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A prolonged test of the

# Hennessy hammocks

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- Gear reviews and tests - Bivouac -



Publication: Tuesday 30 August 2005

Update: 27 June 2005

**Description :**

Hennessy Hammocks at test.

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We have tried the Hennessy hammock for some time, expedition and backpacker ultralight model.

You will find in this review tips on how to rig and unrig the Hennessy hammocks. We decided to make the tips as visual as possible, so you will find them as commented pictures, disseminated in the article itself.

## First Contact



**Hennessy hammocks packed** This is the original pack, backpacker on the left, expedition on the right, large hex fly at the bottom.

These hammocks are the Rolls Royce (without the price) of the hammock.

First, let's get over the figures:

**Expedition a-sym:** 250 lbs max, weight 2lbs 8 oz (1130 grams) 6'x10'

**Backpacker a-sym ultralight :** 200 lbs max, weight 1lbs 15 oz (880 gr) 5'x10' In addition, our hammocks were equipped with snake skins, tubes in which the hammock is inserted, a great and quick way to pack it tight.

We also had Silnylon hexagonal fly from Hennessy.

The Ultralight has a silnylon fly, the expedition is a PU coated Nylon, and a probable 30 % larger fly. I will not go into giving more details of the different pieces of equipment, please go to Hennessy hammocks web site if you need more (pointer at the bottom of the article).

### The hammocks



**The Backpacker ultralight hammock** Here is a The backpacker ultralight hammock using classical fly "tent configuration".



**The expedition hammock** Here rigged in flat fly rig, much better in summer.



**The large hex fly** This is the expedition hammock re-rigged with the extra large hex fly. It is not attached, as the place was not appropriate, but one can size the difference with the classic fly.

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**What is in the packs** You will notice the difference of rope and belt size for the backpacker and expedition. They are here in their snakeskins, which can be purchased at extra care. I carry a set of extralight aluminium tent pegs, as they are often useful for rigging.

The concept of these hammocks is revolutionary. Let us review the features:

**Bug close concept** The hammocks come with a bug netting (No-see-Um is the brand) which closes totally the sleeping space, and makes it bug-proof.

**Bottom entry** As the sleeping space is closed, the entry, instead of being on a side, is done from the bottom, a large slit with velcro on each side, to enter, open the velcro, get in, sit and with your weight, the tension will close the slit.

**Pre-tensioned rig** The trouble with most hammocks is to find the right tension. The Hennessys make it really easy, as there is a ridge line to maintain the mosquito net high, the tension is easy to find. The ridge line that sustains the netting also acts as a pre-tensioner, ensuring that the hammock, whatever is the tension between the trees, will hold the right shape. Well, mostly, it is still subject to differences, and like all hammocks, I like it under flat tension, which is when the curve is the best to me.

There is a water deflector to avoid that water running along the lines enters the hammock.

**Asymmetric** The hammock is a square, but imagine it is hanging from one corner to the opposite corner. The side corners have rope and elastics so that the inside can be maintained spread. The advantage is that the hammock is designed for the body to be at an angle with the ridge line, and therefore the body will lay flat (or near flat), which is not the case if one tries to sleep in the tension line of any hammock.

**Silnylon fly/tarp** The fly is like the hammock, a parallelepiped, and covers the hammock size + 40 to 50 cm in all directions for the expedition, less for the backpacker, but then it seems it has been recently enlarged 30% more by Hennessy. Some versions can be bought from the start with the much larger hexagonal tarp we also tried.

**Tree belts** The hammocks come with tree belts in order to avoid injuring the trees it is hung to.

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**Inside pocket and clips** The ridge line contains two clips and a moving hung netting pocket.

**Snake skins** A great invention, the snake skins slip over the hammock under tension, and compress it ready to pack. Also when mounting the hammock they protect it from the mud and dirt for the short moment it may lay on the ground in order to make the right setup. These are sold as extra, but well worth their price, as they allow deployment in a minute or so. The tarp goes inside the snake skins. The snake skins also act as a shield for water running along the hammock line under heavy rain, thus avoiding water to enter inside.

**Extra hex fly** The original fly is light but short, OK for a bivy, but too small if one wants to dry gear and protect them from rain. The Hex tarp offers the right size for heavy rain and longer stay. However, the hex tarp needs more tree spacing, and does not seem to fit in the snake skins (tbs\*\*\* to be tried). It also weights slightly more than the equivalent silnylon version.

### Differences between the Expedition and Backpacker



**The expedition bottom cloth** You see light through it, and like for underwear, when you see light, you can feel the wind ! The cloth is however thicker than the backpacker's, but more "breathing".

The concept is the same. The Expedition is a bit larger, though I did not really realize as both are spacious. It supports a bit more weight (heavy people, please check the max weights). It comes with large tree belts made from the same material than car security belts. The Backpacker belts are thinner, more of the climber's loops type. The Backpacker's bottom cloth is much lighter, but strangely more air proof, which is better in windy or colder conditions, it seems also to take less stretch, so I like it better. The ropes are standard 6 mm rope for the Expedition, and what seems a 4 mm dyneema or spectra for the Backpacker.

The Backpacker has a smaller fly tarp made of silnylon instead of PU coated nylon. The Expedition is made of sturdier material, and will certainly survive more abuse than the Backpacker.

The prices: \$119 for an Expedition \$169 for a Backpacker \$20 for Snake skins \$129 for the Silnylon hex fly/tarp



**The instruction set** The instructions are on the back of the bag. I find the knots quite difficult to operate, so I use my own version, with quick release hitches. I hope you can read most of them.

## The tests

We have now slept in both hammocks at least 10 days each. Two persons have led this test, Bogdan in Serbia, and me in France.



**Rigging: first side** Some times the trunks are bigger than the band, here I could only make one turn and a half. The knot is temporary, as I want to be able to adjust tensions and center the hammock between the trees. It is better to

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be able to make at least one turn of the trunk, else the belt will slip. For people that live in place with big trees, I recommend to carry two climbing belt loops.

### Rain

I got a few rain falls, including one real heavy "tropical" rain for 4 hours. The hammock with the standard tarp did brilliantly, and protected me well. But it is not so obvious as the standard fly is small to protect all the gear, and find a place for the backpack. Letting the backpack in the center under the tarp is not satisfactory, as it gets a lot of mud splashes. One may sleep with the backpack if it is not too big, but it is not too convenient either.

*notes:*

*One night, I got extremely heavy rain for 4 hours. The hammock did brilliantly, protected me well. JM was dry. But need to remember to hang backpack because it got mud covered from the splashes of the heavy rain on the ground. Well can't think about everything at 3:00 AM. In extremely heavy rain, splashes will wet your back event with a hammock at 1m from ground, so the solution is a higher placed hammock or a bigger tarp.*



**Rigging: second side** The height is arm length over the head, or just 20 cm overhead, depending on how high you wish to be. 20 cm overhead makes the entry a normal seat height. The knots are not the hennessy recommended ones, which are too hard to undo or tune, but my own combination of quick release half hitches.

**Space** The asymmetric concept makes for a lot of space inside, which is really great. But, it does not allow to protect a backpack by hanging it on the side, as it is pointy. Well, most packs have their own cover built in, and at worst it can be tucked inside, there is so much space, but that is something I appreciated with more classical hootchies.

**Ease** Indeed it is a hammock, so it provides instant comfort over rocky, muddy or bushy terrain.

The bottom entry is a great feature, no doubt!!! Fast, easy, just remember the Velcro, as it killed one of my light summer hiking T-shirts by hanging to it!

It takes some time to be able to move and set correctly in the hammock, as well as to find how to slip in the sleeping bag or stay on top of the insulation mat when one is needed.

I can use the hammock as a chair or as a open hammock (over the netting), when it is properly folded, so this is good, an clears my claustrophobia, which did not bother me at night.

**Time to rig** The time to rig is extremely fast, between 1 and 2 minutes, same time to un-rig.



**Rigging: tension** Here it is. do not be mistaken by the curve, there IS tension. The snake skins allow you to rig in muddy conditions without dirtying the hammock. You would think you must put it flat, but you while you must have some tension there is no need to pull the line totally flat, as the pre-tension ridgeline will still work and put the same tension in the hammock rig.

### **Resistance**

The double sewed edge seal between the hammock bottom and the netting did not hold as well as I expected on the first Expedition hammock, by looking at the netting fabric. A moderate localised pull could dissociate it (tear it). It did this in a few places a few cm max over the length, at 4 different places.

I weight 75 kg, so I am largely under the weight limit.

It did need a lot of use to do this, just staying in it and turning for a few hours, as well as tucking my 3 kid inside, that is why I think it is a Quality Control problem.

I thing this is worth explaining to the maker company. I will repair this one by doing a machine zig-zag all the way long

Else than that, it is a great hammock, and it is very sad it has this problem , else it would make a 90 % score.

I do not really know what moved it, I was checking the kids were not destroying it, so I am amazed it moved... I certainly disband the notion of abuse, as I have read on Hennessy site as well as from Tom Hennessy himself similar stories but successful, like the guy being a bit intoxicated that discovered in the morning that he slept in the netting, with the bottom overhead.



**Rigging: undoing the skins** We pull the skins and the fly and hammock unroll.

*Repairing zigzag points all the way. Did the trick. repaired hammock works well too, but a replacement is being sent by Hennessy.*

*notes: I contacted Hennessy, Tom is sending replacement. GREAT service!. In addition we will get a backpacker asym (850 grams) and an over-sized light fly/tarp to try.*

*Hennessy also told us that a major US retailer return rate over the Expedition a-sym is 0.54 %, half a percent. so I think the problem was on quality control. and that we were pretty unlucky. Normal, murphy's law at work!*

**We did much more tests with the new hammocks, stuffing kids inside, and trying to tear the junction and confirm the quality control problem, as the replacements held well to the same treatment. However, owners, please take care with the netting, it needs care and is not bomb proof. Do not apply too much tension on it, take care when you lay or sleep in it that there is not too much tension on the netting !. We have seen reports over the net with the same kind of problems, be warned ,if there is a fragile point, this is the one.**

I would not hesitate putting a zigzag point on the original border as a preventive measure.

Actually one modification I am really considering is a zip on one side, on the whole length, between the netting and the bottom. An alternative to this of which I have heard, and which is much easier, is to cut the ridge line, and mount it with a climbing clamp so that it can be left loose or attached, as once open and without ridge line, the netting falls in the bottom of the hammock thus you get an open hammock.(I have now tried this solution, and the netting does not really fall in the bottom, as it is under more tension than the bottom cloth. So, not so obvious result. More about this to come soon, as the tension without the ridge line connected can be adjusted...)



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**Rigging: the sides.** The hammock has a bungy on each side that is used to keep it open, and the fly has side strings, let's attach these as far as we can. Here on one side, it is tied to a tree, on the other side using tent pegs in the ground, but you could use a big stone, vegetation, or the "pulling stone" tip.

**Snake skins** We have been experimenting with snake skins. While the # 2 for the back packer holds both hammock and fly, thus making the hammock a minute shelter solution, and the #3 for the expedition works well too, except the first time where they are a bit tight.

The snake skins are a great idea. I think the make this hammock THE fastest solution I know of in terms of deployment and folding back a hammock.

They also have the advantage that they seem to work as a rain catcher, and stop some of the water that could run down the main rope.

It is your choice to include the fly in the skins or not:

*It is to early to tell, but I have some ideas on snake skins. I like the way they are working on the Expedition, they don't keep fly with it, and it is advantage in my book. When it is raining I can setup main cord, set fly and then remove Snake skins to free hammock. That way Hammock is completely dry. When collecting it, I can pull on Snake skins without removing the fly, and than remove the fly, which will assure that hammock will be stored dry.*

*Another needed mod will be to make index on the fly and lower part, to know where is head and where are legs, and how to put fly..*



**Rigging: adjust fly tension** The fly is attached to the main line using a prusik knot, (but there are clips) we slide the prusik to the right tension.



**The Backpacker ultralight hammock** Close view of the sleeping area.

# Sleeping

## Entry system



**The entry** The bottom entry system with its velcro.

The entry through the bottom is a good point. No need to escalate anymore high sides, generally bruising sensible equipment the men and women turn to have between the legs, with the hennessy, just lay it so that the bottom when under tension is at chair height. (Well indeed that allows some margin, because it can be a low or high chair)



**The entry from inside** The entry seen from the inside. The velcro auto closes with my weight.

The entry is a velcro opening 1/3 in the length of the hammock. "unzip" the bottom velcro and sit in. Lift legs, bring them in and the velcro under the tension of your weight will close.

## Asymmetry



**The inside** I am inside, staying in diagonal of the main axe, my back is flat, my legs too.

The hennesys are in reality a rectangle hung by two opposite corners. why that? because it one want to sleep flat in a

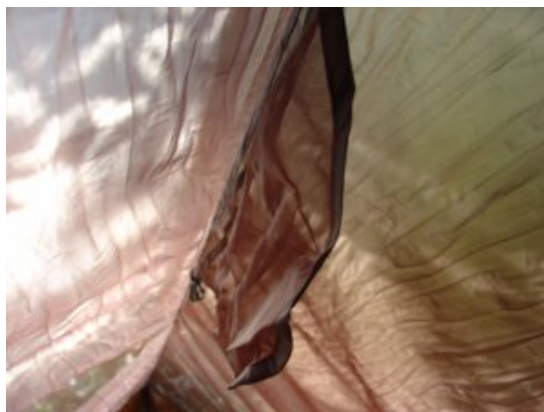
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hammock, he must either tuck it's foot weight on the side of the back weight by opening the legs, or sleep laterally, feet on one side of the center line, and head on the other side. BUT this latest position is not easy in normal hammocks cause it is a good way to fall. No problem with the hennessy, as it is a closed system.

**No-trace, no marks, no damage spirit.** They come with bands, to protect the tree bark, and leave no permanent visible trace to the bark of trees. The expedition comes with a security belt type of band, and the backpacker with a climbing belt loop width kind. The first one protects the tree bark quite well. The second a bit less, but they both work well enough. Particularly interesting is the absence of damage at ground level.

### The inside



**The inside net pocket and clips.** There is a small net pocket with two compartments, and two clips inside. Enough to add more pockets if needed.

That is where you are sleeping, so how is it? spacious!

I regret that the netting cannot be unzipped, (I am slightly claustrophobic) and this would be THE modification that would make it a 100% hit in my opinion.

Can't help to regret the netting does not have a zip of some sort, well, that's JM the claustrophobic.... On the other side it stays simple, no flying or crawling things in it is good too, and for sleeping, one does not care that much, except may be a distorted vision due to the netting.



**Unrigging: Folding.** When the different side attaches are detached, put some torsion on the hammock in order to compress the hammock and fly to fit in the snake skins.

If the two side bungees are attached, the space is quite good. the ridge line mesh pocket is convenient for a light and some reading. The Expedition is slightly more spacious than the Backpacker, but you must have the two at hand to be able to perceive it.

You can stuff gear inside, but a hammock being a hammock, you will probably end sleeping over or under,

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depending of your density relative to the gear. (Thermarest by example tends to "float" and prefers to be isolated by you than the the opposite, and water bottles sink under you Smile )

The mosquito net is fine, however, in a jungle I would fear stinging through the bottom fabric of the expedition, as the netting does not extend under the hammock like other designs. So treatment with repellent would seem necessary.



**Unrigging: pulling the snake skins** Pull the snakeskins by holding them behind the circlip, and twist to give some torsion on the material before it enters the skins.

### Colder weather

Well, that is the problem with hammocks, they are summer gear, in winter the cold will freeze one's back, as unlike sleeping on the ground, there is not the insulation from the ground.

In winter, isolation from the bottom seems mandatory, as the sleeping back gets compressed there, and needs help. tucking stuff inside is maybe not the best, outside protection would seem easier...

Using a Thermarest or equivalent thin sleeping mat, inside (Expedition) is not obvious, but works well enough. (this thing seems to be willing to be over you, not under, the first time (was a 2/3 Thermarest ), but some later research proved it works well if deflated enough.

Hennessy sells an external insulation for these hammocks for winter, that may be the right thing, but I cannot comment, not having tried.



**Unrigging: Half in the snake skins** Let's now process the other side.

### Alternate uses

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**Tip: folding to use as an open air hammock** Fold the bottom un itself, pushing the net on one side, and use as chair or open air hammock.



**Tip: use as a chair** And we also can get a very comfortable chair. Yes the piece of woodland where I took these pictures is very nice, made of cork oak and other ever green oaks with just a few mediterranean pines now and there.

Sitting: the hammock can be used as a sit. only thing needed is to fold the bottom layer so that all the netting is in the back, and sit of the doubled layer. comfy.

Laying in open air: one of the main concerns I had about a closed (netted) hammock ,is that it is closed, thus somehow cutting you from the outside, at least visually, and in terms of air flow ( I confirm that the netting does make inside air more stagnant in summer.)



**Tip: open air hammock.**

Half the size, as the bottom is folded in two, but still confortable enough for a siesta.

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There is a French southern saying: "Better sleep in shadow than work under the sun". I feel like doing just that at that very moment!

Laying down from the sitting position makes an extreme open air hammock. Extreme, because if you move too much, you fall Wink

Tent: the hammock can be rigged as a bivy, in the lack of trees, using poles and sleeping on the ground. *this is still to be tested.*

### Rigging tips



**Tip: one string side rig.** For places where there is no side tree, you can spare an attachment, by tying the hammock bungee to a small stone, and clipping it to the fly clip. The fly is attached to a tent peg or a big stone (the case here).

- ▶ Center the hammock at equal distance from trees.
- ▶ Attach to trunk at arms maximum length.
- ▶ Forget the Hennessy recommended knot, because it is not easy to adjust, setup or untie, instead, use a self release with (secure) half hitches.
- ▶ Make the ridge line flat between the trees, that should make the bottom at 1 metre or 1.20 metre, which is ok to use the bottom entry.



**Tip: closing the fly on the hammock** By clipping the fly clip on the hammock side bungee, you can get less space

between the two.

- ▶ The fly has clips that can be used to clip the hammock side bungees, this closes the roof to the hammock (or reverse, depending on tensions) to make a more air-tight area, good for windy or cold places.
- ▶ The tarp can be set either with a center ridge line, or totally flat at angle, or just to close on the hammock, use your imagination, depending on your expectations and needs.



**Unrigging: twisting** How to twist the fabric before and during the deployment of the snake skins.

## The Sylnylon hex fly

It can be used with the hammock, but it is an excellent large ultralight fly/tarp on its own!



**The hex fly vs the expedition fly** Here you can size the difference of size.

We do find the price of the extra tarp alone at 129\$ pretty excessive, even for a sylnylon tarp. We also regret the lack of extra loop, particularly in the center position and surroundings, which would make it a much more useful item, as it would allow a lot of different rigs (and an hex tarp can have many many rigging ways).



**Hex fly attaches** A nice detail of the attaches of the hex fly, which can be stored inside the reinforcements.

**The hex fly as a tarp** Here deployed alone, A huge space for very little weight.

## Conclusion

These hammocks are extremely well thought out. They are the Rolls Royce of the light camping hammock, and shall certainly attract people that do not like hammocks, because it is difficult to step in hammocks, or because they do not like to sleep with the back bent, or they sleep on the belly, all these problems are solved with the hennessy. This hammock is as comfortable as your bed (more in summer in my opinion). There are few things that could be better, an opening on the mosquito net, to allow to sleep without the netting when bugs are out, or have a look outside without netting-blurr vision, or for claustrophobics. A larger tarp to make at least for the backpack and other hanging gear and protect it from rain could be good. If this is your concern, buy one with the large tarp from the start, as this is feasible.

Overall, this is an excellent set of gear. A little fragility, confirmed by other testers, but nothing that will stop the hammock to function, and nothing a little care cannot take care of. Nothing either that cannot be repaired on spot.

Outdoors lovers, adventurers, scouts, backpackers, this is an extremely light, versatile, and comfortable solution for you, which in addition allows for a fast setup. Again, I think that the larger hex fly is a better investment, as it will have extra use for when a hammock is not convenient. Indeed you will need trees or something to hang it to ( a car can do ), so just forget it above 2000 meters. But when there are trees, it works well!

The only obvious drawback is winter, where a hammock is certainly colder than a tent (unless well prepared).

The Expedition, which is the standard model, "made in china" in larger quantities therefore also the more largely available, is already a good and reasonably cheap solo bivy, which has a lot to offer, including a lot of comfort. The Backpacker ultralight at 800 grams is a great solution and well worth its slightly higher price, it is in my opinion the very best of both on all aspects, you just need to check it can do your weight (90 kg max).

Lastly, because we mention there was a problem, do not conclude it has failed. The replacements held well in the same conditions, and even knowing it will fail this way in advance, I would buy one, that is how much I like it! I mentioned the problem because I wanted to warn people that a netting is not as resistant as another cloth. In addition, Hennessy's service proved to be up to the task. No negative point for this from our side, but we note this is the fragile part.



Your host under the tarp. I hope you enjoyed the review, bye !

## Thanks

Thanks to Jack at [Woodland Organics](#) which is the UK distributor for Hennessy, for making this review possible.

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And indeed thanks to Tom Hennessy, from [Hennessy Hammocks](#), for sending us additional gear, for their patience, and honesty, and for making this review possible.

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*Post-scriptum :This is V2.0. Missing some of Bogdan's inputs and pictures, coming. And indeed additions, corrections to come. This article will still receive changes for a good 6 month.*