

THE HATERS GUIDE TO **CAMPING**

BY Shelley Arnusch, Kevin Brooker
AND Joanne Elves

There are people who love camping and there are people who love to hate camping. The haters aren't shy about expressing their hate either, with a quiver of quips like "Camping is Nature's way of promoting the motel business" at the ready when the outdoor enthusiasts in their lives try to convince them otherwise.

Here's the thing, though, haters: Irritating as they are, those camping-crazy people really are on to something. Camping isn't all bad. In fact, it can be pretty great. And, if you hate it, maybe it's time to uncross your arms, pick up that foot you've put down so hard and identify just what it is you hate about it so much. Because, guaranteed, there's either a place you can go camping or a thing you can take with you that can deal with it.

Better yet, we'll do it for you with our comprehensive list of reasons to hate camping and solutions for that particular source of hate. Give it another shot and, who knows, you may be a lover and not a hater after all. —S.A.



Upper Kananaskis Lake.

I HATE CROWDS

Being sandwiched alongside fully equipped RVs running their generators and blasting satellite TVs is no one's idea of a good time. If the point of camping in your eyes is to get away from civilization, avoid RV parks altogether, or at least try to find one with a "tent loop" — a separate area for tents away from the RV sites. Better yet, pack your tent and camping essentials into a spot without vehicle access, like **Point Campground at Upper Kananaskis Lake** in Peter Lougheed Provincial Park, where the 20 tent sites require a three-kilometre hike around the lake's west shore to reach them (you can also get there by canoeing across the lake).



I hate starting campfires

If you're not a born pyro like the guys from *Fubar*, stock your kit with beeswax-based fire-starter strips and a box of **UCO Stormproof matches** that are so failsafe they'll actually reignite after being doused with water (\$4.75 and \$7.75 at MEC).



I HATE SETTING UP THE TENT

Bury forever your memories of struggling to fit the right poles into the right holes and almost getting divorced in the process. Pop-up tents like the **Outbound 4-Person Pop-Up Tent** (\$179.99 at Canadian Tire) literally do just that — release them from their carrying bag, throw them in the air and *pop*, they're up! Contrary to what you might think, they're not hard to pack up, either, folding in on themselves like those light-reflector discs used by pro photographers.



I HATE SLEEPING ON THE GROUND

Air mattresses are a hassle to pump up and are prone to deflating over the course of the night, so you wake up cold and sore and grumpy. Instead, go for a deluxe self-inflating sleeping pad like the **Therm-A-Rest Mondoking 3D** (\$185 to \$215 at MEC), which could give your bedroom mattress a run for the money. If you want to take things to the next level, put your pad on a camping cot, such as the **Bass Pro Shops Big Outdoorsman XL** model (\$129). It's wide enough to hold a burly dude and you'll be sleeping a solid 24 inches above ground.

I hate being cold at night

You probably don't have a good-enough sleeping bag. Since it's more common for women to get cold, some gear companies have developed gender-specific products, with extra padding around the feet and the bust areas. Check out Sierra Designs' **Backcountry Bed 600 3-Season bag** (\$339.95 at sierradesigns.com), which has a "comforter" piece on the top for more freedom of movement. If your partner isn't too restless, you could also consider cuddling in a double bag, such as **MEC's Big Agnes Dream Island -9C Double Sleeping Bag** (\$339), which will warm your hearts, as well as your bodies.



Upper Kananaskis Lake photograph by Corey Myke



I HATE GETTING EATEN ALIVE

In addition to any topical repellants you're rubbing on your skin, a screened-in shelter is a sanity-saver. The **Hootenanny** from MEC (\$295) packs up like a small tent, but expands into a 10-foot-by-10-foot shelter, big enough to encompass a picnic table with room to spare (plus, you get to invite fellow campers to the hootenanny).



I HATE BEING DIRTY

Choosing a campground with good shower and washroom facilities will keep you next to godliness. That, along with the clean-freak camper's hack of keeping baby wipes on hand to freshen up throughout the day, should do the trick. Check out the **Sandy McNabb Campground** in Kananaskis, which recently renovated its washrooms, adding a brand-new "comfort station" complete with showers.



I HATE SMELLING LIKE CAMPFIRE SMOKE

Campfire smoke is a major turn-off for some — and a health hazard for those with respiratory issues. If that's you, head for **Chain Lakes campground** near Nanton, which doesn't have individual firepits at the sites (although there is a communal firepit within each camping loop). Or try the **Mount Sir Donald campground** in B.C.'s Glacier National Park, which doesn't have firepits at all.



I hate packing and unpacking

The **equipped campsites** at Two Jack Main Campground in Banff National Park each have a six-person tent (already set up) with six sleeping pads, stove with propane tank, lantern, broom and dustpan and all the relevant camping and fire permits. There's even an orientation session upon check-in, so you don't have to fumble around trying to light the stove. All you have to bring are warm clothes, sleeping bags, cooking stuff and food.

I HATE THE LACK OF PERSONAL SPACE

When it comes to your tent, go big or go home. The **Coleman Jenny Lake 8-Person Fast Pitch Cabin Tent** (\$330 at Bass Pro Shops) is bigger than most New York apartments and even has a separate "closet" with built-in shelves and a hanger bar, as well as a divider panel so you can create a separate bedroom and sitting room if you so desire.



I'm afraid of snakes

Your best defense is to get as high off the ground as possible in a tent that sets up on the roof of your vehicle (they're popular in Australia, where they know a thing or two about snakes). The tents expand out from a box that attaches to the roof rack and are accessed by a collapsible ladder. Check out the rooftop models from **Treeline Outdoors**, a gear company founded in 2013 by a couple from Turner Valley after they had a run-in with a bear while sleeping on the ground. They're not cheap (the Treeline Redwood four- to five-person model is \$3,000), but it's a price any serious herpetophobe will gladly pay.

I HATE FEELING THAT I'M FORGETTING SOMETHING

If you're not one of those Boy Scout-prepared types, choose a spot with a campground store (like Bow Valley Provincial Park near Exshaw or the Mt. Kidd campground in Kananaskis), where you can buy most of the things you're bound to forget, including firewood. —S.A.

Two Jack Lake photograph courtesy of Parks Canada/Banff National Park



COMPROMISE CAMPING

Not quite a cabin, but way less rustic than a tent, these “comfort camping” spots are a great way to convince staunch non-campers to join you in the great outdoors.



Sundance Lodge trapper's tent.



Sundance Lodge teepee.



Barefoot Beach Resort.



Dinosaur Provincial Park.

The **Barefoot Beach Resort** at Skaha Lake in Penticton, B.C., has adorable luxury yurts (circular wooden frame structures with canvas covers) along with hotel-style amenities like an on-beach restaurant, café and smoothie bar.

barefootresort.ca

At **Sundance Lodges**, located just off Highway 40 in Kananaskis, you can stay in trapper's tents or canvas teepees, both of which are built over wooden floors and are equipped with wood-frame beds with vinyl-sealed foam mattresses, as well as kerosene heaters and lanterns with fuel provided.

sundancelodges.com

The **oTENTiks** are Parks Canada's version of comfort camping. Constructed in the style of an A-frame cabin, oTENTiks have raised wooden floors, lighting and electricity, sleeping space for six in wood-frame beds with high-density foam mattresses and living areas with table and chairs. The closest from here are at Two Jack Lakeside Campground in Banff National Park and are available late May through September.

pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/ab/banff/activ/camping/otentik.aspx

Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park in the most southeastern part of Alberta has three comfort-camping sites tucked into a shady cottonwood grove, all with wooden floors, electric heaters, fans and lights, fully equipped kitchens and private decks with deck chairs and gas barbecues. The park even provides pillows and bedding so you can sleep tight after exploring the striking geological formations and learning about the area's spiritual and archeological significance among the Blackfoot.

albertaparks.ca/writing-on-stone

You'll also find comfort camping at **Dinosaur Provincial Park**, north of Brooks. (A common misconception is that this park is near the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology in Drumheller, which is actually two hours away.) Like Writing-On-Stone, the sites at Dinosaur are fully equipped, canvas-walled wooden structures with pillows and bedding provided, and are located near the park's concession area, which has a restaurant, convenience store, playground and laundry facilities. —S.A.

albertaparks.ca/dinosaur

BEAR SCARE How to avoid unwanted guests

Steve Michel, human-wildlife conflict specialist with Parks Canada, offers the following advice to reduce the risk of attracting ursine crashers to your camping party.

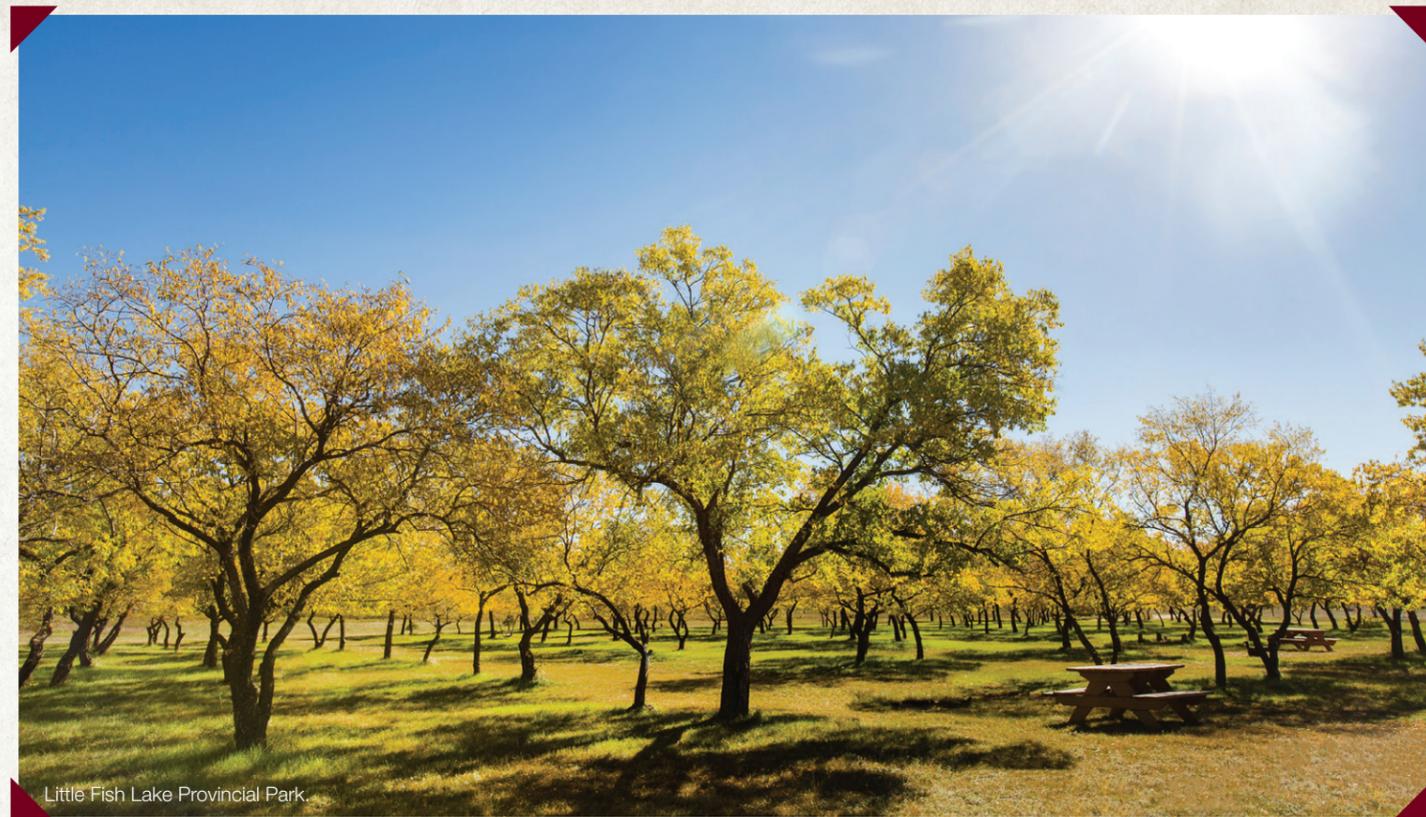
Maintain what Parks Canada calls a “bare campsite.” When you're done eating, put all extra food, dishes, food-prep items, camp stoves and coolers into the car. Keep toiletries in the car, too (animals don't know it's a tube of toothpaste, they just smell something delicious and minty-fresh). Dispose of garbage promptly in the campground's bear-proof bins. Don't forget recyclables, either — empty beer and pop cans still give off an aroma and could create a “wild” after-party.

If you aren't travelling in a hard-sided vehicle (perhaps you're on a motorcycle trip, for example), plan to stay at a campground with food-storage lockers. Keep pets leashed and don't leave them unattended, especially at night. Make sure pet food and bowls are also secured away in the vehicle or storage locker.

Should a bear wander through your campsite, calmly move your group into the vehicle — not the tent. “Bear spray should only be used as a last-resort manoeuvre,” says Michel.

In the National Parks the bare campsite isn't just a suggestion — if you don't comply, your camping permit can be cancelled (with no refund) and you could face charges under the *Canada National Parks Act*. But, even outside the parks, following the bare campsite guidelines is a good move — for your own peace of mind and for the well-being of the bears, which become a risk to public safety if they become accustomed to humans and could end up euthanized as a result. “A fed bear is a dead bear,” Michel says. “If bears learn there is easy food, they lose out.” —J.E.

Dinosaur Provincial Park photograph courtesy of Alberta Parks



Little Fish Lake Provincial Park.

IN PRAISE OF FLATLAND CAMPING

Why pitching your tent on the prairies can reignite your passion for roughin' it.

So, you've lost your taste for camping. That's understandable. You're done with crowded highways and campsites, the need for reservations — even in obscure locations — and rainstorms that sneak up on you from around corners and then turn to snow overnight.

With all due respect, maybe you're doing it wrong. Here's a trick: Turn that overstuffed sport ute of yours 180 degrees, and all of your problems will vanish. You need to do what Calgarians too often forget, and that's to head east and discover the sublime joy of camping beyond the mountains.

Take Kinbrook Island Provincial Park on Lake Newell, near Brooks. It's reliably sunny and hot, the water has a long season of swim-ability and you get to share it with huge, extremely cool white pelicans — although these expert fish-gobblers winter in Florida, the fact they choose to spend summer on the Canadian prairies tells you all you need to know.

What many novices also don't realize is how much variety can be found on the so-called flatlands. For a pure prairie experience,

try Little Fish Lake Provincial Park in the Hand Hills, a still-wild upland south of Hanna where a lawn chair is your most important piece of recreational equipment. Activities include smelling the sage breeze, watching hawks do their hunting and marvelling at the antelope, North America's fastest land mammal. If you're lucky, you'll see them wriggling under fences as they go about their business — swift as they are, they can't jump them. Meanwhile, at Cypress Hills, you'll discover a full-on mountain vibe on the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. The provincial campsite on the Saskatchewan side sits at the same elevation as Banff, with similar surroundings of lodgepole pine. The main difference is only at Cypress are you likely to have a moose wander through your camp. Mountain bikes are definitely at home here.

In fact, for a province with a bad rap, topography-wise, Saskatchewan abounds with highly explorable ecosystems, from desert sand dunes in the south to the endless northern forests of the Canadian Shield. If you're really clever, you'll make that trek north of La Ronge with rods and reels and get re-acquainted to a fishery that is unapologetically catch-and-fry.

If it's a camp-and-golf getaway you're after, prairie courses have much to offer, beginning with the low cost. Since there are small-town nines everywhere you go, suddenly you can actually afford to teach the kids. Or maybe you want to go high-end. Say, a round in a national park, on an iconic Stanley Thompson-designed course? In Banff, that'll cost you around two hundred bucks. In Waskesiu (the Banff of Prince Albert National Park), it's \$60.

There's one more thing about the prairie camping experience: it rarely gets crowded, and, even if your first choice is full up, you can count on every single hamlet to have a Lion's Club campsite or its equivalent right in the centre of town. That's where you'll finally realize that a s'more is a s'more is a s'more. —K.B. ☺