



*To sleep, or not to sleep: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the stones and twigs of outrageous campsites,
Or to take arms against a sea of stubbles, and by opposing end them,
To sleep.*

Some folks call a sleeping pad a luxury; others call it a necessity. I'm of the latter school of thought. I like to feel rested in the morning, ready for another day. A sleeping pad helps smooth out those little pebbles that can grow to become gigantic boulders during the night. A pad provides insulation and, after a long day, some back support for the coming night. In general there are two types of sleeping pad, closed-cell and self-inflating.

The closed-cell pad is almost indestructible. It won't absorb water or leak. It is less expensive and lighter, but more bulky than a self-inflating pad. It will not compress when rolled. Some older materials may tend to crack in extreme cold. A closed-cell pad will absorb an extreme amount of punishment and still do its job - helping to keep you comfortable and warm. It does not require a stuff sack for protection. Some are, to a degree, shaped to body contours. It makes a good chaise lounge around camp.

If you graduate from a closed-cell to a self-inflatable pad, save the old pad. Use a piece for a sit-me-down when the ground is cold or wet. Use a piece under your stove in the winter for insulation, or as back padding in that inexpensive day pack. Use another piece as a kneeling pad in the garden. If you have a short self-inflatable, use a piece of the old closed-cell pad under the foot of your sleeping bag in colder weather. When day hiking in the winter, wrap a piece around your Thermos™ of hot chocolate.

The self-inflating pad is a backcountry luxury, the epitome of fine sleeping. Although it weighs more than a closed-cell pad, it rolls much smaller, and may cost 3-4 times as much. When fastened to your pack it will not catch as often on brush. You

would do well to carry it in a stuff sack, and to carry a repair kit with you so your pad does not literally 'let you down' when most needed.

Most folks carry their sleeping pad crosswise on their external frame packs. I carry mine vertically so there is less chance that it will catch (read catch and tear) on a branch.

Some self-inflatables can be joined for use with a significant other, and some convert into lounge chairs. They are available in different lengths, thicknesses, and widths. In winter some folks use a self-inflating pad on top of a closed-cell pad for extra insulation against the cold, c-o-l-d ground. You can readily adjust firmness in an inflatable pad by adding or subtracting a bit of air. But the moisture you add to the pad interior with your breath may cause it to decompose quicker than had you not done this.

Fix-it kits are available, and easy to use to repair that thorn hole. Get one. One of the newer sleeping pad stuff sacks even has a small pocket in which to keep a repair kit. Driving a car with a flat is no fun; sleeping on a pad with a flat is just as much non-fun. Make sure you keep the fix-it kit directions protected in a waterproof food bag.

Talk to your fellow hikers, visit your local outfitter store, and give yourself the blessing of a good night's sleep on the pad of your choice. (You'll notice there is no mention of a non-insulating air mattress in this little discourse. Nor have I mentioned open-cell pads which absorb water like a blotter).

Sleep well...