

Thursday March
27th 2025

POSTDOC DAILY

Camping in 0°C Nuuksio, Espoo

Issue
#11



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ALL WORK AND NO PLAY

makes the postdoc grey. And we all know we can't have that. So, what should we do? We sign up for a two nights camping trip in Nuuksio National Park in late winter/early spring, scare the living wits out of ourselves and then end up having the best time of our lives. Such is the life of one postdoc from Malaysia living in Finland.

How does one go camping without any equipment? Firstly, you need a good, supportive boss to loan you most of the equipment you need. Or, you can rent it for a very low price. For example, this trip was a collaboration between Hydepakki, Teepakki and APK. They have camping equipment to rent. By participating in their events, you should be able to borrow the stuff for free. You just need to let them know because most people already have their own.

Before I get on with my story, if you are expecting an article on the wonderful, exciting time I had during camping, I suggest you pick something else to read. I still think my couch and bed are the most comfortable place on earth. And that I was mad to leave on this journey.



The beauty of Finnish forest, and the disappearing sight of my companions, because I hike too slowly. Photo by Tobi.



Unexpected aurora sighting elevated this trip from good to awesome. Photo by author.

“Finnish people are truly children of the forest”

Camping is to a certain degree, meant to be a little uncomfortable their tent or tying their hammocks. It was an impressive sight.

Just like travelling, it is more likely to be a little uncomfortable, assuming you, my dear reader, travel the same way most common people do.

I was cold most of the time so anywhere there was fire, I will be next to it, trying to be as close as possible without choking on the smoke or burning my clothes.

I loved watching them build the fire. I loved the smell of tar burning from the firewood, the comforting crackle of fire and deafening silence that usually accompanied Finnish people. But I was just so comfortable I was happy to sit quietly next to a Finn and just stare at the fire, nibble on the occasional candy from the bag handed to me. It was almost romantic.

I must say, it was impressive to see the Finns so comfortable and confident in the forest, starting a fire, cooking, washing up, fetching water, chopping wood, setting up

The first night

I. Was. Shivering. It was about 2°C.

I had a foam sleeping mat (courtesy of my boss) and my own down sleeping mat with a comfort temperature of -3°C. I was wearing merino wool leggings, two joggers, wool socks, merino wool top and fleece jacket. (I should have put on my outer jacket).

I swore, I will leave in the morning. It was just too cold. If I cried, I think my tears will have just made me feel even colder. So I held back, but I was very close to tears.

I fell into an uneasy sleep. When I woke up, it was morning. I decided to use some of my precious water to brush my teeth, to make me feel more like myself and less like Gollum.

I chatted with the people around the fire. By the way, I don't know any of them before this hike. I told them of my misery. I was waiting for the courage to say, "I'm going home".

Someone got water from the lake and boiled it to make porridge for breakfast. Okay, I'll eat first, and then leave. I had oatmeal with jam and peanut butter for the first time. Oatmeal never tasted so good.

The day was looking like a (rare) sunny one. I was feeling better with warm food in my belly and I sat myself near the fire while the rest chatted around me.



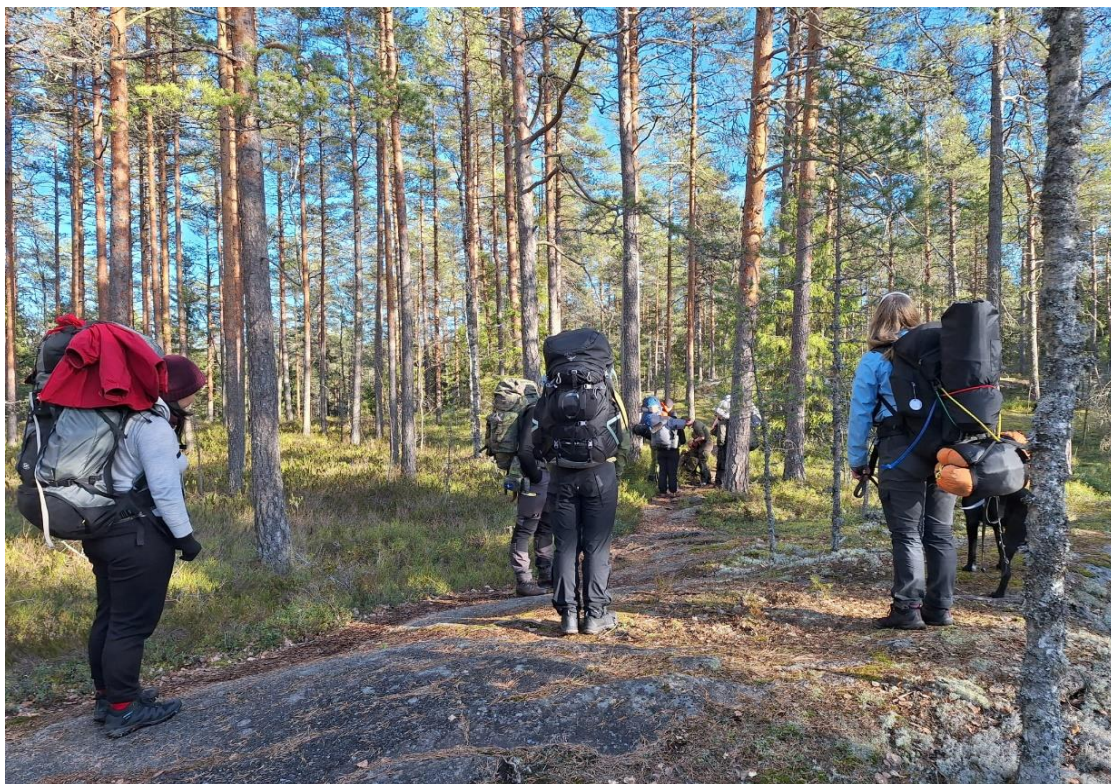
Breaking the ice to go for a dip and also to get water. So bring a swimsuit and towel. Photo by Sirkkku.

A kind soul is all it takes

As we were talking, one of the girls said, "I'm leaving earlier, because I have an event to attend, but I could leave you my sleeping pad, as long as you pass it to someone and not take it back to Turku."

Food, sun, and some kindness was all it took to make me decide to give this another try. And the rest was history.

I stayed. We cooked noodles and basked in the sun. We crossed a frozen lake. We played hide and seek in the forest. We saw an aurora. And I slept through the second night in 0°C. It was a pretty amazing trip.



Waiting and questioning life choices of leaving the comforts of my home while the lead decides which route to take. Photo by Senni Philman.

Tips I learnt from my journey

"I have a PhD but I cannot start a fire or pitch my own tent."

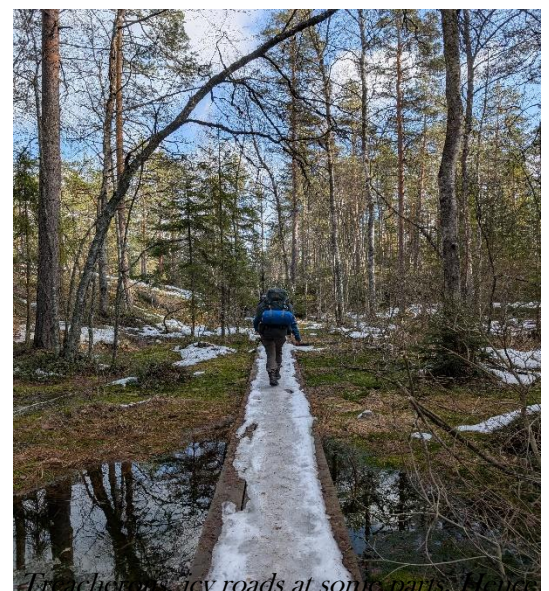
1. Two pairs of thin socks during hiking is better than one thick pair. Somehow it takes away the friction so you don't get blisters.
2. Wear one thin layer for hiking, because the weight of your gear and the exertion will make you sweat. You are good if you feel just a little cold in one layer at the start of the hike. You will warm up pretty quickly.
3. I cannot stress the importance of the sleeping mat. If you get cold easily, bring two. I swear. It's the difference of sleeping or shivering through the night.
4. You need to carry your own weight

5. Don't expect your companions to have extra stuff to loan you. The bag is really heavy. No one in their right mind will pack extra things just for fun.
5. The toilet is either the outhouse or the bushes. So when someone gets up to go into the bushes, don't follow.
6. It is perfectly normal to feel like an idiot and have to hang around and wait for someone to help you start a fire, pitch your tent, show you how to use a Trangia, and how to wash your dishes.

Packing list for overnight trips

THIS IS NOT AN EXHAUSTIVE LIST

1. Sleeping mat(s) - **extremely important** to insulate you against the cold floor.
2. Sleeping bag - check the comfort temperature on the bag and the weather you are camping in
3. A fleece or wool jumper to pull on during breaks. We are on a scenic hike. Not a marathon. It's likely the pace will be relaxed and slow with many breaks.
4. A windbreaker or down jacket for when the night turns chilly.
5. Bring a few pairs of socks. Thin ones to layer when hiking. Thick ones to wear at the campsite.
6. Your own cup, spork and bowl (plates are not as versatile to eat soupy food)
7. Toilet paper (and wet wipes)
8. Water - I carried 3L of water for a 2.5 days hike for my own consumption.



Trangia, icy roads at some parts. Hence why you need your hands free, and extra socks in case you fall. Photo by Tobi.