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Campers: Have Tent, Will Travel

You can find a free place to pitch your tent practically anywhere

NEWSWEEK

May 5 issue — Let's be honest. Camping isn't the comfiest way to vacation. But it sure is the cheapest. Pop your trunk, toss in a tent, some sleeping bags and a few kinds of cold cuts, and you're ready to go. Public campgrounds vary from the primitive (outhouses only) to the luxurious (well, maybe that's overstating things, but at least there are heated bathrooms and hot-water showers nearby), most for just \$5 to \$15 a night.

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IF THE DEVELOPED campgrounds have filled up, or are overrun with hulking RVs—as happens occasionally on peak summer weekends—you can find a free place to pitch your tent practically anywhere, by a stream, on a mountaintop, deep in the desert. Even on some public lands, including national forests and Bureau of Land Management acreage, “dispersed” camping is allowed—if not encouraged. You’ll just have to remember to bring your own water and dig a latrine.

For mountain camping, head to one of the nation’s 155 national forests. More interested in extreme water sports? Check out the dammed lakes—dozens of them—created by the Corps of Engineers. And solitude seekers looking to pull a Greta Garbo should look to the BLM, which can set you up on 262 million remote acres in the West. Not an experienced Eagle Scout? Some helpful resources to get you started:

reserveusa.com: Make reservations with the National Recreation Reservation Service, which oversees 130,000 campsites in 2,000 campgrounds managed by the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other public agencies. For phone bookings, call 877-444-6777.

reservations.nps.gov: Accesses the National Park Reservation Service, for camping at 25 pristine national parks, seashores and recreation areas. Call 800-365-2267.

May 5, 2003 Issue: Travel

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- [Campers: Have Tent, Will Travel](#)
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recreation.gov: Provides a useful online description of campgrounds and wildlife refuges managed by the U.S. Forest Service, Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

gorp.com/dow: The U.S. National Forest Campground Guide, run by outdoors enthusiasts Fred and Suzanne Dow. They've visited 121 of the 155 national forests, and their site includes remarkably detailed descriptions—and personal reviews—of Forest Service campgrounds.

—*J.T.Y.*

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