

# CREEK

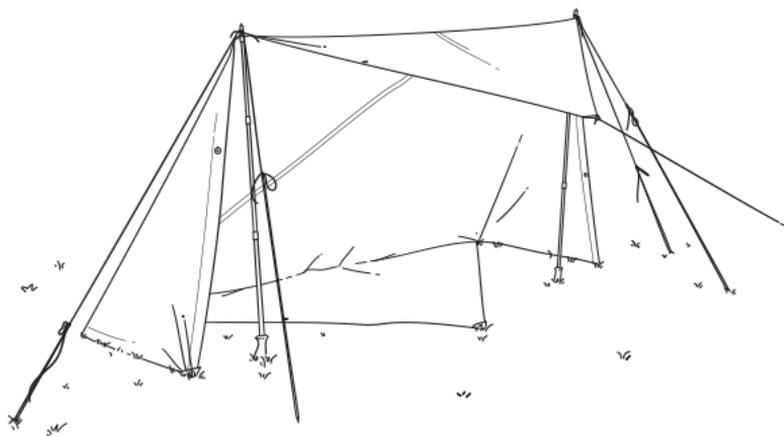
— STEWART'S —

## POCKET FIELD GUIDE



SURVIVAL  
**TARP SHELTERS**

# SURVIVAL TARP SHELTERS



**Learn 8 essential knots, 9 tarp shelter configurations, and 6 woodsman tricks.**

DROPSTONE PRESS  
Pocket Field Guide: Survival Tarp Shelters  
Creek Stewart

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# INTRODUCTION

Canopy shelters are a quick and effective outdoor shelter. With just a few resources and the knowledge contained in this pocket field guide, you can quickly and easily erect a countless variety of tarp shelters for camping or survival.

While tarp shelters do not provide insulation from the hot or cold, they are incredibly effective at protecting one from the wind, rain, sleet, and snow. The know-how to set an effective tarp shelter is a skill set every outdoorsman or woman should possess.

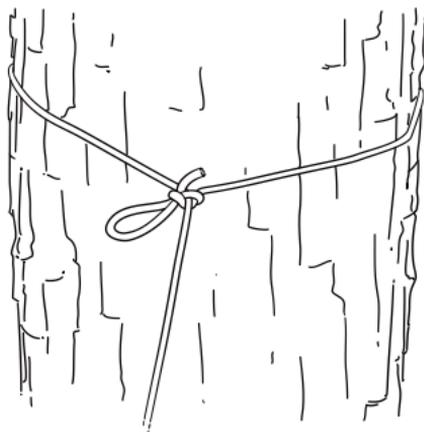
This pocket field guide is divided into three main sections:

- 1. FIRST**, I will teach you eight essential knots for use in setting canopy shelters. I'll explain how and why the knot is used alongside detailed illustrations. Furthermore, there is a video link for each knot, where I show you exactly how to use it when setting a canopy shelter.
- 2. SECOND**, I will show you nine of my favorite tarp shelter designs. These nine canopy sets are the basis for hundreds of others. Your creativity is the limit.
- 3. FINALLY**, I will reveal six woodsman tips and tricks that can help you overcome common pitfalls when setting canopy shelters.

# EIGHT ESSENTIAL CANOPY SHELTER KNOTS

Theoretically, all tarp shelters can be erected with a series of anchor knots and tensioning knots. All eight of the knots below help to either anchor or tension a rope that is attached to a canopy shelter or fixed anchor point, such as tree or stake.

## **EVENK HITCH: Anchor Knot**

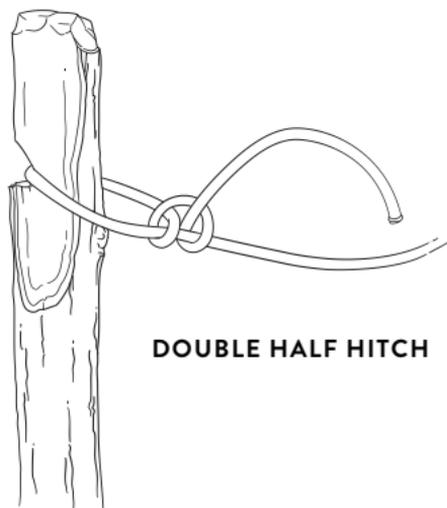


**EVENK HITCH**

The Evenk Hitch originates with the Evenk people of Siberia. They use this knot to hitch their reindeer to trees and posts. It is a very effective and unique anchor knot. It is also a quick release knot that can easily be untied after use. The Evenk Hitch can be used as the first anchor knot in a rope ridgeline or as an anchor knot through a grommet or tie-down loop on a tarp. Above it is shown anchored to a tree for a ridgeline.

For a video detailing how to tie the Evenk Hitch, visit <http://www.creekstewart.com/tarp-pocket-field-guide>

## DOUBLE HALF HITCH: Anchor Knot

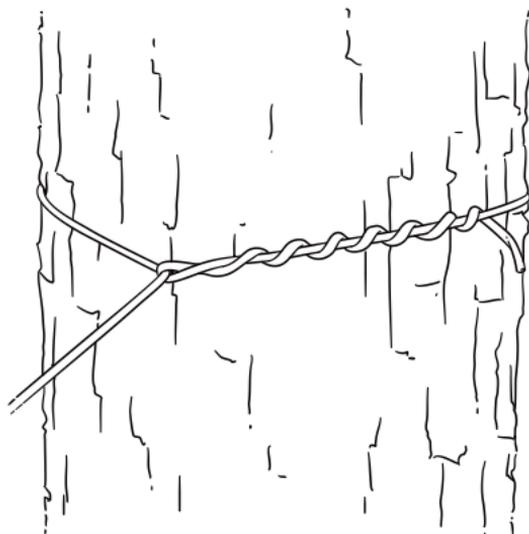


If you can tie your shoes, you can tie a Double Half Hitch. It is simply an overhand knot followed by a half hitch. The Double Half Hitch is a moderately secure anchor knot for attaching guy lines to grommets or web loops. It's easy to tie and untie, both of which are important when quick adjustments need to be made. I typically do not use the Double Half Hitch when anchoring a ridgeline because it can be difficult to untie after periods of stress.

For a video detailing how to tie a Double Half Hitch, visit <http://www.creekstewart.com/tarp-pocket-field-guide>

## TIMBER HITCH: Anchor Knot

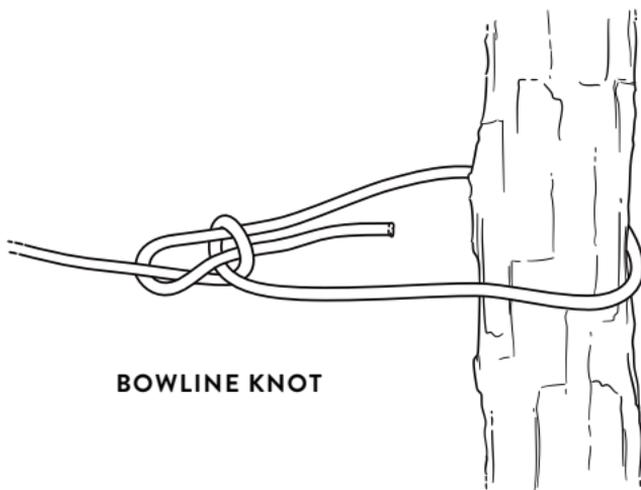
TIMBER HITCH



The Timber Hitch is a knot typically used to drag or lift a heavy log or pole. It works well when tied to any type of pole shaped object and is very easy to untie, even after the rope has been put under extreme stress. The working end of the rope simply wraps around an object, then loops around itself, and finally wraps back around itself several times. The Timber Hitch is also commonly used to attach bow strings for bow and arrow. This is a testament to the security of this hitch. I have used the Timber Hitch many times as an anchor knot around a tree for a tarp shelter rope ridgeline.

For a video detailing how to tie the Timber Hitch, visit <http://www.creekstewart.com/tarp-pocket-field-guide>

## **BOWLINE KNOT: Anchor Knot**

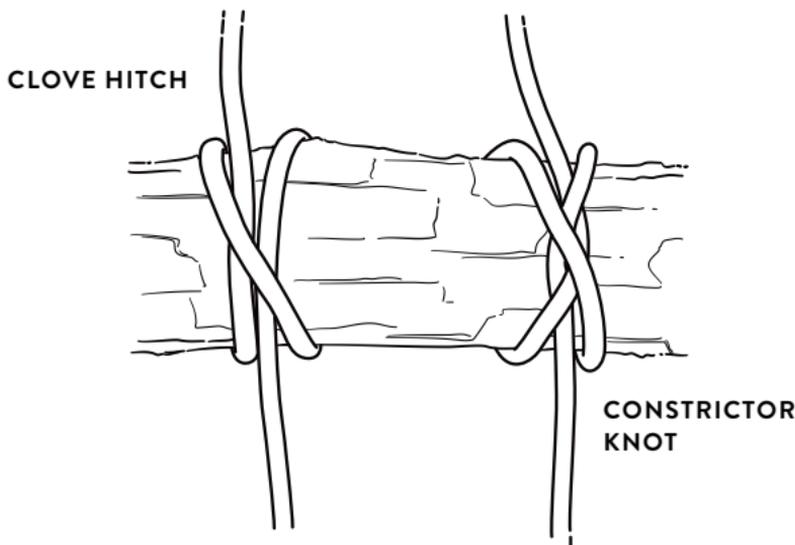


The Bowline has many more uses in the outdoors aside from setting a tarp shelter. It is a knot that creates a fixed loop at the end of a rope. Consequently, it can be used to create a snare noose, as well as a rescue line around the waist.

For tarp shelters, the Bowline has a very specific function that I will detail in the third section of this guide, where I offer tips and tricks for overcoming common obstacles.

For a video detailing how to tie the Bowline Knot, visit <http://www.creekstewart.com/tarp-pocket-field-guide>

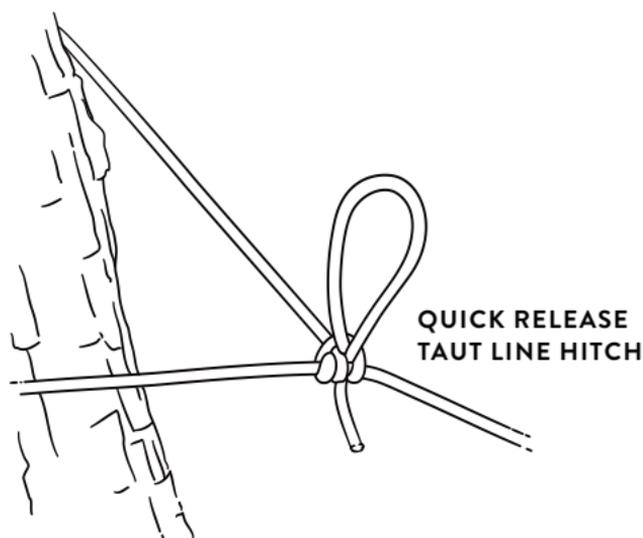
## CONSTRUCTOR KNOT: Anchor Knot



The Constrictor Knot does just what the name implies—it constricts. It is similar to the clove hitch, with the exception that it is more secure. Above is a diagram illustrating the Clove Hitch (*left*) and Constrictor Knot (*right*) side-by-side. The Constrictor Knot can be tied around logs, trees, or any variety of fixed anchor points. However, its reason for mention, like the Bowline, will be detailed in the third section of this guide, where I offer tips and tricks for overcoming common obstacles.

For a video detailing how to tie the Constrictor Knot, visit <http://www.creekstewart.com/tarp-pocket-field-guide>

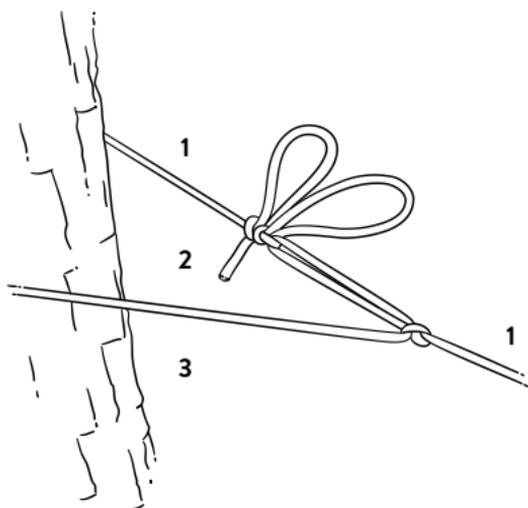
## QUICK RELEASE TAUT LINE HITCH: Tensioning Knot



The Quick Release Taut Line Hitch should be tied on the opposite end of an anchor knot. It is used to pull a guy line or ridgeline taught. Tensioning knots are necessary to keep a canopy tight. A loose canopy shelter is much more likely to fail during high winds and heavy precipitation. The addition of a Quick Release loop to the Taut Line Hitch allows it to be untied quickly and easily after each use. I use the Taut Line Hitch almost exclusively in my tarp sets to tighten guy lines when staking out corners. Above is a photo of the Quick Release Taut Line being used to pull a guy line taught.

For a video detailing how to tie the Quick Release Taut Line Hitch, visit <http://www.creekstewart.com/tarp-pocket-field-guide>

## TRUCKER HITCH: Tensioning Knot

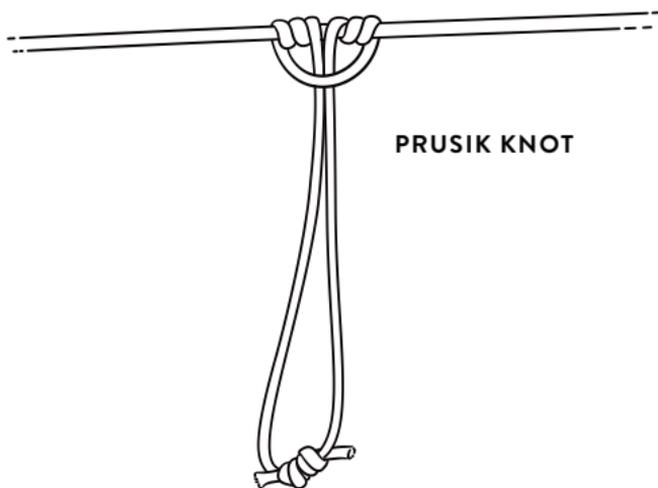


The Trucker Hitch is a popular knot used in the transportation industry to strap down loads on trucks and trailers. It is a tensioning knot that is often called the Power Cinch Knot, due to the 3:1 mechanical advantage created when tying and cinching the knot tightly. Notice this 3:1 arrangement labeled in the diagram below. I use the Trucker Hitch almost exclusively to tighten the ridgeline for my canopy shelters.

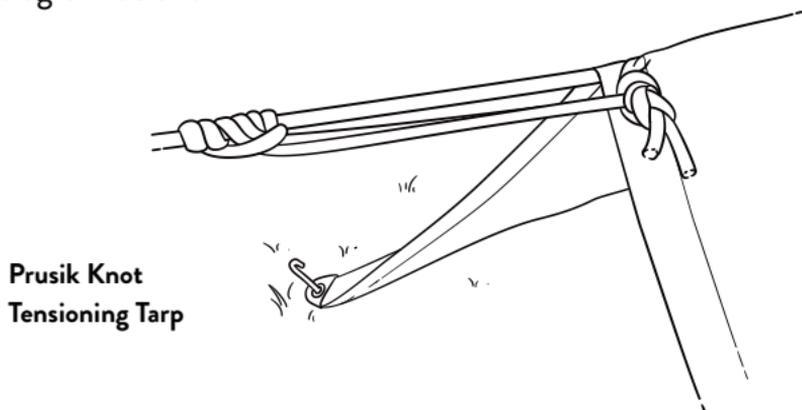
The Trucker Hitch is very simple to tie and utilizes only a simple slip knot and two half hitches. When it comes to tensioning knots, it is unrivaled in its ability to tighten a ridgeline or guy line.

For a video detailing how to tie the Trucker Hitch, visit <http://www.creekstewart.com/tarp-pocket-field-guide>

## PRUSIK KNOT: Tensioning Knot



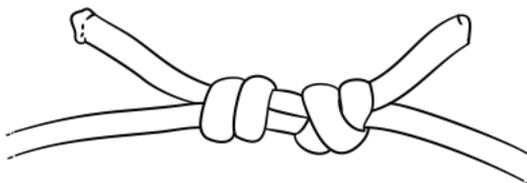
The Prusik Knot is used in canopy shelter building as a means to tighten a tarp along a rope ridgeline. When a tarp is thrown over a rope ridgeline to form a canopy, the Prusik Knot can be used to pull the tarp very taut along that line, preventing sliding or bunching in high winds. This is illustrated in the diagram below.



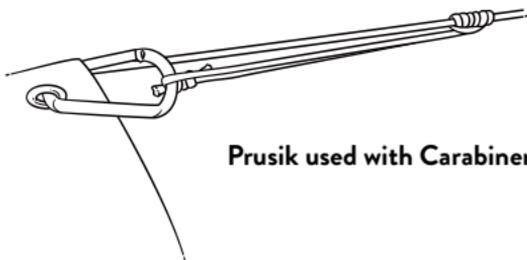
## PRUSIK KNOT: Tensioning Knot

The Prusik Knot is often tied using a piece of rope that has been tied into a fixed loop using the Double Fisherman's Knot. The Double Fisherman's Knot is a very effective means of connecting the ends of two pieces of rope.

**Double  
Fisherman's  
Knot**



The Prusik loop can then be attached to the tarp grommet or tie down using a carabiner or a toggle stick similar to the Bowline Toggle described in the last section of this pocket guide.



**Prusik used with Carabiner**

You can also tie the Prusik Knot on the ridgeline BEFORE you make it into a fixed loop and then simply run one end through the grommet or tie down, then tie it to the other end using an overhand knot or square knot. This is most often the method I use, which eliminates the need for a carabiner or toggle stick.

For a video detailing how to tie the Prusik Knot and the Double Fisherman's Knot, visit <http://www.creekstewart.com/tarp-pocket-field-guide>

# WHAT IS A CANOPY?

A perfectly square waterproof tarp with metal grommet attachment points is a luxury when it comes to improvised canopy shelters. Many situations may call for some 'field ingenuity' if a ready-made sheltering tarp isn't available. A survival scenario is best defined as a situation where you DON'T have the proper materials to meet the most basic human needs. Hence, one must improvise. When it comes to canopies for sheltering, below is a list of potential options:

- Business banners from billboards or road signs
- Above ground pool liners
- Waterproof construction house wrap
- Car upholstery
- Garbage bags
- Ponchos / Rain gear
- Boat covers
- Emergency survival blankets
- Plastic sheeting
- Scrap fabrics
- Vinyl tablecloths
- Shower curtains

When it comes to grommets and tie down points, see the last section of this guide, which details tips and tricks for overcoming common obstacles.

# NINE TARP SHELTER CONFIGURATIONS

In this section, I detail nine of my favorite tarp configurations that I most often use. All of these are made using a selection of the knots previously detailed. As a reference, I have labeled all of the knots in each illustration according to the legend below.

## LEGEND

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**Evenk Knot: EK**

**Double Half Hitch: DHH**

**Timber Hitch: TBH**

**Bowline Knot: BK**

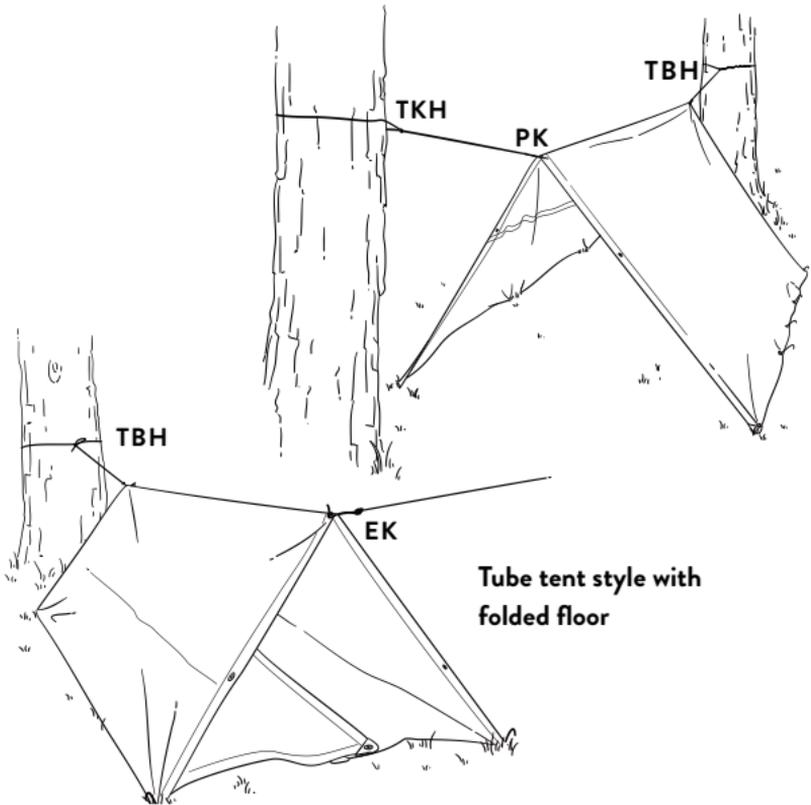
**Constrictor Knot: CK**

**Quick Release Tautline Hitch: QRTH**

**Trucker Hitch: TKH**

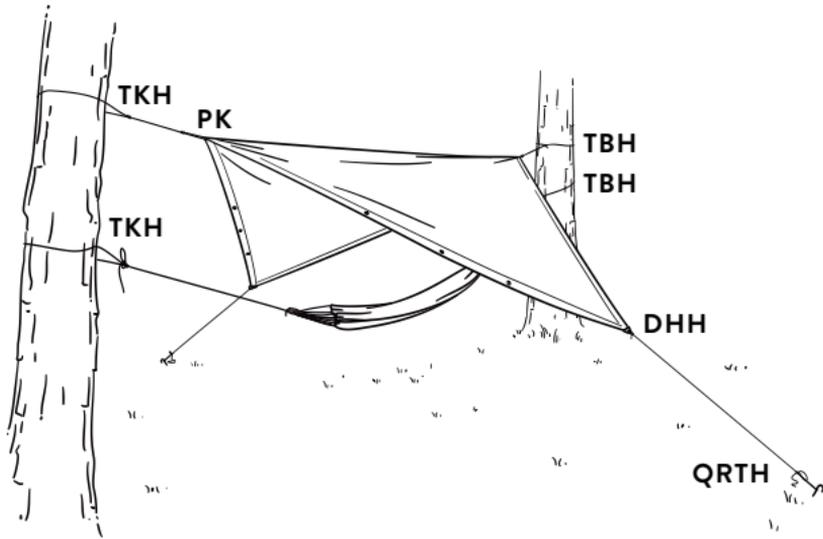
**Prusik Knot: PK**

## A-FRAME TENT



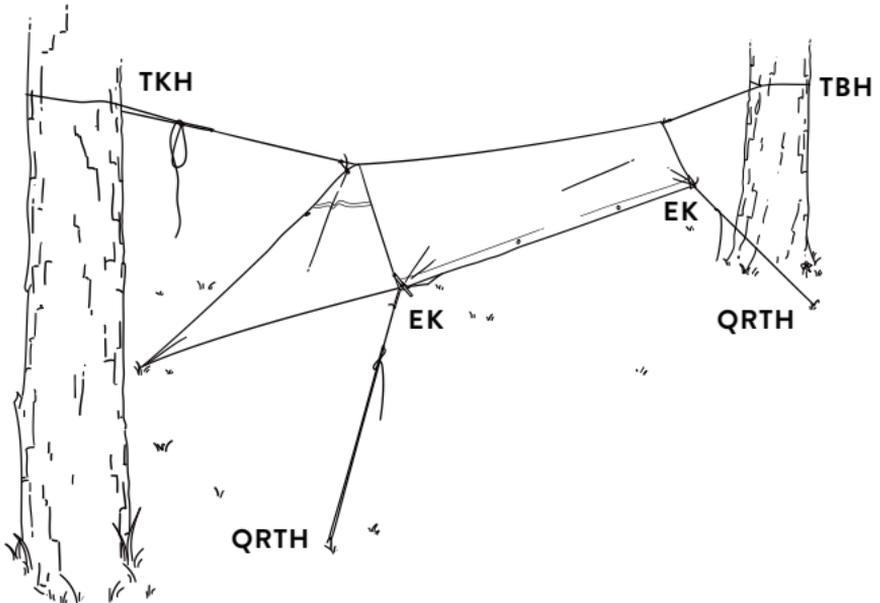
The A-Frame Tent configuration is ideal for protecting against the elements. The back end can be positioned against a large tree, rock, or fallen root for added protection. Stringing the ridgeline at different heights and rotating the tarp can transform the look of this shelter from a tradition pup tent style to a low tube tent with a double-ply floor folded under. The ridgeline is attached using an anchor knot on one side and a tensioning knot on the other. The tarp can be tensioned across the ridgeline with either a Prusik Knot or Prusik Stick (*shown later*), and the sides are simply staked to the ground for security.

## DIAMOND TENT



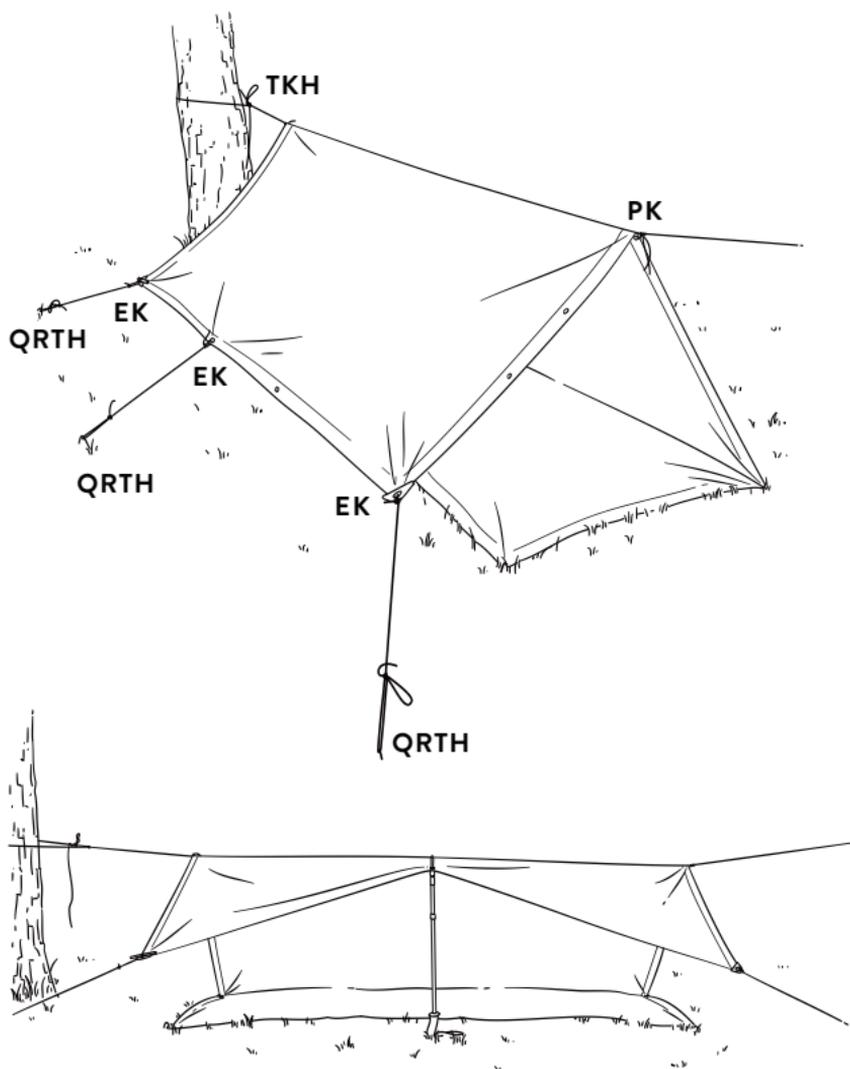
The Diamond Tarp Tent configuration is set similar to the A-Frame except the tarp is positioned corner-to-corner across the ridgeline and held in place with a Prusik Knot on either side. This is a very popular set for hammock campers (as can be seen in the illustration) but also makes an excellent set for a dining fly or sun shade. The tarp walls are anchored to stakes and tightened using the Quick Release Taut Line Hitch.

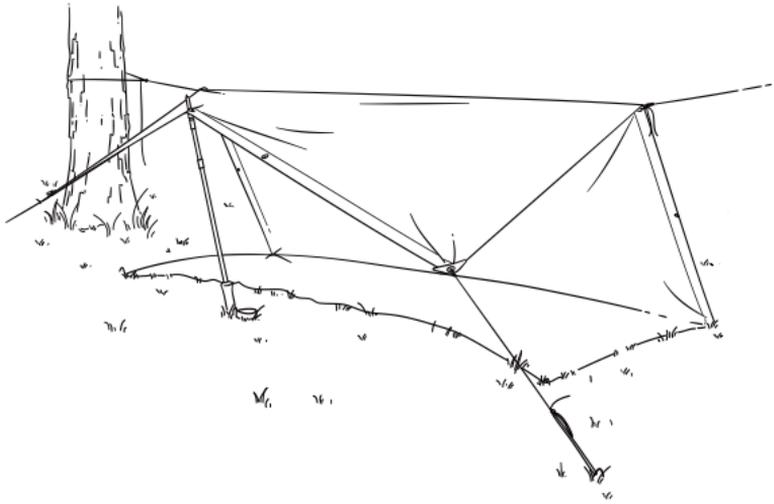
## LEAN-TO



The Lean-To Tarp Set can be configured as shown with a front overhang or as one flat slanted back wall with no front awning. I have always preferred the front awning, as it provides added protection from the rain and wind. The height of the ridgeline controls the angle of the roof. I prefer an angle of around 45 degrees for most times of the year. I will set it to be as steep as 65 degrees in both winter (to catch more fire reflection) and summer (to allow more air flow).

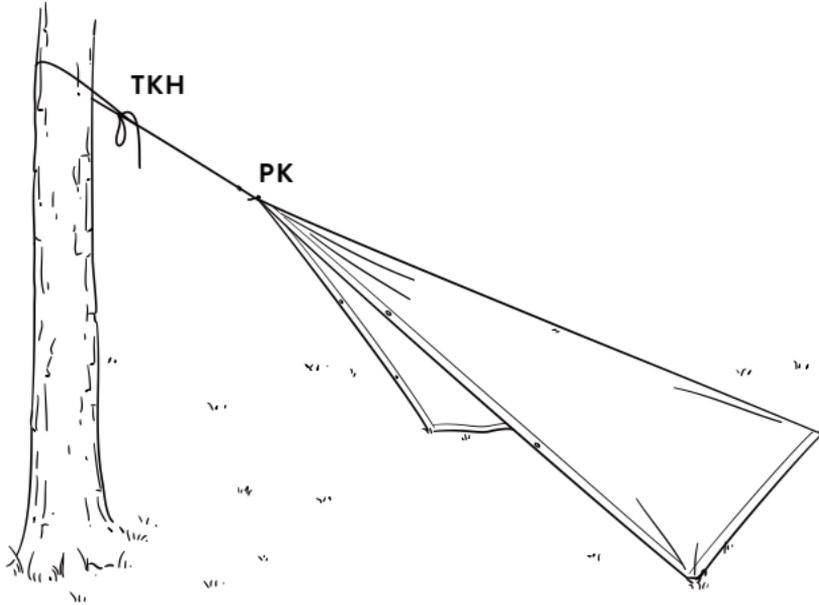
# FOLDOVER





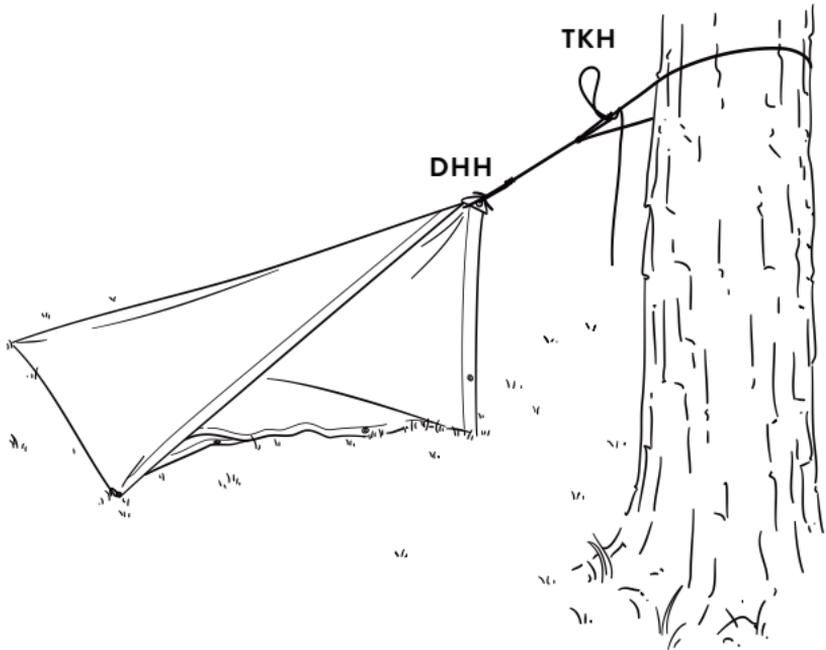
The Foldover design is very similar to the Lean-To. Stringing the ridgeline lower to the ground allows the extra tarp material to be folded under as a ground cloth. The large top awning can be pulled down and guyed out to create a set similar to the low A-Frame Tent, or it can be strung up as a large extension fly to keep gear and wood dry. It can also be propped up (as shown) with a stick for the best of both worlds. Prusik Knots on each side of the tarp on the ridgeline prevent the tarp from bunching.

## WEDGE



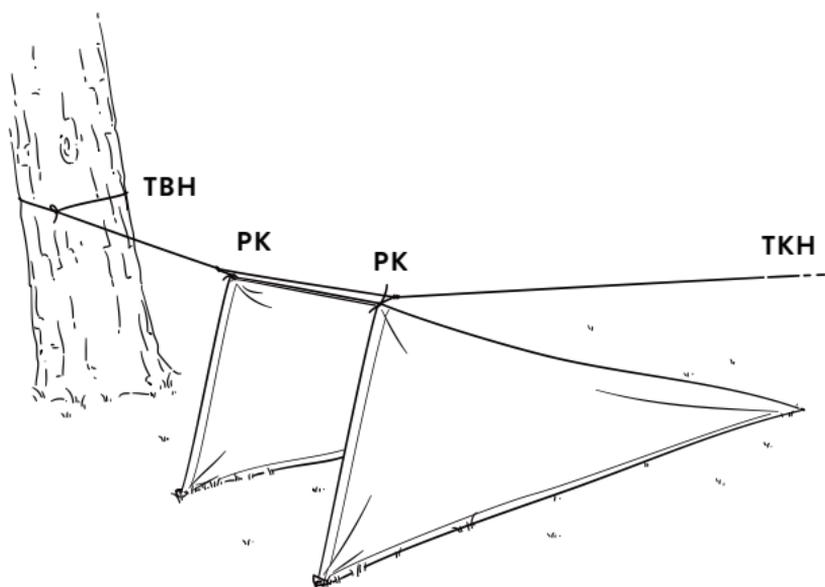
The Wedge starts with a rope ridgeline stretched at a diagonal from a tree to a stake or other anchor point (*rock, stump, log, or other tree*). The tarp is then folded over the ridgeline on a diagonal and held in place at the peak using a Prusik Knot. The bottom corner should meet the ground at the base of the ridgeline and staked into place. The ridgeline should then be given slack and adjusted to a height that allows the side walls to be staked to the ground at the desired angle.

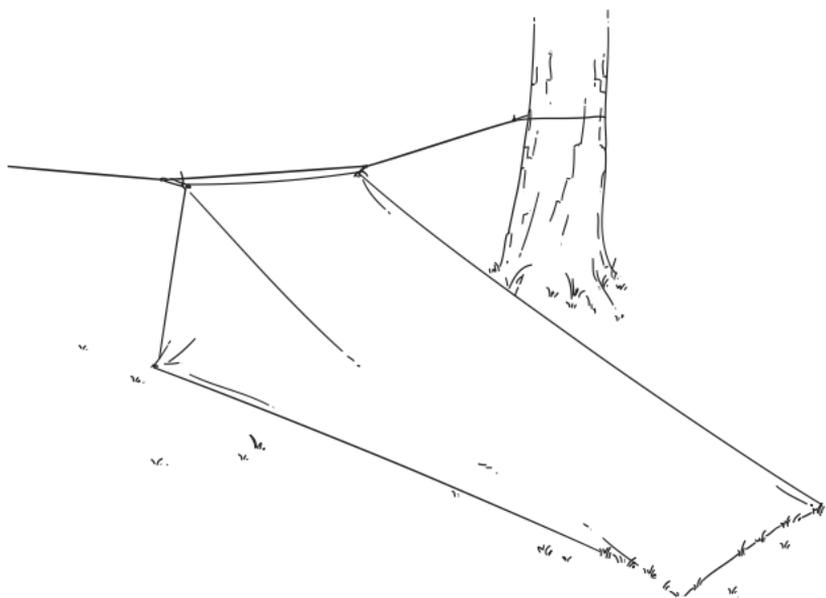
## FLOORED BIVY



A Floored Bivy is very similar to the Wedge shelter except the ridgeline is positioned lower on the tree to allow the tarp sidewalls to fold under into the shelter and create a very functional ground cloth. With only three stakes, this configuration is simple to set, and offers very good protection from the elements.

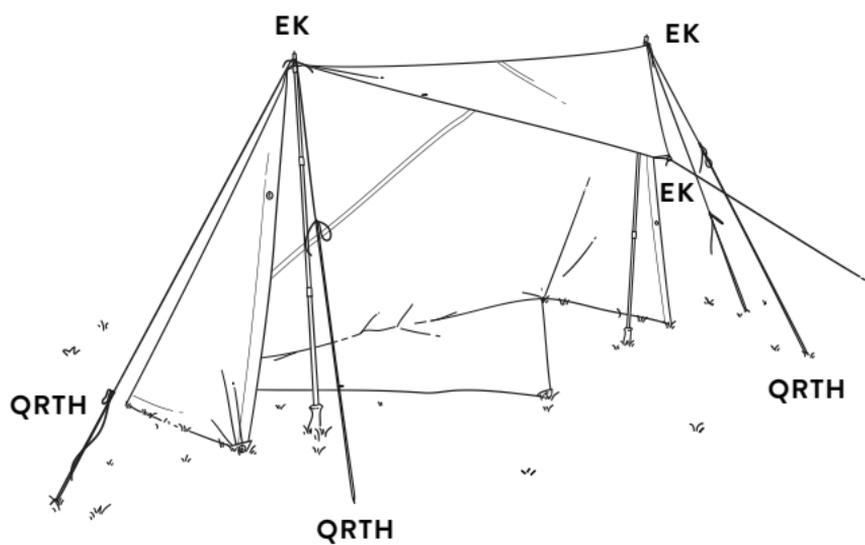
# BAKER

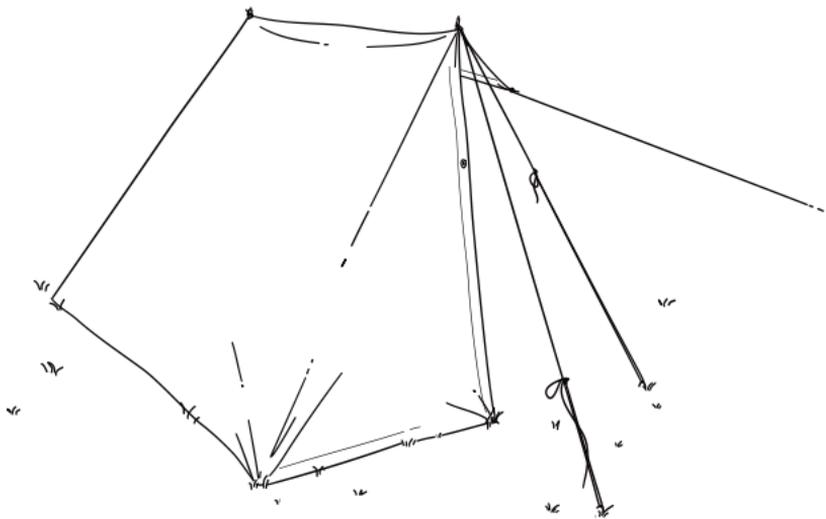




The Baker can be set lengthwise (*shown*) as a long shelter with a narrow opening or widthwise as a low and shallow canopy shelter with a very wide opening. Setting the shelter widthwise with a wide opening allows one to lay parallel with a long fire on cool nights. The lengthwise set offers a folded under floor and also more protection from the wind, snow and rain. Two grommets (*or as many as four with the widthwise set*) are tied to a ridgeline using the Prusik Knot. The front edges are then staked down to create the front corners. The back can then be pulled taught and staked in place. All extra tarp material on the sides should then be folded under to be used as ground cover.

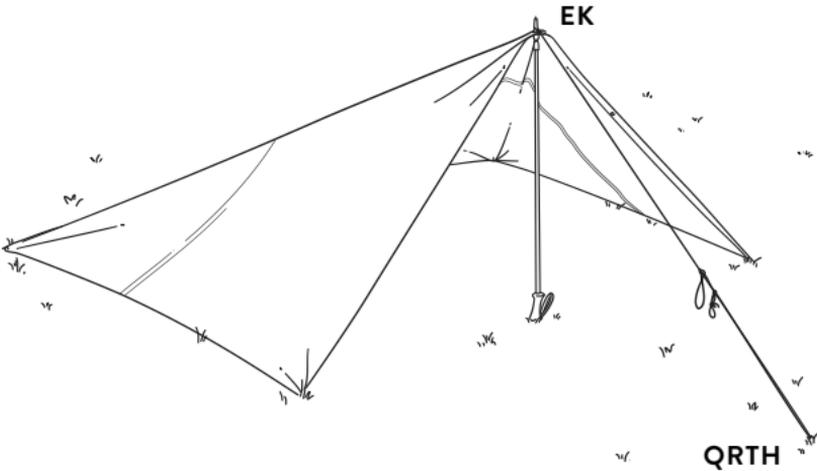
# ADIRONDACK





The Adirondack Tarp Shelter utilizes two free standing poles, rather than a rope ridgeline, to provide structure. The tarp is positioned diagonally over the upright poles with the front corner acting as a partial door, awning, or rain fly. It helps to line up the top of the poles with two grommets to act as tie down points. Sharpening the poles or driving in a nail allows you to insert the top of the pole directly into the grommet or web loop and eliminate tying all together. Two guy lines are run from each pole to an anchor point or ground stake using the Evenk Knot and Quick Release Taut Line Hitch to provide stability. The front and back corners are then staked with the back middle corner of the tarp being folded under as a partial ground cloth.

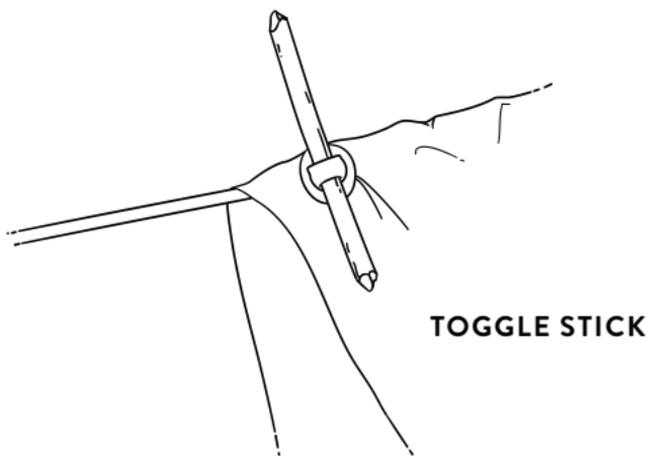
## HOLDEN TENT



Popularized by an article in *Recreation Magazine* by HJ Holden in 1911, this configuration is commonly called the Holden Tent. It works best with a tarp that has a length of 2x its width, such as a 10'x20'. It will work with other tarps, just not as well. The one used in this illustration is a 10'x8'. Start by laying the tarp flat on the ground and staking down both rear corner grommets and the center grommet. Next, place a support stick under the front center grommet or web loop and guy it out tight using one or two guy lines. The front two corner grommets can then be staked into position. The height of the pole and overall tarp dimensions will change this shelter design considerably.

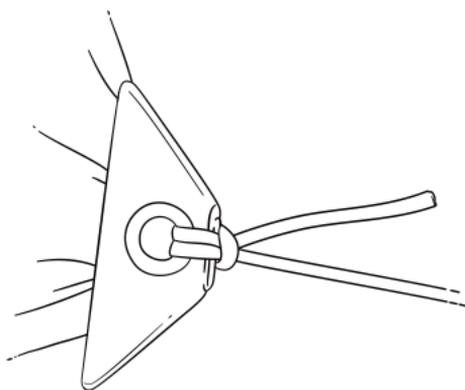
# SIX TIPS & TRICKS TO OVERCOME COMMON PITFALLS WHEN SETTING UP TARP SHELTERS

## THE STICK PRUSIK



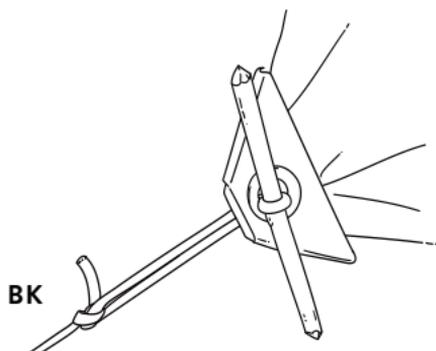
I've already covered how to tension a tarp along a ridgeline using the Prusik Knot. This tip is a great little bushcraft tip if you don't have the extra cordage or just don't want to fiddle with a Prusik Knot. Simply align your tarp grommet or tie down loop along the ridgeline and push a U-shaped bight of your ridgeline rope through the grommet and insert a small stick under it. This allows you to not only reposition your tarp along the ridgeline but also tension the peak to be very taut.

## THE COW HITCH



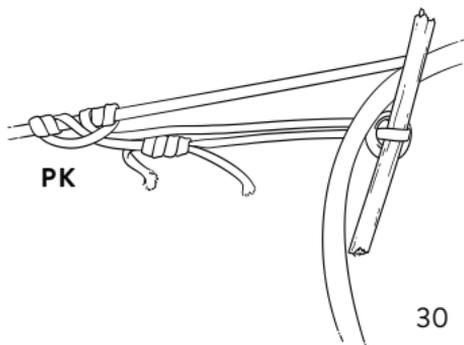
The Cow Hitch, also called the Lark's Head and Girth Hitch, is a very quick and easy way to anchor tarp guy lines. All tarps sets are a little different depending upon the environment, available anchor points, wind direction and type of ground. Because of this, it's not uncommon to be forced to experiment with a few different configurations before you get it perfect. I like to use the Cow Hitch as a temporary anchor knot on the corners of my tarp until I figure out the exact configuration. Then, I switch from the Cow Hitch to the Evenk Hitch, or Double Half Hitch. However, the Cow Hitch can be a very sturdy knot, especially with a stopper knot tied at the end of the line. The Cow Hitch is very easy to tie. Simply run a U-shaped bight of rope through the grommet or web loop and then run the two free ends of the guy line through this loop and pull tight.

## THE BOWLINE TOGGLE STICK



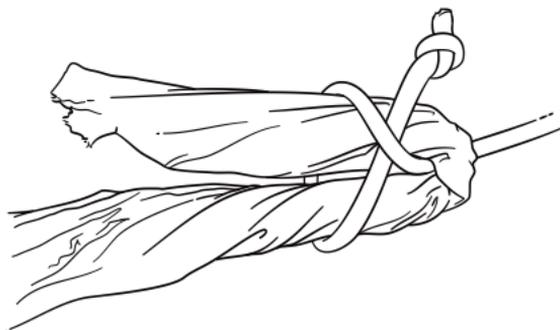
When paired with the Bowline Knot, the toggle stick can be used for quickly attaching guy lines to grommets or webbing tie-down points. Start by forming a small (5" diameter) fixed loop using the Bowline Knot on the end of your guy line closest to the grommet. Then, slip half of the Bowline loop up through the grommet and slide in a sturdy 3–4" toggle stick. This stick holds the line in place with friction and makes teardown a breeze.

A great second use for the toggle stick is in conjunction with the Prusik Knot to tighten tarps across ridgelines. Similar to the Bowline method detailed above, the fixed Prusik loop can be partially fed through a ridgeline grommet and then held in place with the use of a toggle stick. The tarp can then be adjusted along the ridgeline as needed.



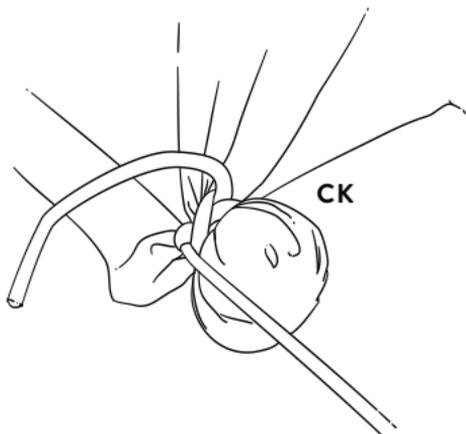
**TOGGLE STICK  
USED WITH  
PRUSIK KNOT**

## THE SHEET BEND



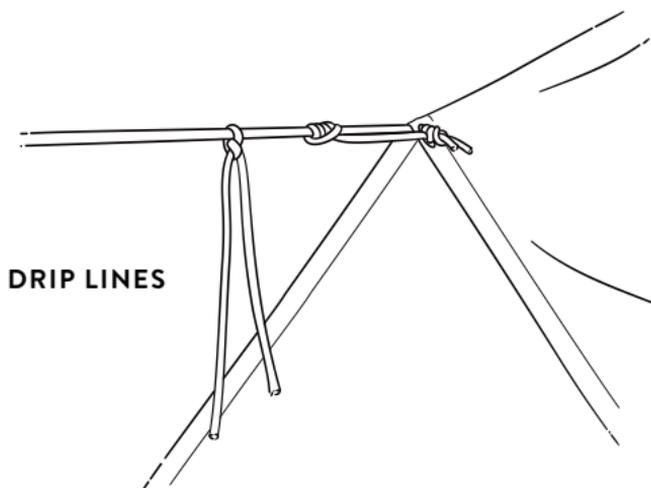
It's not hard to imagine trying to guy out the corner of a tarp or piece of scrap fabric without a corner grommet or attachment point. The Sheet Bend Knot is the perfect solution. The Sheet Bend is a knot designed to join two ropes of unequal size. In this instance, the tarp corner itself would represent the larger of the two ropes. The corner should first be folded into a u-shape (*also called a bight*). Next, the guy line (*thinner rope*) should pass up through the bight, behind and around the tarp and then back under itself to form an X as shown. An overhand stopper knot prevents even slippery rope from working loose. Voila – a secure guy line attachment with no grommet that won't tear out!

## THE BUTTON



Another common trick to anchoring a guy line to a tarp when a grommet has torn or there is no grommet at all is called a button. A button is created by wrapping the edge of the tarp around a small rock, nut or other object to create a bulbous “button-like” tie down point. A Constrictor Knot is then used to tie around the base of the button for an incredibly secure attachment.

## DRIP LINES



Rain or melting snow is notorious for draining along shelter guy lines and ridgelines. A ridgeline that is sloped slightly inward can easily wick water under the tarp and inside of the shelter. A quick remedy for such an annoyance is the addition of drip lines on the ridgeline just outside of the shelter on each side of the tarp. By tying a small piece of rope around the ridgeline, water will run the ridgeline and then down the tails of the driplines and onto the ground; preventing it from entering the covered area.

# CONCLUSION

In order to erect a working tarp shelter one must have the skillset to tie a variety of necessary anchor and tensioning knots. The lack of this knowledge will result in a shelter that sags, rips in the wind and fails when needed most. Under certain conditions, this consequence can be life threatening.

As long as some kind of canopy is available, I can't imagine a camping or survival scenario where the previously listed knots, shelter configurations and tips will not offer sufficient protection from the wind, rain or falling snow.

This guide focuses primarily on key sheltering knots. Check out my Pocket Field Guide titled SURVIVAL KNOTS to further broaden your rope work skills in a variety of areas.

*Remember, it's not IF but WHEN,  
CREEK*











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