

SLEEPING BAG TEST ON SNUGPAK MERLIN SOFTIE 3

by Klets – UK based freelance equipment testing company who also run a guide service.

A Snugpak Merlin Softie 3 bag has been used by different people over a minimum 90 nights.

The bag was used inside a Gore-Tex bivvi bag, on a Thermarest and later on a Karrimat at –5C. It was also used inside a funnel tent at the same temperature. And in a ridiculous test it was also used on a high level bivvi at –12C (!) on the Col du Midi. According to tester Ken Ledward, he quotes – “I was chilly and didn’t sleep a lot (at –12C), but could not say I was at serious risk of hypothermia. Many people make the mistake of assuming the mountaineer/camper is going to get into his bag and lie straight in contact with the frozen ground.

“We have sufficient confidence in the thermal property of the bag as to have packed it in our emergency sack on high level winter ski tour routes on the most technically demanding terrain in the Alps.

“The Merlin Softie 3, no matter how anyone will rate its insulating properties, will certainly work to provide thermal insulation in emergency situations; no-one can doubt that in British wet and cold it will perform as well as any other insulation filling and if wet will dry out faster than most.

“ I did once get water enter my bivvi bag and it was an immediate cold experience, but 2 hours later all felt dry and I certainly felt warm and comfortable, although it is certain that some water was still in the bag. In a down bag of any top rating, I would have stayed wet and none too comfortable.

“The temperature rating for the Merlin Softie 3 is clear: **comfort** will be found between a low of –5C and a high of of +10C. All the mountaineering users acknowledge, that to have such a lightweight and low pack bulk sleeping bag will have some trade-offs. None have thought the manufacturer (Snugpak) has in any way tried to mislead them.

“Even in high pressure zones like the Antarctic, there is a huge problem for users of high bulk (huge in size) down sleeping bags; the body produces sufficient moisture vapour as to seriously wet the down and in doing so nullify its thermal quality.

“Lately the ‘explorers’ use a vapour barrier bag inside the down bag (next to the sleeping body) and this collects the dew-pointed moisture and prevents it from getting to the down bag. This will of course also happen in a synthetic similar to what Snugpak use, but the drying out is achieved in situ by evaporation, which cannot be achieved in a down bag.”

For many years ‘mushers’, who run dog sled races in Canada, believed nothing could equal the natural down and animal skin clothing, are now most strongly advised to go for synthetics.

GENERAL OBSERVATION & RECOMMENDATIONS

It is very difficult to put into absolute temperature figures how comfortable someone will be in any situation. In a sleeping bag, many things have an influence on how one will feel. Age, fitness, body weight and even what food or drink has been consumed before retiring will have an effect.

Although some users have found comfort at –5C, an average temperature rating of +3C for most users of the Merlin Softie 3 has been adopted as a guide to what might be generally expected from the bag. *(It is not unusual for one person to be comfortable at 5C below zero whilst another may feel cold at +10C).* These ratings have been established first in a lab and then by over 10 years of testing in the field by professionals and from feedback by members of the public and in only a few isolated cases has there been any adverse comment to the stated –5C extreme range.