

It's all in the bag

A sleepless night can mean a torturous day on the trail, so make sure your sleeping bag you purchase is ideal to the weather conditions you will find yourself in.

First you must decide what kind of camper you are: a mid-summer snoozer who's lucky enough to get a single five day holiday between late July and early August, an eager camper who heads out the first long weekend in May and then packs it in after the last weekend in September or the hard-core winter camper.

The summer snoozer will be happy with practically any bag on the market, especially the ones on sale. The late spring to early fall camper should choose the versatile three-season bag, with a temperature rating of 15 F to 20 F. And the hard-core "cold" camper should be equipped with a body-hugging mummy bag with an even lower temperature rating. Plus a vapor barrier should be added inside the bag to keep perspiration build-up to a zero and a waterproof liner wrapped around the outside. This will better the temperature rating to five or ten degrees lower. Unless you venture out in the snow more than three times a year or you're planning a three month long expedition to the Arctic, however, I would suggest you rent a winter bag for "cold" camping and go with purchasing a good three-season bag.

Choosing the insulation inside the bag is probably the most difficult decision one must make. The two choices are down (the soft underline plumage of a goose or duck) or synthetic fibre. Down is lighter and warmer, but it's expensive and if wet it loses its insulation abilities, not to mention that it takes forever to dry. Hollofil, Quallofil, PolarGuard and Polysoft are the main synthetic insulating materials on the market. If these new-age

NATURE'S WAY

Kevin Callan

bags happen to get wet they will still retain their loft and keep you warm. The synthetic bags, however, still take up more room in the pack than a compact down bag.

The construction of the bag itself should also be a consideration. The rectangular shaped bag is more roomy than the constricting mummy bag, but is not as compact (make sure to stuff a mummy bag into its sack instead of rolling it up and then packing it away). The mummy bag also comes equipped with a lined hood to keep your body heat from escaping every time you roll over in the night. For greater warmth it is important to note how close the stitching is on the bag. The closer the stitching the better the insulation works. And for better ventilation during those uncomfortable warm nights make sure the sleeping bag's zipper makes its way around to your feet.

The cleaner the bag the warmer it will be, so make sure to wash your sleeping bag before each excursion. It's villainous the way dry cleaners care for a bag. The insulation, both down and synthetic, are mashed to death by the powerful solvents used. Your washer at home is most likely a top-loading machine that's dancing across the floor when turned on, twisting your sleeping bag to pieces. The downtown laundromat's front-loading washing machine is your best bet, when placed on the gentle cycle in cold water. Dry the bag in the drier, set on low or shake well and hang to dry. When not in use make sure to hang the bag up on a hanger.



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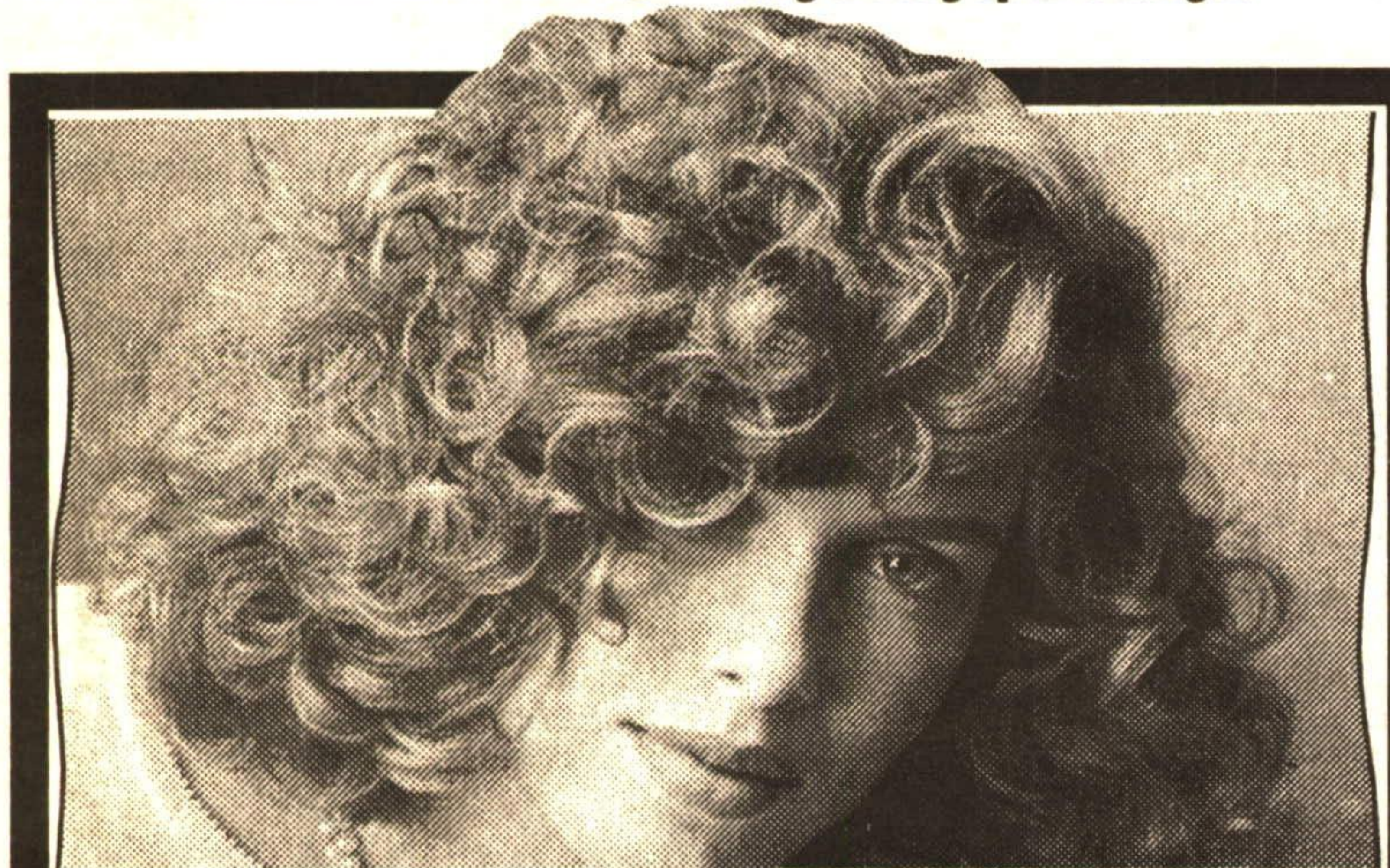
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