

Staking Tents

By Terras, Shire of the Standing Stones, Calontir

I'LL START RIGHT OFF BY STATING THAT MY BACKGROUND IN THE SUBJECT IS MY OWN OPINION AND PURELY EXPERIENTIAL. Trial and error in the land of the twisting winds (i.e. Calontir) has given me some experience that I was enthused to share with *Sacred Spaces* (from Mistress Aelflead's comments in issue #5). To give those who aren't familiar with the Midwest more of clue about the land of the 'twisting winds' - Calontir is the proud home of tornado alley - essentially Kansas and Nebraska, although tornadoes aren't uncommon in the rest of the Kingdom.

The first important bit about staking down pavilions (and keeping them staked down) is the stake. This is almost always the part that gives way when a tent goes flying or a pavilion plummets to the ground in a heap of canvas.

The design of the pavilion has a lot to do with how much the stakes need to endure, but I'll get to that later. From what I've seen, the small plastic tent stakes that are sold with most modern tents today won't hold in a serious windstorm. They certainly aren't meant to hold the kind of sails we set up as medieval pavilions. The sheet metal stakes are a little better, but have the problem of being thin enough that driving them into rocky ground easily bends them and makes them useless for more than one event. A solution that has had some success is the use of 'earth anchors'. They look not unlike giant screws (that's what they are), and vary in length from 18 in. to 30 in. My favorite solution is nothing you can buy at the local camping store - tent stakes made by a blacksmith. Taking 1/4-in. square stock and pointing one end and putting a sharp bend on the other provides a very nice stake that is very difficult to pull out. The length I've found to work wonderfully is about 18 in. If you are really worried, you can use 3/8-in. square stock. I've used both, and found the 1/4 in. to be more than adequate (and I have a wind-catcher pavilion).

Another thing that really affects staking down a tent is the terrain and the direction from which the wind blows. Even a single line of trees can do amazing amounts to help keep the effects of wind from lifting your pavilion and tossing it into the nearby lake. The other aspect of a tent is its facing. If you have a tent with a high, broad side, you probably don't want to put this side facing di-

rectly into the wind. Sometimes you simply can't help it, but it's something to be aware of.

Along the lines of facing your pavilion to shed the wind, you should be aware how much wind your pavilion will naturally shed. The small dome tents are actually pretty good - as are the little pup tents. Those folks with the fine, high-walled rectangular pavilions are going to have more of a problem. A number of Calontir pavilions have recently been made in the style of the Bedu. These are probably the best tents for wind - low and sloped down to the ground. Of all the tents I've seen to date, these shed wind like nothing else. While this last bit may not help you immediately, if you are looking to buy or make a pavilion, it's worth considering.

The last bit about 'practical tent staking' is running the ropes. I've always preferred a natural fiber rope over nylon - for me it handles better, doesn't get slick in the wind, and keeps a knot when you tie it. It's easy to find sisal for rope - and I've found that 3/8-in. rope works just fine. As for running the ropes from the tent or pavilion, here are some basic guidelines:

- Make sure you have ropes spreading in all directions! Sometimes, this is not only difficult, but darn near impossible (the rope mazes of Pennsic some years back).
- Even though it's easy to trip on them, make sure you have them in front. I've seen a number of pavilions go down simply because the owners decided to 'undo' those front pavilion ropes to give out more usable space, and the pavilion pulled up from that very side and pushed off 'backwards'.
- Mark all the ropes so that they're easy to see - white pieces of cloth are ideal. Sometimes markings wear off in the thick of a rainstorm - making the ropes difficult to see.

As a last bit, there's a trick to adding a couple of ropes to a pavilion to help it stand firm. A close friend of mine has a Norman campaign pavilion, and it's stood more than anything else I've seen. The form is very similar to the Viking pavilion presented in Issue #5. The addition (which I suspect will work for that Viking pavilion as well) is illustrated above. The ropes run from the vertical posts to the opposite ground corners on both sides.

Best of luck.

