



OUR FAVORITE GEAR OF THE YEAR

Top picks in new outdoor equipment

BY STUART BOURDON

Every year we see hundreds of examples of new camping equipment — from stoves to footwear and everything in between. Some new gear really wows us, while some leaves us wondering why the manufacturer even bothered, and it seems as if we're getting more selective than ever before. It's not that there isn't a lot of great gear out there, but this list should be reserved for our favorites — the few things that stuck with us months after we examined or tested them. So here they are — the 2011 *Camping Life* Editors' Choice Award Winners.



2011
EDITORS
CHOICE
CampingLife
GOLDEN STAKE



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1► EUREKA MANSARD TENT

We've talked a lot about the Mansard already, but the bottom line is that it's one of our favorite new tents because it's built like a tank, offers nice perks such as DAC aluminum poles, polyester walls, a tub-style floor, a polyester fly with a substantial 1,500mm PU-coating, and it will accommodate a large family. Its pole hubs, upon which the entire tent structure's upper corners and center are anchored, are massive; yet setup is easy with its clip-and-pole design. The structure's architecture provides near-vertical walls, offering an open feeling and interior headroom of more than 6 feet. The moderately sized front and rear vestibules on the ends of the tent can also be configured as awnings; and this tent also has two smaller storage vestibules, accessed through V-shaped zippered panels so you can reach from the inside to grab gear stowed in these compartments. \$680. **Eureka!:** 800/572-8822; eurekaent.com.

2► DELORME EARTHMATE PN 60W WITH SPOT SATELLITE COMMUNICATOR

This is a natural pairing of two great devices that allows you to stay in touch from locations anywhere in the world when there's no cell phone coverage. You can type and send simple messages from the field to cell phones, e-mail or social networks such as Facebook or Twitter, and you can let others track your location on Google Maps. You can also send an SOS with your GPS coordinates embedded.

The SPOT Satellite Communicator was specifically developed for use with the Earthmate PN-60w, but the hand-held GPS unit is itself a rugged, waterproof unit offering full navigation capabilities, a 32-channel dual-core processor, 100-route capability, and it can save 1,500 waypoints per file. It's also WAAS-enabled and IPX7 waterproof. Topo North America GPS maps and PC software are included in the package. The DeLorme/SPOT hardware combo is \$549. The service pricing starts at \$99.99 for Basic Service. Type and Send bundle pricing is \$49.99 for 500 custom messages, or 50 cents per message without the bundle purchase. **Delorme:** 800/561-5105; delorme.com.

3► SIERRA DESIGNS PYRO

Sierra Designs' new Pyro sleeping bag features a trend in sleeping bag design that we appreciated for its efficient use of insulation. The company calls it Core Comfort body mapping, but we'll call it putting warmth where you need it the most. The Pyro offers extra 600-fill down directly over your torso to maximize heat retention in this critical area. Other top-notch sleeping bag features such as a draft tube and draft collar for keeping cold air out, an ergonomic foot box and hood for greater comfort, and a pillow pocket for convenience make this a darn good 15-degree sleeping bag for the price. \$250. **Sierra Designs:** 800/635-0461; sierradesigns.com.

4► GEIGERRIG HYDRATION PACKS

What's so special about this hydration pack? Well, unlike all the rest you don't have to suck on it to get a drink of water. The hydration bladder is pressurized through the use of a hand-pump bulb and once under pressure, all it takes is for the user to lightly bite down or squeeze on the bite-valve to release a continuous stream of cool, clean water. The Geigerrig packs come in a number of capacities, ranging from 500 to 1,600 cubic inches, and all feature 100 percent heavy-duty ballistic nylon construction, size 10 coil zippers, an iPod-ready waterproof compartment, a padded and stowable hip belt, padded shoulder straps with an ergonomic fit and integrated chest strap, compression straps, PVC-reinforced exterior side storage pockets, and internal storage compartments.

The bladder has a capacity of 100 ounces, quick-release valves for the drinking tube, a pressurization tube for easy refill and bladder removal, and a slide top for easy refill, cleaning and drying. The Geigerrig hydration packs can also be ordered with an optional plug-and-play filter for use in areas where water is of unknown quality. \$110 to \$140, depending on pack size. **Geigerrig:** 801/823-3336; geigerrig.com.

5► CASCADE DESIGNS MSR BACKCOUNTRY BARN

The MSR (Mountain Safety Research) Backcountry Barn from Cascade Designs is a tunnel-style tent that offers an amazing amount of room and livability under its 74-inch center height, and the simple design makes it easy to set up and take down. Big windows at the front and rear provide plenty of visibility and ventilation, while free-hanging awnings over the windows keep the weather out. Large D-style doors at each end make entry and exit a breeze; and this is an ideal tent for an active family, as the 80-square-foot outdoor abode will easily accommodate four to five with no trouble. A detachable bathtub-style floor allows the interior space to be customized for different uses. \$700. **Cascade Designs:** 206/505-9500; cascadedesigns.com/msr.

6► LOWA RENEGADE GTX LL BOOT

LOWA Renegade Mid GTX boots feature the company's European-quality leather lining this year, which makes them feel like a whole new boot on your feet, and that's what won us over. A nubuck leather upper, Vibram EVO outsole, and waterproof, breathable GORE-TEX liner are highlights. A wraparound Monowrap frame midsole construction surrounds the lower part of the boot's upper for stability and support, while the PU midsole ensures shock absorption and rebound. The Renegade Lo GTX offers all the same features in a low-cut trail shoe for all conditions and terrain. They are quite simply some of the most comfortable boots we've ever worn. And for 2011, a wide variety of neutral and bright colors is also offered. Mid (\$210) and Lo (\$185). **LOWA:** 888/335-5692; lowaboos.com.

7► REI KINGDOM SLEEPING BAG

Another sleeping bag we really fell for this year was REI's new 30-degree Kingdom, available in a single or double model. Featuring another growing trend in bag design — the combining of fills — this bag is made with a lofty 600-fill down top for superior insulation and a polyfill bottom for compression resistance. The Kingdom is a relaxed-style mummy that offers more interior room and greater comfort than a traditional mummy bag, and features a durable water-repellent (DWR) finish on its ripstop nylon shell with a silky nylon taffeta lining for added comfort. \$129. **REI:** 800/426-4840; rei.com.

8► PRINCETON TEC AMP 3.0

A flashlight is one of the 10 essentials and something every person should have when they're camping. Sometimes we think it's a good idea to have two; but at least have fresh spare batteries for the one you do own on every trip. And batteries are the key to one of the major reasons the new Amp 3.0 from Princeton Tec ended up on this list. This tough, hand-sized flashlight operates on AAA batteries, which can be found in almost any store in almost any place on Earth. In addition to running on readily available batteries, the Amp 3.0 offers sophisticated electronic circuitry that maintains maximum brightness levels as long as the batteries have power, and projects a powerful 40-lumen flood beam of light from four ultrabright LEDs. Run time is 90 hours and it's reasonably priced at \$25. **Princeton Tec:** 800/257-9080; princetontec.com. ▲