

Natural Disasters - Terrorist Attacks - Food Shortages
Pandemic - Economic Collapse - Social Unrest
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and many other situations threaten us

Survival Shelter

Shelter when you are stranded in the woods, on your way to your destination, or just as a temporary shelter for a few days, is one of the most important aspects to survival. Without shelter you are exposed to the elements and your chances of survival are lowered. Most people carry a tent with them as part of their camping or bug out gear. Some people choose to use a military poncho or a tarp, or both as their shelter to cut down on the weight they have to carry. Military ponchos are great for making shelters with, they are tough, have grommets to stake or tie the corners, can be snapped together, etc.

Add a tarp along with the poncho and you can have a slightly larger shelter or add a floor to the shelter you make with the poncho. If you have two tarps you can make a larger shelter and have a floor. Two 6 foot by 6 foot or 8 foot by 6 foot tarps and some rope or parachute cord will allow you to make some nice shelters. Some people also carry a small, light weight tent pole or two so that they don't have to use sticks to support their shelter.

I suggest having two tarps for shelter and a poncho for rain gear. The poncho can be used as a door in a shelter built with two tarps, or to cover you like a blanket to help keep rain off should your shelter leak and to keep you warm. I prefer parachute cord, also called 550 or seven strand, because it is light weight yet strong. Inside the outer nylon shell are seven strands, hence the seven strand designation. Parachute cord makes an excellent survival rope since it is light weight yet strong and has many uses. The outer shell can be used as laces, to tie things while the seven strands can be used as thread for sewing or fishing line, etc. The combined breaking point of parachute cord is 550 pounds, hence the 550 designation. There are cheaper imitations out there, but always go with the real thing if you are planning on using it instead of a 1/4 or 1/2 inch rope.

Along with the two tarps and rope or parachute cord you may want to consider some lighter weight twine, two to four tent pegs and a few (4 to 6) 2 or 3 inch nails. The tent pegs can be used to stake down the corners of your tarps while the nails can be used if you are building a shelter that you plan to stay in for more than a week. Even with two light weight tent poles the weight will be less than all but the lightest tents available.

Below are pictures of a number of expedient survival shelters.

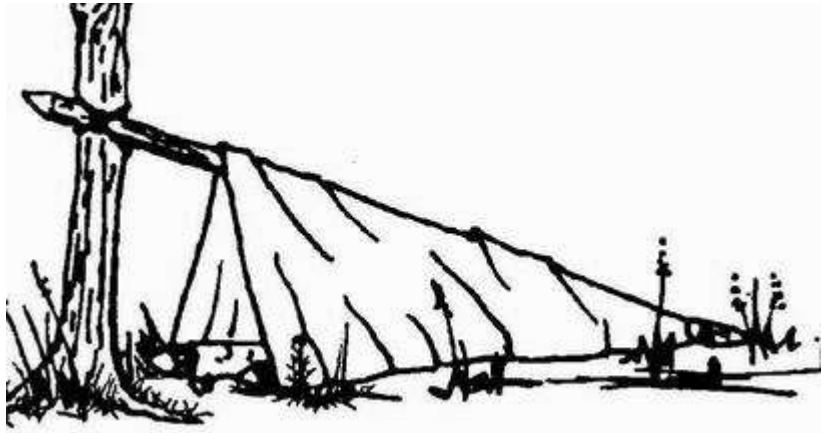
Tarp or Poncho Wrap

Short of hunching down within your poncho this is probably the easiest shelter to construct. You wrap yourself in your tarp or poncho, like a sleeping bag, and use a stick to keep the top up. If using a poncho you want to make sure that the hood is tied so that it minimizes water getting in. You want to make sure that the bottom and foot are wrapped up so that water rolls off and you do not get wet. You can also pull pine boughs over yourself to help keep warm.



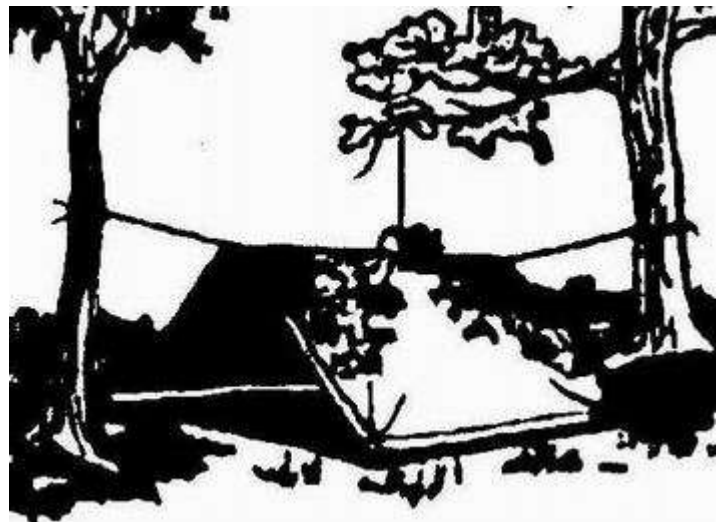
Tarp or Poncho Shelter

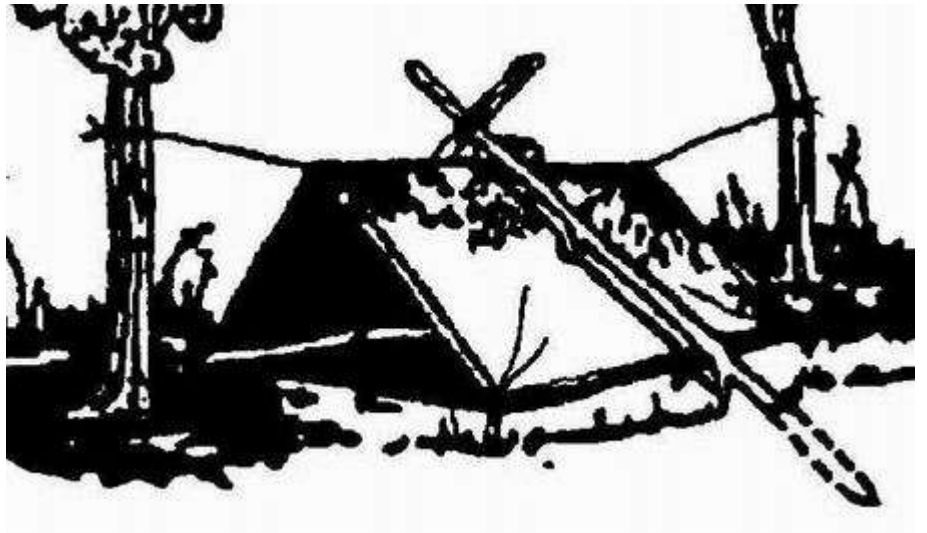
A tarp shelter can be built with a tree, a stick or a piece of rope, twine and a tarp. In the top picture you see that a tree and a stick is used to hold up the tarp. You could use a piece of rope instead of the stick. The bottom picture uses three sticks; you could use the two sticks forming the opening and two pieces of rope, one to hold up the tarp and another to act as a guy rope for the two sticks forming the opening. You can use sticks or tent pegs to stake down the corners of the shelter. A second tarp, or a poncho, can be used as a floor or a "door" over the open end. If there are pine trees around you can lay them along the sides to improve heat retention and as insulation from the cold, wind or rain.



Tarp or Poncho Tents

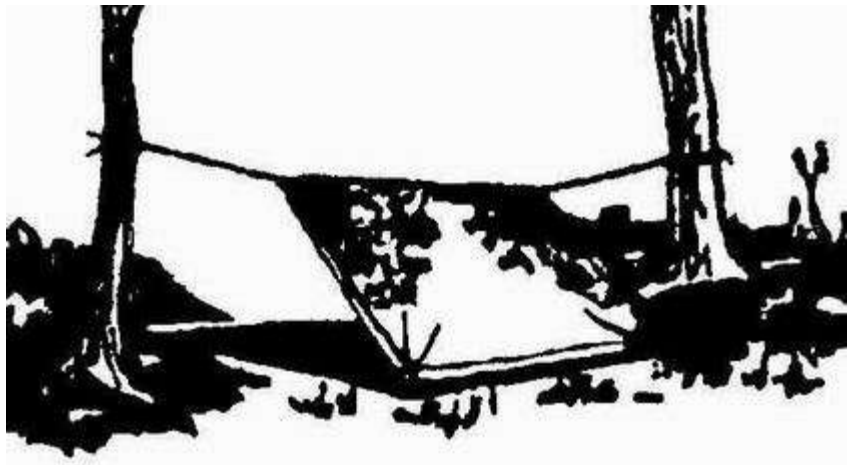
Below are two basic tarp tents. The top picture uses a rope from the top of the tent to a tree branch to keep tension on the roof. The bottom picture uses two sticks to achieve the same purpose. Again, a second tarp or poncho can be used for a floor or doors. And you can always use pine boughs to increase insulation on the sides.





Tarp or Poncho Leanto

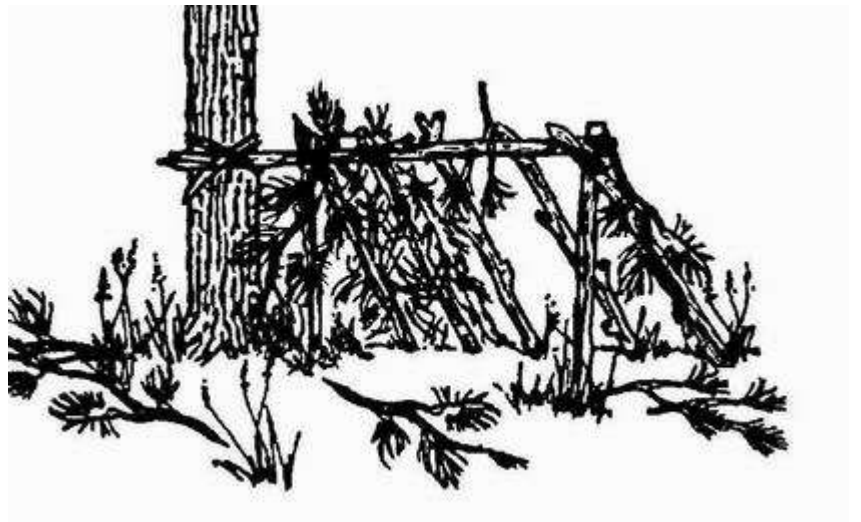
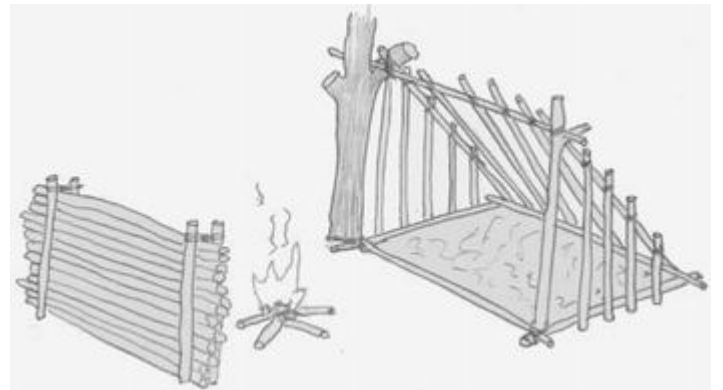
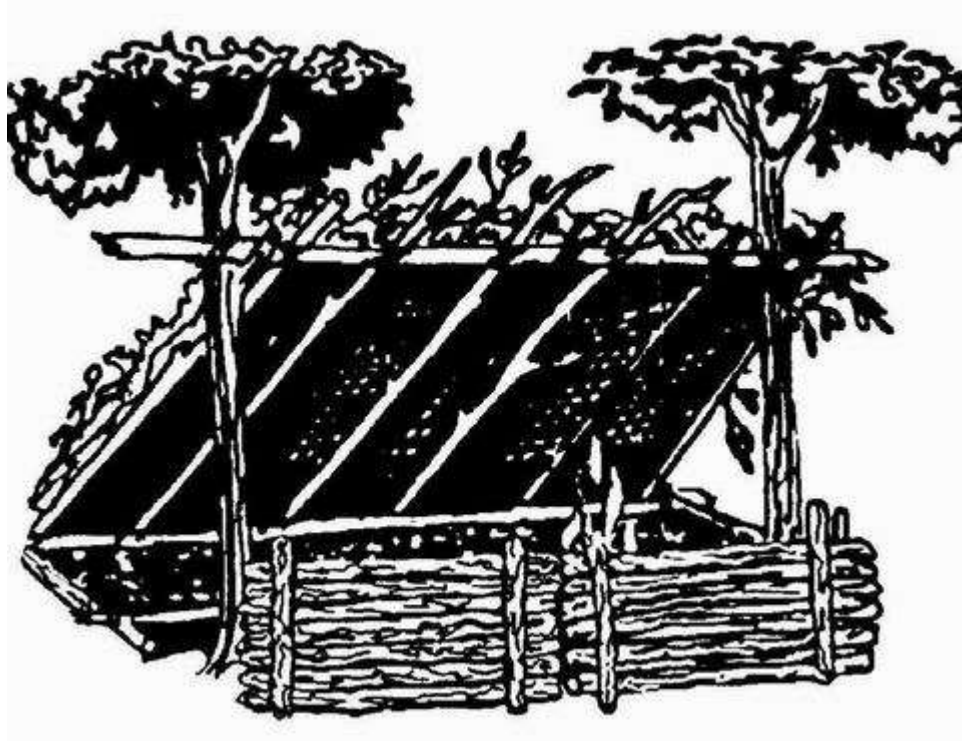
This is a simple leanto built with rope tied to two trees with the tarp attached to the rope. When building a leanto you want to make sure that the tarp is on the side the wind is blowing from.



Leantos

Below are four pictures of leantos. You will notice in the top picture that man is packing a "bough bed" full of pine boughs. There is a tarp or blanket on top of the pine boughs. Two of the pictures show a leanto built with two trees while the other two use a tree and sticks. Two of the pictures also show the use of a "fire reflector" to reflect heat into the leanto from a fire built in front of the opening of the leanto. A fire reflector will keep a leanto very warm. You can use a tarp under the pine boughs on the "roof" to keep water out of the leanto. Leantos can be made with or without sides and with or without a floor. Further down the page you will find information on "bough beds" and "fire reflectors".





Fallen Tree Shelter

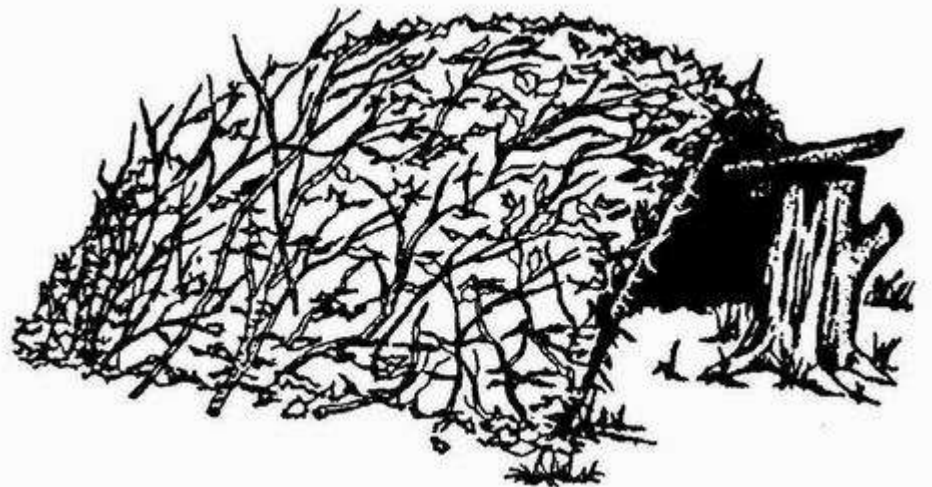
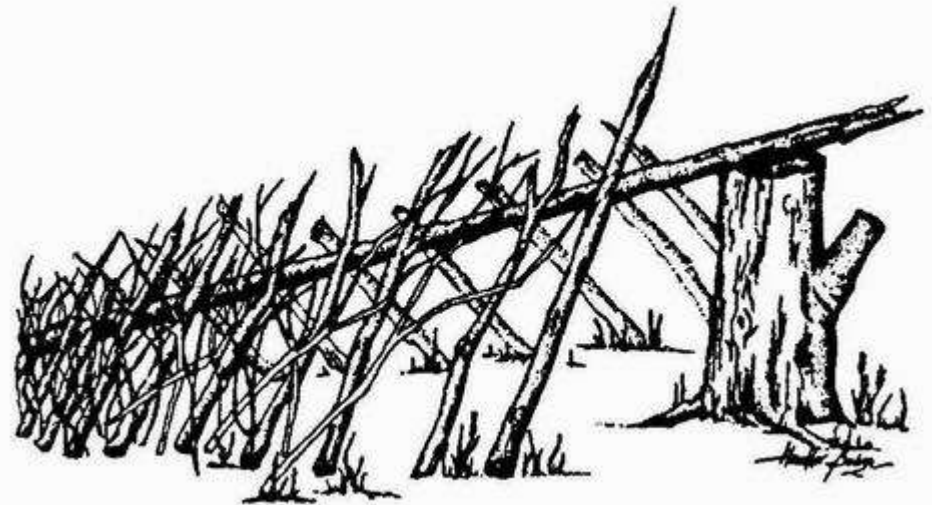
A fallen tree can be used to form the basis of a shelter. By "hollowing" out the underside of the fallen tree you create an area to crawl into. You can improve the shelter by putting a tarp over the fallen tree and using the branches from "hollowing" out the shelter on top of the tarp. If the tree is a member of the evergreen family you can use the branches from "hollowing" out the shelter as a "bough bed". Depending on the fallen tree you may want to shore up the fallen portion with rope or branches.



A variation of the fallen tree shelter can be built under the bottom branches of large evergreen trees, you simply crawl under the lower branches and use a tarp above you to help keep you dry. This variation requires a large evergreen tree and is good for when you want a shelter that is difficult to find.

Debris Hut

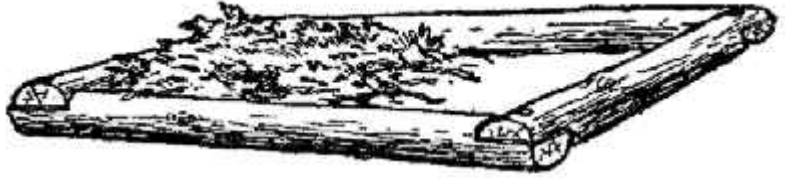
A debris hut is like a fallen tree shelter except that you are using whatever can be found to make the shelter. You can see the two stages of the debris hut below. You can of course use a tarp for a roof before you throw on the branches and whatever else you can find on the roof as insulation.



Bough Bed

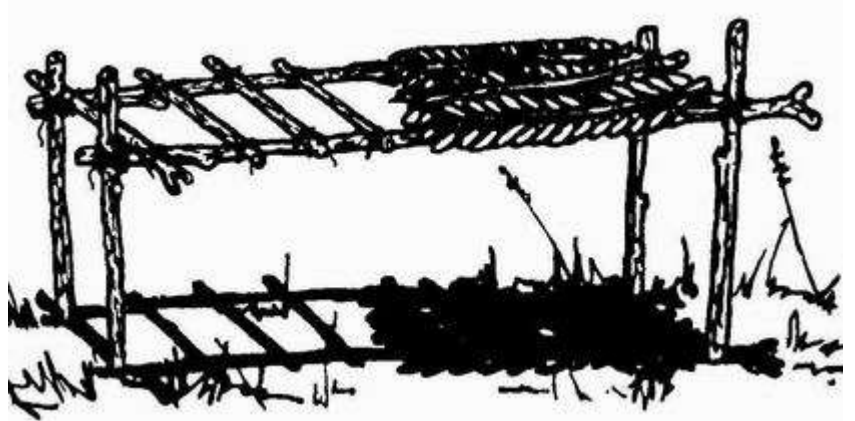
A bough bed is built using the smaller branches of evergreen trees. You lay the boughs as the floor of your shelter, place a tarp or blanket on top and it makes a nice soft bed to lie on. Tarps are preferred to blankets to cover the boughs as it also

aids in keeping you dry. In the picture below you can see that four branches or logs are used to form the outside of the bed, these are not required but will keep the boughs in place better than if not used. A properly constructed bough bed will provide softness, insulation and will keep you above the level of any rain that is running along the ground. The sides of the bed can be tied into a leanto as seen in the top three leanto pictures above.



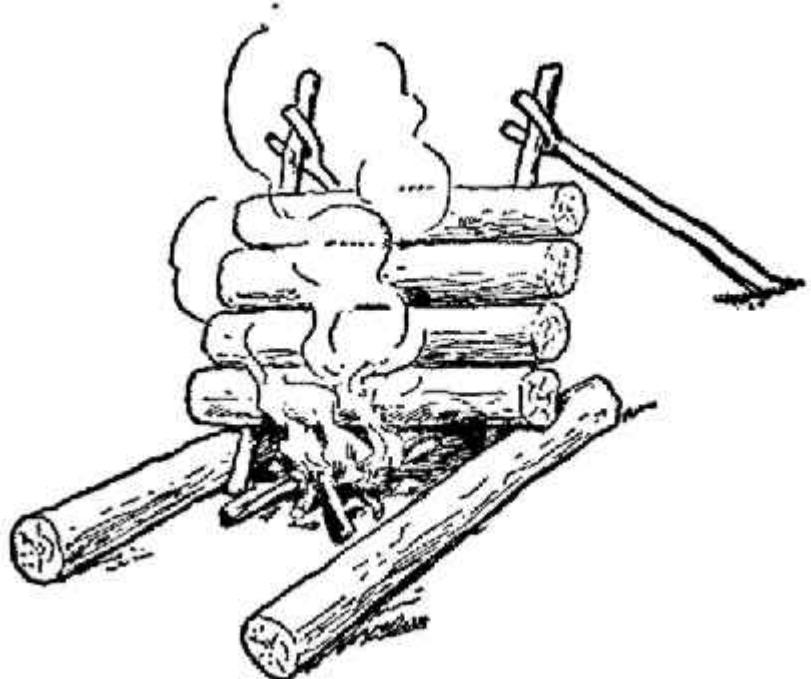
Platform or Swamp Bed

A platform or swamp bed can be used when in a swamp. By changing the height of the legs it can be used to keep you off the ground in a forest, sunk into the snow to create a platform for you to sleep on, etc. You can place boughs, or large leaves if in a tropical/swamp setting, on the top to form a mattress. In a woods setting a platform bed can be used to make sure that you stay dry in heavy rains, such as the Pacific Northwest, with a tarp or other shelter above you to keep falling rain off of you. The legs of a platform bed can be two logs placed parallel to each other with the cross branches laid across them.



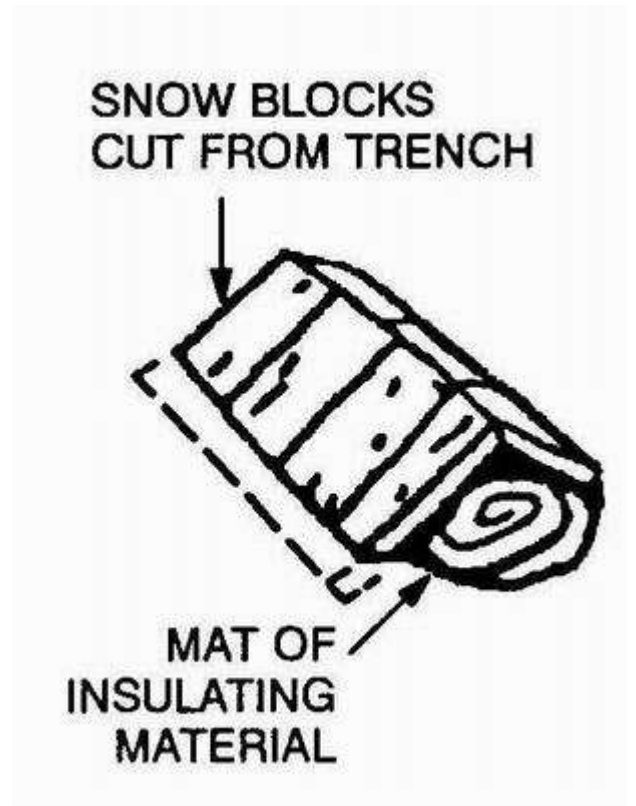
Fire Reflector

A fire reflector is used to reflect the heat of a fire into a leanto or other shelter. Along with the back wall you can use angled side walls to get direct the heat into the open side of a shelter. The reflector should be far enough away from the shelter to ensure that you do not set your shelter on fire. The fire should also be far enough away from the back and sides of wooden walls to make sure that they are not set on fire. A fire reflector can be made from stacked logs, a large log, a rock or piled dirt.



Snow Trench

To make a snow trench you need good packed snow of at least 6 to 12 inches. You will need the trench to be a foot two longer than your height and about 3 to 3.5 feet wide. Cut the blocks from the trench area, blocks should be a foot to two feet wide and the width of the trench long and at least 6 inches thick. Basically, you will need to cut blocks from a trench twice as long as you need. Take care when cutting the blocks, laying each aside as you cut them. Once all the blocks are cut carefully lean two blocks together to form a peak in the center. Once you have made your roof you can pile snow at one end to close it off. You can also use some snow to fill in any gaps between blocks. Make sure you have a tarp, poncho or some boughs on the floor of your trench to keep you dry.



Snow Pit

Snow pits can be built in areas where the snow is deep enough. In picture below the pit is dug around a tree with the tree acting as part of the roof. The snow has to be well packed. You could also pile snow up, packing it as you go, then dig out the center. If you pile the snow yourself make sure to let the snow sit for at least 2 to 3 hours before digging. The picture shows evergreen boughs used as a roof, you can also use a tarp or poncho.

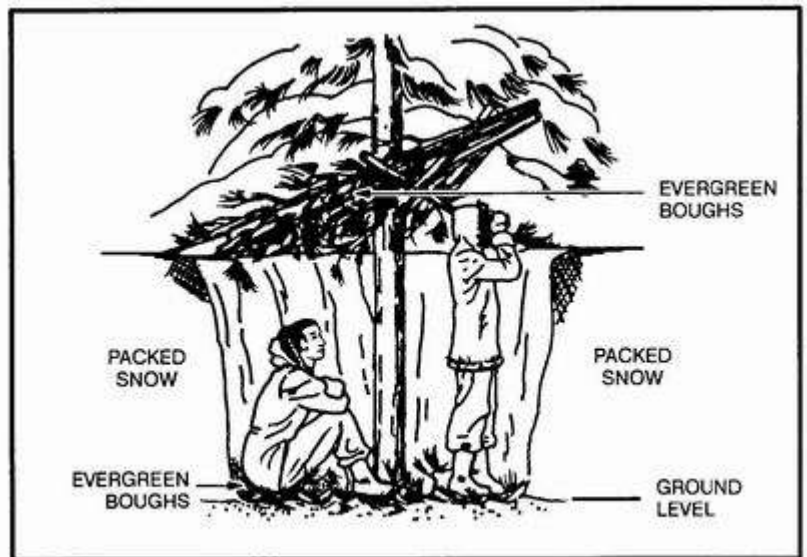
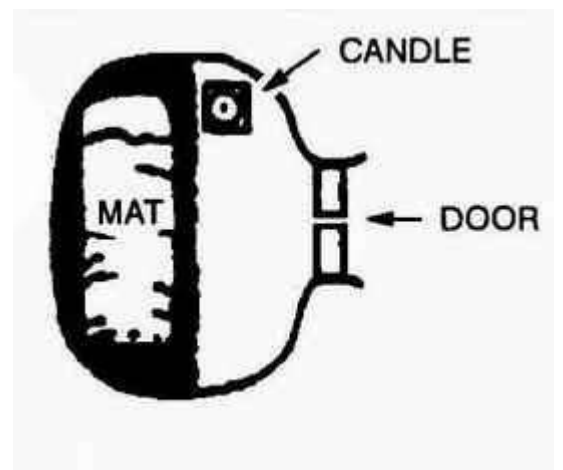
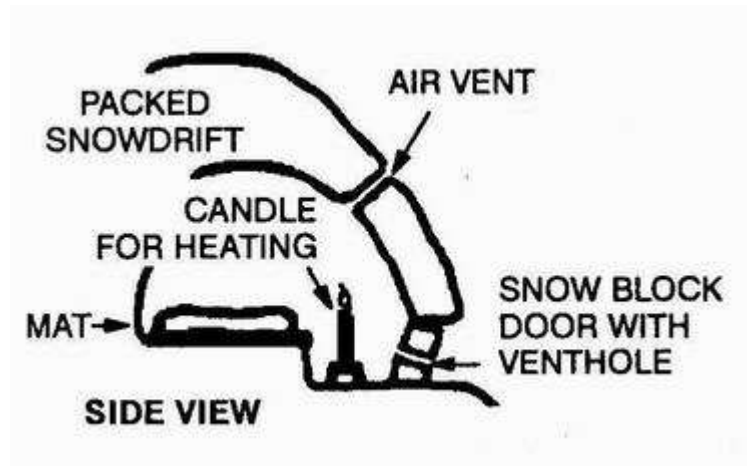


Figure 5-12. Tree-pit snow shelter.

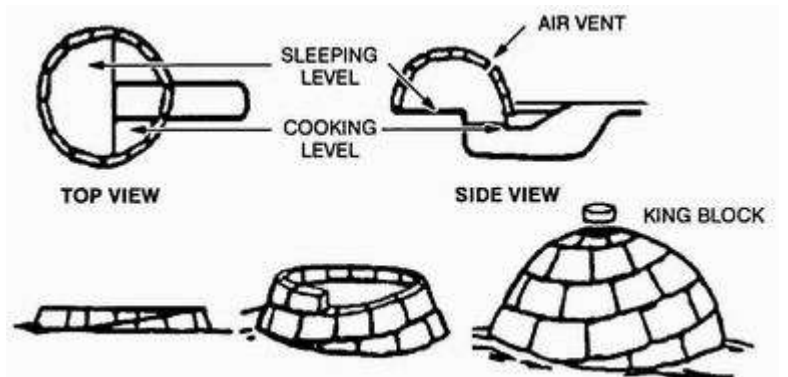
Snow Cave

A snow cave can be built by digging into a snow drift on the side of a hill, or that has formed around some trees. You can also pile snow up then dig into the side. If you pile the snow yourself make sure to let the snow sit for at least 2 to 3 hours before digging. You want to have a tarp, poncho or boughs between you and the snow you are sleeping on. A candle will keep a snow cave very warm.



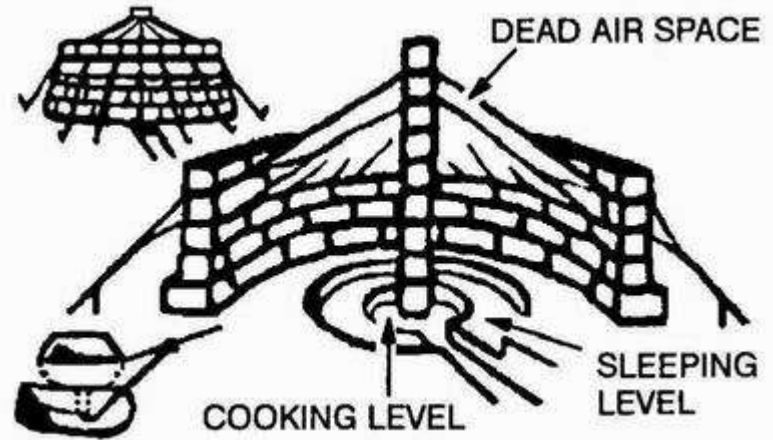
Snow House (Igloo)

A snow house or igloo is a very good shelter if built properly. They take practice to build properly. You have to make sure that each block is placed properly and is well "cemented" to those around it before laying the next block. You may want to consider a snow wall shelter like the one below instead.



Snow Walls

Snow walls can be built by using blocks as in an igloo, except that the walls are straight up and down. They are much easier to build than an igloo, but they are not as warm. A tarp or poncho can be used for the roof. You can also build the walls by piling and packing snow instead of using blocks. You can build snow walls large enough to provide a wind break, with room to have a fire within the walls, and then use pine boughs and snow over your sleeping area for insulation.



Beach Shade

A beach shade can be built by piling sand up into walls around a shallow trench, laying a tarp or poncho across the walls and then putting some sand on top. You can also use any debris or branches to make the walls and roof for more strength.

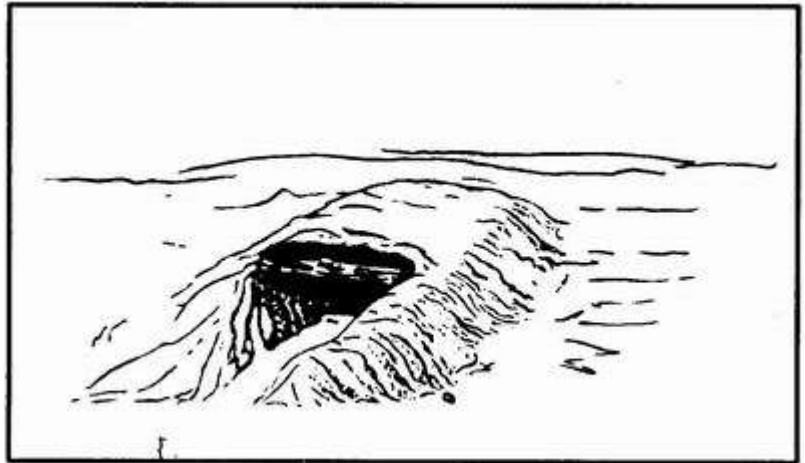


Figure 5-13. Beach shade shelter.

Desert - Below Ground

A below ground desert shelter is basically the same as the beach shade above, except it is deeper. The picture below does a good job of illustrating the building technique. Keep in mind that there are 30 cm in an inch. This requires two tarps for maximum insulation from the sun.

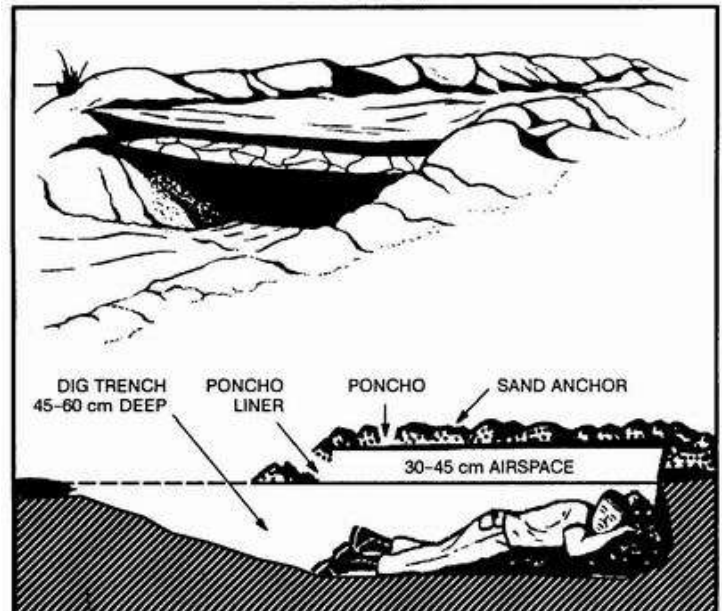


Figure 5-14. Belowground desert shelter.

Desert - Above Ground

The same basic idea as the below ground shelter, except the above ground can be made faster. The above ground shelter is better for the day to keep the sun off of you. At night the desert can get very cold, so you would have to have some walls and insulation to keep you warm.

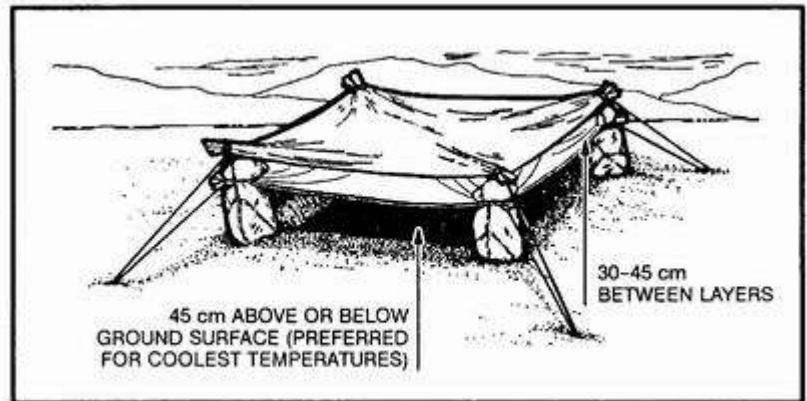


Figure 5-15. Open desert shelter.

Conclusion

As you can see from the shelters above, there are many types of shelters that can be constructed with or without a tarp and rope. You can combine elements of different shelters to build one that is dry, warm and comfortable no matter the weather or the temperature. With a little thought and some minimal items, even just a garbage bag, there is no reason why you should go without shelter in a survival situation.

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