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THE ROOTS, TRADITIONS AND NEW SOLUTIONS IN TEMPORARY STRUCTURES OF SCOUT TENTS

KORZENIE, TRADYCJA I NOWE ROZWIĄZANIA W TYMCZASOWYCH KONSTRUKCJACH NAMIOTÓW HARCERSKICH

Abstract

The article presented discusses the structure and equipment of a temporary scout shelter, i.e. a tent. The author indicates preceding concepts of traditional temporary structures and ways of using them and shows a variety of structures and materials. She discusses changes in the scout tent interior in England – the place where the movement began – and in Poland, a country where it developed in specific historical conditions. In her examination of Polish scout camps of ZHP (Polish Scouting and Guiding Association) and ZHR (Scout Association of the Republic of Poland) from Wielkopolska in 2016, the author points to the dissimilarity of solutions. She identifies the determinants of the development of scout structures. The camp community, whenever they rely on experiences already gained, are not pressed to experiment unless forced to do so by the circumstances. Like in architecture: new needs or limitations offer opportunities for discoveries and inventions.

Keywords: nomadic shelter, tent, scouting, interior of the scout tent

Streszczenie

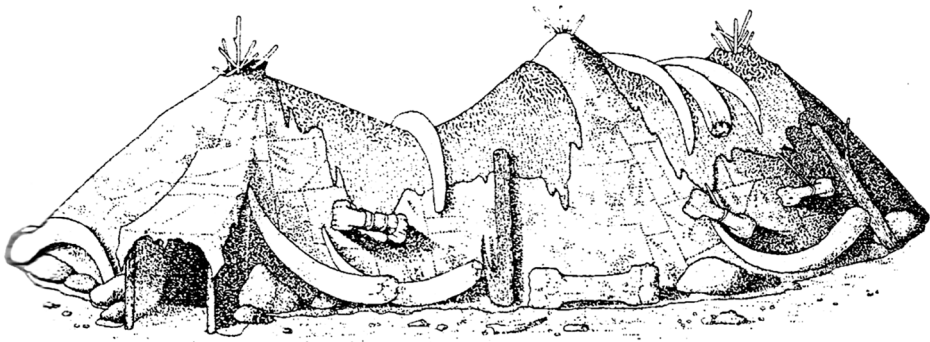
W prezentowanym artykule autorka omawia konstrukcję i wyposażenie tymczasowego harcerskiego schronienia jakim jest namiot. Wskazuje na poprzedzające tę koncepcję tradycyjne tymczasowe budowle, sposoby ich użytkowania, a także pokazuje różnorodność konstrukcji i materiałów. Omawia zmiany wnętrza namiotu skautowego w Anglii, gdzie ruch się zaczął i w Polsce, gdzie rozwijał się w specyficznych warunkach historycznych. Autorka badając w 2016 roku polskie harcerskie obozowiska ZHP i ZHR z Wielkopolski zwraca uwagę na odrębność rozwiązań. Określa czynniki determinujące rozwój harcerskich konstrukcji. Społeczność obozowa, jeśli bazuje na zdobytych już doświadczeniach nie musi eksperymentować o ile nie wymusza tego sytuacja. I jak w architekturze: nowe potrzeby lub ograniczenia stają się okazją do odkryć i wynalazków.

Słowa kluczowe: schronienie nomadów, namiot, harcerstwo, wnętrze harcerskiego namiotu

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1. A TENT – NOT ONLY A NOMADIC SHELTER

Our ancestors belonged to nomadic peoples, wandering in search of food; therefore, they needed to have skills of quick construction of shelter at nightfall, after the whole day of roaming. Such structures were built from whatever was available on spot or possibly brought by the community. ‘Huts were erected from wood, bones and animal hides and skins.’² (Ill. 1). Such structures have been found in Russia and Ukraine, with the oldest ones dating back to approx. 37,000 years B.C. As indicated by archaeological research, certain types of shelter were even several dozen meters long. Most likely, they housed several families, perhaps relatives, and served for long-term stay, possibly until the source of food in the area was exhausted.



Ill. 1. Reconstruction of mammoth hunters' hut in Pushkari, Ukraine; Tobolczyk M., *The birth of architecture. An introduction to the ontogenesis of architecture*, The Urban International Press, Gateshead 2008, p. 52

Humans began to become sedentary when they domesticated dogs, sheep and goats and started growing plants as they needed to wait for harvesting. At the same time, there were still nomadic tribes. Over time, they improved their dwellings and repeatedly built certain forms³. For example, such structures were yurts built in the Asian part of Turkey and Iran, referred to as gers in Mongolia (Ill. 2). Those are large circular tent layouts. A wooden frame carries a felt cover, additionally covered with canvas and tied and held together with a rope or straps. The entrance faces south for lighting. Yurts can be several to around a dozen metres in diameter, thus they offer significant interior space for use. The inside is traditionally divided by function: the part for men is located in the west, the part for women, including children, in the east, whereas the northern part belongs to the gods⁴. The kitchen is located to the left of the entrance and it is connected with a stove situated in the central part of a yurt. Traditional floor coverings included carpets and blankets, nowadays they frequently lie on boards, e.g.

² Tobolczyk M., *The birth of architecture. An introduction to the ontogenesis of architecture*, The Urban International Press, Gateshead 2008, p. 39.

³ Diamond J., *Guns, Germs, and Steel: A short history of everybody for the last 13,000 years*, Kindle Edition (access 05.2017).

⁴ The majority of the Mongolians are Buddhists.

fibreboards. It is still assumed that half of the Mongolian population of 2.7 million live in gers which can be constructed in approx. 2 hours and dismantled in 1 hour.

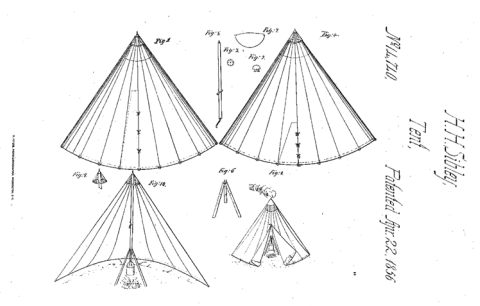
Native Americans, depending on their traditions and locations, built tepees or wigwams. The former were to be found in the Great Plains and used by tribes such as the Dakotas. The frame was made of wooden poles of several metres, covered by sewn animal skins. The entrance to a tepee was in the east, the ventilation hole was at the top of the structure as there was a fire inside, in the middle. The latter type of tent used by Native Americans was constructed by tribes living in the Great Lakes region. Wigwams, domed dwellings, were built from wooden branches bent at the top and covered with animal skins, reed mats or bark. The functional interior layout was similar to that of tepees.

In 1858, Henry Hopkins Sibley, a Confederate States Army brigadier general in the American Civil War, designed a novelty easy-to-pack military tent modelled after a tepee. He patented his invention in 1858. The tent was used as long as the outbreak of World War I and called, after the general's surname, the Sibley tent.

Sibley's patenting of a tent resembling a tepee in the mid-19th century did not change the fact that for centuries various tent structures had served as dwellings for soldiers. It can be observed in numerous presentations: illuminations, icons and pictures, not only from the Middle Ages. Thanks to the victory of the Polish king John III Sobieski over the Turkish army under the command of Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa in the Battle of Vienna on 12 September 1863, abundant and valuable booty was gained. It also included richly decorated tents of high-ranking officials of the Ottoman Empire⁵. The Turkish tent presented in the Wawel Royal Castle in 2013 is a two-pole structure with impressive dimensions: the bottom circumference is 36 metres long; the roof is 27.5 metres in circumference⁶. The roofing was independent of the side canvas. In armed forces, not only in the Turkish army, a tent was a status symbol showing the position in the military hierarchy: the more magnificent it was, the higher the ranks of its owner.



III. 2. A Turkish yurt, <http://gloswschodu.org/artykuly/mongolia/poznaj-kraj/jurta-ger-zycie-koczownika-mongolskiego> (access 19.11.2018)



III. 3. Sibley tent patent sheet dated 1856, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/86/Belltent_patent.gif

⁵ Those precious tents were carried to Vienna by Augustus II the Strong and returned to Poland in 1934 thanks to the antiquarian Szymon Szwarz, who bought them back and donated to the Wawel Royal Castle museum.

⁶ <https://dzieje.pl/dziedzictwo-kulturowe/na-wawelu-pokazano-namiot-turecki-zdobyty-w-1683-r-pod-wiedniem> (access 20.06.2019).

After Poland regained its national independence in 1918, every soldier in the Second Polish Republic was equipped with a military cape-tent – *palatka* (Ill. 4). By combining two cape-tents, it was possible to create a two-man shelter and raise a small conical tent, approx. 180 cm in diameter. Soldiers in the Third Reich used *zeltbahn* tents (Ill. 5), designed by Wilhelm Kraase in 1926 from a military poncho with rings which allowed to connect four *zeltbahns*. On a frame made of tree branches or ready-made elements they provided shelter for four soldiers. Such *zeltbahn* tents were commonly used during World War II. The designer suggested canvas of varying colours and patterns aimed to serve as camouflage for soldiers, depending on the terrain.



Ill. 4. A tent made of two cape-tents, <http://ale-mamo.blogspot.com/2015/07/namiot-z-paatki.html>



Ill. 5. *Zeltbahn* tent of German troops, <https://pl.pinterest.com/pin/260153315952753497>

Nowadays, there are still communities functioning as nomads; for example, in Iran the Qashqai people, thanks to centuries of history, have developed their own traditional shelter construction methods. The Iran nomads build their tents from whatever their surroundings offer: wood and goat hair from their herds. On simple looms built from sticks arranged on the ground they weave a fabric serving as the walls and cover of their tents. As in the case of Turkish tents from the 17th century, the roof and walls are separate elements joined by wooden pins⁷.

2. A TENT AS AN ELEMENT OF RECREATION

2.1. THE FIRST SCOUT TENTS

The first scout camp, which also marked the beginning of the scout movement, took place on the Brownsea Island in August 1907. It was organised by Sir Robert Stephenson Smith Baden-Powell, a British Army general famous for successfully defending the town in the Siege of Mafeking during the Second Boer War (1899–1900). In the besieged town, with a limited number of defenders, he created mobile troops of boys who acted as orderlies and

⁷ Hassas N., *The Natural beauty of Persian Nomadic Tents – the creative crafts* [in:] B. Szuba, T. Drewniak (eds.), *Beauty in Architecture – Tradition and Contemporary Trends. Implementations*, Publishing Office PWSZ, Nysa 2018, pp. 183–200.

messengers. Those young people proved to be great soldiers who executed their tasks very well. As observed by Baden-Powell, where the boys were given an objective without detailed instructions, they would achieve the goal by working together and appropriately assigning tasks within the group.

At the beginning of the 20th century, England had a class society in which children from rich aristocratic families were supposed to learn and be separated from the problems and concerns of the average English people, whereas those from poor working-class families, left on their own, usually struggled for survival in the street. When the general returned to England, with rich experience, he decided to organise groups of boys for the young people to learn person by experience and from each other. Therefore, for the first camp he took twenty boys, half of whom were from the so-called 'good families', whereas the rest came from the working class. Divided into four patrols and mixed in terms of 'class', through games and recreation activities, they learned from one another. Those first scouts lived in tents, needed to cook their food and, as mentioned in the film *Scouts* directed by Michael D. Murphy in 1984, they had to survive one night in a hut built by themselves.

After his wartime and August 1907 experiences, Baden-Powell was convinced that self-instruction, when the boys forming one patrol learned from each other, was a much better educational method than the then popular authoritative approach. Influenced by the concepts of Ernest Thompson Seton⁸ and Dan Beard – wildlife artists and researchers fascinated with Native Americans – he contributed a natural aspect to the emerging scouting ideas. After the success of the first and subsequent camps (Ill. 6), he made efforts to popularise scouting and to reach as many young people as possible. He wrote books and travelled around the world, giving presentations on the scout movement.

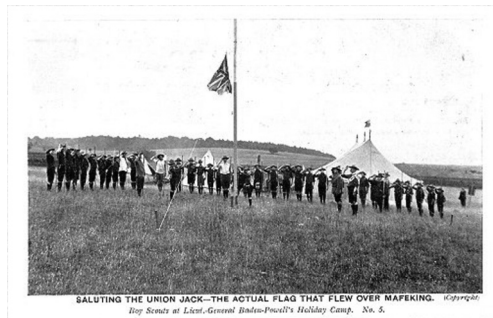
The movement evolving in various countries tended to have local characteristics. The British scouts developed a tradition of camping in tents where the scouts independently built their own beds and sometimes – where they had no tent – constructed huts, mobile kitchens and equipment. They made use of available natural materials such as wood, reed, at times bamboo (specifically imported from the British colonies for scouting needs, so that scouts would acquaint themselves with that material as well), all the structural elements were tied with strings. It is worth emphasising that, as a rule, the English used no nails. Moreover, the camp locations selected forced the construction of infrastructure, e.g. bridges, in the immediate vicinity of the camp to provide connection with the 'world' (Ill. 7). Baden-Powell wrote about this in his book entitled *Scouting for Boys*: '... my scouts in Ashanti, when also acting as pioneers, had to build nearly two hundred bridges – and they had to make them out of any kind of material that they could find on the spot'⁹.

Over time, the art of building the camp 'from scratch' disappeared, most likely as a result of the emergence of finished and readily available tents, beds, sleeping bags, etc. as well as on account of the development of tourism. That trend can be observed after World War II, starting from the mid-20th century. However, due to the construction habit, scouts began to

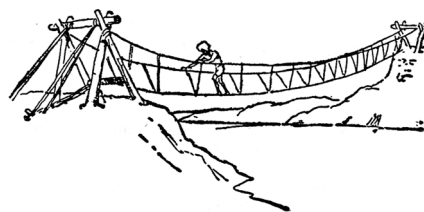
⁸ In 1902, Thompson published articles encouraging boys to seek role models in Native American culture. In the USA, he founded the Woodcraft Indians organisation for boys. As described by Sedlaczek S., *Pierwszy obóz skautowy* [in:] E. Ryszkowski, S. Sedlaczek (ed.), *Harcerstwo w obozach*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls, 2015, Reprint from: Dział Wydawnictwa Naczelnictwa Związku Harcerstwa Polskiego, Warszawa 1928, p. 6.

⁹ Baden-Powell R. *Scouting for Boys: The Original 1908 Edition*, Dover Publications, Mineola 2007, p. 150.

erect other structures at camps: various towers, recreational structures (swings, see-saws). At that time, John Sweet and John Thurman published various proposals for numerous structures with precise building instructions. It is worth stressing that even today, when using wooden construction elements, scouts connect them with strings.



Ill. 6. Assembly during the 1908 Wallington camp, with tents in the background, <http://history.scoutingradio.net/humshaugh.htm> (access 30.11.2018)



Most linowy.

Ill. 7. Rope bridge, Baden-Powell R., *Scouting for Boys*, p. 151

2.2. POLISH SCOUT CAMPS – MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF EVOLUTION

In 1910, having read the book *Scouting for Boys* by Robert Baden-Powell, Andrzej Małkowski and his colleagues from the athletic associations ‘Sokół’, ‘Eleusis’ and ‘Zarzewie’ decide to implement the ideas of scouting. It took place in the Polish region, in Lviv, in the period of partitions. Training camps began in the summer of 1910. The first training course camp was held indoors but in the following year, in Skole¹⁰, thanks to the support of the authorities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire which lent tents and equipment, the camp was organised in the forest. In the subsequent years, Polish scouts began to build the tent equipment, as described by Walery Sikorski: ‘In the last years, certain camp comforts began to be created: apart from internal telephones, the scouts made bedside tables, lamps with lampshades, etc.’¹¹ As emphasised by Olgierd Grzymałowski, it was important that for the daily order and cleaning inspection by the command of the training course the tent should have something new in terms of camp utilities. Every patrol tried to make something new, usually practical items (e.g. clothes racks or hangers, shelves, stands), making camp life more comfortable¹².

Sleeping in tents was not so obvious in the case of training courses for girls, most of them took place in Sromowce Wyżne, in a building erected by girl guides. However, from 1925 such training courses were also organised in tents, as described by Jadwiga Falkowska. ‘From now on, it is hardly conceivable to have an instruction camp indoors. The camp life became for

¹⁰ Skole, at present a town in the Lviv Oblast (region) of Ukraine. Presumably, the camps were organised in the area rather than in the town itself.

¹¹ Sikorski W., *Obozy wakacyjne w Skolem w r. 1919–1914* [in:] E. Ryszkowski, S. Sedlaczek (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 33 (own translation).

¹² Grzymałowski O., *Z dziennika Gillwelleczyka* [in:] E. Ryszkowski, S. Sedlaczek (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 111.

the instructor her element rather than something ‘supposedly’ practised, something genuine and the nicest way of life’¹³.

Due to the difficult geopolitical situation, young people inspired by the ideas of Robert Baden-Powell first adapted them to specific partitioned regions and next to circumstances in the Second Polish Republic. In addition to the ideas promoted in England, in the period of partitions and subsequently in Poland reborn patriotic education was extremely important: the struggle for Fatherland. It also influenced scout construction: in addition to camp building skills, a scout should also be able to erect structures serving the army in warfare, such as trenches, dugouts, passages¹⁴.

Between World War I and World War II, the scout movement was very popular in Poland, also due to the positive attitude of the public authorities. A number of books on scouting were published; among those, publications addressing the camp building methods were written by authors such as: Stanisław Gibess, Tadeusz Maresza, Władysław Nekrasz, Stanisław Sedlaczek. Customs typical of Polish camps emerged: scouts slept in military tents in which they built complete equipment with the use of wood and nails (Ill. 8, 9).



Ill. 8 Scout camp (1929–1937), <https://audiovis.nac.gov.pl/>, reference number: 1-Z-177–3, (access 27.3.2019)



Ill. 9. Scouts during the construction of camp equipment in a tent, from the 1935 film *Obóz harcerski* (‘Scout Camp’)

The development of camp construction was first arrested by the outbreak of World War II and then hampered by the policy pursued in the People’s Republic of Poland (PRL). Immediately after the communist government formed in Poland, any attempts to return to pre-war traditions were severely punished¹⁵. The systemic destruction of pre-war scouting accomplishments also concerned the methods of camp organisation and conducting, including camp construction. In order to ensure greater and more effective control of them,

¹³ Falkowska J., *Dzieje żeńskich kursów instruktorskich* [in:] E. Ryszkowski, S. Sedlaczek (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 14–23, p. 22 (own translation).

¹⁴ Nekrasz W., *Pionierka harcerska*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls, 2018, Reprint from the 1921 edition, Warszawa 1921.

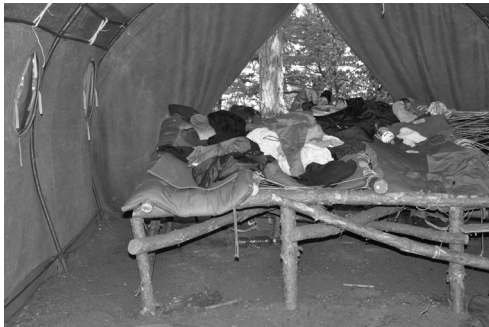
¹⁵ Scouts were persecuted by UB (the political police), arrested, brutally tortured. As written by Stanisław Czopowicz in *Szczerza wola i zniewolenie* (‘True Will and Constraint’): ‘Fifty-two persons (4 girl guides – one under 18 years of age – and 48 scouts – five under 18 years of age) were put to death in UB prisons or murdered during attempted arrests or investigations. Among the 2,997 guides and scouts arrested, 1,889 were sentenced to more than 5 years of imprisonment.’ (own translation).

it was prohibited to organise camps for specific scout communities (one, two troops). It was allowed to form camp groups of 150 to 500 persons, frequently in prepared centres, where it was impossible to build the scouts' own equipment. The inter-war tradition of camp construction (in Polish: *pionierka obozowa*) faded away slowly. That custom survived in individual troops, communicated unofficially by older scouts engaged in the scout movement before World War II as well as by those from the younger generation who had been taught pre-war scouting and its ethos by their families, including how to independently build camp equipment.

After 1989, both the knowledge and pre-war scouting books stored by people risking their lives proved to be priceless. The early 1990s witnessed the formation of scout associations wishing to return to the pre-war traditions and to simultaneously have nothing to do with the activities of the Polish Scout Association operating in the period of the People's Republic of Poland.

2.3. A TENT AS A SCOUT'S CAMP HOUSE

In 2016, the author examined the camps of troops from Wielkopolska (the region of Greater Poland)¹⁶; as demonstrated by her studies, troops of the Scout Association of the Republic of Poland (ZHR) build their camps using the traditional methods, whereas those organised by the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association are equipped by the scouts and guides only to a limited extent. Most of them take place at the Association's bases where troops use ready-made tents, beds and shelves.



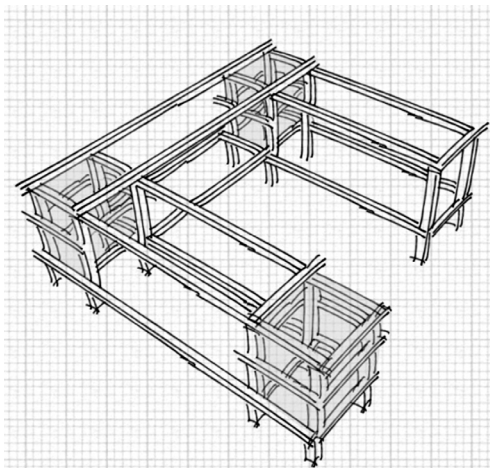
Ill. 10. Tent of a patrol from the *Zielone Szóstki* ('Green Sixers') group (ZHP), with a simple 4-person one-tier plank bed. Łośno 20.7.2016, photographed by the author



Ill. 11. Tent of a girl guide patrol from the 15th PDH *Dzikie Gęsi* ('Wild Geese') (ZHR), a three-tier complicated structure: a plank bed with shelving; Komorze 13.7.2016, photographed by the author

¹⁶ The research carried out in July and August 2016 concerned 20 camp groups (12 from ZHR, 8 from ZHP) where 47 troops and 5 groups camped: the ZHP troops were coeducational, whereas the ZHR camps were organised for 20 girl guide troops and 20 boy scout troops. The study included photographic documentation of tents of 199 patrols as well as surveys of 100 patrols and 624 scouts and guides. The final systematics of the solutions applied comprises 6 types of tent and 88 types of plank bed, of which: 24 one-tier beds, 61 two-tier beds, 3 three-tier beds, usually coupled with areas for the storage and hanging of equipment, implements and utensils.

In accordance with the pre-war tradition, every tent should contain a plank bed, shelving and other elements necessary to function during the camp. At present, there are a number of structural solutions determined by factors such as: the type of tent, the number of persons housed in the tent, building experience, access to wood or even the weather during camp construction. As demonstrated by the research, tent furnishings sometimes showed little difference from the simple equipment presented in the 1935 film *Obóz harcerski* ('Scout Camp') (Ill. 9) but there were also very sophisticated structures. There were significant differences in the degree of complexity and aesthetics of elements built by the ZHP and ZHR scouts and guides, in favour of members of the latter association (Ill. 10, 11). Probably, it is attributable to several decades of experimenting and implementing new camp equipment ideas.



Ill. 12. Two-tier plank bed with two indicated methods for the location of shelving. 1st KŻDH *Fregata* ('Frigate'), Kujanki 12.7.2016, the author's drawing



Ill. 13. Two-tier tent, *kurnik* ('hen house'). By elevating the tent, the builders gained another 20 m² of useful floor area. 1st KDH *Trop* ('Trail'), Kujanki 12.7.2016, photographed by the author

The examination conducted suggests that the planning and construction of equipment is largely determined by the number of persons to live in the tent concerned. The typical tent area may be 20 m² (10 – and NS64 – type tent) or 22.2 m² (12-type tent). That area, further limited by three posts, must be equipped with plank beds, storage shelving, shelves for rucksacks, whereas the scouts or guides frequently wish to also have a table and a bench inside the tent. The construction for all those elements for 2 to 4 people is not a difficult task but it becomes challenging in 7 – or 8-person tents. Those can no longer be simple structures as there would not be enough space for them in the tent concerned; therefore, for several years, multi-tier structures have been constructed in tents in similar situations (Ill. 12). As they upgrade their skills, scouts and guides also build elevated tents, the so-called *kurniki* ('hen houses') (Ill. 13), allowing higher furnishing standards.

3. CONCLUSIONS: FROM NECESSITY TO PLEASURE AND SCOUT PROFICIENCY

Initially, huts that were quick and relatively easy to raise were built as shelter necessary to the survival of primitive communities. When people became sedentary and began to live in houses, few nations and tribes continued to function as nomads. They can build shelters that are easy to dismantle, pack and transport. Many centuries of using the same construction methods gave rise to traditions specifying both the building techniques and the functional interior division indicating the tribe hierarchy.

The necessity to erect temporary and portable shelters also concerned mobile armies where presentable and more comfortable tents belonged to those in command.

The perception of tent structures changed at the beginning of the 20th century with the emergence of scouting: sleeping in a tent was no longer *necessity*, it became *pleasure*. All over the world and in Poland, the scout movement gave rise to fashion for tent tourism.

For more than a century, scouts have gone camping to spend time in the open, to commune with nature and to learn from it. They must build and then equip their shelters and camp, adapting to the surroundings. There are already developed patterns and models functioning in specific environments and communities; however, as in architecture, new needs or constraints offer opportunities for discoveries and inventions. In this way, camps, tents and furnishings become improved through the experience and resourcefulness of camp dwellers. It is reflected in the evaluation of those skills by the awarding to scouts and guides of specific scout proficiency badges related to camp construction¹⁷.

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