

HOW TO BE A BRECON CAMPER



Are we losing our connection with the great outdoors? To my mind the purpose of camping is to allow people, using the minimum of equipment, to get out into nature and reconnect with the elemental forces of the environment – earth, wind, sun and rain – and more importantly, the God who created them.

I'm not picking a fight with those who like their comforts – chalets, showers, electricity, heating – in fact there have been times when I would have happily dumped my tent in the river and made a dash for civilisation, but if you want an experience that's fundamentally different from what you get in your everyday life you really ought to give camping a try.

Now you might think that camping is totally out of the question for you. I mean, how can you survive without running water (actually you'll get plenty of running water, but that's



another story), hairdryers, a cooker and TV? The purpose of this article is to tell you exactly how. In the paragraphs below I will tell you everything you need to know in order to take part in a great Adventist weekend camp, like, say, Brecon.

Ground rules first. I'm not talking about backpacking here, or Pathfinder camping, but the kind of camping that most people do when they come to a weekend event. In short it is the kind of camping that assumes you have a car to transport your equipment, family and dog. So, what do you need?

1. List. The first and most important thing that you need to have before you go camping is a list. Most camping ventures that are failures fail because someone forgot to bring something. Make a comprehensive list of everything that you're going to take and refer to it frequently when you're packing.

2. Tent. The big question with tents is size. Should you go for a small tent which is light enough to carry around and will take up only a tiny space in your loft, or a big tent which will be more expensive to buy in the first place. From my forty years of camping I can categorically say that bigger is better, at least for car-based camping. If you're a backpacker

that's a different matter. For the rest of us, the extra space that a large tent takes up in your boot is more than compensated by the fact that you will be able to move around in it when it is pitched. So what do I mean by large? Don't be fooled by the "man" ratings you'll see in the literature. A "two-man" tent seldom is. That description only applies if you are half way up the Matterhorn, already in the final stages of frostbite and prepared to trade body warmth for survival. If you want to be comfortable get a tent that is rated for twice the number of people you'll expect to have in it. That way you'll have room to put your belongings and sit down to eat. And talking of sitting down, it's a great luxury if you can stand up in your tent without your head touching the roof. A low roof might seem cosy at first but by the end of a wet weekend you'll go home looking like the hunchback of Notre Dame. The design of the tent is important as well. If you go to a camping shop you'll see a bewildering variety of shapes as well as sizes. Again from experience I would say the simpler the better. If your tent looks like a polytunnel then you're on the right track. If it looks like it was designed by R Buckminster Fuller then you're not. Avoid poles that cross and bits that stick out. A couple of years ago we actually managed to put a tent up inside out because we couldn't figure out how it all worked.



3. Bedding. A good night's sleep is essential if you are going to enjoy your weekend and here the primary consideration is warmth. Tents get very cold at night, even in the summer, and you'll need more than a sleeping bag to keep you warm. Insulation underneath is as important as a quilt on top and no, airbeds do not provide insulation, just a degree of comfort. Now that I'm in my fifties I'm only happy when I've got a sleeping bag, quilt underneath, quilt on top, hot water bottle, and dog. It also helps to sleep in a hoodie to keep your head warm.

4. Food. Novice campers often get it wrong with food. They assume that to eat while camping you just replicate what you do at home. But of course you won't have the same



equipment in a tent as you have in your kitchen so you need to think out of the box – or more correctly, out of the packet. You will need a cooker of some kind, and the best ones for beginners are the £10 single burner ones that run off a disposable canister of gas. You'll get a total burn time of only a couple of hours or so, so you need to use that heat wisely. Don't cook potatoes because they'll take too long. Get instant mash instead. Pasta is okay but noodles are better. Food from tins is great because it's already cooked and only needs heating up. If you've only got one burner you'll only be able to use one pot at a time so plan carefully. You'll find plenty of "one pot" recipes online, but

avoid the inflated prices of the instant meals in sealed foil bags that you see in camping shops. These are only for hard-core trekkers and climbers where weight is an issue.

5. Clothing. Again the main consideration here is keeping warm – which also means keeping dry. Take lots of layers and include one good waterproof layer to go over the top. Yes you can be clever and get breathable fabrics that will stop your perspiration condensing on the inside, but for a weekend camp, where you're not going to do much strenuous activity, a basic cagoule will suffice. For your feet, do not despise the humble Wellington boot. They're not warm but they'll keep you dry as you walk across the field in the early morning when the grass is soaking. A hat is good for sun or rain and an umbrella can be useful on the occasions when the rain descends more vertically than horizontally.

6. Washing materials. Most weekend campers adopt the biblical principle of Revelation 22:11 (KJV) and note that the expression "cleanliness is next to godliness" is not actually found in the Bible. However at a minimum you will need a plastic bowl, washing up liquid and various cloths or sponges. For a very quick face or body wash a pack of baby-wipes will do.

7. Miscellaneous. The devil is in the detail as they say so remember that the small things can be very important. A tin opener to get at the beans, a box of matches to light the cooker, a torch (at least one per person) to find your way to the marquee at night and a folding chair to sit on when you get there, scissors to cut the corner off the boxed milk, cutlery and crockery to eat the precious food, and bin bags to contain the inevitable rubbish that you generate. All of these are essential. As I said at the beginning, make a list before you go and you'll be fine.

Those who attend Adventist camping events regularly will notice that the programme of worship and activity tends to be quite relaxed. The days are not packed with meetings and there is plenty of time for just living. The reason for this is that when you are camping, "just living" takes quite a bit of effort. Strangely though many people discover that when they are camping these basic activities become enjoyable in their own right. They reconnect with the fundamental requirements for life – food, water, air, and warmth. And at our Adventist camps many of them reconnect with God as well.

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