Basha's

I have heard the word 'basha' being used for many years to describe the waterproof sheet that is carried by individual soldiers for use as a very basic small tent. Online research about this term indicates that the word 'basha' is actually Malay for 'shelter', with the phrase originating from British troops who served during the Malayan emergency in the 1950's.

I have been using various styles of military basha since I was a young lad. There is always one in my day sack whether I am walking on Dartmoor, or skirmishing in a wood. The reason for having a basha to hand is because it is a very quick and simple form of shelter to put up when the weather turns bad and you need somewhere to rest. The basha can be extremely adaptable to your soundings and various types of shelter can be built from one. On a personal note, the basha is easily one of my favourite items of equipment that I carry, so in this article I am going to explain to you about some different designs that are available and I will also show you some of the methods used for putting one up.

British Army 1958 Pattern Poncho

This design was my first and favourite. The '58 pattern poncho is exactly that – a poncho which is worn as a waterproof garment. Gadge is probably the more knowledgable person to explain in detail about the history from this era as the poncho was issued and carried in the 1958 pattern webbing during the period of the Cold War. This poncho is basically an olive green, rectangular tarpaulin measuring approximately 2 metres x 1.6 metres and has a draw string hood in the middle of it. There are studded eyelets running along the edges and press stud fasteners along two of the sides that allow for these sides to be secured together when being used as a poncho. When the sheet is unfastened and opened out, it can be fashioned into a basha. When two or more ponchos are available, they can both be joined together to form a larger shelter. When being used as a basha, it is important that the hood is closed and tied off at the neck to prevent rain leaking into the shelter.

DPM Basha

This was the replacement for the '58 pattern poncho and is solely for providing shelter – hence the lack of hood and press stud fasteners on the basha. The basha is rectangular in shape and there are webbing loops spaced along all four sides to allow for the attaching of cordage. There are many other brands of shelter available on the market, but at the end of the day, the basha is just a waterproof sheet which means anything of this nature could be used as one – even a space blanket from your survival kit.

Bivvy Bags

A bivvy bag is a waterproof and breathable form of shelter which is in the style of a sleeping bag. Some types of bivvy bag are 'hooped' with a small external frame which turns the bag into a small tent and can be closed at the head end by means of a zip. There are pro's and con's when choosing to use a bivvy bag. Both types are restrictive and take a few extra seconds to exit when needing to do so in a hurry. Both types don't have any room for keeping equipment dry, and changing into dry clothing needs to be done out in the open when exposed to the weather. The field of view is also restricted when inside the hooped bivvy bag. The basic bivvy bag does have a good field of view due to the open top. The basic bivvy bag is probably the fastest form of shelter to use as all you have to do is pull it out from your day sack, unroll it and crawl inside – instant protection. The bivvy bag can be used in conjunction with a sleeping bag and foam roll mat to make things more comfortable over longer periods.

Hooped bivvy bag open and closed

Accessories

Bungees, pegs, para cord, and poles

Although it is possible to erect a basha without pegs , cord and poles, (use rocks, logs or carved out pegs instead) it is far easier to do so if these items are available. One really useful item to carry with your basha set is bungee cord with hooks. Bungee's make easy work of putting up a basha – especially when doing so in a forest where there are plenty of trees around to use as anchor points. Poles can always be made from straight sections of branches found when out in the field, but I always carry a pair of my own. For this job I use extendable fishing rod rests.

Types of Knot

A quick release knot

The basha should be just as easy to take down as it was to put up. The quickest and simplest way is to use bungee's as these can be put on / taken off in seconds. If however cordage is being used to tie the basha to a tree or poles , it is important to use a knot which is easy to untie – even when wet and under tension. I find that quick release knots work best. My preferred method is to pass the live end of the cord around the tree and make a basic over hand knot. I then pass the live end around the cord once more as if to make another over hand knot, but this time I make a loop instead and pass that up through the single turn. The knot is then pulled tight around the loop and it will not undo unless the live end is pulled. The knot will then quickly untie.

Making a Shelter

Your choice of shelter will be dictated largely by the tactical requirements and terrain. The basha / shelter sheet is such a versatile item, you can often adapt the shape of your basha to the ground that you find yourself in. I am going to talk through a few different methods about how to put up a basha, but this is just a guide and the designs are very much adaptable to your own requirements.

Closed Sided Shelter

Closed sided poncho shelter. Notice the hood tied up to stop rain water from pooling on top

Find a suitable location which is safe from hazards such as falling branches. Clear the ground of stones and debris. Make sure that the wind will not be blowing into the entrance of the shelter. Select two solid trees with a distance between them being slightly greater than the length of the basha. Attach the middle loop on the two different ends of the basha to the two trees. Do this by securing the basha using cordage or bungee's and ensure that the sheet is pulled tight. Allow enough space between one of the trees and the entrance to the basha for you to get in and out without too much of a problem. The height at which the shelter is set can be important. In a tactical scenario (such as in a skirmish), the height of the basha should be no more than fifty centimetres from the ground. Once the height is set, the bottom edges of the basha can be secured to the ground to make a basic tent shape. It is easiest to tie short lengths of cord to the loops on the bottom edges and fasten the tent pegs through the cord. Once the basha has been put up, a ground sheet can be added to the inside.

Lean-to Basha

This is one of the easiest shelters to make when using a basha or waterproof sheeting. There are a few different variations of building a lean-to and the style you choose will depend on your circumstance.

Method 1

A low profile lean-to basha

Find two trees which are far enough apart so that you are able to lay out the basha length ways between them. Check the direction of the prevailing wind and plan to position the opening of the shelter facing away from it. Fasten the top left and right corners of the basha to the respective trees by using cord or bungee's. The height of the lean-to should be set so that the tallest person is able to sit up comfortably without their head being able to touch the material of the waterproof sheet. For a low profile shelter, the highest part of the basha should be no more than fifty centimetres from the ground. Pull the bottom edge of the basha

tight so that it runs off diagonally, then peg down the middle loop into the ground. Pull the bottom two corners tight and also secure these to the ground. Poles can then be placed on either side to prop up the shelter (keep them lower than the top corners). Doing this will increase the head room inside the basha and will also stop rain water from pooling on the outside of the sheet.

Method 2

All in one lean-to and ground sheet

This shelter provides you with protection from the ground as well as from above by using just one sheet. The top two corners of the basha are fastened to two trees or poles. The basha is then folded into half and is pulled back underneath so that there is some waterproof sheeting on the ground inside the shelter. This method reduces the overall space within the basha but is low profile and easy to put up.

Other Types of Shelter

One pole shelter

This shelter is a diamond shape and only requires to have one corner raised and secured to a tree. The other corners are all pegged down. A pole can be added to the inside of the shelter to push up the middle of the basha which will increase the head space.

Some Places to Avoid

- **River banks**
- **Areas prone to flooding**
- **Bottom of cliffs**
- **Tracks**
- **Exposed areas**
- **Bottom of valleys (Cold air sinks down into these)**
- **Gullies that could fill with water during rainfall**

NB: When constructing a shelter in wooded areas, always be aware of dead fall which could come crashing down on top of you in windy conditions, so look up and check the tree canopies when selecting

a safe basha site. It is also advisable to dig a small channel around the outside of your basha to direct rain water away and prevent the shelter from being flooded out. As I once found out, it is no fun waking up to find a small stream flowing underneath you.