

WINTER CAMPING SAFETY

There is magic to camping in winter. It is one of the most advanced and challenging of outdoor adventures.

Special considerations for winter camping include the following:

1. Leadership.

In no other camp is the type of leadership as important as in the winter camp. It is vital that a leader be an experienced camper with a strong character.

2. Equipment.

Do not attempt to camp unless completely outfitted. Even if equipment for winter camp is more expensive than for summer camp,

Everyone must be adequately clothed, and leaders should ensure that blankets and other equipment are of suitable quality and weight.

Tips for your next winter camping trip:

- Use the buddy system for winter outings. Buddies can check each other for frostbite, make sure no one becomes lost, and boost the morale of the entire group.
- Plan to cover no more than five miles per day on a winter trek on snowshoes.

An experienced group can cover 10 to 12 miles

on cross-country skis.

- Always allow ample time to make camp in winter, especially if you plan to build snow shelters.
- Fatigue encourages accidents. Rest occasionally when building a snow shelter; taking part in cross-country skiing or snowshoeing; or participating in other active winter sports.

Periodic rests also help avoid overheating.

- Pulling a load over the snow on a sled or toboggan is generally easier than carrying it in a backpack.
- Snow is a terrific insulator. Snow shelters are much warmer than tents because they retain heat and keep out the cold wind.
- If you have adequate time for building snow shelters, you will spend a much more comfortable night sleeping in them than in a tent.
- Snow is the greatest thief in winter, swallowing up small dropped items.

Tie or tape a piece of brightly colored cord to small items so they can be seen in snow.

Some items, such as mittens, can be tied to larger items, such as a parka, to prevent them from being dropped and lost.

- Melting snow in a pot to get water may cause the pot to burn through or may scorch the snow, giving the water a disagreeable taste.

Prevent this by adding a cup or two of water in the bottom of the pot before putting in the snow to melt.

- Punch a hole in the top of your ice chisel and string a stout cord through it.

Before trying to chisel a hole in ice, anchor the cord to something large or too heavy to be pulled through the hole so you will not lose your chisel in freezing water when the ice is penetrated.

- Always test the thickness of ice before venturing any distance from the shore. Ice should be at least 3 inches thick for a small group; 4 inches of ice is safe for a crowd. Since ice thickness can vary considerably, it is best to stay near the shoreline of large lakes.
- 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.
- Encourage everyone to wear brightly colored outer clothing so that each person

will be more visible, especially during severe weather.

- Small liquid-fuel stoves are much better for cooking in winter than fires, which are difficult to build with wet wood. Gathering wood that is frozen to the ground also can be difficult, if not impossible. A pressure/pump-type stove is essential in winter.
- Always use a funnel to refuel a stove so you won't frostbite your fingers by accidentally pouring fuel on them. Fuel evaporates at a high rate of speed and quickly removes heat from anything it touches.
- Place a stove or fire on a platform of logs or rocks so it will not melt through the snow.
- Never light or use a stove inside a tent or snow shelter. A tent may catch fire, and vapors in a snow shelter may 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.
- Dress in layers with wicking material next to your skin, fleece or wool above, and wind or waterproof clothing on top
- Remove and add layers of clothing depending

on your activity level and any condition changes

- Replace wet socks with dry socks as needed
- Wear boots that are waterproofed on the outside
- Cover your head and neck, as well as face when necessary, with hats, scarves, and face masks
- Tuck in pants to keep snow out of your boots
- Replace wet gloves as needed, using mittens, whenever possible, in extremely cold temperatures
- Avoid cotton
- Before you dress in the morning, warm up clothes inside your sleeping bag
- Use a 4-season tent or a 3-season tent placed on a waterproof groundcover
- Choose a spot sheltered from the wind, build a wind break by piling up snow or leaves, or dig a 1 to 2 foot hole in the snow
- Keep tent vents open to avoid condensation inside the tent
- Use special snow stakes for anchoring
- Change into dry socks and footgear
- Sit on a closed cell foam pad
- Drink hot drinks during the evening
- Snack and then exercise a few minutes before you go to bed

- Use one or two ground pads
- Consider a mummy-style sleeping bag which reduces cold air space
- Do not sleep in damp clothes
- Drop in a leak-proof hot water container
- Sleep with a hat
- Do not breathe inside the bag - the moisture will collect
- Stay in the sleeping bag as long as possible while getting ready in the morning