



# Scout Skills

## Tent Pitching

### Information Sheet

Tents are the most expensive part of camping equipment. A good tent is an investment which, with care, should last many years. In order to ensure that this happens, care needs to be taken when putting up, taking down, and storing tents - not to mention looking after them when they are in use!

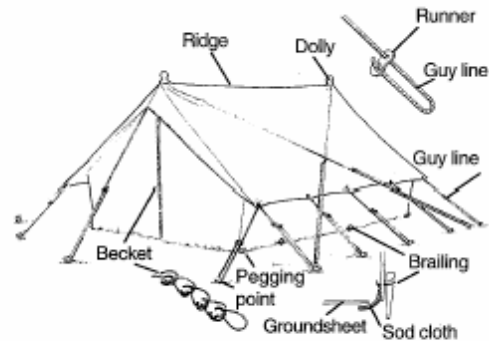
There are usually two main purposes for tents in Scouting; firstly, there is the traditional standing Troop camp which normally uses the large, heavyweight patrol tents which sleep up to six people and, secondly, lightweight one, two or three person tents ideal for smaller camps and expeditions where the tents need to be carried in or on rucksacs.

This factsheet looks at how to put up or 'pitch' tents, take them down or 'strike' them, and a few tips about how to care for them.

It is also important to be familiar with the parts of a tent as they may be referred to throughout this sheet. Although the different tents may look as though they all have different parts, they are in fact comprised of many common features – and although they may vary in their size and shape, they all do the same thing.

**Guy lines** - These may also be known as 'guys' or 'guy ropes'. A guy line is a single line or rope which comes from a part of the tent which, when the tent is pegged into the ground and when the guy line is pulled tight, creates the familiar tent shape. Badly tensioned lines cause a tent to sag and when raining, pockets of water form which may then drip into the tent. These lines also help to keep the tent down in high winds.

*For identifying the main parts of a tent, a patrol tent has been used as an example:*



Note: Valise and flysheet not shown

**Runner** - This is a wooden or plastic bracket that is attached to the guy line, and aids the shortening of the line (and therefore the tightening of the line), more simply than using a sheepshank knot. The guy line goes from the tent, around the peg, and back up to the runner where it is tied off. The runner has a second hole which the line can freely run through, and it is this part which holds the line in position.

**Becket** - There are several forms of becket, and they are the means by which to close or tie up the door. Some beckets take the shape of a wooden toggle and loop, others consist of a loop passing through an eyelet on the other side of the door.

**Pegging point** - As the name suggests, this is the place in which you put the tent peg. On a patrol tent, these points are the brailing loops (see opposite) at the bottom of the tent, or at the end of a guy line. On a lightweight hiking tent, the pegging points are rubber bands that are fixed to the tent through a canvas loop that is stitched to the tent. A pegging point is usually at a strong point on a tent such as on a seam line.



*Ridge* - This is the top of a tent from where the two sides slope away. On a patrol tent this is identified by the top cross pole (also known as the ridge pole). It is important not to put anything between the canvas and this pole, as this will encourage water to seep through at this point.

*Flysheet* - This is an outer covering layer to the tent. For frame and lightweight tents, the inner tent is a very light, breathable cotton layer, and so needs this waterproof layer to protect it from wind and rain. The flysheet is, therefore, made from a heavier material than the inner. There are a few patrol tents that use a flysheet, though many do not.

*Sod cloth* - This is a piece of sacking type material that is attached to the bottom of a patrol tent and is tucked under the groundsheet to provide a method of preventing the groundsheet from creeping outside the bottom of the tent or allowing rain water to get inside and soak any equipment and personal kit that may be inside.

*Groundsheet* - This is made of a heavy waterproof material that is put onto the ground inside the tent and, in effect, becomes the floor of the tent. It stops damp and water from getting into the tent from the ground and also provides protection from any insects that may be lurking in the grass or on the ground. Some tents have these sewn into the inner tent, stopping the need for a sod cloth (as above). On many lightweight tents the sewn-in groundsheet may not be of a heavy quality, and may benefit from having a better groundsheet laid underneath it.

*Valise* - This is the bag that the tent is store in. These vary in size, but it is worth practising folding up the tent before going away, to check that your tent does actually fit inside!

*Dolly* - This is a wooden post that goes on top of an upright pole; attached to it are long guy lines which are used to hold the main body of the tent up. These lines are also

known as storm guys, as they take the strain in high winds.

*Brailings* - The brailings are small loops at the bottom edge of a patrol tent. They are used to peg the vertical walls to the ground, so the wind and rain don't blow through, and the rain can then run down to the ground.

### Tricks of the trade

- Loosen all guy lines at night, as when the morning dew dries it will tighten them.
- All guy lines should also be loosened if rain is imminent as this will cause shrinkage to the canvas or tent material. Failure to slacken them could drag pegs out of the ground, ropes could be broken or, worse, tent material torn.
- Sagging canvas causes undue strain and can cause the tent to 'flap about' in the wind. Even the best pitched tent will sag eventually! Therefore, ensure that the guy lines are tightened periodically to prevent this. However, guy lines should not be too tight as this can also put unnecessary strain on the tent material. The guy line tension should be equal all round and sufficient to stop the tent flapping about too much in the wind.
- Close doors before pegging out - this way the tent will look like it is supposed to, and won't put lots of pressure on the door when it comes to close it up.
- With the exception of corner guys and storm guys, always peg out the guy lines straight from the tent, usually in the direction of the seam line.
- Tying up guy lines before putting the tent away makes it easier to put up next time as it prevents them from tangling.
- If staying on the same site for some time, move the tents occasionally to let the grass recover.
- Always practise pitching and striking a tent at home or at the Troop headquarters never let the first time be at camp. It won't be the best place to learn if it's wet, windy or dark!

### Care of tents

- Always scrape tent pegs of mud before putting them away - even if they are being put into a separate bag, the mud will dry, fall off and leave the pegs dusty.
- Never let anything (or anyone!) rub against the inside of a tent in the rain as water will seep through the canvas.
- Never walk over the canvas of a tent when pitching or striking it as this will not only potentially damage the canvas but it will also affect the waterproofing.
- A badly erected tent causes damage to the canvas as does careless folding and packing.
- Nylon ropes and guy lines need to be checked for wear and tear caused by friction.
- Never wear shoes inside a lightweight tent.
- Particularly with lightweight tents, always store the tent complete with its poles and the correct number of pegs, ready for immediate use.
- It is vital to ensure that any tent is completely dry before storing it. Any dampness will cause the material and guy lines to rot.

### Further information and resources

Speak with other Leaders with experience of camping and also a Quartermaster, who may be able to give you some hints and tips on types of tents, pitching and striking tents and how to care for them.

These books and resources may also help:  
*Enjoy Camping*  
*Scout Camping*

### TEACH YOURSELF

When practising tent pitching it is a good idea to not only have someone with experience to help but also to provide another pair of hands! Pitching most tents, particularly patrol type tents, on your own is very difficult indeed!

### Time

This will depend upon how many different types of tent you are able to have a go at putting up. You should allow at least an hour, with help, for something like a patrol type tent, and time must also be allowed for taking it down and packing away. A lightweight tent will probably take about half an hour for a first attempt.

### Equipment

Again this will depend on your choice of tent, but if possible, try to get an example of a patrol or ridge tent and a lightweight tent. These should be 'complete' and include the canvas, poles, pegs, groundsheet, flysheet, and a mallet per person.

### Learning all about it

You will need to have read the Information Sheet, particularly the section on the parts of a tent as these may be referred to for the purposes of pitching tents.

The aim is to be able to pitch a tent so that all fabric is taut and the guy lines are in line, providing you with a dry, windproof and comfortable habitat for the length of your stay at camp. It should also be done efficiently and in the quickest possible time to alleviate the possibility of bad weather hindering your efforts!

There are many different designs of tent and here we have outlined a step by step approach for two tents; a patrol type or ridge tent and a simple lightweight tent. However, there may be variations in the way that other tents are put up and so it is always important to read any instructions issued by the manufacturers of your particular tent.

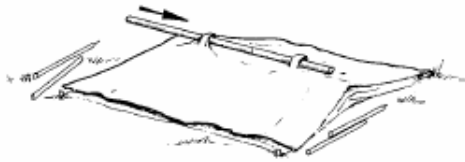
### Patrol type or ridge tents

1. Find a suitable piece of ground - that is, flat and with no sharp objects sticking out. Remember, what might look like a small and insignificant bump beforehand, might be a lot more uncomfortable when you're trying to

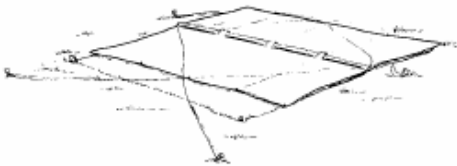


sleep on it! You will also need to ensure that the door of the tent doesn't face the prevailing wind.

2. Empty the valise or bag of the tent and its parts. Lay them out so that you can see what the tent consists of.
3. Lay out the groundsheet in the intended position of the tent and put a peg in the ground at each of the four corners. (See 'Tent Pegs' section).
4. Open out the tent on the ground with the inside uppermost. Assemble the ridge and upright poles and feed the ridge pole through all the loops attached to the ridge of the tent. Take care not to stand on the canvas whilst you are doing this and be careful not to damage the canvas with the ridge pole. One way to ensure this is to lie on the canvas and feed the ridge through gently.

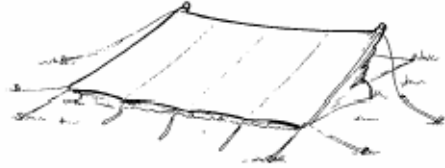


5. Put in four large pegs for the main guy lines. Do not put the pegs in too deeply at this stage as they will probably have to be moved later.

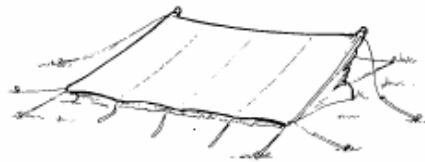


6. Place the spikes on the upright poles through the holes in the ridge pole and corresponding eyelets in the ridge of the tent. Again, care must be taken to avoid damaging the canvas. Once this is done

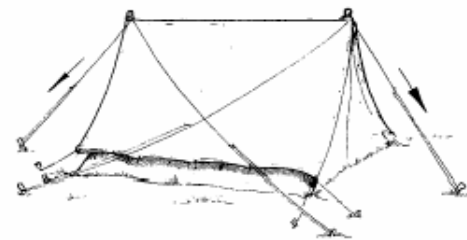
the tent can be folded over along the ridge.



7. Attach the main guy lines to the previously placed pegs and put the dolliies, attached to the storm guys, over the spikes of the upright poles. It might be necessary to reposition the pegs.



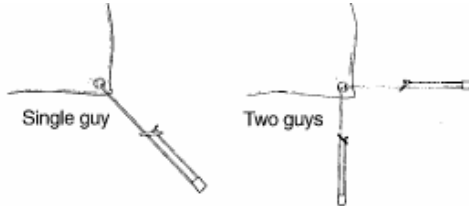
8. With help, stand the tent upright, raising both of the uprights together to avoid bending the spikes. Hold the uprights until the main guy lines have been tightened. The tent should now be upright but rather unsteady. Ensure that the doors of the tent are laced or tied up. Peg out the door and corner trailings.



9. Peg out the other guy lines, corner ones first. Generally, if a corner has one guy rope it is pitched at 135 degrees or, if it has two, they are pitched at 90 degrees. The pegs should be placed so that the runner, when the guy line is taut, is about one-third of the way up from the



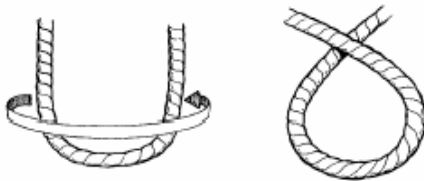
peg. The side guy line pegs should be in a line parallel with the ridge pole and the guy lines following the tent seams.



the tent itself. This should be about 15cm above the tent so that it does not touch.



10. Loop and peg out all the brailings (the small loops on the bottom of the tent) to keep the tent walls straight. The brailings should be looped before attaching to the peg as this helps to prevent them from slipping off the pegs.



At this point you may need to adjust the main guy lines; check that the poles are upright and adjust by slackening the guy lines. Do not move the poles when the guy lines are tight. As there is a ridge pole and four main guy lines, the tent can be 'storm set' to provide protection against bad weather. The main guys are extended diagonally backwards, crossing over each other. The main guy line pegs may need to be moved. If a tent looks well pitched with everything neatly in line and nothing sagging - then it probably is well pitched!

### Lightweight tents

- 1) Find a suitable piece of ground - flat, and with no sharp objects sticking out.
- 2) Empty the bag or valise of the tent and all its parts and lay them out so that you can see what the tent consists of.
- 3) Open out the tent and peg out the groundsheet. Keeping it taut, insert the pegs through the rubber loops at the same time as stretching them. Ensure that the door of the tent is closed. Metal pegs can sometimes be pushed in by hand, but the same rules apply as for wooden pegs - 45 degrees to the ground and 90 degrees to the loop.
- 4) Assemble the metal poles (these are often sprung together to save having to sort them out each time!) and either a) insert a central pole or b) hang the loop at the apex of the tent from the hook on the 'A' pole or c) hang the tent from the ridge pole.



### Flysheets

If the tent has a flysheet you will now need to remove the main guy lines, fit the additional ridge pole on top of the spacers (used to lift the additional ridge pole away from the original one) and place the flysheet over the top. The main guy lines can now be replaced and the flysheet pegged out with a separate set of pegs, in the same manner as

- 5) Peg out all the remaining loops around the base of the tent and guy lines, if applicable. Remember that the loops should be stretched in line with the seams of the tent. The tent should then be upright and free of creases.
- 6) Place the flysheet over the poles of the tent to form an outer 'shell'. Take care not to damage the flysheet, and make sure that it does not touch the inner tent.



### Packing tents away

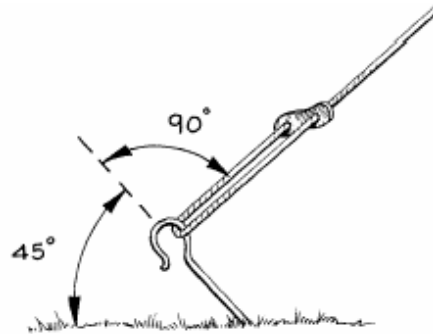
In general, a tent is 'struck' or taken down in the reverse way to which it was put up. However, there are a few useful tips to consider:

- Take up the groundsheet first, remove it from the tent and turn it upside down to dry off the underside. Remove grass and dirt before storing.
- When removing tent pegs, gently tap them backwards and forwards to loosen them. Do not hit them on their flat sides as they may split or break.
- After removing pegs from the ground, scrape the dirt and soil from them and dry them off.
- Each tent is different but usually folds into two or three sections and then is rolled before putting into the valise.

Try not to pack up a wet or damp tent. However, if it cannot be avoided, make certain that it is unpacked and thoroughly dried as soon as possible. Wet and damp canvas, guy lines and brailing loops are soon affected by mildew and then rot.

### Tent Pegs

- The correct way to peg out guy lines gives maximum grip and an even strain on the tent material.
- Wooden pegs should be put in the ground using a wooden mallet, and metal pegs with a rubber mallet.
- A tent peg is at the correct depth when the notch just keeps the guy line off the ground.
- Pegs should go into the ground at an angle of 45 degrees and the guy ropes should pull on them at an angle of 90 degrees.



- If pegs will not hold in loose soil such as sand or snow, they can be made more secure by 'holdfasts' such as rocks or logs around the guy line. These can also be buried in the ground for extra security. Trees can also be used, as can more than one peg for each guy line.

### Can you do it?

When you feel happy about pitching and striking tents, check how you are doing and see which of the following you can tick off:

- Name the main parts of a tent
- List the factors to be considered in caring for tents
- Pitch a patrol type tent in calm weather
- Pitch a patrol type tent in wet and windy weather .
- Pitch a lightweight tent in calm weather .
- Pitch a lightweight tent in wet and windy weather

### So you want to know more?

Try pitching different types of tent (for example, frame tent, tunnel tent, bell tent) - the basic principles for pitching them will be the same.

Learn how to repair damaged tents.

## Your notes on this session

### HOW TO TRAIN OTHERS

This section is designed to give you some practical ideas about how you can help other people learn about tent pitching. This might be Leaders or Scouts - either in an informal way on a Troop night or more formally on a skills workshop, training course or something similar.

#### Objectives

By the end of this session, the participants will be able to:

- List the main parts of a tent;
- List the factors to be considered in caring for tents;
- Demonstrate the correct method of pitching a patrol type tent;
- Demonstrate the correct method of pitching a lightweight tent;
- Demonstrate how to fold and pack away a tent after use.

#### Time

Approximately two hours to cover the above objectives. It may be useful to have follow-up sessions to reinforce the learning at a later date.

#### Equipment

For each small group of participants:

One patrol type and lightweight tent;  
Two or three mallets;  
Sufficient suitable ground on which to pitch the tents.  
Any items necessary as outlined in the training games.

#### Training method

Essentially a practical activity, the most effective way for participants to learn how to pitch and strike a tent is, of course, to do it! There may need to be some introduction about the basic steps to be taken in pitching the tent and the important factors about caring for and minimising damage to the tent. You might like to ask participants if they know the cost of replacing the various tents. You will obviously need to have found out the latest prices before you ask!

Alternatively, with participants watching, the session leader could demonstrate the pitching of a tent at the same time as outlining the parts and so on. Participants, in small groups, should then be able to have a go themselves. After this, strike and pack away the tent. This could then be followed, either immediately, or at a later date, by one or more of the training games to check what has been learnt.

#### Training games

*What's it called?* - Using a previously pitched tent, and with participants in small groups, the session leader states the part of a tent and one person from each group has to run to the tent and point out the appropriate part. The first person to correctly identify the part gets a point.

Alternatively, the parts of the tent are written on cards and these have to be placed on the appropriate part of the tent by the participants.

*Peg bashing* - This is a relay game where each team (or small group) is given an 40cm wooden peg and a mallet. Each member of the team is allowed one hit at the peg. The peg which is deepest in the ground, and at the correct angle, wins.

*Tent challenge* - This is another relay game. Each team has to correctly unpack, pitch, have inspected, strike and repack a tent. The fastest team is the winner. Time penalties may be given for any errors. This



could be repeated at a later date to see if the teams can improve on their times.

*Blindfold tent pitch* - Once participants have mastered how to pitch a tent, get each team or group to pitch a tent with everyone blindfolded except a nominated person who gives the instructions.

Alternatively, get teams to pitch a tent upside down or from outside of a circle which has a radius of three metres greater than the tent length!

*Wordsearch* - Devise a word game such as a wordsearch, hangman, anagram and so on, which identifies the parts of a tent.

Alternatively, make a jigsaw; type out the steps to pitching a tent, cut them up into the different stages and get participants to reassemble them in order.

### Useful hints and tips

If possible, allow participants to sleep in the tents. They will then have a better understanding of the importance of a well pitched tent.

If the weather is wet and windy, do not cancel any tent pitching activities - this will be good practice for when it's wet and windy when you go to camp! The same applies to practising pitching a tent in the dark using only lamps and torches for light.

### Checking their progress

Ask participants if they can answer the following questions:

- Can I list the main parts of a tent? .
- Can I state the important factors about caring for a tent? .
- Can I show how to pitch a patrol type tent?
- Can I show how to pitch a light-weight tent? .
- Can I show how to fold and pack away a tent after use?

### So they want to know more?

Ask participants to try pitching and striking other types of tent.

Encourage participants to learn how to care for and repair tents.

### Your notes on this session