

SHELTERS

A shelter can protect you from the sun, insects, wind, rain, snow, hot or cold temperatures, and enemy observation. It can give you a feeling of well-being. It can help you maintain your will to survive.

In some areas, your need for shelter may take precedence over your need for food and possibly even your need for water. For example, prolonged exposure to cold can cause excessive fatigue and weakness (exhaustion). An exhausted person may develop a "passive" outlook, thereby losing the will to survive.

The most common error in making a shelter is to make it too large. A shelter must be large enough to protect you. It must also be small enough to contain your body heat, especially in cold climates.

SHELTER SITE SELECTION

When you are in a survival situation and realize that shelter is a high priority, start looking for shelter as soon as possible. As you do so, remember what you will need at the site. Two requisites are--

- . It must contain material to make the type of shelter you need.
- . It must be large enough and level enough for you to lie down comfortably.

When you consider these requisites, however, you cannot ignore your tactical situation or your safety. You must also consider whether the site--

- . Provides concealment from enemy observation.
- . Has camouflaged escape routes.
- . Is suitable for signaling, if necessary.
- . Provides protection against wild animals and rocks and dead trees that might fall.
- . Is free from insects, reptiles, and poisonous plants.

You must also remember the problems that could arise in your environment. For instance--

- . Avoid flash flood areas in foothills.
- . Avoid avalanche or rockslide areas in mountainous terrain.
- . Avoid sites near bodies of water that are below the high water mark.

In some areas, the season of the year has a strong bearing on the site you select. Ideal sites for a shelter differ in winter and summer. During cold winter months you will want a site that will protect you from the cold and wind, but will have a source of fuel and water. During summer months in the same area you will want a source of water, but you will want the site to be almost insect free.

When considering shelter site selection, use the word BLISS as a guide.

B - Blend in with the surroundings.

L - Low silhouette.

I - Irregular shape.

S - Small.

S - Secluded location.

TYPES OF SHELTERS

When looking for a shelter site, keep in mind the type of shelter (protection) you need. However, you must also consider--

- . How much time and effort you need to build the shelter.
- . If the shelter will adequately protect you from the elements (sun, wind, rain, snow).
- . If you have the tools to build it. If not, can you make improvised tools?
- . If you have the type and amount of materials needed to build it.

To answer these questions, you need to know how to make various types of shelters and what materials you need to make them.

Poncho Lean-To

It takes only a short time and minimal equipment to build this lean-to (Figure 5-1). You need a poncho, 2 to 3 meters of rope or parachute suspension line, three stakes about 30 centimeters long, and two trees or two poles 2 to 3 meters apart. Before selecting the trees you will use or the location of your poles, check the wind direction. Ensure that the back of your lean-to will be into the wind.

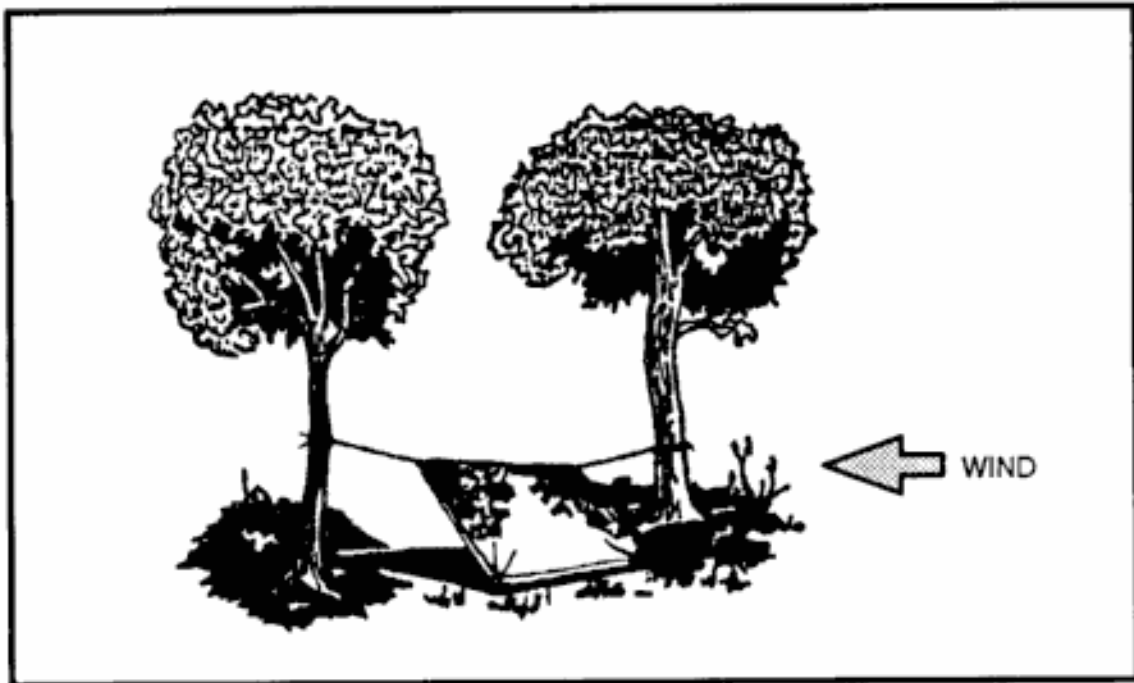


Figure 5-1. Poncho lean-to.

To make the lean-to--

- . Tie off the hood of the poncho. Pull the drawstring tight, roll the hood longways, fold it into thirds, and tie it off with the drawstring.
- . Cut the rope in half. On one long side of the poncho, tie half of the rope to the corner grommet. Tie the other half to the other corner grommet.
- . Attach a drip stick (about a 10-centimeter stick) to each rope about 2.5 centimeters from the grommet. These drip sticks will keep rainwater from running down the ropes into the lean-to. Tying strings (about 10 centimeters long) to each grommet along the poncho's top edge will allow the water to run to and down the line without dripping into the shelter.
- . Tie the ropes about waist high on the trees (uprights). Use a round turn and two half hitches with a quick-release knot.
- . Spread the poncho and anchor it to the ground, putting sharpened sticks through the grommets and into the ground.

If you plan to use the lean-to for more than one night, or you expect rain, make a center support for the lean-to. Make this support with a line. Attach one end of the line to the poncho hood and the other end to an overhanging branch. Make sure there is no slack in the line.

Another method is to place a stick upright under the center of the lean-to. This method, however, will restrict your space and movements in the shelter.

For additional protection from wind and rain, place some brush, your rucksack, or other equipment at the sides of the lean-to.

To reduce heat loss to the ground, place some type of insulating material, such as leaves or pine needles, inside your lean-to.

Note: When at rest, you lose as much as 80 percent of your body heat to the ground.

To increase your security from enemy observation, lower the lean-to's silhouette by making two changes. First, secure the support lines to the trees at knee height (not at waist height) using two knee-high sticks in the two center grommets (sides of lean-to). Second, angle the poncho to the ground, securing it with **sharpened sticks**, as above.

Poncho Tent

This tent ([Figure 5-2](#)) provides a low silhouette. It also protects you from the elements on two sides. It has, however, less usable space and observation area than a lean-to, decreasing your reaction time to enemy detection. To make this tent, you need a poncho, two 1.5- to 2.5-meter ropes, six sharpened sticks about 30 centimeters long, and two trees 2 to 3 meters apart.

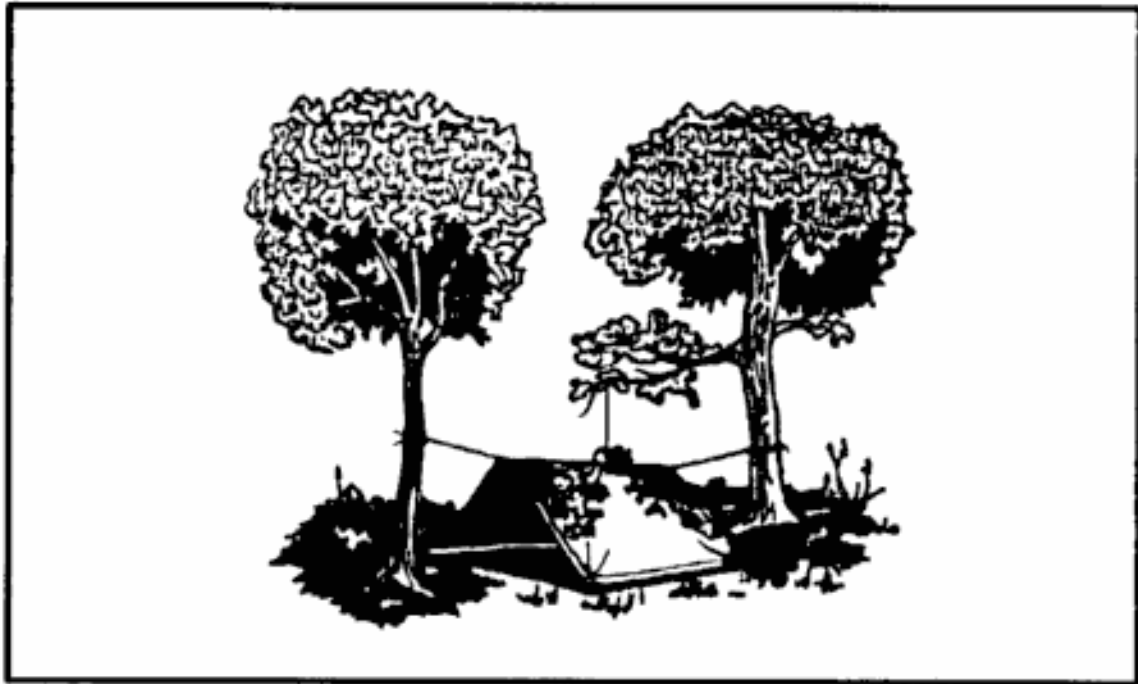


Figure 5-2. Poncho tent using overhanging branch.

To make the tent--

- . Tie off the poncho hood in the same way as the poncho lean-to.
- . Tie a 1.5- to 2.5-meter rope to the center grommet on each side of the poncho.
- . Tie the other ends of these ropes at about knee height to two trees 2 to 3 meters apart and stretch the poncho tight.
- . Draw one side of the poncho tight and secure it to the ground pushing sharpened sticks through the grommets.
- . Follow the same procedure on the other side.

If you need a center support, use the same methods as for the poncho lean-to. Another center support is an A-frame set outside but over the center of the tent ([Figure 5-3](#)). Use two 90- to 120-centimeter-long sticks, one with a forked end, to form the A-frame. Tie the hood's drawstring to the A-frame to support the center of the tent.

Field-Expedient Lean-To

If you are in a wooded area and have enough natural materials, you can make a field-expedient lean-to (Figure 5-9) without the aid of tools or with only a knife. It takes longer to make this type of shelter than it does to make other types, but it will protect you from the elements.

You will need two trees (or upright poles) about 2 meters apart; one pole about 2 meters long and 2.5 centimeters in diameter; five to eight poles about 3 meters long and 2.5 centimeters in diameter for beams; cord or vines for securing the horizontal support to the trees; and other poles, saplings, or vines to crisscross the beams.

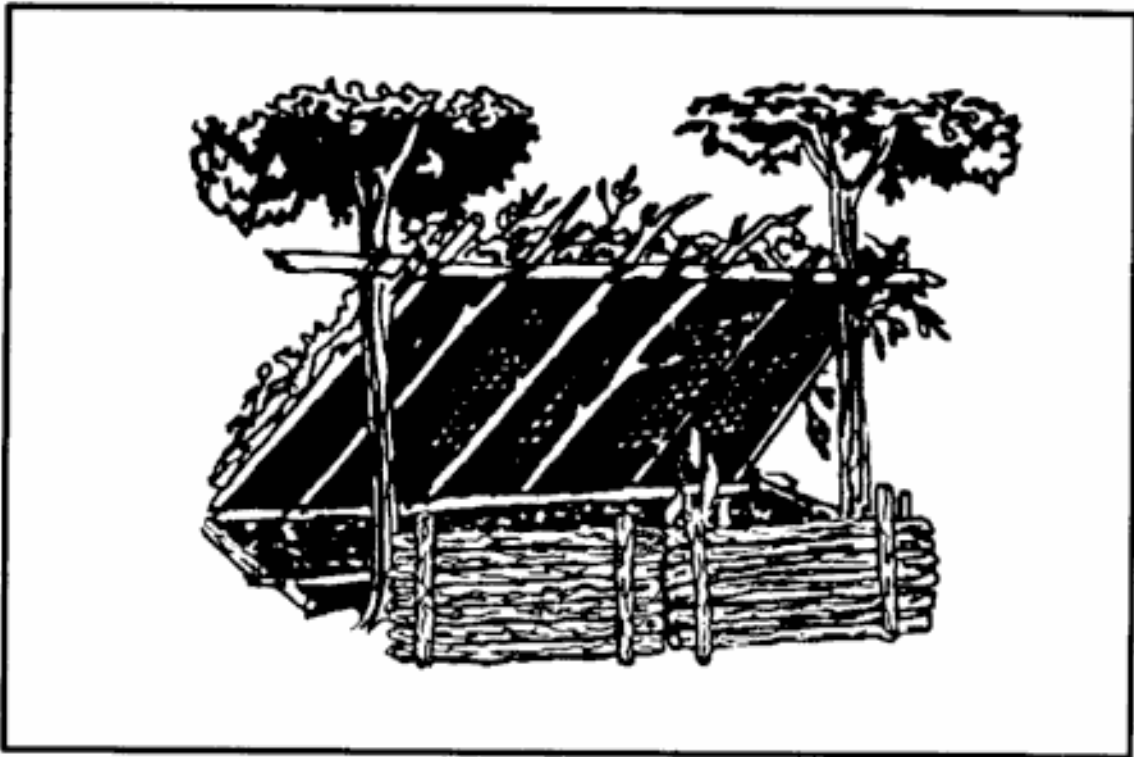


Figure 5-9. Field-expedient lean-to and fire reflector.

To make this lean-to--

- . Tie the 2-meter pole to the two trees at waist to chest height. This is the horizontal support. If a standing tree is not available, construct a biped using Y-shaped sticks or two tripods.
- . Place one end of the beams (3-meter poles) on one side of the horizontal support. As with all lean-to type shelters, be sure to place the lean-to's backside into the wind.
- . Crisscross saplings or vines on the beams.
- . Cover the framework with brush, leaves, pine needles, or grass, starting at the bottom and working your way up like shingling.
- . Place straw, leaves, pine needles, or grass inside the shelter for bedding.

In cold weather, add to your lean-to's comfort by building a fire reflector wall (Figure 5-9). Drive four 1.5-meter-long stakes into the ground to support the wall. Stack green logs on top of one another between the support stakes. Form two rows of stacked logs to create an inner space within the wall that you can fill with dirt. This action not only strengthens the wall but makes it more heat reflective. Bind the top of the support stakes so that the green logs and dirt will stay in place.

With just a little more effort you can have a drying rack. Cut a few 2-centimeter-diameter poles (length depends on the distance between the lean-to's horizontal support and the top of the fire reflector wall). Lay one end of the poles on the lean-to support and the other end on top of the reflector wall. Place and tie into place smaller sticks across these poles. You now have a place to dry clothes, meat, or fish.

Swamp Bed

In a marsh or swamp, or any area with standing water or continually wet ground, the swamp bed (Figure 5-10) keeps you out of the water. When selecting such a site, consider the weather, wind, tides, and available materials.

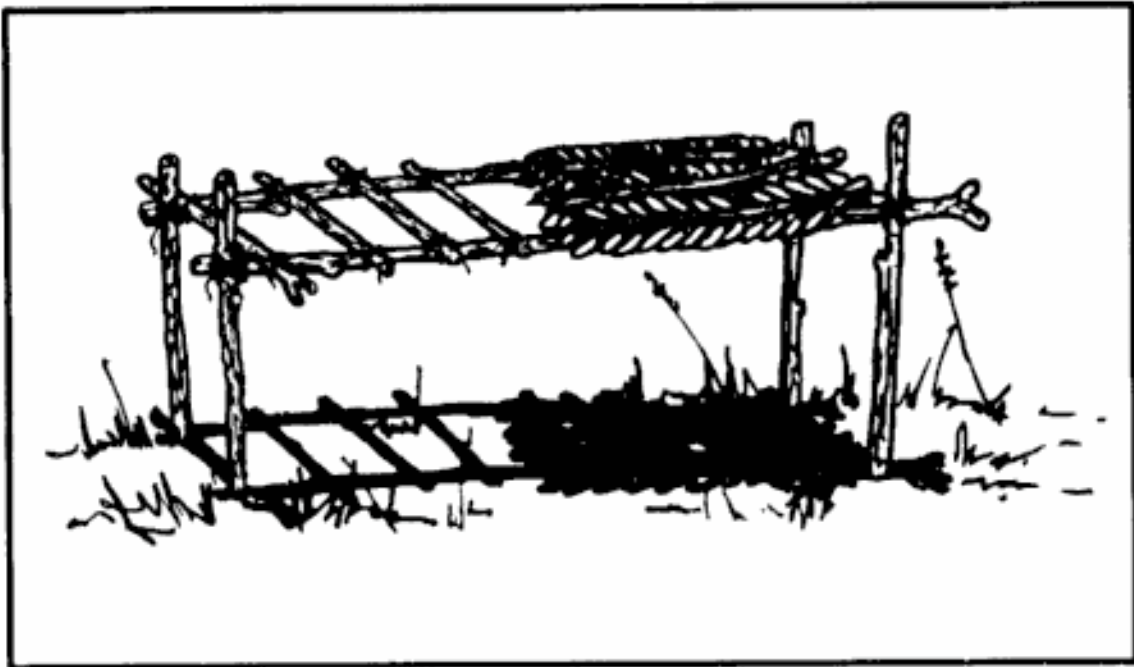


Figure 5-10. Swamp bed.

To make a swamp bed--

- Look for four trees clustered in a rectangle, or cut four poles (bamboo is ideal) and drive them firmly into the ground so they form a rectangle. They should be far enough apart and strong enough to support your height and weight, to include equipment.
- Cut two poles that span the width of the rectangle. They, too, must be strong enough to support your weight.

- . Secure these two poles to the trees (or poles). Be sure they are high enough above the ground or water to allow for tides and high water.
- . Cut additional poles that span the rectangle's length. Lay them across the two side poles, and secure them.
- . Cover the top of the bed frame with broad leaves or grass to form a soft sleeping surface.
- . Build a fire pad by laying clay, silt, or mud on one corner of the swamp bed and allow it to dry.

Another shelter designed to get you above and out of the water or wet ground uses the same rectangular configuration as the swamp bed. You very simply lay sticks and branches lengthwise on the inside of the trees (or poles) until there is enough material to raise the sleeping surface above the water level.

Natural Shelters

Do not overlook natural formations that provide shelter. Examples are caves, rocky crevices, clumps of bushes, small depressions, large rocks on leeward sides of hills, large trees with low-hanging limbs, and fallen trees with thick branches. However, when selecting a natural formation--

- . Stay away from low ground such as ravines, narrow valleys, or creek beds. Low areas collect the heavy cold air at night and are therefore colder than the surrounding high ground. Thick, brushy, low ground also harbors more insects.
- . Check for poisonous snakes, ticks, mites, scorpions, and stinging ants.
- . Look for loose rocks, dead limbs, coconuts, or other natural growth than could fall on your shelter.

Debris Hut

For warmth and ease of construction, this shelter is one of the best. When shelter is essential to survival, build this shelter.

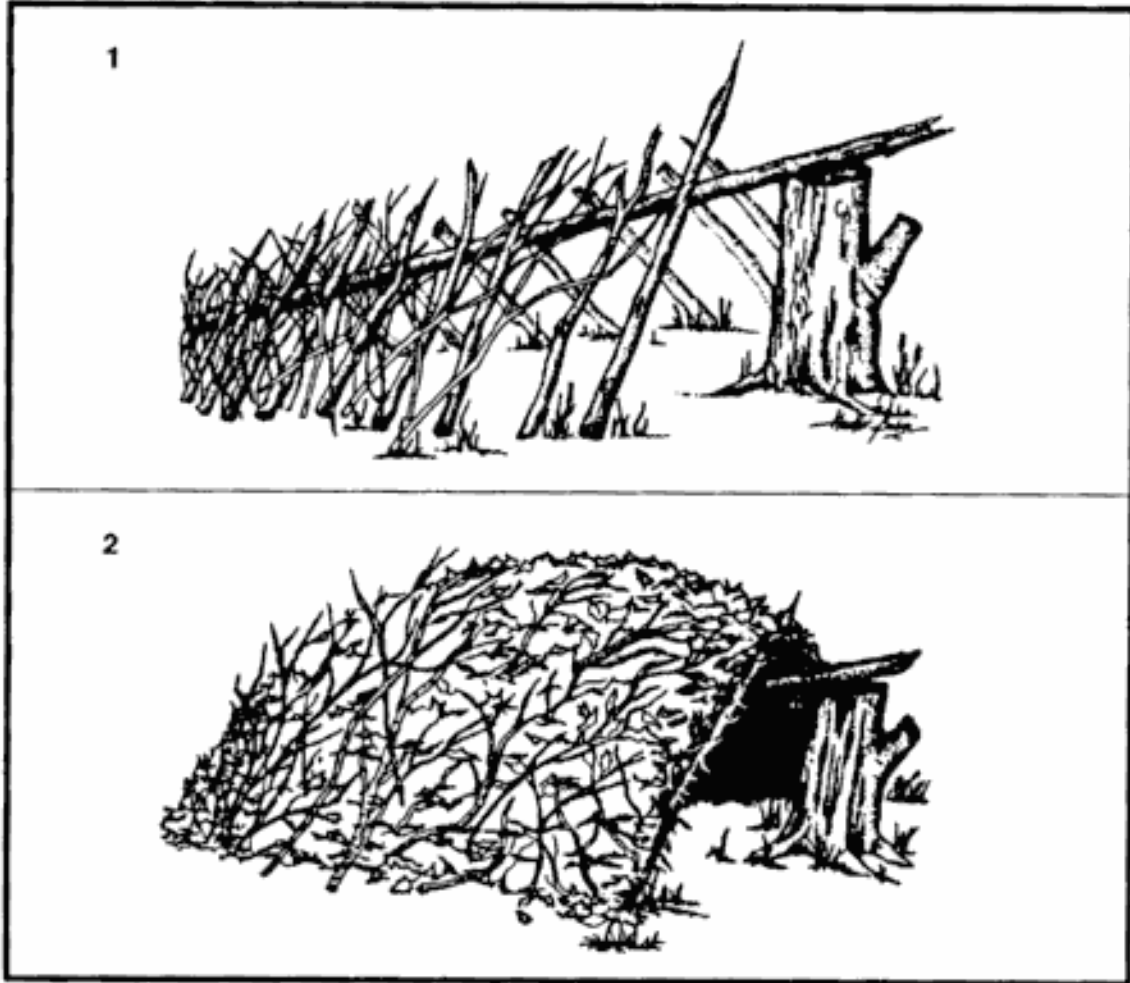


Figure 5-11. Debris hut.

To make a debris hut (Figure 5-11)--

- Build it by making a tripod with two short stakes and a long ridgepole or by placing one end of a long ridgepole on top of a sturdy base.
- Secure the ridgepole (pole running the length of the shelter) using the tripod method or by anchoring it to a tree at about waist height.
- Prop large sticks along both sides of the ridgepole to create a wedge-shaped ribbing effect. Ensure the ribbing is wide enough to accommodate your body and steep enough to shed moisture.

- Place finer sticks and brush crosswise on the ribbing. These form a latticework that will keep the insulating material (grass, pine needles, leaves) from falling through the ribbing into the sleeping area.
- Add light, dry, if possible, soft debris over the ribbing until the insulating material is at least 1 meter thick--the thicker the better.
- Place a 30-centimeter layer of insulating material inside the shelter.
- At the entrance, pile insulating material that you can drag to you once inside the shelter to close the entrance or build a door.
- As a final step in constructing this shelter, add shingling material or branches on top of the debris layer to prevent the insulating material from blowing away in a storm.

Tree-Pit Snow Shelter

If you are in a cold, snow-covered area where evergreen trees grow and you have a digging tool, you can make a tree-pit shelter (Figure 5-12).

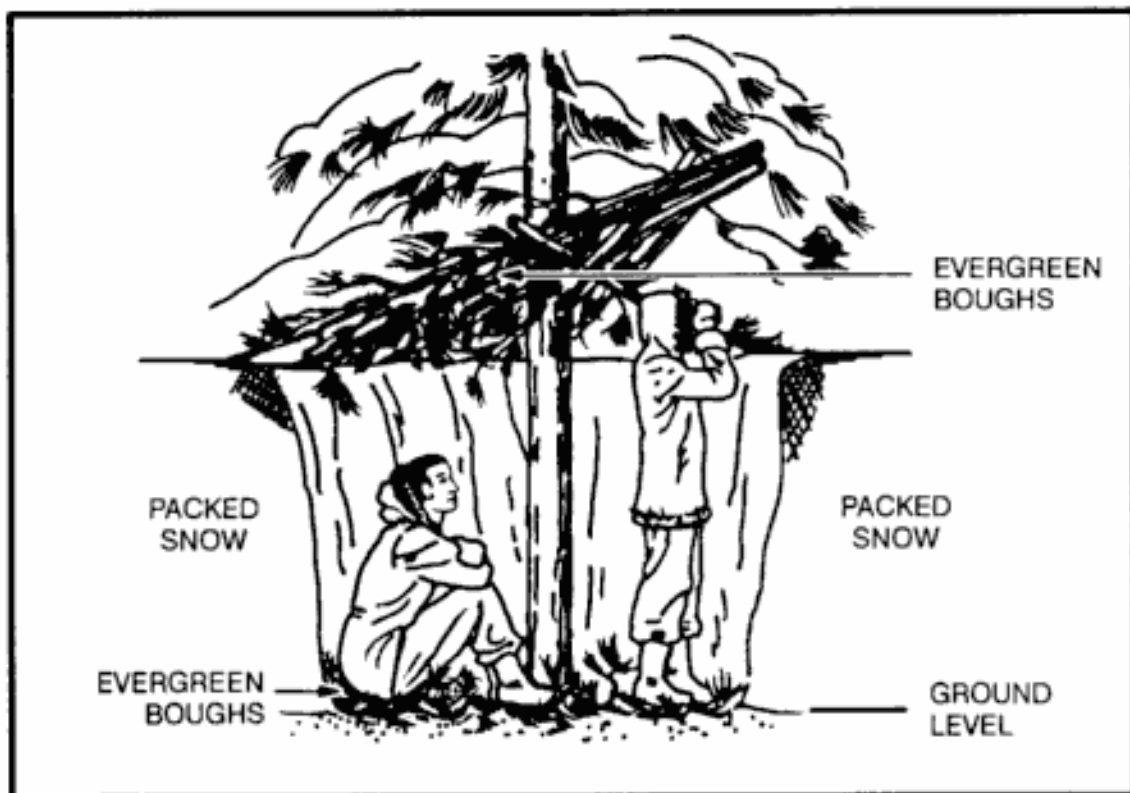


Figure 5-12. Tree-pit snow shelter.

To make this shelter--

- . Find a tree with bushy branches that provides overhead cover.
- . Dig out the snow around the tree trunk until you reach the depth and diameter you desire, or until you reach the ground.
- . Pack the snow around the top and the inside of the hole to provide support.
- . Find and cut other evergreen boughs. Place them over the top of the pit to give you additional overhead cover. Place evergreen boughs in the bottom of the pit for insulation.

Beach Shade Shelter

This shelter protects you from the sun, wind, rain, and heat. It is easy to make using natural materials.

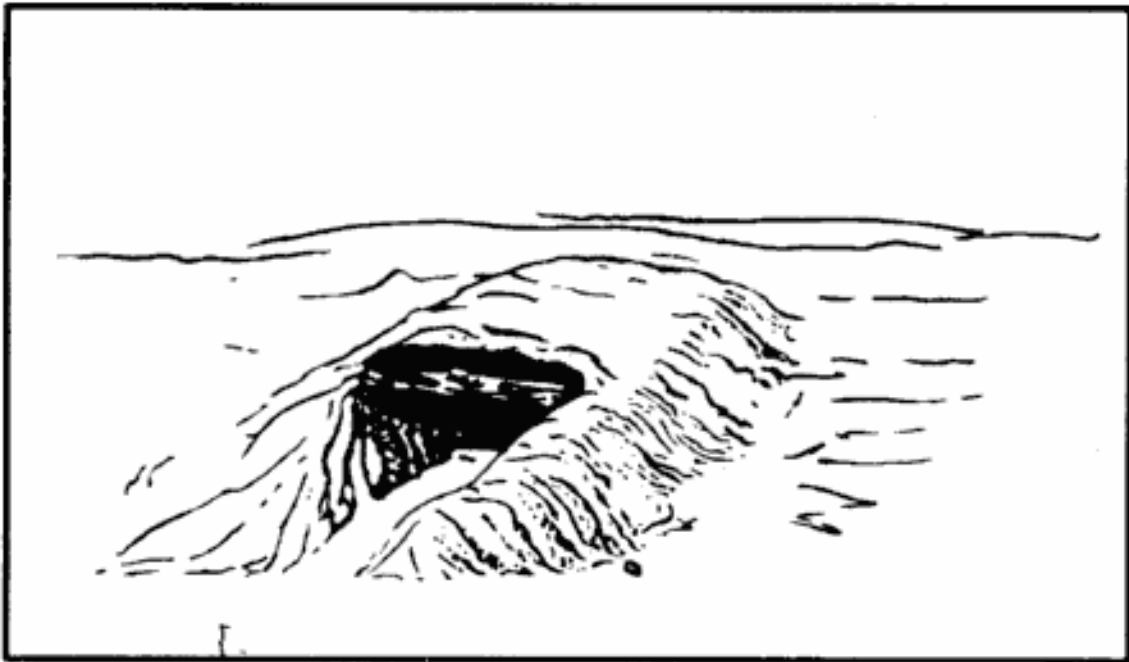


Figure 5-13. Beach shade shelter.

To make this shelter ([Figure 5-13](#))--

- . Find and collect driftwood or other natural material to use as support beams and as a digging tool.
- . Select a site that is above the high water mark.
- . Scrape or dig out a trench running north to south so that it receives the least amount of sunlight. Make the trench long and wide enough for you to lie down comfortably.

- . Mound soil on three sides of the trench. The higher the mound, the more space inside the shelter.
- . Lay support beams (driftwood or other natural material) that span the trench on top of the mound to form the framework for a roof.
- . Enlarge the shelter's entrance by digging out more sand in front of it.
- . Use natural materials such as grass or leaves to form a bed inside the shelter.

Desert Shelters

In an arid environment, consider the time, effort, and material needed to make a shelter. If you have material such as a poncho, canvas, or a parachute, use it along with such terrain features as rock outcropping, mounds of sand, or a depression between dunes or rocks to make your shelter.

Using rock outcroppings--

- . Anchor one end of your poncho (canvas, parachute, or other material) on the edge of the outcrop using rocks or other weights.
- . Extend and anchor the other end of the poncho so it provides the best possible shade.

In a sandy area--

- . Build a mound of sand or use the side of a sand dune for one side of the shelter.
- . Anchor one end of the material on top of the mound using sand or other weights.
- . Extend and anchor the other end of the material so it provides the best possible shade.

Note: If you have enough material, fold it in half and form a 30-centimeter to 45-centimeter airspace between the two halves. This airspace will reduce the temperature under the shelter.

A belowground shelter (Figure 5-14) can reduce the midday heat as much as 16 to 22 degrees C (30 to 40 degrees F). Building it, however, requires more time and effort than for other shelters. Since your physical effort will make you sweat more and increase dehydration, construct it before the heat of the day.

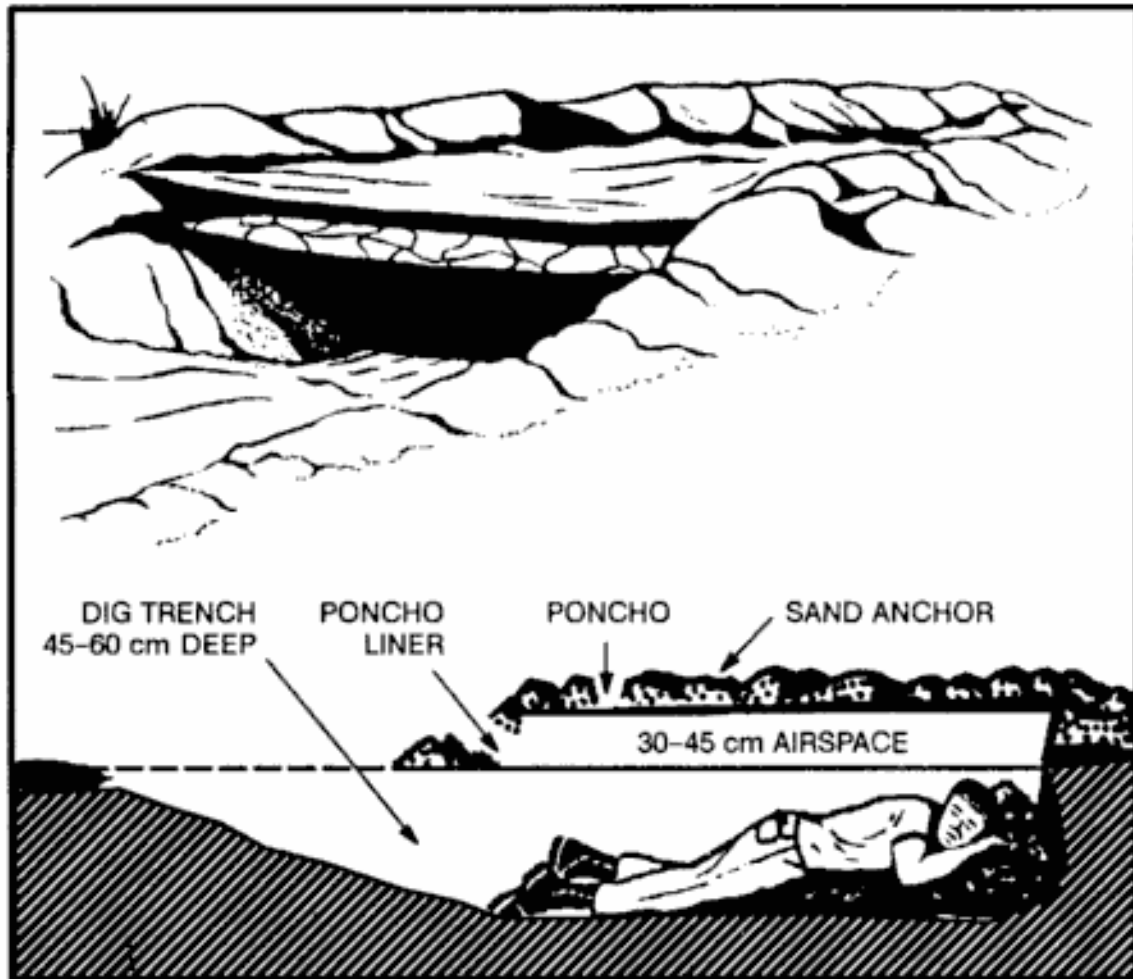


Figure 5-14. Belowground desert shelter.

To make this shelter--

- . Find a low spot or depression between dunes or rocks. If necessary, dig a trench 45 to 60 centimeters deep and long and wide enough for you to lie in comfortably.
- . Pile the sand you take from the trench to form a mound around three sides.
- . On the open end of the trench, dig out more sand so you can get in and out of your shelter easily.
- . Cover the trench with your material.
- . Secure the material in place using sand, rocks, or other weights.

If you have extra material, you can further decrease the midday temperature in the trench by securing the material 30 to 45 centimeters above the other cover. This layering of the material will reduce the inside temperature 11 to 22 degrees C (20 to 40 degrees F).

Another type of belowground shade shelter is of similar construction, except all sides are open to air currents and circulation. For maximum protection, you need a minimum of two layers of parachute material (Figure 5-15). White is the best color to reflect heat; the innermost layer should be of darker material.

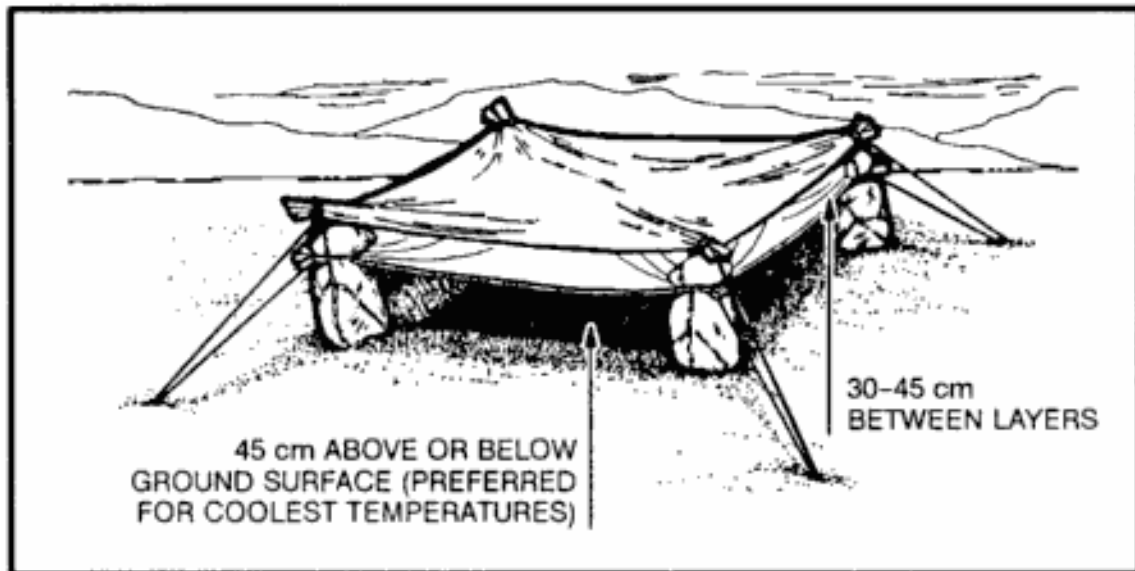


Figure 5-15. Open desert shelter.

All information is from the Wilderness Survival website. The website is based on the US Army Field Manual 21-76.

www.wilderness-survival.net

Buy The Book This Site Is Based On _U.S. Army Field Manual 21-76 is the source material for this website. The U.S. Army Survival Manual covers a broad area of proven survival techniques. Topics include survival at sea, in jungles, desert and arctic regions. This manual, which is used throughout the U.S. Military, contains many useful illustrations and diagrams. Other topics include the procurement of potable water, food from animals and edible plants, finding directions using the sun or stars, and locating or making shelter. This is the finest, most proven book available on wilderness survival. It also includes guides on surviving a chemical, nuclear, or biological attack.