

Staying Warm in a Winter Camp

So, who would not jump at the chance to go camping in the winter?

O. K. so it may not be everybody's idea of a great night, sleeping in a sleeping bag surrounded by snow and cold air. But the fact is, there is an awful lot of fun and a lot of very interesting things you can do to at a winter camp. And the key to enjoying your winter camp and especially winter nights is to take along the proper clothing and the proper sleeping gear.

The best thing to do is dress in layers . What does that mean? Often it is undershirt, then light shirt, then either a heavier shirt or a light sweater, then a winter coat, maybe a hood that goes on and off. Below your belly button, long johns on over your regular underwear, dry pants, then snow pants. You can leave some of these out or take some off or put them back on again if the temperature changes or it snows or rains.

In the morning when you first get up and it's cold and before you get moving around, you might want to dress with so many layers on that you look like the Michelin Tire Man . But as you start to move around, get breakfast, do some work around the campsite, or go for a hike, your body will start generating more heat. You will want to be able to take off one or more layers of clothing so that you don't get your sweat freezing to your skin. Very often your main insulator will be your outside jacket or sweater but it does not necessarily have to be . Recommended is a fleece or warm wool sweater and synthetic long underwear. Then you do not need a very heavy coat on the outside. In fact, recommended for such a situation would be so-called "breathable" outer-wear, that is, jacket and pants -that can protect your body from the wind and would ideally come equipped with various zippers to allow quick ventilation.

You might be inclined to put on a half dozen pairs of socks and then squeeze your now bulked-up fat foot into a tight boot but this will likely result in frozen feet because of poor circulation. Wear a good quality winter boot with its own insulated liner. Boots can be a size larger so you can comfortably put on two layers good quality socks. Avoid cotton socks in winter! You'll be better off with DRY wool socks that get changed when they are no longer DRY because DRY socks will be warmer socks. Do you sense a theme here? So change your socks when they become damp or wet. Wet or damp socks suck the heat right out of your feet. Heatless feet can ruin your day and even lead to frostbite. Yes, I know it's a pain to pull off your boots, get out your dry socks and switch them for the damp socks. But it only takes about two minutes and it will likely give you hours of comfort. It's worth it! There are also socks made of more

expensive synthetic materials specifically for cold weather. Talk to your outfitter or outdoor sports store for more information.

Most Scouts know that you can lose a great deal of heat from your body through your head so a good hat is absolutely essential . It's worth a little extra money to get a good quality woolen toque or specialty fabric hats that are available from outfitters and outdoor sports stores . For extreme cold weather a ski mask or balaclava will perform even better. You can also use a good scarf or neck "gaiter" to keep the wind off your neck. And you can wear your hat to bed to help stay warm!

Give me shelter!



Let's take a minute to talk about the shelter you are in. It is likely a tent. If you are very serious about winter camping, talk to an outfitter or sports retailer about "four season" tents which tend to have good ventilation and won't collapse on you if a lot of snow gets on it. Some tents will even have shelves or "lofts " so you can hang equipment or clothes . Also, look for a tent with double doors. If you have snow shoes or skis, try to flatten the area you're going to pitch your tent on and keep in mind which direction the wind is coming from when you orient your tent and its opening . If you have access to extra poles or small trees and you have a large tarp you can also block some of the wind from your tent by rigging up the tarp near your tent .

Staying warm in bed at Camp:

You've been dreading it...getting into that cold sleeping bag! But it need not be so bad. In fact you can have a very warm, comfortable night if you do things right. (I'll grant you, for the first few minutes you might feel like an apple in a refrigerator crisper.)

In winter, you'll need more time to set up camp because the daylight disappears earlier and fast! If possible, choose a campsite that is not in a park with only a few trees around. Try to find a spot that is protected from wind and snow in a well forested area. It can be even more important to provide lots of ventilation in a winter camping situation than it is in summer. If water vapour from your breath cannot escape through the night, condensation will form on the inside of your tent and will eventually melt and make everything inside damp or wet. Including your clothing.

If there is a lot of snow around, and if you have a small shovel, snow shoes, or anything else to move snow with, you can build up snow around the outside of your tent for added insulation .

Before you climb into the tent be sure to go to the bathroom. A full bladder takes more heat out of your body than an empty one does and you do not want to have to get up at 2:00 in the morning to go to the bathroom outside. Some people will advise you to have a nice hot drink before turning in for the night. You can if you want to but remember, what goes in... must come out. Some people with larger bladders might get away with it. Or they may be climbing out of their toasty warm sleeping bag in the middle of the night.

When it's time to go to sleep, change into a dry pair of socks and long underwear. If you tuck them inside your coat or hood, just before you get ready for bed, they will be nice and warm for you! While you are getting ready you can eat some high energy snacks.

Camper-in-a-Bag! Ah, sweet sleep.

You can use a liner inside your sleeping bag for extra insulation. You can buy a commercial liner or, if you have a sewing machine at home, you may be able to save money by buying a lightweight fleece blanket, folding it lengthwise in half and then sewing up the bottom and part of one side. Sleep on top of a thick foam type pad or a Thermo-o-rest pad. Similar pads may also be available under different names from other suppliers. Often people think that an air mattresses is an ideal mattress to sleep on but in fact you will end up losing a lot of your body heat to all that cold air underneath you in the air mattress. It might be OK for a hot summer night though personally I believe that he even then, an air mattress is a terrible thing to sleep on because I keep slipping off it and disturbing the racoons outside the tent. But definitely don't bring an air mattress along when the air around you is cold.

Now, to perhaps the most important thing for a good night's sleep in the winter - your sleeping bag! It is absolutely critical that you get a proper sleeping bag for any kind of camping but it is especially important to get the right kind for winter camping. There are several different types of sleeping bag that are appropriate for cold weather camping and you might want to talk to your retailer or Scout leader about the kind of sleeping bag that would be best for you. Generally, you will often find some type of "temperature rating" label on a sleeping bag. Do not confuse the temperature on this label with anything resembling reality! First of all you must understand that the sleeping bag does not create any heat whatsoever - your body creates the heat and your sleeping bag simply stops all that heat from escaping away into the air. Or tries to. So the better the insulation in the sleeping bag and underneath you, (that is your sleeping mattress or pad), the more heat will stay inside your sleeping bag where you are! The temperatures you see on the sleeping bags are a very, very approximate guide and if you see -30 degrees on the label it does not mean that you will be anywhere near comfortable if you're sleeping in -30 weather! So it is critical that when you select a sleeping bag for cold weather, you use that label as a very rough guide and more important that you research the type of the insulation used inside the bag. It is also a good idea to kind of "fluff up" the sleeping bag before you get into it. That will fluff up the fibers inside the insulation which will trap more heat inside the bag. There is a lot of good information on sleeping bags in the Scouting Field Book available from your Scout Shop. Here is a list of locations. Phone first for the hours of operation and to be sure the information is up to date. I also recommend books by Kevin Callan- there are several; the Happy Camper is fun to read and very informative.

If it's a really cold night, it can be a good idea to keep your drinking water bottle inside your sleeping bag over night so that it does not freeze into ice by morning.

Now what if you are still feeling cold after a few minutes inside the sleeping bag? Remember that a lot of heat escapes from your head and you'll be amazed at how much warmer you feel and how much better you sleep when you sleep with a toque (If you are from the U.S.A., that's what we Canadians call a knit hat or knit cap) on your head. And if you are in extremely cold weather or your gear isn't quite up to the task of keeping you warm in the cold weather then consider putting on your rain gear which will both keep water vapour out and help keep heat from your body near your body. If you do that though, take off the rain gear if you get too hot and start to sweat. You don't want sweat turning cold all over your body!



Emergency Shelter

What if your shelter is not a tent ? What if you are in an emergency situation? Your tent burned down or was stolen by aliens. Or you wandered away from your group and got lost in the woods? Your overnight shelter could be a Quinzhee (or Quinzee...or Quinzy) which is kind of a snow cave. ("I'd like you to meet my cold weather friend, Quinzy")

If you happen to find yourself in this situation-and I hope you never do- and you have a shovel or something similar (like skis or big hands?) but you have no tent, you can do this if there is a lot of snow around. The temperature is ideally around -10°C but of course you have no control over that. Pile loose snow in a big mound around 10ft. wide and about 6ft. high . Do not crush it down or compact it. Let the snow settle for about an hour or two so it has less chance of collapsing. Then start digging from a side that is sheltered from the wind, in toward the center, keeping approximately 1ft. of snow above you. Make a small hole in the foot of snow that is the "roof" above you, for ventilation and put a tarp on the ground which is now your floor. If you can, sleep on top of something that will insulate you from the cold ground. Cedar boughs will do in a pinch . If you have a candle or candle lantern, it can provide you with some warmth and it can also act as a warning if carbon monoxide or carbon dioxide starts to build up inside your shelter . If the candle starts to sputter or it goes out, check that your ventilation hole in the roof is clear and wide enough, and stick your head outside to get some fresh air.

Depending on the weather outside you may want to build a snow wall near the large hole or entrance which you dug into the mound .You might do this while the main pile of snow is settling. Do not place this wall too close to your entrance because you want enough fresh air getting in . The wall would just be there to break any cold winds that may be coming your way . I know that all this sounds like a lot of

work and it is. It will also keep you warm while you work and, once finished, will help you survive in some measure of comfort while you wait out the cold night.

An alternative "Quinzhee" construction is to use a tarp if you have one, and/or cedar boughs to create a "lean-to " which can provide you with shelter from the wind and you can use extra cedar to sleep on. Lean the cedar boughs and/or some sticks, angled against a large tree or cliff. Create a wind-break with cedar boughs and/or a tarp against the angled sticks. Put down more cedar boughs or anything else that will insulate you against the cold ground. Pile up snow around your shelter. Believe it or not, snow, especially loose packed snow, which has lots of air pockets, can provide you with some insulation and help keep you warmer.