

INTRODUCTION

A decent night's sleep after a long day on the trail is one of life's rich rewards. But how do you guarantee eight hours of relaxation, at just the right temperature, on a mat that protects your back against rocks and with a pillow that doesn't give you a permanent crick in the neck? Sounds like a hard decision? Not really, just so long as you don't expect the bag to keep you comfy half way up Mt Everest and in a London YHA, weigh less than a kilo and take up no room in your bag at all!

Of course, the sort of mat that you are sleeping on and the pillow that you choose to use both make a difference to how comfy your nights sleep will be. But let's first consider the **perhaps the most important piece of kit you'll ever buy – your sleeping bag.**

Every sleeping bag manufacturer has two important fundamental decisions to make when they design a sleeping bag. First, what sort of insulating material to use (synthetic or down), and secondly what sort of design construction best suits the market.

SYNTHETIC

Du Pont make a range of synthetic fibres which are excellent at trapping air and being compacted so that they can be stuffed into a small bag. Quallofill® was the first well known synthetic fill, but it has now been superseded by Thermolite Micro® and Thermolite Extra®.

Synthetic sleeping bags are **ideally suited for cool to warm climates.** With packed sizes and weights similar to down filled bags at temperature ratings above 0° Centigrade it is easy to see why they are so popular. Synthetic fills have the advantage of **retaining their warmth even while wet or damp,** they are **easy to clean and dry,** and they are economical to buy.

Our range starts with bags rated to between +10°C and +15°C, so they're great for travelling to warm temperate and cool tropical climates. The warmest rated synthetic bag is -10°C and is therefore ideal for cold temperate and general alpine trekking climates.

Major Benefits

- Inexpensive
- Warm when wet or damp
- Easily laundered
- Compact stuff sizes for bags rated above 0°C

DOWN

Nature's best insulator is still head and shoulders above anything man-made. So when it comes to keeping warm, especially when it's freezing outside, down should be your first choice.

There is a fair amount of techno-babble about down sleeping bags but in reality there is only **one universally recognised measurement of down quality - Loft** (the volume filled by expanded down). Normally different downs are blended to produce a desired loft, however it is only necessary to remember that **the higher the loft, the better quality the down.**

Which Loft?

600 to 650 loft bags are ideal for the general trekker and traveller – people who need to know their bag will work and last the distance. As the potential harshness of climate and environment increases, so should the loft. Technical trekking and adventure travel bags have a loft of 700, and extreme alpine and mountaineering bags have a loft of 800.

Major Benefits

- Excellent insulator in very cold conditions.
- Long lifetime.
- Comfy and soft to sleep in.
- Extremely compact.

BAG DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Before considering technical construction issues **it is important to get inside the bag and make sure that it fits around you properly.** The ideal bag should minimise redundant airspace, and neck baffles and the hood should fit snugly. There are two very different types of specialty sleeping bag designs:

1. Tapered rectangular — imagine a rectangle shape and then trim the corners down on one end so that it becomes noticeably slimmer than the other end. The hood of the bag goes at the wider end of the rectangle. This shape is moderately thermally efficient, allows some leg movement, and can generally be opened out into a duvet.

2. Mummy shaped — imagine an Egyptian mummy and there you have it, a sleeping bag that completely surrounds you with no excess room inside. It moves with you as you turn and follows the contours of your body to provide maximum thermal efficiency.

Perhaps unsurprisingly synthetic bags are commonly of a tapered rectangular design, and down bags are a mix of designs, but nearly all high loft down bags are a mummy design. The bottom line is, if maximum warmth for minimum weight is your preference, go with a mummy. However, **if versatility and comfort are more important then consider a semi-rectangular sleeping bag.**

ZIPPERS

The longer the zip, the more versatility the sleeping bag will offer. Improved ventilation on warmer nights, the option to open the sleeping bag right out like a doona, even the ability to zip together two similar sleeping bags to make a double on those cold, lonely nights...

Zips usually have an insulated **'draft tube'** running along the inside of the zip to reduce heat loss. The trade off is that a sleeping bag with a full length zip and insulated tube will be just a little heavier than one with a shorter zip. Most bags come with the option of left side or right side zips and if looking to join the bags together, you'll need one of each.

Traditionally, mummy shaped bags will have a shorter zip for weight saving and thermal efficiency, while semi rectangular bags have full zips for versatility.

FOOTBOX

Most footboxes are rounded or fairly flat but some specialist bags may have an **inclined foot** which is designed to follow the natural angle of the foot when lying down. This ensures maximum warmth for weight. Other bags have special baffling in the footbox to **prevent cold spots** occurring from toes pushing against the end of the bag.

BAFFLES

Protrusions such as toes, knees, elbows and shoulders can push into the inner of the bag, shifting the down away and creating cold spots. To counter this, manufacturers place insulation into 'sleeves' or baffles, which are created either by sewing in mesh panels between the inner and outer shell, or by sewing the inner and outer together (sewn-through design).

The baffled version usually incorporates fine mesh panels which form a wall between the inner and outer. The degree of thermal efficiency needed will determine the type of panel wall used, eg some are vertical, known as box walls baffles but slant walls are better and **trapezoidal baffles are the most thermally efficient.**

Sewn-through designs keep insulation fills in place but create cold spots where the inner and outer meet. This method is generally used on budget bags for indoor conditions where minor cold spots don't matter. **Tapered rectangular bags have versatile baffle systems that permit some down movement.**

FABRICS

Sleeping bags need to handle a lot of abuse - from sleeping on a rough floor, coping with snow or ice, accidental spillages, wet weather and harsh travel conditions. **Most bags therefore use a tough outer fabric and a softer more luxurious inner.** Pertex and Apex Taffeta nylon are popular fabrics because of their soft handling characteristics, high breathability, dense weave which prevents down leakage, and they can be treated with DWR (durable water repellency) finish.

For those adventurers looking to spend sustained periods of time in wet or alpine conditions, a wind-proof, water-resistant outer is a better choice. Popular breathable, weather-resistant outer fabrics include Gore Windstopper® (used to be known as Dryloft), Conduit SL and EPIC® from Nextec.

TIP

To fully waterproof your sleeping bag, you'll need a bivvy bag



Maturing contour feather quill – although long-lasting these feathers have a low loft and frequently 'leak' out of the bag.



The semiplume feather is ideal for insulation and therefore the most common feather in a high lofting sleeping bag.



Undeveloped down feather, these are always blended with semiplumes and/or quills as they are very delicate.

SLEEPING GEAR



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SLEEPING MATS

A decent sleeping mat can make all the difference between a great night's sleep or waking bleary eyed, with a painful back.

For many years Therm-a-rest have been the world leaders in both mat design and quality, and we are proud to support their range.

There are three general styles of mats:

- 1. Camp & Comfort Series** — these are designed for family campers, 4WD campers, and overnight walkers who want a comfy self-inflating mat.
- 2. Trek & Travel Series** — light enough for the trail yet comfortable enough for base camp they are perfect for everyone from backpackers and globe-trotters to paddlers and adventure 4WD campers.
- 3. Prolite Series** — engineered to be as light and compact as possible, these mats are ideal for trekkers, mountaineers, bushwalkers, or anyone who needs to minimise weight in their packs.

Airbeds do not have any foam insulation within them, so they are ideal for use in homes, or for summer camping. When inflated they are very comfy, although you may require a pump. Ideal for 4WD and family campers.

If you only want insulation from the ground and aren't too concerned about comfort then you can also consider foam mats. Ideal for yoga, extra insulation on ice or snow, or just as a light weight mat for occasional use a Therm-a-rest Z-Lite or a 12mm closed-cell foam mat are inexpensive and weigh almost nothing.

INNER SHEETS

To help prevent your sleeping bag from absorbing body oils and moisture we recommend that you use a sleeping sheet. Sewn off along the sides and sometimes with a pillow slip, sleeping sheets are **extremely handy for the adventure traveller** — especially when you want to unzip your sleeping bag and use it as a duvet. Sleeping sheets are made from three different materials: cotton, silk and thermal fabrics.

Cotton sleeping sheets — These are ideal for travelling in hot climates where you need the absorbency of cotton, or if you just enjoy sleeping between cotton sheets. As cotton absorbs body moisture it will provide a cooling effect, and is therefore not recommended for cool to cold climates. These sheets can be bulky and sometimes slow to dry when laundered.

Silk sleeping sheets — Far more compact and lighter than cotton, silk sleeping sheets are by far the most popular. The natural fibre of silk helps to regulate your body temperature, and of course, they provide a little luxury while out on the trail. These sheets are very easy to launder and dry, which also makes them ideal for travellers.

Thermal Fibre sleeping sheets — If you want a little extra warmth or you want a sleeping sheet to keep comfy on a cool night then a thermal sleeping sheet is ideal. There are a couple of popular fabrics, polypropylene and Thermolite®, which are both very breathable, and provide an extra few degrees on insulation. Of the two Thermolite® is the more efficient insulator.

CLEANING YOUR BAG

Hand-Wash — Soak your sleeping bag in a bathtub with lukewarm water and mild soap or detergent. Rinse thoroughly to remove cleaning solution. Drain the tub, and then press the water out of the sleeping bag. **DO NOT WRING**. Supporting the bag carefully, remove from tub and place flat on towels to air-dry, or drape carefully over two or more clotheslines.

Machine-Wash — Wash only in a heavy-duty, commercial front-loading, tumble-type of machine. Use mild soap or detergent in lukewarm water. Dry as directed for hand washing (above). Alternatively, use a heavy-duty dryer on the gentlest cycle; first zip sleeping bag shut and **USE LOW HEAT ONLY**, then regularly remove the bag and pull apart any down clumps that may have formed. More than one drying cycle may be needed.

Dry Cleaning — **IS NOT RECOMMENDED FOR BAGS FILLED WITH POLYESTER INSULATION**. It's not easy to totally remove the cleaning fluids from the bag, and remaining vapours can be irritating or sometimes cause allergic reactions. It is important that you fully air a down bag after dry cleaning.

PILLOWS

For many a pillow is a down or fleece jacket stuffed into their sleeping bag stuff sack. However, there are alternatives for those who want an extra touch of comfort.

Therm-a-rest make a variety of pillows with the left over foam sections from their die-cutting procedure. They all compress down extremely well and yet offer your head support throughout the night. Inflatable pillows can also be a good idea, especially for adventure travellers who may spend many hours on a bus or train trip.

TIP

To increase your sleeping bag's lifetime we also strongly recommend that you store it in a large cotton sack so that the down can 'relax' and breathe.