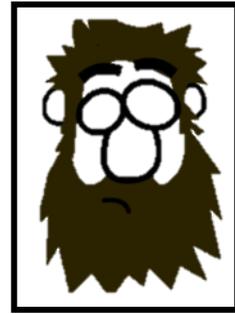


Uncle Wacko's Gear Corner



TRAMPING GEAR ADVICE FROM THE EXPERT

Rounding out your sleeping system

SLEEPING PADS

Sleeping pads do two jobs: insulate you from the ground (so you don't freeze your nunchucks off), and make you comfortable enough to sleep.

You've got two decent options.

Closed cell foam

There's only one way this makes sense - cut yourself 4 sections a foot or so long and 500mm wide and tape them together on one side only.

Laid out, they're your sleeping pad, folded up the support in a super light frameless pack. Sit on 'em during the day. Three birds with one stone, couple hundred grams in weight, total cost less than 20 bucks.

Uncle Wacko used this sophisticated setup for years - works a treat.

But wait ... I can hear your gnashing and wailing from here. Not comfortable enough for your sedentary old bones? Then go for the second option.

Inflatable air pads

To start with, forget self-inflating pads, they're way too heavy and bulky.

For three season use, blokes should get **R-value** 2 or above, sheilas and cold sleepers 3-4. R-value is a measure of insulating ability, so how well the pad lets you retain body heat.

For winter you'll want R-value 5, and for camping on snow take an additional thin foam pad as well.

Standard pad **length** is 72 inches but there are also small and larger sizes.

Newsflash: You probably don't need a full length pad. Uncle Wacko only ever uses a small size outside winter, 119cm long, and he's not exactly vertically challenged.

Thing is, your legs don't contact the ground that much, so why have a pad under something that's off the ground anyway. You can slide some clothes or your pack under them if you need to.

A small size save heaps on weight, bulk and dosh.

What to buy

OK, let's not ponce about here. The only mat to buy is the **Thermarest NeoAir X-Lite**. R-value 3.2. Regular is 350g, \$399; small 230g, \$329.

Don't even consider anything else – no other brand competes on weight, bulk or warmth. Thermarest are simply in a league of their own.

For winter, get the XTherm – R-value 5.7, 430 grams.

Think they're a bit pricey? Tough, that's just what you gotta pay.

SLEEPING BAG LINERS

Liners slow down the soiling of your bag from sweat and body oils. Or so they say. If you sleep butt naked, that might make sense. But if you wear a bunch of clothes, what difference are they really gonna make?

And some of you are way, way too precious about having to wash a sleeping bag anyway. Get over it, it's really not a problem.

Ducks and geese don't fall apart when they're wet, and nor will your bag. Just follow the manufacturer's instructions.

So liners are an optional extra.

I see they come in silk, cotton, fleece and polyester. My, my ...

And can weigh anywhere from 100 to a completely ridiculous 300+ grams.

And here's another ridiculous thing about bag liners – manufacturers' claims about how much warmth they add. Don't believe a word of it, it's marketing twaddle. You might gain a degree or two, but most will do diddly squat. You're way better off wearing a fleece or down jacket for extra warmth.

If you must have a liner, buy whatever feels most comfortable and is still light. And enjoy the added excruciating delay in the middle of the night extricating yourself from your bag for those emergency bladder relief episodes.

So now you've got a sleep system – bag and mat, and liner if you want it. and pigs might fly ...

If you've followed Uncle Wacko's advice (and you'd be a right plonker if you haven't!) then your mat will weigh 230-350g and your bag 560-820g. Now that's damn good kit at a nice low weight.

Lordy, we might even make competent lightweight trampers out of youz yet!

Spot ya.

Uncle Wacko

