

# CAMPING AND THE OPEN MARKET

by Johnathan Fortier

Last week, as I slogged through the pain of a two kilometre portage (2,380 metres to be exact) with a huge pack and 16-foot canoe, I spotted fresh bear tracks in the mud.

It was pouring with rain, and we were a little apprehensive that the bear might not hear us coming in the storm, so we sang loudly while we wished we had remembered the bells.

The tracks veered away after a while, and we picked up our pace, dreaming of the campfire and a warm meal. When trying to stay safe, dry, warm and well-fed, the mind doesn't tend to wander very much; there are sufficient challenges from hour to hour. There are tents and tarps to put up, firewood to collect, fires to manage, water to purify, meals to make, dishes to wash and mosquitoes to battle. Not only does all this happen in varieties of challenging weather, but there are always limited resources with which to get things

done. In a way, this is why camping is relaxing—there just isn't time to think (and worry) about the paperwork back on the office desk.

On the drive home, however, I found myself speculating about how the free market plays such an important role in all forms of recreation, and camping offers one great case study. One could argue that the popularity of recreation (from skiing to canoeing, camping to sailing) depends on significant leisure time and disposable income. Leisure used to mean sitting on the front porch and talking to passersby. If you were lucky you might have a cold drink, or your feet in a bucket of cool water.

Now, at least in North America, the sedentary nature of work for many seems to compel us to find activity in our leisure time. Fortunately, our advanced market economy creates the wealth necessary to allow us this time, and provides us with the disposable income to pursue many of our (sometimes expensive) interests.




For much of human evolution we have lived in primitive shelters and gathered around fires for warmth and cooked food. When we go camping in the wild, we are essentially returning to that state, sleeping on the ground, battling the elements and eating things that smell like wood smoke. The similarities end there, however, for we sleep on portable mattress pads, survive the elements in our Gore-Tex rain suits and eat dehydrated fettuccine Alfredo instead of freshly killed mammoth.

It's somewhat ironic that we go camping to escape the luxuries that modern markets provide, and then enjoy the lightweight high-performance camping gear that the extended market makes possible.

To fully appreciate how creatively the market has responded to the interest in camping, one need only think back 10 years to what gear was available. There were no hand pump

water filtration systems, no prima loft insulated jackets, no 35-pound carbon fusion canoes, and certainly no GoPro cameras to capture the experience for your home-produced film.

You can now go to any number of retailers (online or in person) and shop for precisely this stove or that sleeping bag that suits your particular trip. Thanks to the free market, whether you're headed to Grouse Mountain for a day hike or planning a month-long paddle in the Northwest Territories, there's gear to match. (Portable electric bear fence anyone?) 

Read the blog post here [»](#)



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