

GIVE ME SHELTER!

Picking the right backpacking tent for your outdoor adventure is easy.

| By Mark Anders

"Most people think of a tent as just a place for staying out of the rain,"

says Eagle Scout John Mead, president of outdoor gear retailer Adventure 16. "The truth is all the natural elements are important to guard against. You want a tent that will keep out wind, snow, sun and flying and crawling critters, too. And a tent is also a nice place for privacy."

With so many things to consider we decided to ask Mead, an award-winning tent designer, to give us the inside scoop on buying a new backpacking tent.



THE LOWDOWN

DESIGN: Tents come in many shapes like domes, tunnels and wedges. Some are free-standing, meaning they can stand on their own without stakes. Others require guy lines and stakes for set-up. Dome tents are popular because they are freestanding and roomy, but they tend to be heavier than other designs. Wedges are usually lightweight but less roomy. Tunnels provide good space for their weight and are generally better in bad weather. "Shape is most important if you're camping in high wind, heavy rain or snowy conditions," Mead says. A good rule: The more poles a tent uses, the sturdier it will be. Finally, some tent designs are easier to set up than others. Those with pole sleeves, hub-style poles and quick clips will be simplest to pitch.

SPACE AND WEIGHT:

The best way to tell if a tent has enough room is to lie down inside. Solo tents usually have 15 to 25 square feet of space. For two- and three-person tents, add an extra 10 to 15 square feet per person. Some tents also have a vestibule that gives you extra space for storing backpacks, boots, even your dog. "When backpacking, I always recommend taking a tent that can be shared with someone," he says. "That way you can also share the weight. One Scout carries the tent body while the other carries the poles and rain fly." Aim for a tent that weighs no more than three to four pounds per person.

PRICE: "The biggest mistake people make when tent shopping is not matching the tent up with their needs," Mead says. "Why buy a \$500 tent if a \$100 model will work just fine for what you're doing?" The price difference is usually noticeable in the quality and durability. In general the higher the price tag, the lighter-weight and more durable the tent and its poles will be.

BREATHABILITY: Airflow inside your tent is the key to comfortable sleeping. If you're camping in hot conditions look for a tent with lots of mesh panels. For rainy conditions, make sure

next page >>>



Courtesy of John Mead

THIS GUY'S GEAR

Name: John D. Mead

Job: President of Adventure 16

Home: San Diego, Calif.

Eagle Scout, Troop 66, Twin Falls, Idaho

In 1962, a group of Scouts founded their own outdoors company called Adventure 16 (A16). They started making innovative hip-hugging backpacks and designed the first-ever dome tent. Today, John Mead runs Adventure 16 and it's one of the nation's top outdoors stores. He's an avid outdoorsman and has personally designed three tents. Here, Mead fills us in on his favorite gear:



A16 Mountain Shuttle

"I designed this tent (above) in 1981. I named it on the day the first Space Shuttle went into orbit because I thought it looked like a spaceship. It has lots of room inside and was the lightest two-person tent on the market. We don't make it anymore, but I still have one, and it's holding up great." (\$295; www.adventure16.com)

Gregory Lassen

"Wayne Gregory—who designed this pack—is [an Eagle] Scout and good friend. He was actually our first paid employee at Adventure 16. It fits me well, is super comfortable, and has lots of pockets and organizing compartments." (\$299; www.gregorypacks.com or 1-800-477-3420)



Black Diamond Zenix "I like the two flavors of light on this headlamp because it always gives the right amount of light for the job. It's reliable, simple, and it lasts for 100 hours on the lowest light setting." (\$44.50; www.bdel.com or [801] 278-5533)

GUY GEAR: TENTS

there's plenty of space between the rain fly and the tent. Without proper airflow, you'll roast inside. Even if a tent is freestanding, Mead says it's essential to stake it out properly. That way you'll have enough airflow and avoid pesky leaks and condensation on the inside of your tent.

THREE-SEASON VS. FOUR-SEASON: Most tents are designed for three-season use, meaning they'll work for everything except winter conditions. Four-season tents are sturdier and designed for camping in snow, but Mead says they are often heavier and less breathable.

TRY BEFORE YOU BUY: "Make sure you set the tent up in the store and crawl inside," he says. "Most stores don't set up all their tents because of space limitations. But insist on setting it up before you buy it. If they won't let you, go to another store." Pitching it in the store will give you a better idea of how easy it is to set up. You can also make sure that no parts are missing.

WHAT'S HOT

BL's own Gear Guy selects the top tents. All are three-season except where noted.

Mountain Hardwear Alcove 2 (\$220) This roomy freestanding tent has plenty of vestibule and living space for two people. Includes wide mesh door for added ventilation. 5 lbs. 5 oz. 37+14 square feet (tent + vestibule). www.mountainhardwear.com or 1-800-953-8375

Eureka! Apex 2 (\$127) Value-priced two-person dome tent with double doors and a partial vestibule. 5 lbs. 4 oz. 36.5+5.4 square feet. BSA Supply No. 01862; www.scoutstuff.org or 1-800-323-0732

Kelty Aztec 2 (\$180) Freestanding, two-person dome tent with mesh ceiling for better ventilation and star-gazing. Color-coded clips and hub pole attachment make set-ups simple. 4 lbs. 10 oz. 31+8 square feet. www.kelty.com or 1-800-423-2320

Big Agnes Seedhouse I (\$169) Ultra-ventilated all-mesh solo tent with full coverage fly and vestibule. Quick pitching with clips and one pole linked with three hubs. 3 lbs. 15 oz.; 22+5 square feet. www.bigagnes.com or 1-877-554-8975



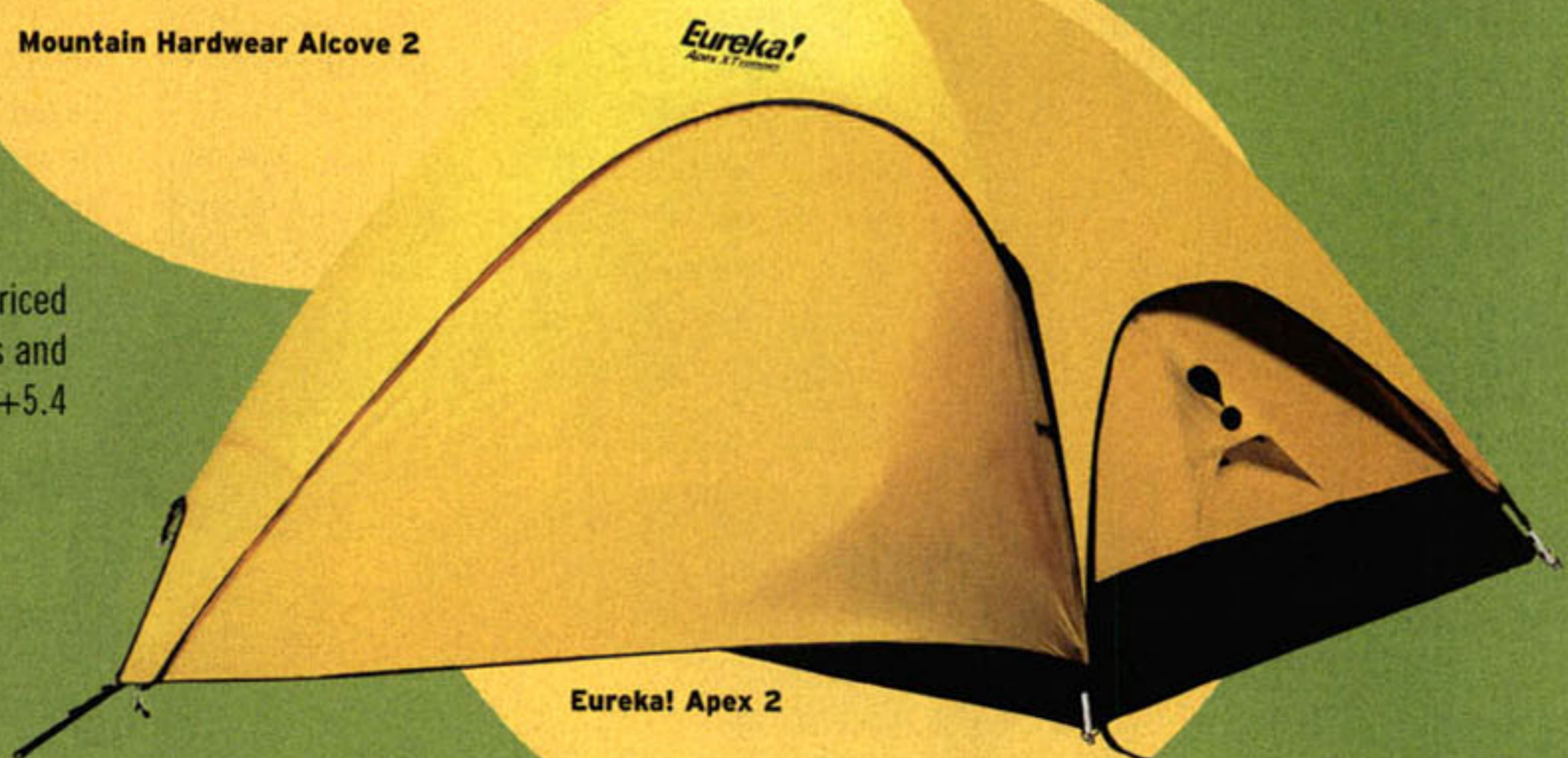
Kelty Aztec 2



Big Agnes Seedhouse I



Mountain Hardwear Alcove 2



Eureka! Apex 2

EMS Starlite II (\$149) Lightweight, hoop-style tent with wrap-around mesh panels for better ventilation. Sleeps two and features two doors, each with its own vestibule, for easier entry/exit. Pitches with clips and pole sleeves. 3 lbs. 15 oz. 38.4+9 +9 square feet.

www.ems.com or 1-888-463-6367



EMS Starlite II



Sierra Designs Gamma

Sierra Designs Gamma (\$149)

Freestanding dome with good headroom and a large vestibule. Sleeps two and has three poles with quick set-up clips. 4 lbs. 12 oz. 34+10 square feet.

www.sierradesigns.com or 1-800-635-0461



Coleman Cadence 3

Coleman Cadence 3 (\$200)

Freestanding three-person dome for four-season camping. Two doors, two vestibules, and a four-pole frame with seven intersecting junctions provides better strength and stability. 8 lbs. 6 oz. 40.8+10.7 + 5.8 square feet.

www.coleman.com or 1-800-835-3278



REI Roadster

REI Roadster (\$139)

Non-free-standing, ultra-light solo tent with unique aluminum corner struts that keep walls vertical to maximize interior space. 3 lbs. 3 oz. 15.5+6 square feet.

www.rei.com or 1-800-426-4840



“Make sure you set the tent up in the store and crawl inside,” Mead says. Pitching it in the store will give you a better idea of how easy it is to set up.