

A compilation of Winter Camping Tips

Be Prepared

- Fail to Plan / Plan to Fail!
- Always bring more than what you think you'll need. If you think two sleeping bags will be good enough, bring 3. Nothing's worse than being cold at night when you're trying to sleep.
- Make sure that you have a good knowledge of the signs of frost bite and hypothermia. You should be able to recognize it in others and in yourself. Tell someone right away if you or another boy is showing signs of cold-related problems.
- **C O L D E R:**
 - C** Clean - dirty clothes lose their loft and get you cold.
 - O** Overheat - never get sweaty, strip off layers to stay warm but not too hot.
 - L** Layers - Dress in synthetic layers - Cotton does not dry easily - Cotton Kills
 - D** Dry - wet clothes (and sleeping bags) also lose their loft and therefore their insulation properties
 - E** Examine - Upon returning to your camp examine your gear
 - R** Repair - repair and clean and dry your gear before storing it
- Dress in layers. It's much easier to manage body temp by adding/removing small layers rather than large ones.
- Stay hydrated. It's easy to get dehydrated in the winter. Eat and drink plenty of carbs.
- Keep out of 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.
- Remember to have a great time. No snow ball fights, but snowball throws are OK (where you try to hit a target.)

Cooking

- 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!
- Bring extra food that doesn't need to be heated or cooked. Granola bars, trail mix, etc.
- Always keep a pot of hot water available for hot chocolate or Cup-a-Soup. Warm and delicious beverages will 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.
- Consider Styrofoam eating dishes - again to keep cleanup to a minimum.
- Shelter the cooking area (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. The water bottles from your sleeping bag come in handy too.

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Daytime Clothing

- COTTON KILLS! Do not bring anything cotton. Dress right during the day. Staying dry is the key to staying warm. Layered clothing is very important. 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.
- If you're camping in the snow, wear snow pants etc over your regular clothing
- Bring extra gloves. If in the snow, mittens are much more useful.
- Bring 2 changes of socks per day.
- Every one in camp must be dry by sundown. No wet (sweaty) bodies or wet inner clothing – you must be dry, dry, dry.
- Use plastic grocery bags or bread bags over socks. This keeps your boots dry and you can easily change those wet socks.
- Keep your hands and feet warm. Your body will always protect the core, so if your hands and feet are warm, your core will also likely be warm. If your hands or feet are cold, put on more layers, and put on a hat!

Night time

Sleepwear

- Dress right while sleeping. Change into clean, dry clothes (change all of your 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. You lose 80% of your body heat through the top of your head.
- 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.
- Some will say that sleeping sans clothing will keep you warmer. This works for some, but not all. You should not, however, bundle up to go to bed. It's too easy to overheat and get sweaty!
- 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.

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Sleeping Bag

- Use a bag that is appropriate for the conditions. A +20°F rated bag when new is only good to +40°F after a few uses and probably is not going to cut it in the winter. Two +20°F sleeping bags, one inside the other will work to lower the rating of both bags.
- 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. A wool blanket is a good alternative but doesn't stay put very well. On those really cold nights, a small down throw thrown over the bag will keep you toasty and warm.
- 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 5 to 10 degrees. Or buy an inexpensive fleece throw or blanket and wrap yourself in it inside the sleeping bag. Always bring an extra blanket for inside and on top of leaky sleeping bags.
- Most cold weather bags are designed to mummy up. 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 or warm air from going out.
- Don't burrow in. It is important to keep your face or at least your mouth and nose outside the bag. If you burrow in then all you are doing is adding humidity to the inside of your bag when you exhale. That 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 a great added layer of insulation. And your coat might be warm when you put it on in the morning.

Cot / Pad

- You need 4 x the thickness below you at night than you need above you. Down sleeping bags are great, but they compresses when you're laying on it, so you need more under you.
- Don't sleep directly on the ground. Get a closed cell foam pad, blanket or whatever you can find 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.
- Cardboard makes a great insulator. Old newspapers are also good insulation. A layer of foam insulation works too.
- Bring a piece of carpet or 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.
- DO NOT sleep on a cot or air mattresses! Better to have ground beneath you at 30 degrees than air at 10 degrees.

Shelter

- Bring bales of hay, dig through the snow to the ground, spread out the hay, then put up our tents.

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- Sleep in snow shelters (quinzee.) 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.

Other

- Drain your bladder before you go to bed. Having to take a whiz in the middle of the night when it is 5 degrees out is not conducive to staying warm. Consider not drinking any fluids one hour before bed time (if you are dehydrated then ignore this). Keep an empty throw-away water bottle in the tent for relief at night, and dispose of it in the morning!

Thank you to all the contributors on the Boy Scout Talk Yahoo group for their contributions to this compilation! Thanks to the Scoutmaster of Troop 12 in Twin Valley Council for compiling all of these tips to one document.