

American Alpine Institute^{Ltd.}

Guide's Choice Field Testing Notes

AAI's Guide's Choice is an independent, international gear evaluation program started by the American Alpine Institute in 1989. Our professional climbing and ski guides are continually field-testing equipment and clothing in a variety of mountain environments and conditions throughout the world. Guides Choice awards are given to the top item of gear in each product category based on excellence in design, performance, and durability. Each year new Guides Choice awards are presented to manufacturers at the Outdoor Retailer Summer Market trade show in Salt Lake City, Utah.

All of AAI's equipment testing takes place in rugged mountain environments as part of their guided climbing and mountaineering trips. All tests are conducted by professional mountain guides

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Testing Start Date: December 2007

Anticipated End Date: August 2008

Item Tested: MSR Asgard Tent

Product Description: A double-wall expedition mountaineering tent

Testing Areas: Mt. Baker, Washington Cascades
Red Rock, Nevada



At 10,781', Mt. Baker is the northernmost Cascade volcano and is the fourth highest peak in Washington. It's proximity to the Pacific Ocean garnishes it with incredible amounts of precipitation, most of which come in the form of snow. In fact, the world record for snowfall occurred at the nearby Mt. Baker Ski Area in 1998-1999, with over 1200" of snow in one winter! High winds often accompany winter storms, creating an environment that resembles conditions found in many of the great mountain ranges of the world.

The desert climate of Red Rock, Nevada is nearly the opposite of the Cascades in winter. Moderate temperatures (~30 - 80F) and sunny days are the norm, with occasional storms bringing light amounts of precipitation and moderate winds. Solar radiation is harsh in this climate, reeking havoc on nylon because of its tendency to break down under exposure to UV light.

Testing Conditions: Winter conditions in the Cascades can be extremely severe, with incredible amounts of snowfall, winds, and even rain on occasion. To date, this tent experienced temperatures from 0F to 80F, all forms of precipitation, and winds in excess of 40MPH.

Testing Summary: This test is currently in progress.

Specific feedback

1. Fly & Vestibule: The rain fly, while functional in rain, snow, and winds, warrants a thorough redesign. Having a symmetrical fly is excellent in that it eases the setup confusion of asymmetric designs. The primary concern with the fly is the layout and function of the vestibule space. The vestibules are simply not large enough for extended expedition usage. The zippers down the roof apex are also challenging to operate and impossible to reach while inside the tent body, making venting and peeking outside a chore. Moving the zipper to one sidewall would ease in entry to the vestibule space and alleviate the challenge of reaching the zipper. Lengthening and increasing headroom of the vestibule, by adjusting the pitch of the poles perhaps, is also important. There is not very much workable space, even with a 'boot basin' dug into the snow below the vestibule.

The plastic clips on the fly seem to work well, but can get jammed with snow if the user is not careful. The cinch system to tighten the fly is excellent and makes getting a taut fly a possibility. The fly does not flap in the wind, due to its tight fit



over the poles. The integration with the gray transverse poles via the small pocket in the fly is a tight fit, but seems to add to the stability of the tent and fly.

2. Body: The first impression of the tent body is that it is quite cavernous. Being able to sit completely upright is a critical feature of expedition tents and this one will easily allow climbers up to 6' to sit comfortably. The length is just long enough to prevent compression of the sleeping bag on the tent walls, while allowing shorter users to stretch out a bit more. The tent easily sleeps two and could handle a third person if an emergency arose (not to mention that sleeping would be warmer); unfortunately, this would mean that both people on the outside would have their sleeping bag touching the tent fabric, getting them wet from condensation. Thus, I believe that it is a roomy two person tent, not a 2-3 person tent as marketed.

The doors have proven to be problematic. The design of the door as a “C” shape means that when one user has to get up during the night, he has to reach over the other to get to the zippers. An inverted “U” style would solve this and allow for the door to fold out of the way more completely than the current design. The size of the door is also quite small for use on protracted expeditions since one has to crunch/duck to get into and out of the tent; taller users are affected more than others. Finally, the zipper pulls have failed or come apart after only a few uses; perhaps a system that does not use a plastic knob would be more effective (and lighter).

The fabric used on the tent inspires confidence against rips and tears. The pole sleeves are well designed (see comments about poles below) and appear to withstand abuse well. The white tent body fabric, however, is not very breathable, resulting in considerable amounts of condensation at times. This could be remedied by a small ceiling vent or by reconfiguring the doors such that their apex is higher, allowing one to vent effectively with the doors.

3. Weight: Given the spacious size of the tent, the Asgard comes in at a very reasonable packed weight of 6.94 lbs (3.79kg)—which is, interestingly, less than the manufacturer’s listed weight. This relatively light weight is the result of use of ultralight fabrics on the fly and tent body, since the complex pole system comprises nearly 31% of the total weight.

Simplifying the zipper pulls and decreasing the number of poles would further decrease the weight.



4. Poles: The pole system has been engineered such that it is very capable of withstanding nearly any forces, whether it comes in the form of wind or heavy snows, but this comes at a cost. The five-pole design is overly complex to setup, especially in challenging environmental conditions. Three poles criss-cross the tent body in a traditional style, except that they must be threaded in a specific order to ease setup (middle first, then the two longer poles). If attempting to thread the middle pole after the others, the pole will catch on the fabric near the roof apex and bind, forcing you to flex the poles greatly to insert the middle pole. Additionally, the gap between the tent body and rainfly (as facilitated by the pole sleeves) seems to be a little on the small side, resulting in poor air circulation especially when snow piles up around the edges of the tent.

The two gray poles that encircle the tent are an excellent idea, but don't work out that well in practice. These poles thread easily through the tent body, but feature an awkward self-attachment system (a 90 degree sleeve) on both ends. The overall gain from these poles is in debate also since they don't seem to add a lot of stability to the tent or increase the vestibule size noticeably. Perhaps a better option would be to get rid of these poles and add a vestibule specific pole to increase the vestibule size (see previous comments).

5. General Comments: Overall, this is a good tent, but not quite up to expedition standards. Its lightweight design is likely to withstand a few seasons or expeditions of abuse, but the setup complexity, vestibule spaciousness, and other assorted shortfalls warrant minor redesign.

The MSR Asgard has not been awarded a Guides Choice Award at this time.

