag. Our manufacturers label their bags with a temperature rating. The rating allows the salesperson and the customer to know the minimum temperature the bag can sustain heat. However, the rating is only an estimate and should not be viewed as exact. Different people have different metabolic rates and generate heat in different ways, That is why it is extremely important in cold weather bags(≤ 20 degrees) and are camping away from adequate shelter, to be prepared for weather by bringing extra layers, food, and water. Layers help to insulate and food gives you energy to sustain heat.

There are factors that make up the comfort of a bag. Metabolism is important. However, most people do not know or can not acquire their metabolic rates. Keeping a good diet, along with hydrating the body play an important role in remaining comfortable. A well-prepared packer should have sufficient clothing for any situation. If you do not have the experience to know what is needed, try your local outdoor store and ask for the hiking guru. This person can sometimes shed some light on what is needed in different hiking conditions. Learn from someone else's experience. Books can help also.

Ground pads are necessary to determine a temperature rating of a sleeping bag. The pad acts as an insulation layer between you, your sleeping bag, and the ground. Without a ground pad, the ground will continuously pull heat out of the bag, rendering the bag useless.(Have you ever been to football game on an extremely cold day and you were dressed for the weather. Your nice and warm, until you sit down on the metal or cement benches, your butt gets cold and remains cold). SAME PRINCIPLE!!!

Ground pads are not just for comfort. Always purchase a pad with foam as core and not an air filled mattress. Air is a poor insulator and will continually pull heat from your bag, just as the ground, There are several ground pads adequate, for this use. Alabama Outdoors carries Therma-Rest, Ridge-Rest, and Metolious ground pads. It is also important to talk about the different styles of sleeping bags.

There are three different styles of sleeping bags:

3. SEMI-RECTANGULAR

Mummy bags are the most popular for backpacking and cold weather camping. They are the most thermal efficient bags available. They are made to fit close to the body by tapering down the legs. The taper cut allows for less circulation of air. Low circulation creates dead air which retains heat best. There is also a hood that covers the head. to create a cocoon around the body trapping the valuable heat.

Rectangular Bags are best suited for warmer weather camping. These bags are cut for comfort and not efficiency. Rectangular bags usually do not have hoods, which

makes it less desirable in cold weather. Tremendous amounts of heat can be lost through the head. These bags, because of their wider cut, have more circulation and less dead air making them more difficult to heat.

Semi-rectangular bags are considered a sort of hybrid bag that can be used in cool backpacking situations. They were presented to the market as an alternative to mummy bags, because many packers desired more room than mummies offer, while being lighter in weight and more compactable than their rectangular brethren.

To create these bags different materials and means of construction are required. There are two different types of insulation that exist today; down(natural fibers) and synthetics(man-made material). Down is the most efficient insulator on the market. Down is also the most durable. Some people still use the same bag for over 10 years without losing any thermal value. Down possesses the greatest amount of warmth to weight ratio. It is the lightest and most compressible of all insulators. One problem with down is that when wet, it only retains about 10% of its thermal value and takes a very long time to dry out. Also, when down is saturated it gains 128% of its weight. However, the shells used by many of the manufacturers are very water resistant and breathe well, making it more difficult to saturate the down.

There are four different types of down; 550, 650, 700, and 800+ fill power down. The "fill power" of down is an indication of the loft of one ounce of down in cubic inches. The higher the number (550 to 800+), the more loft the down has, therefore it offers higher insulation value for the same weight. 550 is the cheapest down available. It usually consists of down and feathers. Feathers do not work as well as the down fibers. 650 is a mid-grade quality down. 700, until recently, was the best down available. 800+ is currently the highest quality down, available. Is very difficult to source which makes it extremely expensive. It consists of strictly down fibers and little to no feathers.

Because of the down/saturation problem, man has been on a quest to create a more efficient, quicker drying, light, and compressible alternative to down. Synthetics are usually cheaper in price, but they are usually heavier, less compressible, and have a shorter lifespan than their natural counterpart. However, Synthetics dry quicker; absorb a small % of their weight when wet, and can keep almost all of their thermal value when wet. So there appears to be a compromise between the two. If you know that you will camp in wet conditions it may be safer bet to go with a synthetic.

If that is no concern and neither is price, go with down. When choosing a synthetic it is good to know the different types.

Hollofil II - A four-hole hollow polyester. This fiber is treated with silicon to give it a softer hand and make it more supple. Hollofil is the heaviest and bulkiest of all synthetics. However usually the cheapest. Great for car camping or sending boy scout on first(maybe only) trip. Polarguard- a longer continuous filament that is also made from polyester. The continuous construction enables this synthetic to be laid in any direction and aids the fill from shifting. This technique creates an extremely durable bag by preventing tearing. Tears in the filament can create cold spots, rendering the bag useless.

Polarguard is a mid-line synthetic good for the price conscious buyer and/or beginner not willing to sacrifice any quality. Polarguard also has a higher warmth to weight ratio than Hollofil. Polarguard comes in two ways. Regular Polarguard and Polarguard HV. HV is the newer filament that decreases weight and increases compressibility and price.

Because of the durability and price of this fiber, many manufacturers experiment with this material and in 1996, many companies have started to use Polargaurd 3-D, an even lighter version of the fiber.

Liteloft - the newest innovation in synthetics. The theory is taken from the natural design of down. Tiny fibers are intertwined in larger thick fibers that imitates down by boosting the loft of the synthetic fiber. The result is the closest fill similar to down. The most efficient of the synthetics, greatest warmth to weight ratio, greater compressibility, and keeps its insulating value when wet. Litelofts price is comparable to 550 down, but less expensive than 650 and 700 fill down.