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Helleberg Bivanorak

The Ultimate Bivy

Sharpshooter

- Gear reviews and tests - Bivouac -



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Description :

Designed for Swedish Pilot Survival gear, the Bivanorak is a perfect choice for Backpackers, Woodsbums, and Bushcrafters.

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One of the best pieces of gear I had the opportunity to test lately is the Hilleberg Bivanorak.

Hilleberg is known for premium quality four season tents that have been used on expeditions all over the world, surviving the frigid winds of the Antarctic and on Mount Everest. In addition to being strong their products are designed to be lightweight making them a top choice for modern explorers and mountain rescue teams that need the best.

The Bivanorak was designed to be included in survival kits for Swedish Air Force pilots to provide them with a waterproof garment for use in the rain as well as a quickly deployed shelter. It looks to me like they got it right.

The Polyurethane Coated Ripstop Nylon is very lightweight, so much so that when I first took the Bivanorak from its pouch I was unnecessarily careful to not rip it when trying it on. Having used it for a while I find that the material provides the perfect balance of light weight, ruggedness and portability. The entire package weighs just about a pound and a half including the stuff sack and it compresses quite small.

On my recent outing to North Carolina, I brought the Bivanorak along to see just how well it filled the utility shelter/ rain gear role. For a lot of years I carried a USGI Poncho as raingear and have used it as a shelter a few times as well. The poncho did pretty well, so for something to supplant it on my pack is a pretty tall order.

Putting on the Bivanorak is quite different from a poncho, you're not wearing a square tarp, but rather a huge hooded bag with sleeves.



Helleberg doesn't send instructions in the package, but that's not a big problem as it's pretty much intuitive, I step into the body and begin pulling the cover up much like wearing coveralls.



The Ultimate Bivy



Once inside you'll notice that the Bivanorak is VERY long, it needs to be in order to serve as a shelter.



The design includes a draw string on the bottom seam which can easily be used to bring the bottom up and secure it at your waist providing you with protection from the rain far better than you would ever get from a traditional poncho with plenty of room to move about freely.



The two way zipper is covered by a Velcro secured flap assuring that the closure is water and wind proof, pulling up the hood provides such fantastic protection from the weather that it makes me wonder how well it would work against the cutting winds of winter. It's certainly water and wind proof.

The Ultimate Bivy



Loosening the string at the waist and pulling it closed below your feet provides you with complete coverage of your body, comfortable enough in fact that I found myself wishing for some more rain or a sudden cold snap to test the Bivanorak's abilities more fully.



One of the reasons I like the poncho is that it's sufficiently large to cover my pack were I caught in the rain much as I would like to believe the pack makers that their packs are waterproof, I've found that a hard driving rain can and will work it's way thru the zippers. Nothing spells miserable better for me than to pull on a pair of cold wet socks in the morning. With the poncho I have another layer of rain repellent material keeping my gear a bit drier.

I'm far from a small guy, close to 6 feet tall and weighing in at 250 lbs; being at the upper end of size has lead me to believe that "One Size Fits All" really means doesn't fit anyone. A hard rain usually runs down the poncho, over my pack and right into the top of my boots, leading me to wonder if I needed to develop the sense to get in out of the rain.

Hilleberg shows the Bivanorak being worn OVER a pack, I wondered just how small the guy wearing it was and just how tiny the pack is under there. I found out when a rain squall started in North Carolina...

Just for laughs, I decided to pull on my pack and then try the Bivanorak.



It wasn't easy, but as you can see, it works. And I'm not carrying a small pack, a Maxpedition Vulture 3 day assault pack (2810 cubic inches) with a USMC IFAC attached along with 100 feet of 1 inch rope, quite a load.



Testing the bivy application was pretty easy as well, "Gee, I wonder if I can sleep in it?"

Actually it's a bit more than being able to sleep in the Bivanorak, many Bushcrafters carry a large plastic garbage bag to serve as a waterproof bag to sleep in.

Helleberg put a lot more thought into their version. Since the bottom of the Bivanorak is open, it's easy to slide your sleeping bag inside; the drawstring in the bottom seam closes it up giving you a waterproof cover for your sleeping bag. I found the hood to be a very nice feature for sleeping in the bivy, while my entire body was enclosed in a wind and waterproof shell, the open face of the hood gave me access to plenty of fresh air. The hood has a couple of drawstrings as well allowing you to close off the face opening should the weather become really nasty.



Before going to sleep, I set my Trianga Stove along with a water bottle nearby, in the stuff sack for the bivy I keep a container of boat matches. The sleeves of the Bivanorak allowed me to slip my arms out, set up my stove and begin heating up some water for my morning cup of coffee without leaving the warmth of my sleeping bag. If I would have thought of setting a package of dehydrated breakfast food, I could have had "breakfast in bed"; I guess the Swedish Air Force guys can really live it up in a survival situation. Sounds good to me, Thriving rather than surviving seems like the way to go.

The last feature of the Bivanorak is the clincher for me. Occasionally while Woodsbumming out in the rain I need to check my map. It seems like the harder the rain falls the easier it becomes to become a "mite bewildered". Even with a waterproof map, I would prefer to be able to get out of the rain to check my bearings.

The body of the Bivanorak is large enough that by holding my Peak Atlantic light between my teeth and pulling my arms back inside, I can escape the rain while checking my map. While this may not seem to be a big deal to most people, anyone who has hunched over under a poncho in an attempt to stay dry will appreciate the ease and effectiveness of this technique.

When you compare the price of the Bivanorak against a GI Poncho it seems a bit pricey, but the utility and quality of the design and construction has me just about convinced to join the Swedish Air Force to get a Bivanorak of my own. Maybe I'll have better luck by just buying one for about \$130.

You can get a few more details and pics of the Bivanorak in action at Hillebergs web site...

They have some pretty impressive tents as well, I need to start saving my pennies as I have my eye on the Muddus or Akto.

Reid