

2ND-GENERATION TEKURTS WOULD HAVE BEEN GREAT IN PAKISTAN

In December 2005 I traveled to Pakistan after the terrible earthquake there. I was a logistics specialist for the Dutch section of an international medical relief organization whose personnel were living in tents more than 2,440 m (8,000') up in the mountains of Kashmir. Committed to providing health care through the coming winter, the group purchased fifty Pod shelters from Markus' previous company to shelter them.

The first heavy snows fell shortly after we finished setting up the unique shelters. Over a meter of snow fell the first night in the tiny town of Leepa. Predictably, most of the tents collapsed under the snow. Three tons of snow on each of the three large 8 meter (26') diameter "Clinic Pods" slowly caved them in too. But the forty-seven smaller 4 meter (13') diameter "Housing Pods" withstood the snow and rain, and a year later they were still being used in Pakistan. There is a slide show about them at <http://www.uk2.msf.org/multimedia/Leepa%20Valley/slideshow/slideshow.html>.

In December 2007 Markus invited me to come see the new Folded Homes TekYurts - the fruit of two years of development and testing since our experiences in **Pakistan**. I was very impressed. The TekYurts use the same basic technology as the old Pods. They are folded together out of sheets of fluted plastic to create double-shelled structures. But that is about all they share in common. The TekYurts are far simpler to assemble. The plastic bolts together rather than being taped like the shelters we put up in Pakistan. This makes them stronger and more durable. Ladders aren't needed for assembly and they don't rely on tape to make them waterproof. It was difficult to make the tape work. It was always leaking and we ended up covering the Pods with tarps to make them water tight. The TekYurts use a natural fold in the design that channels the water away. It's a surprisingly clever idea!

The new TekYurts are smaller than the housing Pods we set up in Pakistan; only 3 meters (10') across. That makes them easier to keep warm, but there's still plenty of space for several people and their gear. The TekYurts have opening windows and doors that lock from the inside. But what's really interesting is you can combine TekYurts together to make multi-room structures. This is a huge benefit. A six-room TekYurt structure shaped like a star could be used as a clinic with a waiting room, an office, a couple of private rooms for examining patients, and a room for supplies or other activities. Or, it could be used as living quarters for five or ten of an organization's personnel with a central shared common room. And combining many small buildings eliminates the danger a big structure faces from snow load collapse.

We often have to worry about controlling camp compounds in a disaster area. Control and patrol are needed for the safety of personnel and to protect the medical material and other supplies that we use in the field. And having a private compound can help with issues of cultural sensitivity. So being able to string TekYurts together to form a walled compound is really useful. This modularity gives the TekYurts great flexibility.

In Pakistan I assessed temporary shelters from virtually every country that sent emergency personnel to the earthquake zone. These TekYurts would have been a very welcome addition to the work accomplished there. They are stout, hardy, and light-weight. They deserve a serious look by any group that needs to rapidly deploy shelters in extreme environments.

- Bryan Blondeau, January 2008

