

Chapter Chair Chat

Ode to Tent Camping

By Carole Mintzer, Chapter Chair



Oh, tent camping, how can you be so magical and miserable all at once?

It's been a long time since Alex and I took our first tent camping trip around Lake Huron in the early 1980s. We had a newly purchased 2-person pup tent – basically an A-frame with poles across each end around which you had to maneuver to get in and out of the tent – thick foam pads, Coleman sleeping bags, and a single burner for cooking. Over the years, the pup tent was replaced with a 2-person REI Half Dome tent without the annoying poles across the entrance and then, after the zippers failed, a 3-person Marmot tent that was oh-so roomy. LOL. The foam pads

took up a lot of space in the car and were eventually replaced with Therm-a-Rests, which worked until our joints got creakier and our backs got achier.

This year, we tried out a self-inflating, 9-inch thick air mattress, which was very comfortable for sleeping, but changing positions was like maneuvering in a bounce house. The sleeping bags have lasted 40+ years if you don't mind the tattered lining. We upgraded to a 2-burner Coleman stove mid-trip in 2001 when the single burner failed and we needed something to cook on.

In the intervening years, and mostly in the last 25 years, we have tent camped in some pretty amazing places – all the way down the Baja Peninsula, central and northwestern Australia, and a number of our national parks and monuments, including Crater Lake, North Cascades, Cedar Breaks, Bryce Canyon, Joshua Tree, and Organ Pipe Cactus. Our most recent trip found us camping 4 nights at Guadalupe Mountains National Park in west Texas.

So now it may surprise you to read that I've never been super enthusiastic about tent camping. Maybe it's my inner Goldilocks? It's great when the weather is perfect, but how often does that happen? You're exposed to the elements, so wind, heat, cold, pea gravel, or rain can all conspire to make tent camping miserable. Our last campsite (at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument) had daytime temperatures in the mid-90s, no shade, and wind. We left a night early.

Tent camping also has a way of reducing life to the bare necessities, which is OK for a while. Dinners become one-dish wonders. Cleanliness becomes an afterthought. I mean really, how often do you need to wash your hands while cooking dinner? Or take a shower? Do you really need a bathroom just down the hall? Not while you're camping! Once it gets dark, there isn't much to do. And then there's the challenge of getting up and out of the tent. This has not gotten easier over the years. If you're a light sleeper, lots of random, weird noises can make sleep challenging. But who needs sleep when you're in the great outdoors?

Which is exactly why tent camping can be magical. You're in the outdoors, about as close to nature as you can get. The air always seems fresher and cleaner. There's a certain serenity that comes with stepping away from day-to-day busyness and reducing life to the bare essentials. If you're lucky, your campground won't have cell service or wifi and you really can get away from it all. After dark, on clear-sky nights, the stars are amazing. The tent is cozy and inviting. The nights are long, and sleep (or at least rest) is never far behind.



Until next time, stay safe and get outdoors, where magic awaits.

Carole