

SIX OF THE BEST


Tents for two

With adventures back on the agenda, you may be frantically planning to fill the rest of 2021 with long-distance backpacking trips, multi-day mountain routes and plenty of wild camping overnights. A **TWO-PERSON TENT** is the most versatile option for such a multitude of outdoor escapades. Here are our top picks...

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There's a phrase that chefs use when planning new dishes: "what grows together, goes together". But when it comes to backpacking in the hills, you might adapt it to: "what tramps together, camps together". Okay, sharing a tent might involve a couple of compromises, but there are undeniably many benefits to taking a companion with you on the trail. Conversation and camaraderie can help the miles tick by, making big hill days far less arduous. You'll also get to share experiences that will linger long in the memory, whether that's witnessing epic sunsets, spectacular cloud inversions or just dealing with various trail mishaps (which, in our experience, usually involve falling in bogs and streams or dealing with the tricky problem of outdoor toileting).

Then there's the practical side of long-distance life: two people can share the load, enabling you to split your trail weight across two packs and two backs. That includes the heaviest and bulkiest bits of kit, like your stove and cooking gear, but also your tent, which can make a huge difference on extended trips.

Sharing sleeping quarters might mean sacrificing a little personal space, but then again, that all depends on how much you love your chosen partner/best friend/favourite child/dog, right? And thanks to the latest developments in two-person tent design, you can still expect a decent night's sleep (tent-mate's snoring excepted – don't forget to pack those earplugs). That's because most modern tents utilise clever engineering and ingenious pole geometry to maximise the internal footprint and headroom of the tent, while simultaneously minimising weight and packed size. 

YOUR TESTERS



Matt Jones & Ellie Clewlow

Matt and Ellie are Snowdonia-based outdoor writers and photographers with a passion for all things adventure, from walking long-distance trails to climbing mountains.



Wild Country Helm Compact 2 £220

As the more affordable brand of renowned Derbyshire tentmaker Terra Nova, Wild Country has a reputation for solid tents at reasonable prices. Its Helm series is highly regarded by budget-conscious campers.

The latest version of the two-person model, the Helm Compact 2, has the same floorspace and headroom dimensions as the original Helm 2, but the pole sections have been shortened to give it a more compact pack size. It's short enough to fit in the bottom of most rucksacks, so perfect for backpacking. The flysheet vents have been tweaked for improved airflow, and you get a side-opening tent bag, reducing the frustration of trying to cram it back into its stuffsack. The design pitches all-in-one for fast, convenient setup and is great in wet weather.

"Sturdy, practical and well-priced"



Inside it feels comfortable, with excellent headroom and more length than most dome-style tents, albeit a little less width than some rivals. The two-door, twin porch design is very practical and offers reasonable storage space. Fabrics, poles and pegs are reassuringly robust too, with the polyester fly rated at 4000mm Hydrostatic Head and the bathtub groundsheet at 5000mm.

IF WE'RE BEING FUSSY

It offers plenty of internal length but is a bit narrow compared to other designs. It's on the heavier side, and the poles can snag when threading them through their sleeves.

- **INTERNAL DIMENSIONS** (LxW) 225x118cm
- **PEAK HEIGHT** 105cm
- **PACKED SIZE** 30x21cm
- **TRAIL WEIGHT** 2.35kg

- **DOORS 2** ■ **PORCHES 2**
- **STYLE** Semi-freestanding
- **MATERIALS** 8.5mm Superflex aluminium alloy pole set, Stormex polyester fly (4000mm HH), AquaStop polyester groundsheet (5000mm HH), 70:30 solid nylon/mesh inner

Verdict

Sturdy, practical and well priced, this is an excellent tent for wild camping in the UK hills.

Robens Buck Creek 2 £330

This unusual and innovative tent employs hubbed aluminium alloy poles to form a sturdy 'exoskeleton', from which both the polyester flysheet and pre-attached inner are suspended. It pitches all-in-one and is extremely quick to erect. Numerous guy lines anchor it solidly to the ground, and Roben's own tests claim it can withstand winds of up to 70mph. We didn't manage to verify that, but it held up fine even on relatively exposed wild camps.

The design is freestanding, with a forward floating ridge pole to increase the porch area. Indeed, we reckon the Buck Creek 2 has the best porch of all the single-entry tents we tested, thanks to a partial groundsheet that helps to keep packs dry, while still providing plenty of space to cook or store boots.

An offset door stops rain dripping onto the inner and is equipped with a double zip

"Unusual and innovative"



so you can crack it open for extra airflow. Unfortunately, the sleeping space isn't quite as spacious and it narrows considerably at the foot end too. Headroom is good at the entrance though, enabling you to sit up, while thoughtful features include storage pockets for inner doors and an internal adjustable ridgeline; a good place to hang a tent lantern or air your kit.

IF WE'RE BEING FUSSY

At 2.35kg, it's tied with the Wild Country Helm Compact 2 for heaviest model on test. But it costs over £100 more than that tent, has only a single entrance and isn't particularly roomy.

- **INTERNAL DIMENSIONS** (LxW) 215x120/100cm
- **PEAK HEIGHT** 105cm
- **PACKED SIZE** 41x13cm
- **TRAIL WEIGHT** 2.35kg

- **DOORS 1** ■ **PORCHES 1**
- **STYLE** Freestanding
- **MATERIALS** 9/9.5mm DAC Pressfit aluminium alloy pole set, Hydrotex 30D polyester fly (3000mm HH), 75D polyester groundsheet (7000mm HH), 30D polyester solid/mesh inner

Verdict

Not the most spacious but still very 'liveable', with a practical porch and good extra features.

Sierra Designs Meteor 3000 2P £250

Based on the brand's Meteor Lite backpacking tent, the Meteor 3000 has been tweaked for wetter and wilder weather, with only a slight increase in weight. It tips the scales at just over 2kg, but it boasts upgraded waterproofing, with fabrics rated to 3000mm Hydrostatic Head, plus increased fly coverage.

The polyester flysheet is now a muted dark green,

far better suited to stealthy wild camps. The inner tent features more fabric and less mesh too, making it feel less draughty and chilly. You get two entrances with roomy porches, decent internal dimensions – particularly in terms of overall width – and generous headroom. This is down to pre-bent poles that create a near-vertical front wall

at the head end of the tent. An extra ridge pole also results in steeper sidewalls, which makes the inner doors easier to use. In terms of setup, it's quick to pitch but does need to be erected inner-first.

We loved the 'burrito'-style storage bag, which makes packing up easy. The Meteor 3000 also has a 'stargazer' fly that can be rolled back halfway

– a bit of a gimmick maybe, but one worth trying next time you're out on a clear night.

IF WE'RE BEING FUSSY

Although there's plenty of room at the head end, the ceiling drops sharply at the feet. The inner-pitch first design isn't ideal for setting up in the rain, and flysheet doors tend to snag on the storm flaps.

- **INTERNAL DIMENSIONS** (LxW) 213x129cm
- **PEAK HEIGHT** 104cm
- **PACKED SIZE** 45.7x16.5cm
- **TRAIL WEIGHT** 2.08kg
- **DOORS 2** ■ **PORCHES 2**
- **STYLE** Freestanding
- **MATERIALS** DAC Pressfit aluminium alloy poles, 68D polyester fly (3000mm HH), 68D 190T polyester groundsheet (3000mm HH), 70:30 15Dnylon/ 'NoSeeUm' 15D mesh inner

Verdict

Balancing performance, weight, internal space and price – a solid all-rounder.

"Good performance, weight, internal space and price"



internally braced with Vango's Tension Band System, which prevents the aluminium alloy poles from bending in high winds.

IF WE'RE BEING FUSSY

Since this is a tunnel tent, you need multiple pegging points and solid ground for maximum stability. There's also only a single entrance and limited ventilation, which can sometimes cause condensation.

- **INTERNAL DIMENSIONS** (LxW) 230x130cm
- **PEAK HEIGHT** 105cm
- **PACKED SIZE** 45x15cm
- **TRAIL WEIGHT** 1.9kg
- **DOORS 1** ■ **PORCHES 1**
- **STYLE** Non-freestanding
- **MATERIALS** Yunan SD70 pole set, Protex 15.SRN sil-nylon fly (3000mm HH), 70D ripstop nylon groundsheet (6000mm HH), 15D nylon solid/mesh inner

Verdict

Needs slightly more careful pitching, but is a roomy, robust and protective shelter for camping and backpacking.

Vango F10 Xenon UL 2 £395

This high-spec sil-nylon tent maximises the traditional benefits of a tunnel-style design, namely a superior space-to-weight ratio, ample headroom and good wind-shedding ability, at least when facing end-on. It pitches all-in-one, which is ideal for setting up in the rain, while also ensuring minimal fuss. It does need pegging out securely, but

tensions easily, with super-strong Dyneema guy lines and non-slip, locking runners.

Inside it offers generous length and width, though both sidewalls and the ceiling taper towards the foot end. However, there's plenty of headroom in the front half of the tent, which combines with a roomy porch to give excellent liveability. The bottom of the flysheet door has

a clip to keep it partially closed without needing to zip up – ideal for cooking in poor weather. It also has a slight canopy, which works with the vertical inner door to stop water dripping down inside. As such, if you're forced to wait out a storm, this is a nicer space to shelter in than most.

Despite weighing under 2kg it feels very protective, and the use of arched rather than hooped poles allows for slightly steeper walls that improve water run-off. These are

Nemo Dagger 2 £450

If you're a weight-conscious wild camper or long-distance backpacker who appreciates having plenty of room to stretch out at the end of a long day, the Dagger 2 is an enticing option. It has generous length, width and headroom, plus twin doors and two very spacious porch areas. Two interior mesh pockets make it easy to stay organised, and there are also translucent overhead pockets for a headtorch, so you can see what you're doing in the dark.

The design employs a single, hubbed pole structure, with an inner-pitch first setup. That isn't the best if you're forced to make camp in the rain, but at least it's all very intuitive – in fact, the symmetrical footprint means it's pretty much impossible to go wrong.

Once it's up, the tent feels stable, despite its generous proportions, aided by two pegging points for each porch



that keep the fly fairly low to the ground and prevent flapping. The fly curves upwards at both ends of the tent though. This promotes airflow and helps to ensure a taut pitch, important for silnylon fabrics as they can tend to sag when wet. On the other hand, it reduces overall coverage and means rain can sometimes splash in under the fly, though the extended height of the bathtub groundsheet prevents it from entering the inner in all but the fiercest conditions.

IF WE'RE BEING FUSSY

We'd like greater flysheet coverage at either end of the tent. The Velcro tabs to attach the fly to the poles are annoyingly fiddly, and the door zips are a bit tricky to operate one-handed.

INTERNAL DIMENSIONS

(LxW) 229x127cm

■ PEAK HEIGHT 106cm

■ PACKED SIZE 50x16cm

■ TRAIL WEIGHT 1.75kg

■ DOORS 2 ■ PORCHES 2

■ STYLE Freestanding

MATERIALS

1 Hubbed DAC Featherlite NSL 9.6+9+8.5mm pole, 15D sil-nylon fly (1200mm HH), 30D nylon groundsheet (3000mm HH), 30D polyester solid/mesh inner

Verdict

Though the design isn't perfect (at least for UK use), this tent offers exceptional space-to-weight. It's also roomier and more liveable than most rivals, while still weighing well under 2kg.

Vaude Lizard 1-2P Seamless £540

When we first started camping in the hills, fitting two adults in a '2-person tent' was always a claustrophobic experience. As tent design has improved, that now isn't always the case – as some of the more spacious models here demonstrate. But Vaude's '1-2 person' Lizard is at least upfront about the fact that things will be cosy. Instead, its USP is the level of protection it offers at very low weight.

The double-walled, single hoop design is the same basic shape as some of the best backpacking tents of recent years (the Terra Nova Laser being the classic example). It results in a low, wind-shedding profile. The nylon fly is also siliconized on both sides and has virtually no seams, so rain just rolls off.

Pitching requires careful peg placement, but the Lizard is easier to tension than most sil-nylon tents, thanks to a central pole sleeve that only needs



adjusting from one side, plus well-placed guy lines and short corner struts.

Ventilation is good for such a compact tent, and there's a handy internal ridgeline. There's only a single side door with a small porch though. However, if you're usually a solo camper, this is a palatial 1-person tent that isn't hugely uncomfortable for two, particularly if you plan to pitch up late and hunker down for the night before packing up early.

IF WE'RE BEING FUSSY

It's snug for two people. The groundsheet feels very delicate – we'd recommend adding a footprint. The single side-entry door and small porch might also be a dealbreaker for some.

INTERNAL DIMENSIONS

(LxW) 230x110/90cm

■ PEAK HEIGHT 98cm

■ PACKED SIZE 40x16cm

■ TRAIL WEIGHT 1.29kg

■ DOORS 1 ■ PORCHES 1

■ STYLE Non-freestanding

■ MATERIALS 1 DAC aluminium NFL Featherlite 8.7mm pole and two end struts, 20D sil-nylon fly (3000mm HH), 30D nylon groundsheet (3000 mm HH), 15D nylon/20D polyester solid/mesh inner

Verdict

This ultralight, technically advanced tent is impressive. Ideal for solo use or quick overnights with a partner or close pal, but perhaps less ideal for extended trips.