



the kitchen fly

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It's four o'clock in the afternoon you're in the middle of the lake and it's raining. Correction, raining is a polite euphemism it's pissing down and has been for two or three hours. The drizzle with occasional heavy showers has given way to cold, pelting nastiness as far as the eye can see. The wind driven, slanting torrent has penetrated every crack of your expensive rainwear and your undergarments remind you vividly of life before potty training. The thoughts of a bowl of hot soup and being 'charged' are like fresh liver to a fly so you head for the nearest likely spot and land.

The woods are drippingly sodden and the rocks are slick horrors complete with miniature versions of grade six rapids. You dump out the gear and cover it with the canoe. You find the fireplace awash but usable. You note that there are convenient trees about and, leaning in one of them, a bunch of poles left by a previous tenant with an old Wood's tent.

Given this optimum situation, you quickly rig the kitchen fly over the fireplace, gather a load of birch bark, split up some standing deadwood and in next to no time you are warm with exertion, luxuriating before a roaring fire and making rude gestures at the elements, now reduced to an inconvenience. That is, if you happen to have a kitchen fly. If you haven't you are probably retreating into your tent and contemplating a cold supper unless you are equipped for one pot meals on a small stove.

Maybe at this point I should make it clear that I am writing this for people who trip with menus designed for cooking on an open fire, i.e. a bush kitchen. I have infinite respect for people who use nothing but a stove and, with their tent and vestibule can laugh at anything that nature serves up. I recall seeing a film of climbers preparing hot food in a blizzard on the North Face of the Eiger with such a stove. It is not for us, however.

We enjoy cooking on trips and find the fireplace both practical and a necessary part of our campsite. We do long trips which normally involve days of excessive heavenly moisture and have solved the water/fire incompatibility with 'The Fly'. I should add, somewhat boastfully, that we have never had to forego our scheduled hot supper since we acquired it.

Now, just in case there are readers who think this is a smart idea and want to run out and get one, let me hasten to say that there are pitfalls ... in fact there are positively deep mine-falls that can make the wet 'Pamper' feeling inconsequential. You see, a kitchen fly consists of three elements. A square or rectangular piece of waterproof material, approximately 10 ft. X 12 ft., with grommets on the corners and sides; support poles found on or near the site and a set of guy lines (we use our 50 ft. 'lining' ropes).

This kit will provide you with a fly but it will also provide a sail which would do the Mayflower proud, a cloth funnel which will divert gallons of water into your otherwise perfect tent space and an enemy in league with the rain which, if given half a chance, will self-destruct just when you have all your packs open under it. Believe me, we have suffered all its quirks and have only survived because we are alert for its infantile pranks.

The traditional fly used by generations of outdoor travellers and presently by the canoe camps is made of canvas. It is usually set by tying a ridge pole between two trees and lashing the high leading edge of the fly to it. The whole thing is guyed with wannigan tump lines. While this method will certainly provide shelter, fireplaces located between two close trees are, for good reason, rare. Our free-standing system allows sheltered cooking and a chance to dry things out beside the fire. We use a ripstop nylon fly made by Eureka of the same coated fabric as the floors and flysheets of their tents. It is light and waterproof but, if you don't use a ridgepole, the hem and grommets are not strong enough. In one hefty gust last year the wind ripped a corner right off.