



ROSIE GREEN

Carry on camping

Fleeces, challenging cooking facilities, and a deflating mattress. Will our columnist survive a wilderness adventure?

"GREEN!" SHOUTS ALPHA MALE, his booming voice muffled by the mounds of polyester he's trying to approximate into a living space. "Where are the bloody poles?" The poles? The poles! An essential component of the tent-pitching process, I concur. After emptying the entire contents of the car onto the field, I conclude they are definitely, most certainly, not here. Not a good start.

Camping holiday? Sounds like an oxymoron. Sleeping on the floor? Waking up at 4.45am to feel your bones aching as if you'd been dug up from a car park à la Richard III? Where the domestic drudgery of cooking/washing/tidying is not escaped as per a five-star hotel, but increased twentyfold thanks to lack of oven, dishwasher, and Hoover. Oh, and fleece is the default fabric. What's to like?

We're camping. I've bowed to family pressure. The kids are crazy about it. The opportunity to go completely feral, to avoid hairbrushes, maraud through woodland with sticks and eat unwholesome foodstuffs. AM loves it, too. Return to Neolithic man. Build shelter, make fire, consume charcoaled meat and drink those tiny bottles of lager.

Back to the erection process. Luckily our friends donate their 'play tent' – a spare kept for the purposes of evacuating their kids from their primary canvas residence. AM tries to maintain a Bear Grylls demeanour while constructing the brightly hued 'castle'. He discovers multiple headless Sylvanian figures, a prized train and a half-eaten cereal bar, which he consumes "for energy".

As smug members of the Camping and Caravanning Club pitch up (I can tell by the stickers) I sense we are about to be revealed as amateurs. This fear is realised when said campers pump up their mattresses in minutes with the help of some mechanical device. AM and I are reliant solely on our lungs and within minutes are staggering about, light-headed and breathing like pugs on a ventilator.

At bedtime our family of four attempt to squeeze into the play tent. The kids won't fit so they retreat to our friends' capacious dwelling. I crawl in and start layering up – leggings, pyjamas, tracksuit bottoms – until I'm double my normal circumference. I (attempt) to get comfortable. Within seconds a 16-stone, sleeping-bag-encased AM crashes down on the mattress like a felled tree, bouncing me upwards in cartoon manner. For a moment there is silence. Then a noise, which indicates an expulsion of air either from said mattress or from a bottom.

Because of AM's staggering beer consumption ("only small, Green") he gets up to pee 22 times. Every time he does I sink down, then on his return am bounced up. And the mattress deflates a little more.

BY DAWN WE ARE LYING ON A SHEET OF FLAT PLASTIC. I am enraged that AM is sleeping soundly. While I'm thinking murderous thoughts I hear a kerfuffle outside. Our mate N, who had imbibed similar quantities of beer to AM, wanted a pee and rather than venture outside, decided to urinate in his daughter's potty in their tent's 'porch'. He misjudged how much liquid he would produce from beers ("so small"). The extent of the aftermath is only now being discovered...

Despite all this, breakfast (prep time two hours, 11 minutes) is a joyous affair and tastes 100% more delicious than at home. I don't brush my hair. I wear fleece with impunity. I eat cremated bacon with unadulterated joy.

Still, 24 hours is the maximum that I, or I venture any sane person, can endure.

So, we herd the kids into the car and as we lurch off something slides out from under my seat. It's the pole bag. ■

For far more appealing 'glamping' options, turn to page 141 (no tent poles required)

"AM loves it. Return to Neolithic man. Build SHELTER... and drink TINY bottles of lager"

