

COLD-WEATHER CAMPING

The Boy Scouts of America defines cold weather camping as any camping that takes place when the high temperature of the day is 50° F or below and is or could be involved with cold, wet, or windy conditions. Troop 220 and the Boy Scouts of America camps in all types of weather. Every Scout and Scouter needs to learn how to cold weather camp.

No camping is quite as challenging or exhilarating as that done in cold weather. The most important single point about cold weather camping is that the cold is not as bad as it seems. Your attitude about the cold has a greater effect on your enjoyment of camping than does the weather. Thus, cold weather is no excuse for not camping. In fact, succeeding at cold weather camping can be a source of great personal satisfaction. Cold can be unpleasant and may provide a good excuse for quitting, but a major hurdle is overcome once you learn to handle the cold and decide that it need not interfere with the fun of camping.

Let me tell you some simple rules to keeping warm and having a good time.

- Good hygiene.
- A good, healthy appetite.
- Dry clothing that is in layers.
- Staying active.

Let's look at some details now.

C O L D

C - Keep yourself and your clothes **CLEAN**. Dirt and body oils which build up on clothing destroy its insulating properties. Clean clothes will keep you warmer longer than dirty clothes.

O – Avoid **OVERHEATING**. Clothing is designed to be taken off or added to in layers to maintain an even body heat.

L – Wear clothes **LOOSE** and in **LAYERS**. Several layers of medium-weight clothing provide more insulation and flexibility than one heavy garment of equal thickness.

D – Keep **DRY**. Wet clothing removes body heat 240 times faster than it will dissipate through dry clothing. Wet is trouble.

WHAT KEEPS YOU WARM? It is you. Your body produces all the heat you need and uses your blood to move the heat around. This heat is made by the food you eat and being active. Food is the fuel that keeps your body warm. In the cold, your body burns up more food in order to keep warm. It's a good idea to carry a snack and drink plenty of water. Your clothing is designed to hold in the heat you need to feel comfortable. You will notice all your clothing is loose. That is because tight clothing constricts the flow of blood so the body heat cannot move around. That is why tight boots mean cold feet and tight belt means cold legs.

CLOTHING: You need to dress in layers. The ideal clothes for cold weather camping should be made out of wool, synthetics (polypropylene, polyester, polyester/rayon blend, thermax, polarfleece, hollofil, quallofil, or thinsulate), or synthetic/wool blends. Cotton is not used during winter camping. Once cotton is wet it loses all insulating value. Even cotton/wool blends are of questionable value during cold weather camping.

- 1st layer: These are your long-johns. Wear a wicking (polypropylene or similar material) type so that moisture from your body will be wicked away. You need two pairs. One for the daytime and one to sleep in.
- 2nd layer: This is your shirt and pants. Some common fabric is wool or polarfleece.
- 3rd layer: This should be wind resistant and water proof (nylons for example). Be careful, plastic raincoats, even though they are water/wind resistant, will make you sweat. The idea is to stay dry.
- Socks: Wear a wicking sock next to your foot. The next sock is your insulating sock. Your insulating sock can be wool or wool blends. If it is really cold out (below freezing), you may want a vapor barrier (such as a bread sack or large plastic bag). The vapor barrier goes between your wicking sock and the insulating sock. You will also want extra insulating socks to sleep in.
- Boots: Your boots should be large enough so that you can wear at least two pairs of socks but snug enough so that you won't develop blisters. They should also be waterproof. If not waterproof, you might want to wear the vapor barrier to keep your feet dry. Remember, your feet may sweat with the plastic bag on so bring extra socks to keep your feet dry. Foam insoles will also help keep your feet warm. Tennis shoes do not work well in cold weather camping.
- Gloves: Mittens are better than gloves. Once again the use of wool is ideal. You can also use thinsulate, leather over-mitts or wind and waterproof mitts. Also, a wicking glove first then followed by your outer mitten is ideal. Bring extra mittens/gloves in case they get wet or to sleep in.
- Neck: The use of a scarf or neck gaiter will add more protection from the cold.

- Headgear: Stocking caps with or without face mask are recommended. Bring an extra one to sleep in.

VENTILATION/TEMPERATURE: This indicates how much of the layering system you will need. In warmer situations, only part of the system may be needed. In extreme cold, the entire system may be used. To regulate the amount of heat, yet not get overheated and wet with perspiration, adjustments can be made to the layers of clothing. You can loosen up the waist, the cuffs and the neck opening, allowing more heat to escape. You can also remove or add a layer of clothing to help regulate your body temperature. It is better to be a little cool than extremely hot.

SLEEPING SYSTEM: Essentially, you are sleeping in several layers of insulation with an additional layer underneath you to insulate you from the cold ground.

- Sleeping pads: These are essential for insulating the body from the cold ground. They come in three types: (1) closed cell foam; (2) open cell foam, used with a closed cell pad; (3) insulated air mattress or therma rest style pad. The closed cell foam of 3/8 to 1/2 inches thick, offers the most insulation overall.
- Sleeping bags: These can be synthetic or down. A hooded sleeping bag will keep you warmer than one without. If your sleeping bag does not have a hood, then you can wear a hooded top to sleep in.
- Inner bag: This is a light weight three-quarter bag or bag liner, that is used inside your main sleeping bag to increase the insulation. These bags are usually made out of a synthetic material. You can also stuff one sleeping bag into another one. If you use a down bag in combination with other sleeping bags, always make sure it is the bag closest to your body. The reason is because the warm air leaving your body is moist. As it cools, it loses its ability to hold moisture, and the moisture condenses. Since down is porous, it absorbs this moisture; synthetics, being less porous, let the moisture pass more readily. Down, even though a good insulator, once it is wet, it has no insulating value.
- Sleeping attire: You will want socks, long-johns, gloves, and a stocking cap. Other clothing items normally worn for protection during the day can also be used at night. Make sure that you and all the clothes are dry and clean before getting into your sleeping bag.
- Food: Before you go to sleep, make sure that you have built the fires up in your body. Eat foods that are high in fat, such as peanut butter or chocolate. Drink plenty of fluids, such as water or gatoraid. If you wake up during the night, have a snack and a drink.

A WORD ABOUT FIRES. Nowhere in the winter clothing or sleeping systems will you find any provision for fire to provide body heat. Fire is useful for cooking food, making hot chocolate, and for its cheerful glow. Extreme care must be taken around an open fire not to get too close with synthetic fiber garments which can shrivel or melt just from reflected heat.

Chemical heaters (hand/foot warmers): These provide only temporary heat. They are not designed to provide heat for long periods. It is important that a Scout learns how to keep oneself warm and comfortable in the winter time with proper clothes and food. Troop 220 does not recommend or even allow the use of chemical heaters.

A NOTE TO THE PARENTS: As a parent, I understand that the above items can be costly. If you do not have many of the items that I have talked about, do not hesitate to borrow them from other Scouters, friends or family members. This is also the best time to purchase such items as most stores are cutting their prices to remove inventory and getting ready for spring. I cannot stress the importance of making sure that your Scout is properly prepared for cold weather camping. A Scout not properly prepared for cold weather camping can experience a range of complications; from being cold and miserable to hypothermia and frostbite. Winter camping can be the best camping experience that a Scout can ever have. The air is clean, the starry night sky is bright, and his experiences will provide a lifetime of values.

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