

by Joel McNamara

Terra Nova Bothy Bags

For quite some time mountaineers have used bivy bags—easily packed, compact shelters that help keep them dry and conserve body heat when they're caught without a tent in bad weather or nightfall. When on land you can easily crawl into a bivy bag and wait out a storm. In a survival situation, a bivy can save your life.

An alternative to a bivy bag is a Bothy Bag. Bothies are big in Britain, but haven't yet caught on in North America. A Bothy is a simple, wooden or stone shelter popular with hikers and trekkers in the hills and mountains of Scotland, Ireland and Northern England. A Bothy Bag is a fabric tent of sorts but without a frame or stakes. Unlike a bivy bag, which is a fabric

bag you lie in, you sit upright in a Bothy. You and your paddling partners put the shelter over your heads, sit down on fabric seat flaps at the perimeter (there's no full floor) and lean back; this makes the walls taut and supports the occupants.

Terra Nova Equipment (www.terra-nova.co.uk) makes Bothies in several different sizes that can accommodate anywhere from 2 to 20 people. I had a chance to check out their 2- and 4-person offerings.

The Terra Nova Bothies are made from windproof, water-resistant ripstop nylon. The 2- and 4-person models pack to about the size of a football and weigh 12.9 and 19.5 ounces, respectively. Bothies come stowed in an integral stuff sack; the bottom of the sack is mesh and

serves as a roof vent. Without much effort you can pull a Bothy from its sack and be sitting inside it, out of the weather, in about a minute.

To test the 2-person Bothy, my paddling partner and I both got inside and sat down—you sit facing each other. It's a fairly confined space, but the nylon (your choice of red or yellow) does let a fair amount of light in so it's not like you're in a dark cave. As a bonus there are two clear windows, one on each side (four windows with the 4-person model), which are great for checking outside conditions and reducing any feelings of claustrophobia.

Our test conditions were overcast skies with light rain, calm winds and an



Two-man Bothy occupied

Joel McNamara

outside air temperature of 50.7 degrees Fahrenheit (10.4° C). After five minutes, air temperature inside the bag was 68.4 degrees (20° C). At 10 minutes it rose to 70 degrees (21° C) and remained there for the duration of a 20-minute test. While a 2-person Bothy can be used by a solo paddler sitting with feet extended to the other side, I noted air temperature six degrees lower when using the Bothy solo than when two people were inside. *[In my own test the air temperature was at 33 degrees (0.5° C). After three minutes, the temperature reached a comfortable 63 degrees (17° C) without being muggy in the bag. -Ed.]*

The seams are not sealed but we didn't note any leaks and we stayed dry. In more of a downpour the seams could leak, but since you'd customarily be wearing your outerwear or immersion wear in the bag, a bit of dripping isn't going to be an issue.

The coated nylon fabric isn't breathable so humidity rises quickly with breathing and wet clothing. We had condensation forming on the windows after five minutes. Under survival conditions this can be a plus, since evaporative cooling is reduced. If it gets too muggy or warm you can always lift the sides up for more ventilation.

The Bothy's roof has a sleeve for inserting a hiking pole to give the bag some rigidity and keep the nylon off your head. I found that a take-apart paddle—half of it or both pieces in an A-frame—also worked.

If you lean against the Bothy's wall with your head, you may soon start to feel a crick in your neck, so use your back. Wearing a PFD helps keep the pressure off your neck and reduces heat loss from your back where you have contact with the Bothy fabric. I felt noticeable heat loss from my bare head when pressed against the nylon, so a hat is a must. An insulated sleeping or sitting pad is also a good idea for additional comfort and insulation.

Beyond serving as an emergency shelter the Bothy can serve as a warm, albeit a bit cramped, place to take a shore break or have lunch when the weather is unpleasant. Even if you're packing a tent for overnight camping, a Bothy bag would make itself useful during the daily paddling. How many times have you cut a break short because you got chilled standing exposed to the wind? Even the 4-person version is compact enough to be carried aboard your kayak as standard cargo, ready for emergencies and for getting psyched for another stint of paddling in the cold and wet. Getting the Bothy back into its stuff sack was a



The Bothy 4 Superlite (without windows)

Sea Kayaker photo

snap and took less than a minute, so using one during a shore stop will add little time to the break.

With the 4-person model, it takes a coordinated effort to go from standing to sitting and back up to standing. It was an uncomfortable fit for four adult males averaging about 175 pounds, but comfortable for three women and one man. With the four males inside, the temperature in the Bothy 4 shot up from 51 to 72 degrees (10.5° to 22° C) in about three minutes. No one thought to bring Tic Tacs.

Terra Nova offers lighter weight and more compact models made of Silnylon (silicon-impregnated nylon). They are without windows, about half the weight and two-thirds the packed volume. But at half again the price, the savings in size and weight would be more appreciated by climbers than kayakers.

The Terra Nova bags are functional and well constructed and nicely fill the role of temporary and emergency shelter. **SK**

Joel McNamara is the author of GPS for Dummies.

Terra Nova Dealers

For a list of dealers, visit the Terra Nova website and click on Retail Partners. American retailers are listed under U for United States of America.

Bothy 2 - \$45

Bothy 4 - \$60

Superlite Bothy 2 - \$95

Superlite Bothy 4 - \$125

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