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SPORTS

New high-tech camping gear takes 'rough' out of roughing it

BY MIKE HAYAKAWA
Staff Writer

At one time, camping was seen as roughing it in the woods.

A protective cover under which to shelter, a ground mat and sleeping bag were the basic tools.

Those furnishings remain the staples of survival in the wilderness.

However, a visit to a campsite or an outdoors store will unveil some startling changes that have taken place in this time-honoured outdoor activity.

Through innovative technological and cosmetic updates, new equipment enables year-round camping to be an enjoyable experience.

These changes might also be contributing to the increased popularity of the recreational pastime.

'Cotton and canvas are out and synthetics are in. We're now in the soft shell revolution.'

At a recent western Canadian camping trade show, it was announced the camping market in Canada has grown approximately 25 per cent over the past three years, said Peter Durst, spokesperson for Coast Mountain Sports, a Markham retail outlet specializing in outdoor sports apparel.

"Camping equipment has definitely changed over the past five years," Mr. Durst said.

Rodger Taylor, owner of Camper's Place in Newmarket, said equipment today has reached the point where the better quality items, including tents and sleeping bags, offer lifetime warranties.

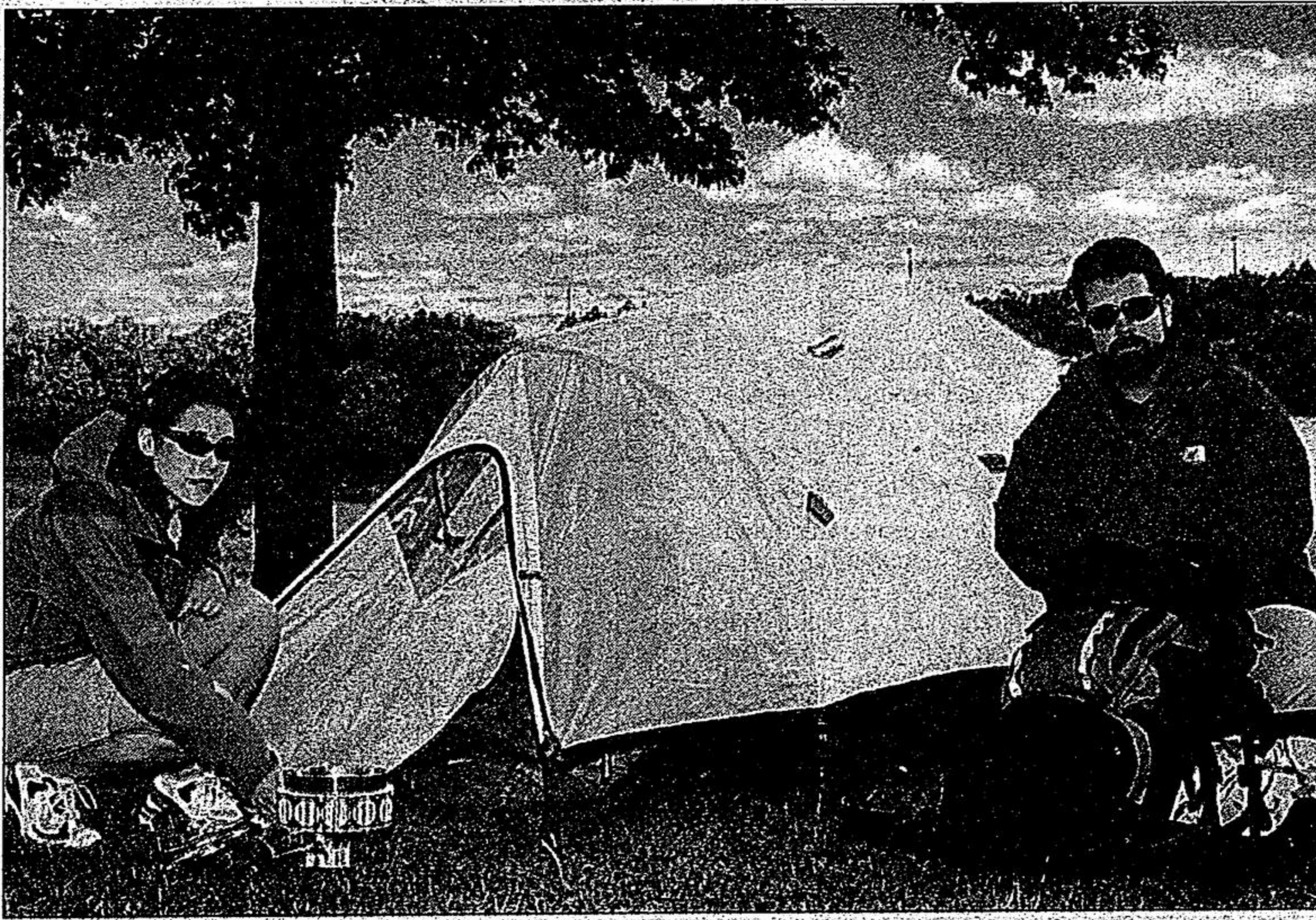
"There's always constant improvement in camping equipment," Mr. Taylor said.

Gone by the wayside are tents of heavy-duty fabric. These days, tents are constructed of waterproof material that's lighter, more durable and breathes more easily.

"Cotton and canvas are out and synthetics are in," Mr. Durst said.

"We're now in the soft shell revolution."

Mr. Taylor said the shape of tents has undergone a transformation. Once hexagonal, they now are mostly square or rectangular. This makes for far better



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Peter Durst and Jenn Randall of Coast Mountain Sports at the Markville Shopping Centre display some of the latest in stoves, tents, sleeping bags, backpacks and clothing.

utilization of space, Mr. Taylor said.

While today's tents still won't rival a room at the Hilton, Mr. Durst said current models offer far more comfort.

"The old adage of tents was when people went to sleep, it was like sleeping in a plastic bag. There was no attic or venting porch."

To allow improved air movement, tents now have sophisticated venting systems comprised of zippered panels that can be removed to enable air to move more freely.

"Ideally, you want cooler air to come in and push out the hot air from above," Mr. Durst said.

Not only is there a noticeable change in the design and durability of tents, those who have to carry them will benefit from more compact and lighter designs.

Mr. Durst said there are one-person tents rolled into 18-by-four-inch packages weighing about five pounds.

A two-person, full-fly tent can come in a similar-sized package that weighs even less.

Accessories have changed, too, Mr. Durst said.

"The biggest knock on poles and pegs in the old days was that they were made of heavy metal material that were weak and could bend easily.

They are now constructed of high-end aluminum or Fiberglas.

As well, poles are "shock-corded" with a rubber-type of cord that enables them to be assembled more easily.

The time needed to put up a tent has also been dramatically reduced because newer models have a clip system or sleeves where poles slide through a fabric sleeve.

'Camping equipment has definitely changed over the past five years.'

"With higher quality tents, you get better fabrics, better stitching and an improved vent system," Mr. Taylor said.

Tents aren't the only camping items that have improved.

Ground or floor mats, previously made of heavy vinyl or rubber, are now constructed of heavy duty nylon. They are far lighter in weight, more pliable and come waterproofed.

Modern ground mats, or footprints, are specifically made for each tent design; a far cry from the old one-size-fits-all mats.

"You buy one for your tent and it fits exactly underneath and clips onto the tent," Mr. Durst said.

Even sleeping bags, designed to trap an individual's body heat, have become specialized. Once bulky, sleeping bags are now lightweight and compact. Mr. Taylor said there are sleeping bags on the market that weigh as little as one pound.

When buying a sleeping bag, Mr. Durst said consumers should consider when they do the majority of their camping. Some models are tailored for three-season camping (spring, summer and early fall for temperatures as cold as -7 Celsius) or winter camping on days when the thermometer plummets to -18 C.

Sleeping bags also come with different downfill material.

Traditional goose-down models are still popular, but there are also sleeping bags made of synthetic material. Both have advantages.

With goose-down bags, Mr. Durst said down-sourcing has become more sophisticated. Modern models have fine, soft plume.

"The better the bag, the softer the plume will be," he said.

The big advantage of goose-down bags is they offer the most compressible insulation. However, due to their delicate composition, goose-down bags



Mike Adler

Been There, Done That Hike in woods good escape

The first thing I see at the pond is a boy with a net, splashing in the water.

The second thing I see is a great blue heron, standing in the stagnant pond, patient and still.

A small reservoir for the Black River in Whitchurch-Stouffville, the place isn't even on a map and is not featured in the new *Everyday Guide to the York Regional Forest* I carry on this hike.

Plenty of people have found it, though, and they've brought their dogs.

In a canine frenzy, a golden retriever rubs against my legs repeatedly.

I'm wearing shorts and, after the retriever is led away, another dog owner, John Daniel of Uxbridge, has an interesting thought.

'I'm glad to be here at the Eldred King Forest Tract in Whitchurch-Stouffville, where the air is cool and clean and bearable.'

He tells me the retriever has probably been running through poison ivy and may have transferred the poison to my legs.

"Wash them right now if you can," he advises.

Gee, there were pictures of poison ivy on a bulletin board near the entrance, but I wasn't paying attention. It would explain all those plants along the trail with "leaves of three".

I step in among the tadpoles and minnows. I'm glad to be here at the Eldred King Forest Tract in Whitchurch-Stouffville, where the air is cool and clean and bearable.

Stopping for a second on the damp sand of the trail, I can hear and spot chipmunks moving over needles of pine trees planted in 1924 to stabilize the blow-sands of the Oak Ridges Moraine.

The region's pocket-sized forest guide (available soon from York Tourism, 1-888-448-0000), contains event listings and maps for seven of the region's 18 tracts.

They should name the next tract after E.J. Zavitz, the province's first chief forester, whose 1908 report on the barren wastelands left by logging led to a reforestation movement.

The results of reforestation in York