



# 1966

## and all that

As Vango celebrates its 50th birthday, Iain Duff looks back at the history of a company that started life in a windowless office under a staircase and has grown to become one of the biggest outdoor brands in the world.

In 1966, London was the place to be. The revolution that had hit the worlds of pop, art, fashion and politics, reached its peak. It was the year the '60s really began to swing. The Beatles and Kinks dominated the charts, Carnaby Street was the fashion capital of the world while flower power was just around the corner. And, of course, England won the World Cup.

But as society was changing beyond all recognition, a few hundred miles away, in an unremarkable factory in Glasgow, another revolution was quietly getting under way. Fifty years ago, one of the UK's best known – and best loved – outdoor brands was born.

Although Vango officially came into being in 1966, the story actually begins more than 100 years earlier, with the founding of canvas

### ALL ACTION ANORAKS

**JAGUAR** BOBCAT WILDCAT PANTHER JIFFY

**JAGUAR** is Vango's new weatherproof anorak. It has an extra tough outer material in water-tight and wind-resistant seams. The anorak is made of 100% cotton. The double-breasted front is well cut to fit over a range of sizes and is reinforced in a pocket at the back of the neck. Size S, M, L. Price £19.95.

**BOBCAT** is an all-weather anorak. It is made of 100% cotton. The anorak is made of 100% cotton. The double-breasted front is well cut to fit over a range of sizes and is reinforced in a pocket at the back of the neck. Size S, M, L. Price £19.95.

**WILDCAT** is a general purpose anorak. It is made of 100% cotton. The anorak is made of 100% cotton. The double-breasted front is well cut to fit over a range of sizes and is reinforced in a pocket at the back of the neck. Size S, M, L. Price £19.95.

**PANTHER** is a general purpose anorak. It is made of 100% cotton. The anorak is made of 100% cotton. The double-breasted front is well cut to fit over a range of sizes and is reinforced in a pocket at the back of the neck. Size S, M, L. Price £19.95.

**JIFFY** is a general purpose anorak. It is made of 100% cotton. The anorak is made of 100% cotton. The double-breasted front is well cut to fit over a range of sizes and is reinforced in a pocket at the back of the neck. Size S, M, L. Price £19.95.

### LIGHTWEIGHT CAMPING-CLIMBING

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**FORCE TEN TENTS**

1. FORCE TEN TENTS have a 100% cotton outer fabric with a 100% cotton inner fabric. The outer fabric is made of 100% cotton. The inner fabric is made of 100% cotton. The double-breasted front is well cut to fit over a range of sizes and is reinforced in a pocket at the back of the neck. Size S, M, L. Price £19.95.

**FORCE TEN Mk 3**

2. FORCE TEN Mk 3 has a 100% cotton outer fabric with a 100% cotton inner fabric. The outer fabric is made of 100% cotton. The inner fabric is made of 100% cotton. The double-breasted front is well cut to fit over a range of sizes and is reinforced in a pocket at the back of the neck. Size S, M, L. Price £19.95.

**FORCE TEN Mk 4**

3. FORCE TEN Mk 4 has a 100% cotton outer fabric with a 100% cotton inner fabric. The outer fabric is made of 100% cotton. The inner fabric is made of 100% cotton. The double-breasted front is well cut to fit over a range of sizes and is reinforced in a pocket at the back of the neck. Size S, M, L. Price £19.95.

**VITAL I**

4. VITAL I has a 100% cotton outer fabric with a 100% cotton inner fabric. The outer fabric is made of 100% cotton. The inner fabric is made of 100% cotton. The double-breasted front is well cut to fit over a range of sizes and is reinforced in a pocket at the back of the neck. Size S, M, L. Price £19.95.

**VITAL II**

5. VITAL II has a 100% cotton outer fabric with a 100% cotton inner fabric. The outer fabric is made of 100% cotton. The inner fabric is made of 100% cotton. The double-breasted front is well cut to fit over a range of sizes and is reinforced in a pocket at the back of the neck. Size S, M, L. Price £19.95.

### AJUNGILAK

The AJUNGILAK is a sleeping bag. It is made of 100% cotton. The sleeping bag is made of 100% cotton. The double-breasted front is well cut to fit over a range of sizes and is reinforced in a pocket at the back of the neck. Size S, M, L. Price £19.95.



merchants Andrew Mitchell & Co in 1847. The business was taken over by the Moodie family 51 years later, and it passed through the generations until it reached Alastair and Garry Moodie in 1955. The company took over tent maker James McIlwraith & Co in 1963, moving production from the Govan area of Glasgow, to Shettleston in the city's east end.

Realising that non-Scots struggled to pronounce the company's name, Alastair decided to change it – going for an anagram of Govan. Alastair ran the business from a windowless office under the stairs, which later became known as the Vango cupboard. "In the beginning it was just me," he recalls. "I didn't have any high-finance ideas. I hadn't even thought of 'marketing'. I was just trying to design and make tents that people would want to camp in."

The first major success for Vango was the Force Ten tent – the design for which was literally sketched on the back of a cigarette packet. In the late '60s most tents on the market were imported from continental Europe and were not specifically designed for the British weather. Covered space for cooking and storage was needed for wet conditions. The Force Ten was designed with bell shaped ends with a flysheet that came down to the ground to solve this problem. The marketing slogan that accompanied it, A Tent For All Seasons, was inspired by a poster for the play *A Man For All Seasons*, spotted by Alastair on a trip to London. The Vango product range quickly grew, incorporating not only tents, but also



1970-1979



1970-1979

camping furniture, cookers, sleeping bags and even footwear.

Innovation continued throughout the 1970s and '80s, and with the support of explorers like Chris Bonnington and Doug

Scott, Vango became synonymous with high-spec, technical products for daring mountain expeditions.

"In the late '80s, we started working with Aarn Tate, now one of the world's leading designers of outdoor equipment," said Alastair. "We spent many hours out on the hills, developing the Tension Band System, which became a core innovation of the 1990s." An upgraded version of the TBS system is still a key feature in the Vango tents of today – providing superior stability in strong winds.

In the mid-'90s, the company decided on a new strategy – family camping. Their range of family tents was significantly expanded and today Vango reckon they have more than a third of the UK tent market.

Innovation has always been the key to Vango's success. Inflatable tents have been around for decades but it wasn't until Vango launched the AirBeam in 2011 that they became part of the mainstream. Twelve years of development – including numerous false starts – went into creating the AirBeam and many in the outdoor industry dismissed the idea as a fad. But despite a few early hiccups, the public loved them, and backed with an innovative marketing campaign (the video of an AirBeam tent being launched into space went viral), they were a huge success. Inflatable tents are now ubiquitous on British campsites, and every major tent manufacturer now produces their own version.

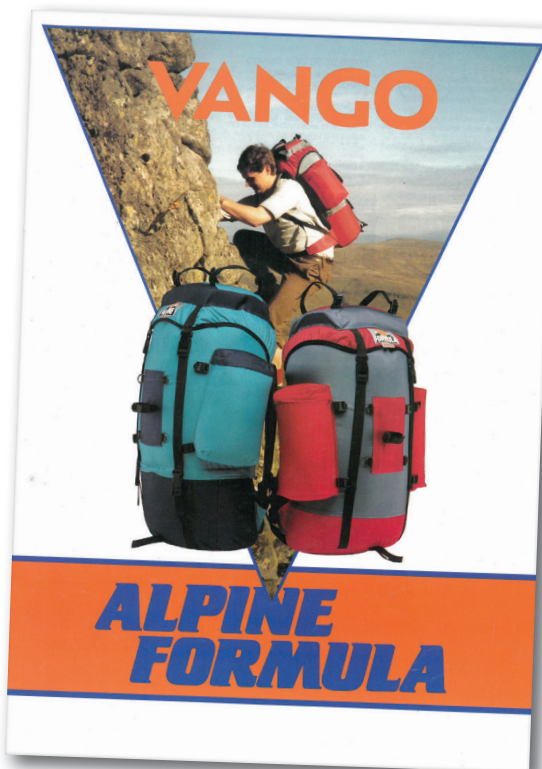


Vango say they are the leader in the UK tent market, with a 34% share of sales. But, according to the marketing director, Derek Scott, the aim is for tents to become a smaller share of their business, thanks to the expansion of other categories. In fact, tents are already only part of the story. Vango has a 30% of the UK's sleeping bag market and is also the market leader for larger rucksacks.

The huge scale of Vango's product range becomes apparent on a visit to the company's showroom near Glasgow Airport. Hidden away in the corner of a grim-looking industrial estate, from the outside, the warehouse is uninviting. But step inside and you enter a campers' paradise. Brand new gear covers every square foot of floorspace; the space is filled with tents of all shapes and sizes, awnings for caravans and motorhomes, rucksacks, furniture and accessories.

Stephen Newlands is managing director of AMG Group, the company behind Vango. Stephen, along with his fellow directors Steve Craig and Glenn Andrews, took control of the company in 2014 through the purchase of a 75% stake. At the time of writing, the management team are poised to take a 100% stake in the business, ending the Moodie family's financial involvement in the business.

His aim is to expand the business overseas. International sales currently account for 15% of turnover, and there are plans to grow existing markets in France, Germany, South Korea and North America in the coming years. "Our mission is to continue delivering market-leading brands and products in terms of quality, function and design," he says. "Our vision is to be the custodians of an international range of brands, respected by



1980-1989

our customers, desired by our consumers and the envy of our competition."

Though he retired many years ago, Alastair Moodie still takes a close interest in the business he founded in 1966 and it's clear from speaking to him that he has an enormous sense of pride at what the company has become. Looking out at the vast range of products on display, he says modestly: "I could never have envisioned all this when I started out in that factory in Shettleston all those years ago. It's incredible what it has become and the credit all goes to these guys (the management team)."

It's certainly all a far cry from the Vango cupboard...



## TIMELINE



### 1966 - VANGO FOUNDED

**1967** - The first Force Ten tent is launched with an integrated flysheet and 'A' pole, to make it easier to get in and out of, whilst maximising stability of the tent



**1968** - The Scots Guard tent, Canada sleeping bags, Coolibah cool boxes and Micro-Therm nylon fabric launched

### 1973 -

Vango sold to Black's & Edgington Plc (part of Black's



of Greenock and Millets)

**1984** - The Moodie family buys Vango back, returning the company to its family roots

**1984** - Vango develop and patent the Quattro mummy shaped sleeping bag, a first for the UK market, which rapidly became the norm

**1987** - The Hurricane tent designed in collaboration with New Zealand traveller and designer Aarn Tate.



**1993** - The Tension Band System (TBS) developed in co-operation with Aarn Tate. A wind stabilisation mechanism for hoop tents was designed to add stability in adverse conditions.

**1995** - Alastair Moodie retires, after being at the helm for 30 years

**1996** - Following a major change in strategy, Vango expands its range of tents to appeal to the family market, along with the launch of Pro-Tex - a breathable and waterproof fabric to keep tents cool in hot weather and warm in cold weather.

**2008** - Vango adds flat pole sleeves to tents to allow for a more streamlined shape and easy pitching

**2010** - Tied Arch System developed to give simple, quick to pitch tents with good usable inner space and headroom.

**2011** - After 12 years in development, Vango launch AirBeam inflatable tents

**2014** - Vango AirAwnings launched for caravan owners

**2014** - The Scout Association chooses Vango to be their official partner for camping equipment

**2014** - Management buyout by directors Stephen Newlands, Steve Craig and Glenn Andrews

