

Things I learnt this summer

Simple questions tend to pile up over the years, because I am not good at asking them in public. So it's always a relief to file a few of them away. Here are a couple of answers the 2013 season has provided me with to date, along with a few other discoveries.



The silnylon canopy of my **SMD Lunar Solo 2012** is seamless over my actual sleeping space and had withstood several shorter storms without a glitch. But 20 hours of torrential rain in France convinced me that you should, indeed, seal two seams: the one connecting the mesh skirt to the silnylon and the one around the black material at the apex of the tent.

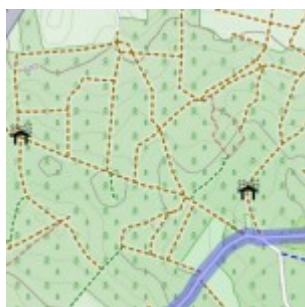
In the event, rain eventually seeped through these seams - not a huge problem, since the quantities were manageable and a NeoAir keeps my sleeping bag off the floor anyway. But the manufacturer's advice to seal ain't just a formality, as I discovered.



Stealth camping isn't advisable everywhere in Germany (where I live). The ADAC is the country's main automobile association - but also provides a very comprehensive mobile hiking guide with over 6000 short and long-distance routes as an [iPhone](#) and [Android app](#). It's a great research tool for bikers too, and can be used to navigate at a pinch (though it seems to use up my battery pretty fast). But additionally, a quick glance at the Wanderführer's map tells me whether I'm in a national park or nature reserve - where wild camping can incur a stiff fine. See the pic on the right and the green(ish) lines marking a nature reserve's boundaries. It was very much a guessing job with other GPS apps/maps I had tried, so this digital guide rates as a eureka discovery in more ways than one.



The pic on the left shows a **lean-to** on Germany's Rheinsteig trail - arguably the ultimate convenience in outdoor shelters, but they always constituted a bit of a planning challenge for me. Distribution is erratic, and prior research is advisable if you mean to rely on them. On some trails, you can even leave your tent at home... but how to know that in advance? Maps, people suggested. Which maps?



While many classy topographic maps show lean-tos as unspecified blobs (just like any other building) OpenStreetMap has a distinct symbol for these havens. Only, you might not ever see it, because the default colour is an almost invisible green. Fortunately, OpenCycleMap uses the same symbol in sensibly conspicuous black. It's an important distinction that could be used to showcase the word 'meaningful' - and I only noticed it last month.

The towel sandals you get in good hotels make extremely light **camp shoes** for summer, weighing in at just 80g for a pair... and better than DIY flip-flops if you sometimes want to wear socks in the evenings. However, mine only lasted a week (just like all the other UL sandal solutions I have tried, so I will be forgoing this luxury in future). Other common suggestions that fail the durability test include **ziplock bags** - good for some uses, iffy for others. Ziplocks that get opened a lot (e.g. for money) are liable to fail early.

My **external battery pack** gave up the ghost after four years of fairly frequent use. Shopping for a new one, I was faced with the usual trade-off: capacity vs. weight. For once, I was clever - realising that huge capacity also means long hours of charging time. You need to figure out how much you need, but also how often you might get the chance of a full recharge on tour. A monster of a battery is redundant weight, if you are not exploiting its potential in both respects: in and out.

Yes, it's generally a shaky idea to compromise on the quality of your clothes. That includes underwear. Even when all else is equal (and it often is) **drying time** can prove paramount. Testing this variable at home is a superb habit - but nukes your chances of a refund when a product fails to convince. By contrast, some other compromises are fundamentally necessary; and further contemplation of them just devastates your peace of mind. Once again, I wasted many hours on many days toying with the dream of a **full-suspension** bike frame... and once again I invariably came to the conclusion that I don't want to sacrifice a bottle cage or put one in a silly place. Some racing frames that place the rear shock behind the saddle kept invading my imagination. But this solution would interfere with my dropper seat post cable, and the mud problem would probably ruin my time on a multi-day trip. Besides, such competition frames only come in carbon nowadays, and I am a carbon hypochondriac. A good scheme would be to write down my various insights comprehensively when I have reached a final verdict on an issue like this. A folder of *Thoughts I Have Well and Truly Put A Lid On* would make a great resource.

Such a folder would definitely put the topic of **pack covers** to rest. Yes, silnylon dry bags provide ample protection for clothes and sleeping bags. But I'm psychologically unable to accept that fact in real life, even though I have proved it to myself. A wet backpack will always scare me until I have opened it to check everything. So while I disappoint myself hugely by carrying unnecessary grams and a double solution, I just can't adjust to a true UL strategy on this one.