

Portable Camp Bed

After trying different types of sleeping arrangements at events, I've decided that the slat bed is the way to go.

My first exposure to a camping bed in the SCA was a rope bed. I tried someone else's then I built my own. First using a straw tick, then a feather mattress, then simple 4-inch foam padding. None were very comfortable after the first night. The ropes would stretch and would be very difficult (not to mention a hassle) to tighten, which needed to be done each time I slept on it, so I decided on a slat bed.

After much debate on types of fasteners, I decided on cast-iron bed fasteners from Whitechapel Ltd. Though they may not be period, they are impeccably sturdy and I don't have to worry about difficulty when breaking down camp due to swelling wood (like with pegs) in wet weather.

There's no little pegs to keep track of, and they don't break.

The bed goes together and comes apart very quickly and without fuss, so it's a lot easier in inclement weather or in the dark.

3/4" plywood slats make up the bottom of the bed. They are slightly shorter than the bed so they fit in very easily. The rails are 2"x6", and the legs are 4"x4"...though I would recommend laminating a couple of 2"x4"s instead, as the 4x4 tends to twist, making it a little difficult when it comes to assembly: it causes the fasteners not to line up properly. I use an air mattress on top of the slats. Not period, but it is comfy & compact, and you don't see it anyway. I based my measurements from the size of the air mattress plus an inch or two to allow for blankets & tucking, etc.

The little platforms at the bottom of the legs help the legs stand independently during setup, thus eliminating the need for an extra set of hands.

The headboard and footboard simply fit into slots on the legs, they don't need anything to hold them in. Put in the head and footboard simultaneously with the respective bedrails rather than trying to fit in the board after the rail is secure.

You can decorate the head and footboard however you wish, and make the bed as tall or short as you wish. I used a jig saw to cut out patterns in the 1/2" plywood head and footboards, and trimmed them with wood mounding and iron-on veneer. The finials I use on my bed are pre-made and sold at Home Depot for the tops of fenceposts but you can use anything. I also rounded the legs a little, again that's totally up to you. I sanded everything well and put on a healthy coat of polyurethane to avoid splinters and weather damage.

Below are thumbnail drawings that you can click on for a larger image to see how things fit together.

