Winter Camping

Leadership Planning:

* Teach youth the potential dangers of cold-weather camping.
* Show youth how to dress in the winter using the standards of wick, wind, and warmth.
* Explain how food is essential to keeping warm.
* Teach the essentials of cooking when it is cold.

**Planning for Winter Camping**

Most of this information can be found in the Boy Scout Handbook. If you are going to be doing a lot of outdoor activities, this book is an invaluable source of know-how and advice.

**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, especially from the skin areas exposed to the elements. A good set of gloves, hat, and scarf can help best in keeping bare skin to a minimum.

Conduction - The absorption of cold by the body when sitting or lying on cold ground or handling cold objects such as metal cooking utensils and metal canteens. Therefore, 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.

**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

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. 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 #1. 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.

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.

- 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 footgear 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 silk, nylon, or thin wool socks next to your skin. Then layer on several pairs of heavier wool socks.

- 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

- 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 a scarf can be an invaluable item to have.

- 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 allowing ventilation to keep moisture away from your body. A large permanently attached hood will prevent heat loss around your head and neck.

- 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 a thick pair of sweats and thermal underwear to sleep in. Keep the thermals and sweats for sleeping in only. Do not wear them during the day; this will keep them the driest. Also, be sure to have a couple of layers of wool or heavy thick cotton socks on as well. Always sleep with a stocking hat on your head. Your sleeping bag needs to be a winter rated bag, typically rated down to 20 degrees. It is also a very good idea to have sleeping mat to use in the winter, such as Thermal Rest or a piece of high-density rubber foam at least one inch thick. 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. If you don't have a sleeping mat, bring a spare wool or natural fiber blanket to use as a ground pad under your sleeping bag. The sleeping mat is worth its weight in gold.

**Have fun!**

Every year, tens of thousands of boys will 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 the Scouts come prepared. If a Scout feels that at this time winter camping is not for him, then he should not go. There is always next year and the year after and so on. If a Scout comes to camp and I do not feel that he is prepared, I will have to ask him to stay behind. Make sure you are ready, and most of all, SAFE.

Resources:

Boy Scout Handbook

Troop Program Features for Troop, Teams, and Crews A Guide for Program Planning, Volume 3

Field book