

Camping is cool

It is officially cool to camp, according to a new guide which highlights events in mid-Somerset.

According to author Jonathan Knight, designer floral-print tents, self-inflating air mattresses and state-of-the-art campsite facilities mean it is no longer a chore to head for the hills at the weekend.

And to cash in on the rediscovered hobby, Mr Knight has produced the Cool Camping guide to England, which includes 40 of what he describes as exceptional campsites.

The new book is already proving popular and Mr Knight explained why.

"A generation raised on summer festivals and gap-year backpacking has rediscovered the great outdoors as a tonic to high-density urban life," he said.

"And there's no better way to enjoy a wilderness experience than with a sleeping bag and tent, to sleep under the stars and to wake with the sun.

"This book features a hand-picked selection of campsites and camping experiences in England, each with something very special.

"It might be an unbeatable view of a pristine coastline, a tranquil lakeside location, or the chance to spend the night in an American trailer or a Mongolian yurt.

"Camping was once the preserve of boy scouts, hippies and pensioners towing rusty caravans.

"But now it has been officially declared cool. Thanks to state-of-the-art sites and hi-tech tents, more and more townies are packing their rucksacks and heading to the countryside.

"Now some sites are cottoning on, making their facilities more comfort-

By Emma Frampton

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able and appealing to those who are loath to live without a power shower.

"The trend has been fuelled by celebrity camping enthusiasts such as models Kate Moss and Jodie Kidd, actress Sienna Miller, chefs Jamie Oliver and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, Blur bassist Alex James and singer Kim Wilde."

Mr Knight believes that the festivals have helped to make camping more glamorous.

"The undisputed daddy of English festivals is Glastonbury, the original and, many would argue, still the best," he said.

"As well as the music, everyone remembers Glastonbury for the inevitable rain, muddy camping and tents floating in knee-high water.

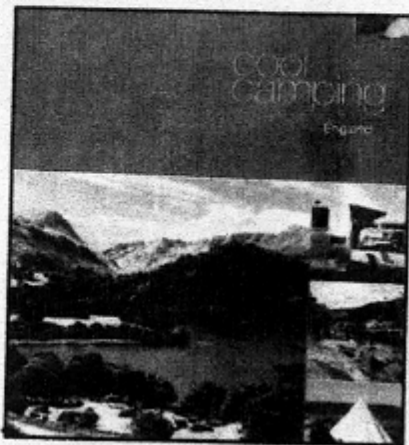
"Stoic campers have come to accept it as part of the ritual and fun of the event, the Glastonbury rite of passage.

"You haven't truly been to a festival - haven't truly camped - until you've



Glastonbury Festival, a cool place to camp

g/cam1005



Cool Camping by Jonathan Knight

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danced in the mud in a field at Glastonbury."

Another local festival is already mentioned as a must-visit camping experience, the Big Green Gathering, held annually near Charterhouse.

Mr Knight describes the BGG as an environmentally-friendly event that prides itself on being the first exclusively solar- and wind-powered festival, which - unusually for a festival - discourages alcohol from being sold on site.

"With limited electricity, the vibe here, especially after dark, is very medieval," he said.

"The simplistic ideals of the Big Green Gathering are a refreshing tonic to most corporate-sponsored events, but whatever your particularly brand of summer festival, surely it's all just an excuse to go camping without the 'no noise after 11pm' rule."