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mKettle Review

by ianbarrington

I recently tried out an mKettle (on loan from [Stuart](#)) as an alternative to my usual meths stove that I take with me on bikepacking trips. Its first outing was on a short single night bivvy a few weeks ago. The real world test went like this:

I'd planned to bivvy in a suitably exposed spot with a great view but not much in the way of fuel. I'd intended to pick up some sticks on my way up to the summit but forgot in all the excitement (the sun was out, it was a beautiful evening and I'd not been on the bike for a week). Once I'd pitched the tarp, I looked around and picked up numerous small bits of wood, dead bracken stems and a bit of wool – all within a 10m radius of the bivi spot:



mKettle and scavenged bits of woody debris

I also had some tinder card with me to help get things going. Lack of familiarity with matches and tinder card, it took a little while to get things to catch, but once lit the kettle did its job quite

well. It didn't seem long, though I didn't time it, before a pint of water was boiling. It was also surprising how little fuel it required and how much heat was generated. Once the water had boiled, the neoprene sleeve around the outside was enough for me to pick it up off the burner and pour the water into another pan. A generous lip at the bottom of the kettle prevents the neoprene from getting burnt.

The following morning I was able to quickly scout for more bits of wood and get the kettle fired up again. This time I was better at getting it lit – the previous night was the first time I'd used it at all – and it wasn't long before I had a pan of hot porridge to eat while I watched the sun rise.



Fired up for breakfast

This was the first time I've ever used a stove to boil water than wasn't fueled by either meths, gas or petroleum of some sort. As a result, its tempting to compare things directly, though there are some unique attributes to the mKettle, good and bad. So here's a list of the pros and cons, beginning with the latter:

Cons:

- It's smoky in use (depending on what you burn) some of which inevitably blows in your direction while you're using it. (The tinder card didn't help in this regard actually, as I did a subsequent test at home with dry wood and it seemed that all the smoke came from the card). If you're used to quiet and clean meths, then the mKettle is something of a departure from this system.
- On looking inside the burner part of the kettle, it was coated in black sticky resin type stuff presumably as a result of burning the dead bracken. Subsequent burns did not seem to get rid of this residue.

- The kettle itself get very dirty/sooty/sticky which means you need the stuff sack to carry it around to keep your other gear/ inside of frame bag clean.
- You could find yourself in a situation not being able to find anything suitable to burn, perhaps in very wet or sparsely vegetated conditions, but compared to other systems you could equally find yourself out of meths/ gas/ petrol.
- It gets very hot (surprise surprise) and it's quite a while before its cool enough to pack away again. On reading the instructions afterwards, they suggest using a small amount of water to extinguish the flames. I admit I didn't think of this at the time.
- You still need to take an extra pan/ mug unless you intend to eat entirely dehydrated food from its cooking bag, or intend going without a hot drink.
- It ultimately takes longer to boil up water by the time you've gathered your wood etc, perhaps no more so that meths, but that's not really the point I guess (see last on the list of pro's)

Pros:

- It weighs 429g in its stuff sack. I took with me an extra pan that weighed 67g, therefore a total of 496g. The weight of my meths setup, which comprises of numerous titanium items selected for their light weight, with three nights of fuel weighs 507g.
- It's pretty quick to boil up water once you got the fire going, and if you needed to boil more than one pint of water, then once the fire is lit you can easily add more wood to the burner to keep it going.
- My tibetan ti 550 pan was a perfect fit over the top of the stove, so when packed up the pan added virtually nothing to packed volume.
- It fits in a Wildcat Leopard frame bag.
- You didn't need very much fuel to get it lit and for it to burn long enough to boil a pint of water.
- You can use it to store a pint of water with you as you go, so extra storage capacity on top of your other bottles/ bladder if you pick a spot without water.
- You can use it to burn any rubbish you generate on camp.
- You could use it to warm hands/ feet on a cold trip.
- Gives you a generally satisfied feeling of having boiled your water using the ancient and manly art of using a real fire, rather than the more "sterile" meths/ gas systems.

Conclusion:

My initial feelings were a bit mixed. Not having used this type of stove before, I was sure what I should expect from it. Initially, I wasn't sure it was as good a system as perhaps imagined it would be, but I would undoubtedly get better at lighting it with more practice and probably more savvy in sourcing fuel that will lit quickly and burn efficiently. Would I buy one? Yes, though I think it's suited more to trips longer than one night as the weight benefits pay off with not having to carry more than one night's worth of liquid fuel.