

Winter Camping Tips

Some tips to keep in mind when your troop takes on winter camping.

- Fail to Plan = Plan to Fail
- Look for branches overhead if you are camping in a wooded area. Branches may easily break under the weight of snow and cause injury or even death.
- Always bring a bit more than what you think you'll need – water, food, clothes.
- Make sure that you have a good knowledge of the signs of frostbite and hypothermia. You should be able to recognize it in others and in yourself. Tell someone right away if you or another scout is showing signs of cold-related problems.
- Stay hydrated. It's easy to get dehydrated in the winter. Eat and drink plenty of carbs.
- Keep out of the wind if you can. A rain fly for a tent can be pitched to serve as a wind break. The wind chill factor can often be considerable and can result in effective temperatures being much lower than nominal.
- Bring extra WATER. It's easy to get dehydrated in the winter. You aren't visibly sweating, so you don't think to drink water, but since the air is so dry, you lose a LOT of water through breathing. Drink lots of water!
- Keep your water bottles from freezing in your pack by putting them in a wool sock or insulated bottle cover. You can make bottle covers by taping closed cell foam around your bottles. Water mixed with something such as Gatorade, lemonade, etc will freeze at a lower temperature than plain water. In below-freezing weather, turn your water bottles upside down so that the ice forms at the bottom of the bottle instead of in the opening.
- Bring extra food that doesn't need to be heated or cooked. Granola bars, trail mix, etc.
- Keep a pot of hot water available for cocoa or Cup-a-Soup – these warm from the inside.
- Always eat hot meals (breakfast, lunch, & dinner.) Dutch ovens are the best – they keep the food hot longer. It doesn't need to be fancy DO cooking. Meals should be 1-pot meals to keep cleanup to a minimum. Don't get too fancy with the meals - it's hard to chop onions & carrots at -10°F with gloves on. Prep all meals at home in the warmth of the kitchen.
- Shelter the cooking area from wind (walls of tarps, etc.)
- Fill coffee/cook pots with water before bed. It's hard to pour frozen water, but easy to thaw it if it's already in the pot.
- Remember **C O L D**:
 - **C** Clean - dirty clothes lose their loft and get you cold.
 - **O** Overheat - never get sweaty, strip off layers to stay warm but no too hot.
 - **L** Layers - Dress in synthetic layers for easy temperature control.
 - **D** Dry - wet clothes (and sleeping bags) also lose their insulation.
- **COTTON KILLS!** Do not bring cotton. Staying dry is the key to staying warm. Air is an excellent insulator and by wearing several layers of clothes you will keep warm.
- Remember the 3 W's of layering - Wicking inside layer, Warmth middle layer(s) and Wind/Water outer layer. Wicking should be a polypropylene material as long underwear and also sock liner. Warmth layer(s) should be fleece or wool. The Wind/Water layer should be Gore-Tex or at least 60/40 nylon.

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- Adjust your layers of clothing by adding or removing to prevent heat buildup and sweating. Zippers in the armpits of rain shells or fleece jackets work well to vent heat and moisture. Too much moisture in your clothes will make you cold as it evaporates.
- Instead of stopping for a long lunch, snack on food all during the day at short breaks. This will keep you from cooling down too much and having to adjust your layers of clothing too many times.
- Carry a small insulated thermos-type bottle full of a hot drink or hot soup. If you get cold or just want a warming snack, you will already have something hot prepared.
- If you're camping in the snow, wear snow pants over your regular clothing
- Bring extra hand covering - mittens are warmer than gloves.
- Bring 2 changes of socks per day.
- Everyone must be dry by sundown. No wet (sweaty) bodies or wet inner clothing.
- Use plastic grocery bags or bread bags over socks. This keeps your boots dry and you can easily change those wet socks.
- Your boots should have waterproof outer shells such as oiled leather or plastic. Even though fabric and leather boots have Gore-tex linings, the outer layers will absorb water which will eventually freeze, placing a block of ice next to your foot.
- Gaiters will keep snow, rain, etc out of your boots and therefore help keep your feet drier and warmer. Gaiters also add another layer of material around your lower legs to help keep them warm.
- Protect against heat loss through your head by wearing a hat, balaclava, etc. Over half of your body heat can be lost through your head. One saying goes, "If your feet are cold, put on a hat." A balaclava helps protect your face and neck from cold and wind.
- Dress right while sleeping. Change into clean, dry clothes before bed. Your body makes moisture and your clothes hold it in - by changing into dry clothes you will stay warmer and it will help keep the inside of your sleeping bag dry. Wearing wool socks and long underwear (tops and bottoms) in the sleeping bag is OK.
- Put on tomorrow's t- shirt and underwear at bedtime. That way you won't be starting with everything cold next to your skin in the morning.
- Wear a stocking cap to bed, even if you have a mummy bag.
- Put tomorrow's clothes in your bag with you. This is especially important if you're small of stature. It can be pretty hard to warm up a big bag with a little body, the clothes cut down on that work.
- Put a couple of long-lasting hand warmers into your boots after you take them off. Your boots will dry out during the night.
- Fill a couple of Nalgene water bottles with warm water and sleep with one between your legs (warms the femoral artery) and with one at your feet. Or use toe/hand warmers. Toss them into your sleeping bag before you get in. Some of the toe/hand warmers will last 8 hours.
- Eat a high-energy snack before bed, then brush your teeth. The extra fuel will help your body stay warm.
- Use a sleeping bag that is appropriate for the conditions. Two +20°F sleeping bags, one inside the other will work to lower the rating of both bags.

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- Use a bivy sack to wrap around your sleeping bag. You can make a cheap version of this by getting an inexpensive fleece sleeping bag. It isn't much more than a blanket with a zipper but it helps lower the rating by as much as 10 degrees.
- Use a sleeping bag liner. There are silk and fleece liners that go inside the sleeping bag. They will lower your sleeping bag's rating by up to 10 degrees. Or buy an inexpensive fleece throw or blanket and wrap yourself in it inside the sleeping bag.
- Most cold weather bags are designed to trap heat. The proper way to do this is to pull the drawstrings until the sleeping bag is around your face, not around your neck. If the bag also has a draft harness make sure to use it above the shoulders and it snugs up to your neck to keep cold air from coming in and warm air from going out.
- Don't burrow in - keep your mouth and nose outside the bag. Moisture from your breath collecting in your bag is a quick way to get real cold. Keep the inside of the bag dry.
- Put a trash bag over the bottom half of your sleeping bag to help hold in the heat. A zipped up coat pulled over the foot of a sleeping bag makes an extra layer of insulation.
- Don't sleep directly on the ground. Get a closed cell foam pad to provide insulation between your sleeping bag and the ground. A foam pad cushions and insulates. The air pockets are excellent in providing good insulation properties. Use more than one insulating layer below you – it's easy to slide off the first one.
- In an emergency, cardboard makes a great insulator. Old newspapers are also good insulation. A layer of foam insulation works too.
- Bring a piece of cardboard to stand on when changing clothes. This will keep any snow on your clothes off your sleeping bag, and help keep your feet warmer than standing on the cold ground.
- A space blanket or silver lined tarp on the floor of the tent or under your sleeping bag will reflect your heat back to you.
- No cots or air mattresses! Better to lay on with 30° earth instead of -10° air.
- Sleep in quinzees or igloos. These are warmer than tents since you've got an insulating layer of snow between you and the outside air, instead of just a thin nylon layer.
- If in tents, leave the tent flaps/zippers vented a bit, it cuts down on interior frost.
- Snack before you go to bed so that your body will have enough fuel to generate heat during the long winter night.
- Exercise for a few minutes before getting in your sleeping bag. This will warm up your body and make it easier to warm up a cold sleeping bag.
- Drain your bladder before you go to bed. Having to go in the middle of the night when it is 5 degrees out chills your entire body. Drink all day, but stop one hour before bed.
- To keep your boots from freezing at night, put them in a stuff sack (you can use your sleeping bag stuff sack) and put them inside your sleeping bag at the foot of the bag. A long sleeping bag is helpful if you do this. You can also put the boots in a sack and place them between your sleeping bag and the pad underneath.
- To prevent your feet from getting cold when you put on cold boots in the morning, remove the insoles and warm them up in your sleeping bag or inside your coat before putting your boots on.
- Use the buddy system for winter camping. Buddies can check each other for frostbite, make sure no one becomes lost, and boost the morale of the entire group.

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- Encourage everyone in your group to wear brightly colored outer clothing so that each person will be more visible, especially during severe weather.
- Use alkaline batteries in flashlights. Standard batteries deteriorate quickly in cold weather. Tape the switch of your flashlight in the "off" position until you are ready to use it. This will prevent it from being turned on accidentally while in your pack or on your sled.
- Never light or use a stove inside a tent or snow shelter. A tent may catch fire, and a snow shelter may help lead to carbon monoxide poisoning. Neither of these potential mishaps is worth the risk.
- A windscreen is essential for using a stove in the winter. Even a slight breeze will direct the heat away from its intended mark.
- Always use a lid on your pots to keep the heat in. It makes a huge difference, especially in the winter.
- Carry a closed cell foam pad to sit on in camp. Frozen ground or a shelter floor will quickly pull body heat out through your rear end. You can also use your sleeping pad to sit on.
- An insulated coffee mug will keep hot drinks hot much longer than regular cups. Large insulated mugs can also be used for soups, etc at mealtime.
- Stay organized. Know where each item of your gear is stored in your pack. This will enable you find the items you need quickly and prevent you from unpacking everything to find one small item. Arrange items in your pack, etc where they can be easily found. Items such as snack foods, water, extra gloves, or a headlamp / flashlight should be easy to get out when needed.

Here are some links for additional Winter Camping Tips:

<http://www.wintercampers.com/>

<http://www.princeton.edu/~oa/winter/wintcamp.shtml>