



JOLLY SWAGMAN

ROLLING OUT A SWAG IS ABOUT AS AUSTRALIAN AS IT GETS. SCOTT HEIMAN LOOKS AT PRACTICAL OPTIONS FOR THE MODERN ROVER.

Swags are still widely used by overlanders and bushmen. In fact, there are probably few other bits of outdoor kit that are so uniquely Australian. So what is the swag's origin? And is it beginning to 'outgrow' its utility? After all, it seems like every time a company releases a new model it's bigger than the last one, but not always.

We've done some research on swags and bivvy bags to see what options are out there if you're looking for a smaller, lighter option.

HOW DID WE GET TO SWAG?

Originally, a thief's swag was a bag of stolen clothes or goods (stereotypically thrown over a shoulder). To 'carry the swag' meant - being in possession of, or transporting, stolen goods. By the 1830s, the term 'swag' was being used to refer to a bundle used by bushmen to move possessions and daily necessities around. After the 1850s' gold rushes, the 'swagman' became someone who was

unemployed and would walk from place to place looking for work. The swag was generally the swagman's bed roll and possessions in a sheet of canvas. Things have come a long way since then.

These days, a lot of swags weigh more than 20kg, have three-inch mattresses and have more in common with dome tents than traditional swags. Some include queen-sized mattresses, flies and awnings, while others come with built-in stretchers and can cost more than \$800. You'd be hard-pressed to drag them 50 metres from the back of your ute to your campsite!

LIGHTEN YOUR LOAD

Happily, for those of us looking for a simpler solution, they are still available. For the traditional minded, some manufacturers still create original-style swags that can cost as little as \$120 or as much as \$500, and can weigh less than five kilograms. But what we find really interesting are those companies that have taken the notion of the traditional, basic



WORDS AND PHOTOS SCOTT HEIMAN

swag, but are also using modern materials to maximise effectiveness.

BACKPACK BED

This is a swag that was designed by a company called Swags for Homeless, which provides bedding options for the homeless and distributes its products through charity organisations. Available commercially at www.swags.org.au, the Backpack Bed has been awarded seven product-design awards, including the world's premier product-design award: the German 2011 Red Dot, 'Best of the Best'.

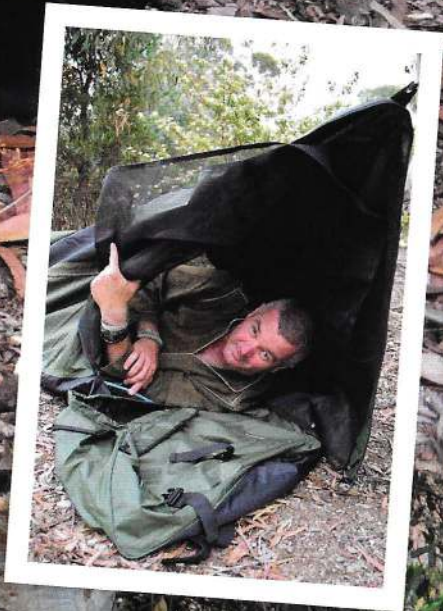
The Backpack Bed is an ultra-light swag at three kilograms. It has a 600D Litetrex top-cover fabric and a minimalist 1cm-thick built-in camp mat. While thin, this mat has a silver-cell technology lining which works much like a survival blanket to reflect your body heat back into you while creating a barrier to the cold surface. It is designed to be used as a traditional swag, A-frame swag, lean-to tent, or a carry bag. It has three external pockets and enough space internally for a sleeping bag and clothes for the

weekend. Taking up half the size of most modern swags, it could even live in the car without getting in the way, day-to-day. It's waterproof, windproof, fire retardant, mildew resistant and includes mosquito netting. Available from about \$220.

GORE-TEX BIVVY BAGS

Bivvy bags (or bivouac sacks) are commonly used by the military, mountain bikers, climbers and hikers. They're essentially a cocoon for your sleeping bag. Small, lightweight, waterproof and windproof, the typical bivvy bag is made from a material that allows moisture and carbon dioxide to escape while providing about 5°C extra warmth. I trialled a Gore-Tex Bivvy, which was a genuine standalone sleeping option, and it was less bulky than the Backpack Bed. A Bivvy bag comes into its own in situations where you only use the swag as a mattress, as you would in the far north, or during summer.

Gore-Tex Bivvy bags are usually light, waterproof and windproof, and



The Backpack Bed takes the swag back to basics.

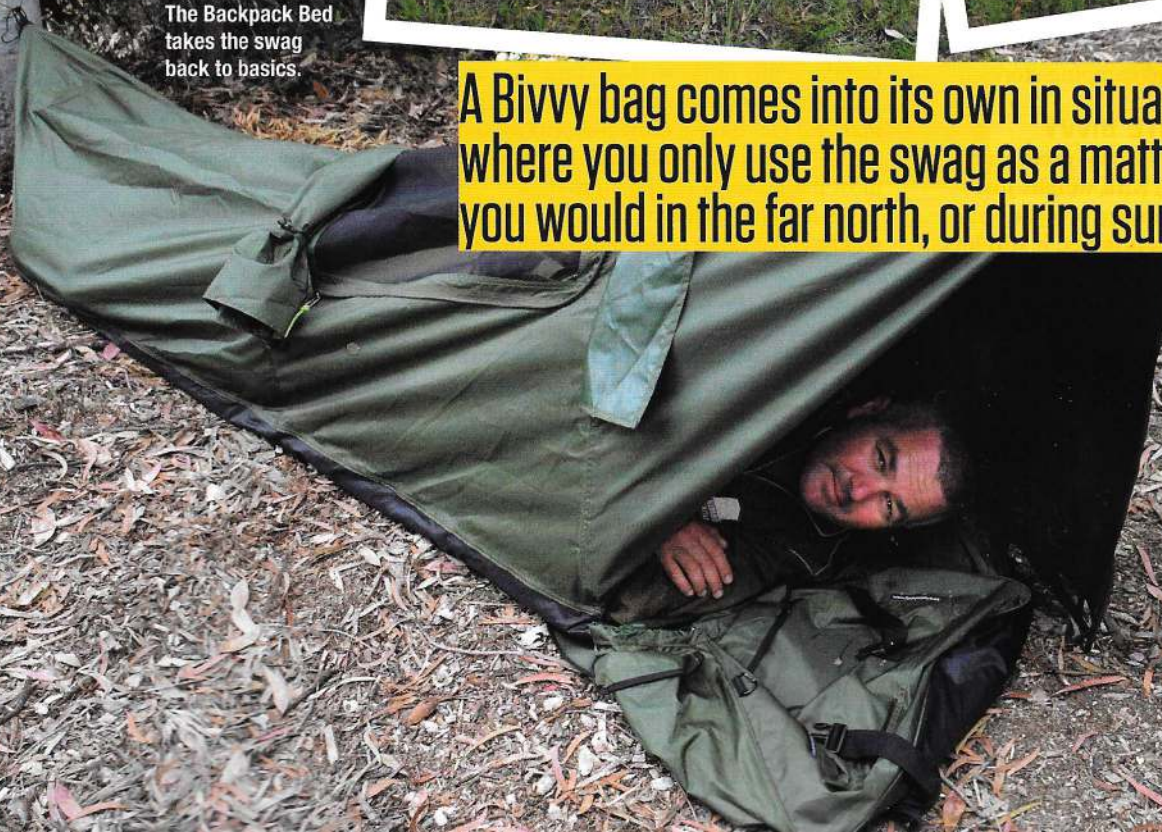


Gore-Tex Bivvy bags are waterproof thanks to their composite fabric.



Bivvy Bags are a small lightweight option for use in summer or the tropics.

A Bivvy bag comes into its own in situations where you only use the swag as a mattress, as you would in the far north, or during summer



The products we've looked at here are small enough and practical enough to pack wherever you go



Stay warm and be seen in an emergency, with the Escape Lite.

incorporate mosquito nets. Roll one out under your vehicle awning or beneath the shelter of a dense tree canopy, and you're covered. Enhance it with a sleeping bag, thermal mat or stretcher, just as you would a traditional swag.

It's ideal for storing in your vehicle, backpack or bug-out bag for emergencies, or for use when it's stinking-hot but you still need to keep the mozzies and bugs at bay. Available from about \$200 at selected military surplus and camping stores.

SOL ESCAPE LITE BIVVY

The Sol Escape Lite bivy, produced by Adventure Medical Kits, weighs just 150 grams and is the size of a soup can. Primarily a survival product, it still lets moisture escape while keeping the rain, snow and wind out. It is re-usable and is a 'Rescue Orange' colour to help search and rescue teams find you if you need help.

We wouldn't call it a sleeping solution in its own right, however it does reflect 70 per cent of your body heat back to you. The Escape Lite also has a big brother called the Escape Bivvy (not tested) that comes in Rescue Orange or Army Green.

This model is said to weigh 240 grams and is almost twice the size of the Escape Lite. However, rolled up, it's still smaller than a football. It can also be used as an inner liner to enhance the warmth of a traditional swag or bivvy when the

weather turns and you wish you'd brought an extra blanket or your winter-weight sleeping bag. Or simply keep it packed away for emergencies because accidents do happen.

They are ideal for storing in your glove box, tackle box, backpack or your vehicle survival kit. Retail price is approximately \$70 - \$90.

SNUG AS A BUG

Combine any of these three together or individually with a stretcher and thermal mat and you have a total sleeping system, for all conditions, that is smaller than most mega swags on the market.

We all have different ideas about what's acceptable night-time comfort and protection. But whether you're out for a daytrip in the Glasshouse Mountains or an overland trip across the Simpson Desert, it pays to be prepared. While they have their place, we don't always need a 20kg, mini-dome swag to keep us 'safe' from the elements - lighter options offer versatility and functionality.

Being safe in the bush means that you're sheltered and, when it's cold, you can keep your core body temperature constant. The products we've looked at here are small enough and practical enough to pack wherever you go, and can give you the 'edge' when Mother Nature or Lady Luck is unkind. 🚗

The Escape Lite fits in the palm of your hand.

