

An extract from  
***SOVE UTE***  
*HÅNDBOK FOR NETTER I SOVEPOSE*

**(Sleeping Outside – A Handbook on  
How to Use Your Sleeping Bag)**

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English translation © Ian Giles

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## Introduction (p. 11)

**HOW TO SLEEP OUTSIDE.** Some people hate it. There's mosquitoes and rain, not to mention tree roots and rocks under your sleeping mat. It's cold, wet, dark and scary.

But you know what? You'll love it – at least you will after you've read this book.

Or perhaps I'm exaggerating... There's no guarantee that you'll love it. But I'm going to try and get you to that point. To the place where you can imagine almost nothing better than spending the night in a tent – whether under canvas or the open sky. Sleeping outside is about the stars, cosying up to the fire, fresh air and tranquillity. It is a pure and simple way to experience nature. It is a way to get to know yourself, and an opportunity to form close friendships.

In straightforward terms, sleeping outside is just wonderful.

But it does help if you know what you're doing. It helps to know how to plan your trip, what constitutes a good campsite, how to pitch your tent, hang up a hammock, light a fire or go to the loo. These things aren't all that complicated, really. However, there are lots of things you need to know to ensure pleasant nights outside – whether in good weather or while storms and cold are raging. If you need to get hold of a new tent for your expedition, it can be easy to get lost in the myriad of equipment and marketing.

That's why I've written this book: it's for beginners as well as those experienced in the art of sleeping outside. The goal is that the pages of this book will give you the confidence, knowledge and inspiration to unroll your sleeping bag and sleep just as well as (or better than) you do indoors.

Sleep tight!

**Caption:** A long evening at Romeriksåsene.

## My first night outdoors (p. 12)

It may not have been a night that changed my life. But I think it holds meaning for everything I've done since. My bag was slung on my back. My boots were on my feet. I shouted goodbye, opened the door and headed into the darkness. Outside, the cold bit into my skin. The sky was completely clear. There was a thin layer of snow on the ground. I was sixteen years old – I should have had better things to do on a Friday night in December, but that evening I just knew what I was going to do: sleep *alone* outside.

I had already done a lot of hiking over the course of my short life. I don't actually remember my first night in a tent, but it was around the age of three or four – one summertime with my mother and father. And it was almost certainly somewhere or other in Jotunheimen National Park. Most likely in a blue, worn out tunnel tent with space for three people. As I said, I don't remember the night itself, but I remember the small boy's delight at how fun tents were. That tiny room where we slept close to each other. Where we woke up slightly sweaty in our sleeping bags. Then we made breakfast on the Primus under the tent canopy. Perhaps it was simply the enthusiasm of my mum and dad that was infectious. But I believe I considered it something of an adventure.

However, I didn't get my first proper 'outdoor schooling' until I joined the scouts. We had great leaders and became a bunch of friends who experienced most types of outdoor living and activity together. We were sent into the forest and up into the mountains, we learned to light a fire and navigate, find campsites, construct lean-tos and pitch tents. At any rate, we were supposed to learn how to do those things. We were relatively lazy. Which also meant we made all the mistakes. We went off in the wrong direction, we picked bad campsites, we shivered through night after night by fires that wouldn't burn and in lean-tos that blew away. We might very quickly have ended up hating each other. But there was a lot of fun too. We struggled and laughed, and we had hundreds of stories to remember afterwards. I don't think we learned very much – but all in all we formed friendships that are still some of the best I have today.

Nevertheless, on this particular December night I went out alone. Not because my friends had stopped liking the great outdoors, but because they had begun to change their priorities. Other things were more important. And if it hadn't been for this particular night, it could have ended up like that for me too. The night I hiked into the

Nordmarka forest, following the trails to Lake Ørfiske and traipsing up through dense forest to the top of Søndre Karlshaugen. It wasn't actually that far into the forest, but it was far enough that I felt removed from everything. At the top of an open expanse where the forest had been felled, I brushed the snow away from the ground, unpacked my sleeping mat and bag and started a fire that to my great surprise continued to burn and provide heat for several hours.

I have read other descriptions of nights like this. Some of them almost transcend into spirituality. There is no end to how great an experience people have, or the wonderful thoughts and senses they experience beside a fire like that when on their own in the forest. I think first and foremost I thought it was beautiful. Finding a place where I could sit quite still without worrying about anything else. All while surveying the forest and looking up at the stars. And I remember the feeling that I had pulled it off – I had managed to get set up in the dark without being scared, I had managed to keep the fire going, keep my equipment dry and sleep through a long night in the great outdoors without getting cold. It was the purest feeling of mastery I've ever experienced.

It was this particular night that made life outdoors my thing. In the time that has passed since then, I have spent a cumulative total of several years sleeping outside. In tents, under lean-tos or even under the open sky. It isn't really the sleeping itself that is my primary reason for heading off on foot. It's largely the experience of nature – all the raw landscapes you can take in and the things that you can do. But sleeping outside is and remains one of the finest things I ken.

**Caption:** Since my youth, I have been fortunate to spend hundreds of nights outside. Shown here is Femundsmarka National Park by night.

## Testing your kit (p. 38)

Later on in this book, you can read all about different types of equipment for sleeping outside and how to use it. Here, I want to quickly mention that you should test new equipment on short, straightforward hikes before you take it out into the faraway mountains or on trips that last for several days.

- Pitch your tent or hang up your hammock or tarpaulin. Check sheets, rods, guyropes and pegs are all as they should be and everything is complete. Remember: when you are out hiking you may need to pitch camp in the pouring rain or a gale. You'll be grateful then for all the preparation you did beforehand.
- Before taking your sleeping bag out into challenging conditions or on longer trips, you should have tested whether it is warm enough in similar temperatures – preferably in your local area. This is especially important for winter hikes.
- If you are going to use a Primus stove or other cooking equipment, check that it works and whether it needs cleaning before you set off. Remember to test or learn how much fuel your equipment uses before setting off on trips where you are dependent on it as a heat source.

**Caption:** Mornings in a tent can be just as comfortable as mornings spent at home.

## Packing light (p. 39)

By all means carry as much as you can. But for some people, a heavy bag is the demotivating factor that means they opt out of outdoor living. Carrying less weight saves you energy, gives you more strength to do other things and reduces the risk of sprained ankles and other injuries from being overloaded. So paying close attention to weight can be useful.

- In terms of equipment, you can save the most weight on ‘the big three’: tent, rucksack and sleeping bag. If light equipment matters to you, then you should pay the most attention to these three items. Just be careful to ensure that your focus on weight doesn’t overshadow your need for things to work for their intended purposes.
- Lay out everything you’ve planned to take with you on your hike. Is there anything you rarely or never use? Consider leaving it at home. For example, you should think critically about how much clothing and kitchen equipment to bring.
- Have you been planning to bring liquids like soap, toothpaste, sun cream, fuel for your burner, methylated spirits, etc.? A little extra is great – but how much do you really need? Remember you can decant into drinks bottles or mini travel sets from the pharmacy.
- Does any of your equipment have a dual purpose, allowing it to replace something else? Could you use your frying pan as a plate? Do you really need both a chef’s knife and a butter knife?
- Food packaging causes the most waste on any hike. Throw away anything you don’t need while you are packing. Bring an extra garbage bag. You should never leave behind any litter.

**Caption:** When getting equipment: think about weight and volume, but you should always pick first and foremost on the basis of enduring quality.



## Packing (p. 40)

- Rucksacks should be packed with the heaviest things towards the back. Remember the bag should have a higher centre of gravity when hiking on foot and a lower centre of gravity if cross country skiing.
- Try to pack your equipment so whatever you need first is most easily accessible. Place items like headlamps and first aid kits in side pockets or the top pocket of the rucksack. Tell anyone with you on the trip where the first aid items are.
- Compression sacks are bags with tight straps on the outside, most frequently used to store sleeping bags. These are great for reducing the volume of soft equipment. I often pack both my sleeping bag and spare clothes in the same sack. Clothes I may need during the day, such as gloves or waterproofs, are packed in more accessible locations.
- Do you have a plan for keeping your clothes and equipment in your bag dry while you are out and about? Use a rain cover on the outside and/or pack things into a waterproof bag within your rucksack.
- If you are packing a tent, tarpaulin or anything else that may need to be unpacked in suboptimal conditions (such as wind and rain), try to pack these as practically as possible. Bundle each guyrope together so they do not get tangled up with each other, fold the sheet in a way that means you can tell which end is top and bottom – as well as which sides are long and short.
- If you have a type of tent where the inner tent can be pitched at the same time as the outer (most Nordic models are like this), attach the inner and outer tents together before setting off.
- Tents should be packed so that the peg fasteners for one of the short ends of the outer tent are sticking out of the packing bag. This means you can attach this using pegs into the ground before removing the rest of the tent from the bag. A great cheat in windy conditions.
- There is a suggested comprehensive packing list at the back of this book.

## Food and drink (p. 41)

**Caption:** Cocoa is always good.

**Food and drink** are important. It's better to bring too much than too little. And you can take more or less anything you like with you.

**Steak and potatoes?** Tex mex? Yes, why not? But think about how to save weight and reduce the need for heating. Roast your meat at home, cook the things that need cooking. Then it's fine to just warm them up while you are outside.

**Freeze-dried and instant meals** don't weigh much. They can be bought in bags from most sports stores, and they are prepared simply by adding boiling water to the bag. One of the best known producers is the Norwegian firm Real Turmat. These provide a lot of energy for their weight, and the food isn't bad either.

**Tinned foods** are heavier, but taste good and are easy to prepare. My three favourites (which all go very well with mashed potato) are pemmican, mackerel in tomatoes, and the traditional Norwegian ration tin known as 'snurring'. Just remember to bring the empties home with you.

**For breakfast**, I like to have porridge that is pre-mixed at home using lightly cooked oats, milk powder and sugar which I then pack in freezer bags. The mixture can be poured into a cup to which you add warm water. Otherwise, just bring bread.

**For lunch**, you can eat bread or crack open your supplies of biscuits, nuts, crisps and chocolate. Or have a proper break and cook something more advanced. Just keep in mind that wind or poor weather can make long breaks rather unappetising.

**In winter**, you need a thermos for your drinks. In the summer, you can get by with ordinary plastic bottles. Water is the easiest and best thing to drink, and you can find it almost everywhere. Drink clear water from running water courses or large lakes. Be cautious if water is still – it may contain bacteria. You should also avoid drinking unboiled water that may have been contaminated by farmland, grazing animals, birds or small rodents. Ask the locals if you are uncertain, or boil your water before drinking it.

**Drink a lot** – at least as much as you feel you need for any other physically demanding activity. You often need more fluids than you think. This applies whether you are sweating in the heat or panting in the winter chill.

**Caption:** A solid outdoor dinner. Heavy to carry, but absolutely worth the effort at moments like this.

## Enjoy your trip! (p. 43)

Before leaving: Tell your friends and family where you are going, which route you are taking and when you expect to return. It's also a good idea to provide them with contact details for anyone else who will be with you.

**Caption:** Nightfall in Finnemarka, north of Drammen.

## A night in the wilderness (p. 44)

**When I was in my teens, most of my friends thought outdoor living was pretty stupid. Now more and more of them are discovering what it has to offer. One of these people is Bjørn Tore Moen. For him, moments close to nature have changed his life.**

The man by the campfire at the very tip of the small headland in the forest strikes a match against the yellow box and sees a flame flutter between his fingers. To say he is unaffected by today's exertions would be to modify the truth. He is covered in pine needles, out of breath, muttering about being hungry and how his body will feel wrecked in the morning. Nevertheless, Bjørn Tore Moen is exactly where he wants to be. Just like many others throughout Norway on this particular Saturday evening. We can't see them from our position deep in a valley below Skrimfjella, but there is a flood of content about the great outdoors on social media: pictures of sunsets, tents and summits. Videos of freshly-cooked trout and sizzling stoves. Hashtag genuine. Hashtag myoutdoorlife. And so on.

Who would ever have imagined this just a few years ago? Completely ordinary, unhurried hikes would become trendy? As it happens, we don't have to go back more than a decade to find the situation was rather different.

'There was a period where outdoor activities were connected with activities for the more mature person. This was something we could see based on the age of our members,' says Lasse Heimdal. He is Secretary-General of the Norwegian Outdoor Council, an umbrella organisation for 17 Norwegian outdoor associations and clubs.

'Now we have surveys showing that nine in ten Norwegians want to go outdoors,' says Heimdal. He is watching youth organisations grow and seeing young adults streaming into the forests and mountains. For instance, the Norwegian Trekking Association has never had more members than it has today.

**Caption: Bjørn Tore Moen has lit a fire deep below Skrimfjella.**

'If you want to confirm that there is a trend, you need do no more than look at Instagram,' says Heimdal.

At the campfire beneath Skrimfjella to the south of Kongsberg, the flame from the match has slowly grown into a crackling fire of dry spruce branches.

‘This will look good,’ says Bjørn Tore Moen, pointing his mobile phone camera towards the flames. The camera captures the sparks rising towards the sky in front of dark hills reflected in the still water. Seconds later, a video has been shared with more than 8,000 Instagram followers.

Moen puts his mobile in his pocket and leans against the rock wall behind him:

‘Ah. A perfect evening.’

Earlier in the day while he had been making his way through the wilderness to this evening’s campsite, he had been telling me about times when he had prioritised things other than the forest on a Saturday night.

‘I had gone out hiking when I was little, but I had never really got what the big deal was. I liked photography, but nature photos were some of the most boring things I could imagine,’ he said.

This lasted until Bjørn Tore Moen turned 26 and weighed 30 kilos more than he does today. Then everything changed. ‘In 2012, a friend and I found out that could start hunting down local guide posts placed by the local tourist association in Notodden. We took fifteen hikes in total and it was a major motivation to get us out,’ he says.

The motivation soon became an all-consuming passion. It took him on new trips, including his first week-long hike alone across the Hardangervidda plateau. He had packed so much stuff that his bag straps cut into his shoulders, but his interest survived. That was followed by courses on expeditions, new trips and more experience. Today, he goes hiking almost every single day.

‘It’s genuinely changed my life. The great outdoors is basically what it’s all about now. Friends refer to me as “him outdoors”.’

And they know him as @btmoen. His Instagram profile is bursting with tents, kayaking, starry night skies and everything else a photographer can find out here. He hopes and believes it may inspire others to discover some of the same things that he has.

**Caption:** The area around Skrimfjella is a relatively easily accessible area of wilderness just south of Kongsberg.

‘A lot of what people share on social media quite clearly shows that Norwegians have a strong desire to experience nature,’ says Lasse Heimdal.

‘Many people also want to be identified alongside their experiences. We see this in the bragging photos that are shared from our major natural landmarks when both Norwegians and foreign tourists very clearly show off that “I was here!”.’

The Norwegian Outdoor Council also uses social media platforms to get people outside. Using the hashtag #nightinnature, they have encouraged people annually over the last few years to spend a night outside on a set date. The concept is simple: people sleep outside wherever and however they like. They find a sense of community by sharing online.

‘The night this year was in September. Somewhere between 60,000 and 100,000 people participated, and a total of 3,000 pictures were shared,’ says Heimdal.

So what is it that drives people into the great outdoors – apart from attention and a desire for identity? ‘Good question,’ says Bjørn Tore Moen. ‘For me, nature is a place where I can relax, get away from everything at home, and live without any worries. It’s a place where I can enter a zen mode of sorts. Probably some of the same stuff that people who do yoga talk about.’

## Outside (p. 49)

And with that you're there. Under the open sky. All you have to do is savour it. A few mnemonics and good routines will ensure your pleasure is even greater.

**Caption:** A summer's morning in Lomsdal-Visten National Park in Nordland.



## The campsite (p. 50)

**I would happily eat a slice of bread with liver pate for breakfast every day for a hundred years. But when it comes to picking a campsite, I'm a connoisseur. A picky gourmet. A campsite should ideally be perfect.**

**But what is a perfect campsite? Here's my recipe.**

### **Find your spot**

Have you reached the area you want to camp in? Do you have sufficient drinking water there (either in your bag or available from a stream or other sources)? Do you have what you need in terms of fuel if you are going to light a fire? If the answer to these questions is yes, then all you have to do is search for the campsite itself.

### **Old campsites**

When you are near popular lakes or views, you will generally find sites where other people have camped previously. Perhaps they have cleared the ground or laid out a stone ring for the campfire. If you are in a location with established campsites like this, you may as well pick what is easiest: use the campsite that is already there. Nature is worn down enough as it is, and there is no need for you to wear it down somewhere else nearby. At least provided the established campsite suits your equipment and the purpose of your trip – not to mention the weather conditions. Nevertheless, remember that in popular hiking areas it may be difficult to find firewood close to these well-used sites. If you want to set a fire, bring a few extra lumps of wood in your bag.

**Caption:** On some nights you need to seek out shelter.

### **Shelter or views?**

The main advice for a comfortable night outside is most often to find a warm place where there is little risk of being caught in the wind during the night. So, at the bottom of a valley, behind a rock or in a forest. When you are sheltered, you are warmer, you may sleep better, and you have more energy the next day. This applies whether or not

you have a tent – but is particularly important when sleeping outside without one. Your body will burn a lot of energy if you are exposed to the wind for a full night.

**Caption:** In fine weather, you can sleep in locations that are more exposed to the weather and wind – like this small islet in Jotunheimen National Park.

At any rate, many people are still drawn to views and open locations. The long headland in a fishing lake. The treeless islet in the lake. The mountain ridge that stands out above everything else. I must admit I am just the same, and some of my best campsites have been in locations like this. In general, this is fine – especially in the summer and if you are sleeping in a tent or can pull something windproof over your sleeping bag (see chapters on equipment). In the summer, it is sometime advantageous to sleep somewhere in the open as the wind provides extra ventilation and keeps mosquitoes and midges away. But if there is a gale and it is raining sideways at two o'clock in the morning – well, you want to be sheltered. And you should always seek out shelter in the winter regardless.

**Caption:** The sun sets over a one person tent in Aurskog-Høland.

## The don't list (p. 52)

### I'm mostly writing this just to get it out in the open

**DON'T** pitch camp beneath any steep terrain covered in a lot of snow or snowdrifts in winter. It may collapse, and those avalanches can go a long way.

**DON'T** camp beneath trees uprooted by the wind. They can collapse.

**DON'T** sleep beneath dead, rotten trees when it is windy in the forest. They may fall down.

**DON'T** settle by the seashore at low tide. Nor should you be too close to a river before a night of heavy rain. The water will rise.

**DON'T** sleep at the highest point or anywhere exposed if there is a risk of thunderstorms. You may be struck by lightning.

There – now it's been said.

## **Water, sun, noise and wildlife (p. 53)**

**Caption:** A lovely campsite at Helgeland.

Direct access to water is great, but remember that rivers and waterfalls are noisy and can keep you awake. Sleeping just a little way into the forest or behind a hillock may reduce the volume considerably. In low temperatures, you should always generally avoid sleeping too close to open water. An open stream can cause frost mist and breeze. Both of these cool you down quicker than dry, still air.

The sun is often a good thing. Particularly in the spring, autumn and winter, you want to make sure you are in a spot where the sun will find you early. Perhaps the warmth of the sun will be the reason you get an extra hour of sleep and have a good morning. But in the summer, the sun can transform a tent into a baking oven and the nights become unnecessarily short. Consider where the sun will rise (always in the east) and whether you want anything between it and you.

The sound of birds is usually pleasant, but be considerate of nesting birds. For example, if a territorial golden plover is diving towards you and screaming while you are pitching camp, it may be worth picking somewhere else. Firstly, you're disturbing it. Secondly, it may keep at it all night.

Other animals rarely pose any major issues in Norway, but there are some exceptions. In the summer, it is advisable not to camp right beside an anthill unless you like the idea of ants in all your bags.

## **Your bed for the night**

So, what do you need in the spot where you want to lie down? If you're going to sleep in a hammock, you need

two solid trees. Simple as that. Everyone else will need to assess the ground conditions. The advice is simple: find a spot that is as dry as possible and flat with as few bumps as you can. This may be rather difficult. A slight slope doesn't matter much, so long as you sleep with your head at the top. Small stones, pinecones and branches can be removed, but avoid changing the place so much that others can tell you have been there. If you are sleeping in a tent, you obviously need to be able to fasten your pegs, unless you have a free-standing tent that can be anchored using stones or other weights.

During hot periods, dry, soft marshes can be great to sleep on. However, as a general rule, you should avoid places that are particularly wet. This is especially true when sleeping in a tent, as the water can condense and soak the entire thing. If there is a chance of heavy rain, you should also avoid pitching camp in ditches or other locations where water may trickle down and collect.

### **Don't be too picky (p. 55)**

Campsites are just like life: there is no such thing as perfection. There's always something to complain about. Be ready to adapt to the site and make peace with anything that is good enough.

**Caption:** Tent site with a soft underlay and water (almost) on tap. In the morning, sleeping bags are aired while wet socks dry in the sun.