



MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT WINTER CAMPING

Myth #1: Leather hiking boots will keep your feet warm. -- FALSE

The snug fit of most leather hiking boots can limit the circulation of blood in the foot, especially when wearing thick socks. Overboots cut generously enough to hold your foot and shoe are much more effective. The cloth stitching in leather boots can also wick moisture into the shoe. Nothing is worse than wet feet in cold winter conditions.

Myth #2: Waterproof clothing is ideal for cold weather camping. -- FALSE

To keep warm in the cold, your clothing must allow body moisture to escape. Moisture that is trapped too close to the body can wick heat away through evaporation. It is better to layer your clothing on in cold weather. Wool, Gortex, and polypropylene garments work nicely in the cold. Always wear insulated underwear.

Myth #3: Winter camping does not require much preparation. – FALSE

Arctic conditions exist when the wind is blowing and the temperature drops below 20 degrees F. There are only seven states in the U.S. that do not experience arctic weather. Colorado is not one of them. It is very important to prepare and even over prepare. No one has ever complained about being too warm or having too many dry clothes on a winter campout.

Myth #4: Mental attitude has little to do with winter camping. – FALSE

A positive mental attitude is the most important ingredient in the success of cold weather camping trips. The demands of winter will drain your energy and you'll have to rely on yourself to keep your spirits high.

Myth #5: In cold weather, tasks can be done just as quickly as in warm weather. – FALSE

Every effort in cold weather takes longer to complete. Be sure to bring some winter patience with you when you camp in the cold.

CONSERVING BODY HEAT - THE PRIME OBJECTIVE

There are three ways to lose body heat. Keeping them in mind will help you be much more aware of what you are, or could be, doing to keep your body warm.

RADIATION

The emission of body heat, especially from the skin areas exposed to the elements. A good set of gloves, hat, and scarf can help the most in keeping bare skin to a minimum.

CONDUCTION

The absorption of cold by the body when sitting or laying on cold ground, or handling cold objects such as metal cooking utensils and metal canteens. This is why a decent sleeping pad is required for cold weather camping. The same goes for wearing gloves. A camp stool is a must on a winter camping trip. Try not to sit on the ground.

CONVECTION

The loss of body heat due to wind blowing across unprotected body parts. This situation can also be reduced by keeping bare skin covered with hats, scarves, and gloves. It is important to keep exposure to a minimum, ESPECIALLY in a windy situation. Convection heat loss can reduce body heat the fastest. Wet clothing will accelerate this process, making staying dry even more important.

PROPER PREPARATION PREVENTS PROBLEMS

Time should be spent preparing for the rigors of winter camping. The Boy Scout Handbook, the Boy Scout Fieldbook, and the Internet (Google “winter camping”) provide a wealth of information about winter camping. Below is some great information adapted from the article “Winter Camping” by Brian J. Murrey, found at www.macscouter.com.

OTHER CONCERNS

Tent Placement

Whenever possible, place your tent in a location that will catch the sunrise in the morning. This will aid in melting off any ice and evaporating any frost or dew that may have formed during the night. This will also warm your tent as you awaken in the morning. Cold air sinks. Try to place your campsite on slightly higher ground than the rest of your surroundings. Try to choose a protected site if it is snowing or the wind is blowing.

Water Consumption in Cold Weather

Dehydration can seriously impair the body's ability to produce heat. Drink fluids as often as possible during the day and keep a water bottle or canteen with you at night.

Cooking In Cold Weather

Cooking in cold weather will take about twice as long as normal. Always use a lid on any pots that you are cooking in. This will help to hold in the heat and decrease the overall heating time.

Make sure you start hot cleaning water before you start cooking. The pots and utensils must still be cleaned. Try to keep your menu to good one-pot meals. Things like stews, chili, and hot beans stick to your ribs, lessen the cleaning time, and provide good sources of energy and fuel for your internal furnace. A good high-calorie snack before bedtime will also keep you warm all night. Stay away from an overabundance of sugar - cheese is a good high-calorie bedtime snack.

Sleeping Tip

Do not sleep with your mouth and nose in your sleeping bag. The moisture of your breath will condense in the bag, and cause it to become wet and ineffective as an insulator.

Buddy System

Buddies can help each other pack for an outing, look after one another in the woods, and watch for symptoms of frostbite, hypothermia, and exhaustion.

Checklist

Make a checklist of everything you need before you start to pack. Then check each item off as you pack it. This way you will not forget anything.

KEEPING WARM

Keeping warm is the most important part of cold weather camping. Use the C-O-L-D method to assure staying warm.

C = Clean

Since insulation is only effective when heat is trapped by dead air spaces, keep your insulating layers clean and fluffy. Dirt, grime, and perspiration can mat down those air spaces and reduce the warmth of a garment.

O = Overheating

Avoid overheating by adjusting the layers of your clothing to meet the outside temperature and the exertions of your activities. Excessive sweating can dampen your garments and cause chilling later on.

L = Loose Layers

A steady flow of warm blood is essential to keep all parts of your body heated. Wear several loosely fitting layers of clothing and footwear that will allow maximum insulation without impeding your circulation.

D = Dry

Damp clothing and skin can cause your body to cool quickly, possibly leading to frostbite and hypothermia. Keep dry by avoiding cotton clothes that absorb moisture. Always brush away snow that is on your clothes before you enter a heated area. Keep the clothing around your neck loosened so that body heat and moisture can escape instead of soaking several layers of clothing.

CLOTHING

Footwear

As with other clothing, the layer system is also the answer for foot wear. Start with a pair of thin synthetic or wool socks next to your skin. Then layer on a pair of heavier synthetic or wool socks. When and if your feet become damp, change into another pair of dry socks at the first opportunity. Boots with liners (Sorels, etc.) offer the best cold and weather protection. No tennis shoes!

Mittens and Gloves

Mittens allow your fingers to be in direct contact with each other. They will keep your hands warmer than regular gloves that cover each finger. There are many good choices these days for mittens and gloves. Since it can be guaranteed that your mittens or gloves will get wet, bring several extra pairs.

Headgear

The stocking hat is the warmest thing you can cover your head with in cold weather. Get one that is large enough to pull down over your ears. Also, ski masks are great in the winter and can help in keeping your neck and face warm as well. Noses and ears can be very easily frostbitten, so make sure your headgear covers these sensitive areas. Remember, a significant amount of body heat can be lost through an uncovered head.

Parka and/or Overcoat

Your coat or parka is the most important piece of your winter clothing. It needs to be large enough to fit over extra clothing without cutting off blood flow, and allow ventilation to keep moisture away from your body. A large permanently attached hood will prevent heat loss around your head and neck, and prevent snow from falling down your back.

Sleepwear

Never should you sleep in the same clothes that you have worn all day. They are damp and will cause you to chill. This could cause frostbite and hypothermia. It is advised that you bring an extra pair of thermal underwear to sleep in. Do not wear them during the day - this will keep them the driest. You can also wear a pair of synthetic or wool socks. Always sleep with a stocking hat on your head. Your sleeping bag needs to be winter rated. You can also use two sleeping bags together (as long as they aren't too tight around your body) or use a fleece liner. A sleeping pad is also required to insulate you from the cold ground. A layer or two of high density foam works well. In cold weather camping you never want to sleep on an air mattress or off the ground in a cot. The air under you will cool you off in no time and this would create a threatening situation.

HAVE FUN!

This article presents some ideas for preparing for Klondike weather. As stated earlier, there are many resources available with information on winter camping. Make use of them and come prepared. Every year, tens of thousands of Scouts go winter camping. Although the threat of danger is always present in a winter camp, planning and knowledge can overcome this. It is very important that Scouts come prepared. Make sure you are ready, and most of all, SAFE.