**Motorcycle Camping**

**CC Rider**

***Following are some tips which motorcycle campers may find useful.***

The key to gear selection for motorcycle camping is to choose things which are compact, durable and highly effective. High quality gear which is useful, reliable and compact is rarely cheap and you will not find it at Walmart or Target. For example, you may be able to find a compact 2-person tent at a discount store for around $60, however will it keep you warm and dry at 2 AM in the rain? Does it have a full coverage fly? Does it have shorter pole lengths which make it easier to pack on the bike? Will the zippers or poles fail after the first couple of nights? The difference between having a positive or a negative experience largely hinges on your gear, so choose it wisely.

**Tent** - The largest piece of gear you will carry is usually your tent. A good tent will protect you from the rain and cold, will not trap excess condensation, will have adequate space for you, possibly a friend and all of your gear. It should also have a full-length fly which extends almost completely to the ground. Cheaper tents have much smaller half-flys, which only cover the top 1-3 feet of the tent, leaving the bottom walls or screens exposed to water, wind, cold and splashing. It should also have a waterproof bathtub floor with no seams or perhaps one well-sealed seam. All seams on a tent, even a brand new one must be sealed by the owner using seam sealer. It’s helpful if a tent for two or more people has two doors.

To protect your tent floor from tears, leaks and wear, you should always use a footprint. This can be as simple as a piece of plastic like a shower curtain, tarp or a large trash bag, or it can be a footprint designed specifically to work with your tent. Your footprint will have a shiny coated side and a flat non-coated side. The rubberized coated side should always face up. Also carefully preparing the tent site before pitching is important. Make sure to remove all rocks, sticks & sharp objects. If available, it sometimes helps to cover the tent site with a layer of leaf litter, sand or loose dirt. This not only helps protect your tent, but also helps to insulate you from the cold ground. Expect to pay at least $140 for a decent tent, and probably much more for a better one. 4-season expedition tents can be very expensive and often run from $600 to over $1000.

For the motorcyclist, packed size is critical, so compare that specification as well when shopping. Some tents have shorter pole lengths, which make them very compact to store. There are even a couple tents which are inflatable and don’t use poles at all. Avoid more tent than you need, including ones with large vestibules designed to park a motorcycle in or those designed to stand up in. If you want to keep your bike dry, carry a compact motorcycle cover rather than putting it under the same tent you sleep in. Tent capacities are always optimistic. A 2-man tent comfortable houses one person, a 3-man tent houses two people, etc… Since your body radiates heat, using a tent which is too large means it will have more volume and surface area, thus it will be colder.

Modern tent poles all use shock cords, however pole material varies. Most poles are fiberglass or aluminum. Some expensive tents can use carbon fiber. Fiberglass poles are heavier and splinter or break. Aluminum poles are lighter but can bend, sometimes completely in half making them useless. Carbon fiber poles are rare, light & strong but will still break if bent too much. My personal recommendation is aluminum, especially one of the more durable alloys such as Easton 7075, 7001 or 6061. The harder alloys are stronger and stiffer, however they will break rather than bend if overstressed. For this reason, it’s a good idea to throw an extra pole section in with your tent which you can use in a pinch.

Always stake your tent, even if it’s not windy. Even free-standing tents often rely on the staking process to keep the fabric taut and functional. Also, you never know when the weather will change, which could result in your tent blowing away. If you have any guy lines – use them.

It goes without saying that you should always pitch a tent on a flat, level surface. However in reality those rarely exist in nature. If you do pitch on a slight incline, you always want to orient your pad and sleeping bag so your head points uphill. Also take note of any hazards, such as ant hills, drainage channels, low spots, etc… Do not pitch your tent in a hazardous place where you could find yourself flooded or being bitten by ants. Pitching a tent under a tree canopy is ideal since the tree will prevent dew and excess moisture from accumulating on your tent. It’s also a couple degrees warmer under a tree canopy at night. However be aware that certain trees such as some pines exude sap. Check the ground for this before pitching, otherwise you could wind up with a stained & sticky tent.

And a little about the tent fly – always bring it! Even if the weather forecast absolutely and positively calls for no rain, bring it anyway. Remember that protection from rain is just one purpose for your tent fly. The fly also keeps you dry if any dew is present, traps an air layer around the tent for insulation, provides privacy, adds shade to prevent greenhouse warming, strengthens the overall structure and is often an active part of the cross-ventilation design for your tent.

**Sleeping Bag** - The next critical piece of gear is your sleeping bag. A sleeping bag traps your body heat at night so you can sleep comfortably. There are two basic designs of bags: square and mummy. Square bags are designed for occasional home use, car camping or to be zipped together into a roomy double bag for two persons. They often can also be completely unzipped to form a blanket. Square bags are usually heavier, less compact and provide less protection from the cold because of their generous space inside. They are often lined with cotton flannel, which is soft to the touch, but is also one of the worst insulating materials.

A mummy bag is cut to follow the contours of your body, with a smaller boxed section around the feet and a hood & drawstring to close tightly around the head. Mummy bags are much more efficient than square bags. They are light, compact and have zippers which do not run the full length of the bag. For the motorcyclist or backpacker, the mummy bag is what you want.

Sleeping bags are divided further by the type of insulation they use and by their temperature rating. The very best bags as far as insulation and compactness go are down filled bags. These use goose or duck feathers for insulation. Other synthetic fill material can be excellent as well, usually consisting of Holofil, Dacron or other man-made fibers… Down bags can be very expensive and synthetic bags are a lot cheaper, but both can work very well.

The temperature rating of the bag is the lowest outside air temperature where it will keep an average person comfortable and warm. For 4-season use, try to get a bag with a temperature rating of 20 degrees or lower. Remember if you mostly do summer camping, you may want to get a second bag with a higher rating. A lot of campers have two or three bags depending on the weather. The important thing is to be warm and comfortable.

When using your sleeping bag, unless it’s warm, it’s best to leave some clothing on. Especially socks and a hat. Those two things will greatly improve your comfort in the cold. You can also add a liner to a sleeping bag to boost its temperature rating by a few degrees. To help you stay warm on a really cold night, eat a late dinner just before bed. This will kick start your body’s metabolism so it will generate more heat. Also by sleeping in your clothes, it will be a lot easier if you have to get up in the middle of the night to relieve yourself.

For the motorcyclist, the size of your rolled bag is important. Cheaper bags can be quite large when packed. Some of the most compact bags aren’t necessarily the most expensive either. Coleman for example makes a line of extremely compact bags in their Max-series. Also Ozark Trails, normally a lower quality manufacturer makes some extremely compact and affordable down bags, some of which can be zipped together. Whichever bag you choose, it’s extremely important that if it doesn’t already come with a cinch sack that you get one for it. A good cinch sack (storage bag with compression straps) can greatly reduce the packed size of a sleeping bag.

**Pad** - The last part of your sleep system is your pad or air mattress. A simple dense foam pad like a RidgeRest is effective for insulating you from cold ground temperatures, however it takes up a lot of space and may not be as comfortable. An air mattress is usually the best solution for the motorcyclist. An extremely compact air mattress can either be self-inflating, like the ThermaRest or it can be filled manually with air, like a vinyl air-core mattress. The air core mattresses usually offer more thickness and comfort, but can still be punctured. Most good mattresses come with a patch kit. The better mattresses have a heat-reflective side, which can be helpful on a cool night, along with a textured side to keep you from sliding off in the middle of the night. If you do choose an air mattress, consider getting a small inflator, which can either use batteries or a 12 volt accessory plug on your motorcycle.

**Pillow** - One often overlooked sleeping accessory is the pillow. Obviously a full-sized pillow from your home is too large, however there are several compact options. One is to simply place your clothes into a camp bag. It may not be the softest or most comfortable, but it will work in a pinch.

The other option is a small camp pillow, which is either compressed and stuffed into a small sack or an inflatable pillow, which can be incredibly compact when deflated. It’s always best to see and feel the pillow before camping with it. Some can be noisy, cold to the touch or have sharp seams. Others will have a softer flocked or fabric-covered side.

**Light** – Normally when camping, you will need a reliable light source. For the bare minimalist, you can get by with only a single flashlight. However it’s often convenient and useful to have two or even three lights around.

Your basic flashlight will be what you use to navigate around camp with in the dark. The key here is lumens, battery life and durability. You should try to purchase a lamp with the greatest output in lumens contained in the smallest lamp, which is easy to pack. It also helps if the light is rugged, usually with a machined metal case and waterproof. 100 lumens in a usable, well-dispersed pattern is a great camping flashlight. Some prefer head-mounted lamps.

Modern lights use LED technology to provide much greater light, longer battery life and greater durability. The two basic modern lights are the LED array type and the Cree LED. An LED array is just that, a cluster of individual LED’s behind a clear lens. These are great for most routine camping needs. For more power and longer battery life, Cree Inc. LED’s use a flat chip design to emit very high intensity light. This is often projected onto a parabolic reflector to evenly distribute the light. A Cree LED flashlight can produce 200 lumens of light or more for hours on just a couple small batteries, however they can cost a lot more than a simple LED light.

Another light you may want to bring is a lantern. On a motorcycle, it’s not practical to bring a large gas lantern, however there are many very compact, telescoping LED lanterns which can provide light over a campsite and picnic table for hours. It’s often better to suspend these high and above the site so you don’t attract bugs to your table.

The third type of light you may want to consider is a small tent lamp. A small booklight is often perfect for this, and they can be suspended from the center of the ceiling in your tent to provide light in the dark while reading, getting dressed or just entering your tent.

An important factor to consider with lighting are the batteries. It’s usually better to choose lights that use conventional batteries (D, C, AA, AAA) which can be found anywhere when you’re far from home. Plug-in AC rechargeable items should be avoided for this reason.

**Clothing** – For warmer weather, it goes without saying that light, well-ventilated clothing works best. However for colder weather, the trick is to dress in layers and stay dry. Wool is exceptional in its ability to insulate and wick moisture away from the skin, so it should be used directly over a base layer (such as a T-shirt). A wool sweater is perfect for this. The next layer should be something with loft which will trap air, such as synthetic fleece. And the final layer can be a nylon shell which breathes, so moisture can leave your body, but which prevents wind and water from getting in. Gore Tex is an excellent choice for a shell.

Because of limited space on a motorcycle, it’s critical to pack only what you absolutely need and avoid bulky items. This means getting by with only one pair of shoes (plus compact shower shoes) and often wearing jeans for 2 or 3 days. T-shirts and socks can be rolled tight to take up as little space as possible. And also don’t forget a good scarf, hat and gloves, which will keep you a lot warmer without taking up much space.

**Toiletries** – A very small zipper bag to contain toiletries is handy. This should include your toothbrush, toothpaste, small motel-sized soap, travel-size shampoo, mirror, deodorant, razor, etc… Travel-size items can be found at 99 cent stores or grocery stores and are perfect for motorcycling. If you stay at motels, grab the free travel size soaps and shampoos for your camping bag. Remember a washcloth, small compact towel and some toilet paper. Also don’t forget to throw a few quarters in the bag for pay-showers when you encounter those at camp sites.

**Cooking** – For many trips, you may not need any cooking gear or food. You may decide to eat strictly at restaurants and bring dinner back to camp. However for most of us, food at camp is part of the experience and required. At least being able to boil water for hot coffee, tea, hot chocolate or freeze-dried camp food is nice. Cooking involves a minimum of four things: Stove, fuel, utensils & food.

* Stove – For motorcycling, you need the smallest camp stove you can find. This is usually a single burner, folding iso-butane or white gas stove. These are available by MSR, Snow Peak, Coleman and other manufacturers at better sports stores like REI. Iso-Butane is a gas and camp fuel or white gas is low octane unleaded gasoline – a liquid which must be carried in separate fuel bottles. Ordinary motor fuel will not work in a white gas stove. The butane stoves are easier, cleaner and safer than the white gas stoves and except for very high altitudes, they work well. Most have a built in piezo-electric pushbutton starter. You can cook on an open camp fire, however depending on the location, season & weather, a campfire may not be permitted or very effective.
* Fuel – There are three basic types of camp fuel: White gas, Iso-butane and Propane. White gas is a liquid, stored in sealed fuel bottles and must be pressurized in order to be used in a stove. It is basically a type of low-grade gasoline. Iso-butane is a mixture of liquid butane and propane which is stored in a small pressurized cylinder. When it is released through the burner, it is a gas. These are very portable because of the small size of the gas cylinders. Propane is also a pressurized gas, which is stored in somewhat larger cylinders. Propane cylinders are usually about 9 inches long and around 3.5 inches in diameter. Because of their larger size and higher weight, they’re often overlooked by hikers, bicyclists and motorcyclists. Other fuels can be alcohol or Sterno.
* Utensils – This can be as simple as a small aluminum pot for boiling water in to a full mess kit. It also includes a drinking cup, fork and spoon. In some cases, you can include a small kettle or percolator. It’s also important to have a way to clean these things after each meal to keep insects and animals away. All utensils should be fire-safe so they won’t melt if placed on a fire.
* Food – Camp food traditionally includes beanie weenies, Spam, corned beef hash, chili or other canned goods, however it can be whatever you want. It can also be freeze-dried or fresh foods. Keep in mind that your food should be safe & edible after being kept in a hot saddlebag all day while riding. For this reason, unpreserved meats, fruits and vegetables are discouraged. Likewise, it’s best to avoid glass containers which could break while in your luggage. For beverages, you can bring coffee (either regular or instant) or tea. Instant packets like Starbuck’s VIA make coffee an easy, painless chore. For more discriminating tastes, you can bring a real camp percolator. You can even store supplies in the pot while transporting it. It also helps to bring bagged snacks, like trail mix, dried fruit, seeds or nuts to nosh on. Remember that chocolate melts easily and carob may be a better choice.

**Alcohol** – A lot of campers love to have some beer and wine, or perhaps keep a flask of strong spirits to enjoy around the campfire. Just a little caution though. There are in fact some private campgrounds which prohibit alcohol, so check ahead of time before bringing the hooch. Also remember that alcohol will dilate blood vessels. This will give you a warm, flush feeling while drinking, but in fact causes your body to lose body heat at a faster rate, especially from your core. If you’re camping in very cold weather, this can be a problem and may induce hypothermia. Something to consider…

**Chair** – Most camp sites will have a picnic table, however that may be fixed to the ground and nowhere near the fire ring. A small camp chair is often a nice luxury to have. Most folding camp chairs are too large for a motorcycle, however there are options, such as pocket chairs, camp stools and chairs which assemble from shock-corded poles like a tent.

**Fire** – This can be as simple as a lighter or matches, or as elaborate as a magnesium fire starter. Also bringing some paper to start a campfire with helps. If you’ve never been able to easily start campfires, you can buy small fire starters from the grocery store. Just place one at the bottom of your firewood and light it. If you forget a lighter or matches, you can also use a camp stove with an electric starter to make fire with. Be sure and check with the camp host first as fires are sometimes prohibited during certain dry or windy times of the year. Firewood can usually be bought at the town you arrive in, or from the campsite itself. You can carry a small amount of wood on the bike, but it’s usually bulky, heavy and dirty. You want to use wood that’s cut, split and well-seasoned. Large green wood can be extremely frustrating. If it does light at all, it will often smoke too much and pop. Use your folding camp shovel to clean out your fire pit before building a fire. If your fire pit is filled with ashes, this can make the difference between a poor fire or an excellent fire. Remember that in order for a fire to burn you need air, fuel and heat. For good air flow, it helps to make sure there’s open space under your fuel and a way for lots of air to get into or under your fire ring or fire pit.

**First Aid** – A first aid kit should be standard equipment on motorcycles, however it’s especially important while camping. Things like burns, abrasions, stings, splinters, cuts and scrapes are more likely while roughing it. It also helps to throw in some pain reliever, iodine tablets for water purification, sunscreen, Epipen, Benedryl for allergies, daily medication, Caladryl for poison oak and other things.

**Tools –** Most modern motorcycles are as reliable as cars, however it still can be useful to have a simple tool kit handy in case of a problem. This can be as simple as an adjustable wrench, a couple screwdrivers, Allen wrenches, a shop rag or two, pliers, electrical tape, zip ties, RTV silicone, wire, fuses, bulbs and a few other items placed in a small bag. A miniature portable air compressor and tire repair kit can be extremely useful if you’re in a remote area, however this would depend on your space limitations. Many riders simply carry a AAA card, which is fine too. Tools tend to be heavy and are not likely to be used, so these can be packed low and out of the way.

**Electronics** – While many would prefer to completely cut the cord and leave without any modern devices, the fact is we often do. And while riding around in remote areas, where cell reception can be spotty, cell phones often roam and use more energy. For this reason, it’s handy to bring a 12VDC charger and equip your bike with either a 12VDC outlet or a trickle charger outlet. That way you can charge things from your bike battery while at camp. If you don’t have a camera on your cell phone, consider bringing a camera. Pictures will make the trip more memorable. Just remember to start the bike once in a while. Otherwise all the extra battery use could leave you stranded.

**Entertainment** – Entertainment while camping can include games, music, sports or simply sharing stories. Something as simple as a deck of cards or a set of dice can keep everyone entertained into the night. You can also find compact chess or checkers sets. As far as music goes, if you’re inclined, you can bring a harmonica or even your iPod and small dock. Just remember to be considerate of your neighbors at night and please, NO Kumbaya... More games can include a Frisbee, horseshoes or bean bag toss.

**Other Things** – 20-30 feet of parachute cord or strong nylon rope is very helpful. You can often find cord at surplus or sporting goods stores. This can be used for hanging hammocks, lanterns, drying clothes, guying or fixing a tent or preparing shade. A very small hammer is often useful as well for driving stakes in the ground. It’s easier and safer than using a rock. If you’re at a campsite where you can cut wood, you can bring a hatchet instead. Also a small folding shovel helps when preparing a firepit. In some sites, park rules mandate that you have a shovel handy at all times. Sunglasses, reading glasses, a book, ear plugs, bug repellant and more can make the trip a lot more enjoyable.

**Packing The Bike** – Keep the heavy stuff low and forward and the light stuff high and back. Try to keep food items together. Also try to keep your clothes in plastic bags or away from dirty camping gear, like your folding shovel. Nesting can conserve a lot of space. An empty coffee cup will fully contain your deflated camp pillow. An empty coffee pot will hold several small items. It you do decide to carry firewood, shrink wrap it together or place it in a duffle and attach it to the pillion, as if it were a passenger. Don’t overload saddlebags and use plenty of bungees to keep everything firmly in place. If you have hard bags and a hard trunk, this will make your job a lot easier. Also don’t forget to utilize the space in front of your handlebars. This is often the perfect spot for a tent or sleeping bag. Once the bike is packed, take it for a test spin to check for handling problems and familiarize yourself with the extra weight.

**The Checklist**

* Compact 3 or 4 season tent with fly
* Stakes & guy lines
* Tent footprint
* Compact camp chair
* Compact sleeping bag – Rated to <20 degrees
* Pad or air mattress
* Camp pillow (inflatable or collapsible)
* Inflator (12V or battery pump)
* Compact collapsible lantern
* Flashlight
* Extra batteries
* Earplugs
* Pocketknife
* Lighter
* Toiletries
  + Toothbrush
  + Toothpaste
  + Soap
  + Washcloth
  + Small towel
  + Comb
  + TP
  + Quarters for showers
* Extra clothes
* Swim trunks/shorts
* Bungees
* Cargo net or storage duffle
* Bug repellant
* Sunscreen
* Lip Balm
* Sunglasses
* Sweater
* Jacket
* Scarf
* Warm hat & gloves
* Water bottle or canteen
* Camping cup
* Snacks
* Coffee (Via or other) or tea
* Compact stove
* Stove fuel
* Mess kit
* Tools

**CC’s Personal Gear List**

* MountainSmith Equinox 4-man, 3-season Tent With Compression Sack
* JanSport Isodome 3-man, 4-season Tent for weather < 32 degrees F.
* REI ½ Dome Footprint
* REI Flex Lite Camp Chair
* Coleman Max 0 Degree Mummy Bag With Compression Sack
* Big Agnes Air Core Insulated Mattress
* Modified Coleman Propane Catalytic Heater (< 32 degrees only)
* Cocoon Air Core Inflatable Pillow
* Coleman 12VDC Inflator
* Coleman 4AA Pack-Away Compact Cree Lantern
* Maglite LED Pro AA – 226 Lumens Cree Flashlight
* Extra AA batteries
* Book Light
* 40 Feet of Parachute Cord
* SMC Carabiners
* First Aid Kit
* Air Compressor
* Tire Repair Kit
* Basic Tools
* Shop Rag
* Coleman Folding Camp Shovel/Axe
* Small Hammer
* Earplugs
* Victorinox Swiss Knife
* Long Reach BBQ Lighter
* Toiletries
* Extra Clothes
* Shorts
* Wool Socks (< 32 degrees only)
* Bungees
* Storage Duffle
* Bug Repellant
* Sunscreen
* Sunglasses
* Wool Sweater
* Insulated Motorcycle Jacket
* Silk Scarf
* Granite Gear Fleece Hat
* Fleece Gloves
* Water Bottle
* Blue Enameled Steel Camp Cup
* Blue Enameled Percolator
* Snacks
* Spam, Corned Beef Hash & Chili
* Coffee
* Snow Peak Gigapower Folding Compact Stove
* Iso-Butane Cartridges
* Stainless Steel Fork and Spoon
* Mess Kit
* iPod & AA-Powered Dock