

The MacScouter -- Scouting Resources Online

Winter Camping & Hypothermia

Rules and Instructions for Keeping Warm in the Sack

By Chris Haggerty

1. **REMEMBER:** The sleeping bag doesn't heat you, you heat it. So use this rule, "Thickness is warmth", to keep this heat. If you're cold, add some more insulations (blankets, clothes, more newspaper).
2. **DO NOT SLEEP IN BOTTOM OF BAG:** Your breath contains water. If you close your bag with your head inside, then this water sticks to the bag. Wear a hat to keep your head warm.
3. **CHANGE CLOTHES:** *NEVER* sleep in wet clothes. Even perspiration will chill you at night.
4. **EAT A CANDY BAR:** This increases your metabolism (moves your blood faster) and it helps keep you warm.
5. **GO TO THE BATHROOM BEFORE BED:** This saves you a middle of the night trip in the cold.
6. **DO NOT DRY "WET" CLOTHES IN BAG:** Moisture will travel from wet clothes to sleeping bag.
7. **PUT TOMORROW'S CLOTHES UNDER BAG:** This heats up clothes for tomorrow's cold morning and also provides more insulation.
8. **FLUFF UP YOUR BAG:** Always fluff up bag before using to create the thickness important in keeping warm.
9. **MOST IMPORTANT, KEEP IT DRY:** Keep all your sleeping gear dry and follow these rules, and winter camp should prove to be a rewarding experience.

IMPORTANT STUFF TO KEEP IN MIND

1. Clothing does not make you warm; it is your body processes that keep you warm. Clothing merely provides the insulation to preserve your warmth.
2. Layered thickness is warmth.
3. Keep your torso warm so that it can send heat to the extremities.
4. Avoid sweating by ventilation.
5. Keep rain and wind out of your insulation.
6. Use your head. Keep it covered when you're cold; remove cap as you warm up to avoid sweating.
7. Strain one muscle against another to maintain metabolism.
8. Wool clothing is best but needs wind protection, synthetics are next best. Down is OK as long as it stays dry, cotton is a poor choice.
9. If your feet are cold, put a hat on.
10. Remember the word "COLD" -

Keep your clothing - Clean.
Avoid ----- Overheating

Wear clothing ----- Loose

Keep it ----- Dry

RECOMMENDED CLOTHING FOR TWO DAY WINTER CAMP

in addition or in substitution to what you would normally bring to camp, bring:

- 2 shirts (wool,best, or flannel)
- 2 pairs wool or synthetic pants (Strongly recommend against cotton pants like jeans. They absorb moisture like a sponge).
- Fishnet, thermal or polypropaline underwear
- Boots (WATERPROOFED)
- 2 pairs of heavy socks (wool recommended)
- 2 pairs lighter socks (polypropaline is best)
- Windbreaker (as is or part of heavier jacket)
- Balaclavia or stocking cap (wool is best)
- Parka or heavy jacket
- Mittens, (WOOL, gloves not recommended except as extra pair)
- Extra shoes

It is always best to stay dry when camping in the snow, but you can expect to get wet and should be prepared. Boots or other shoes which are not waterproof will normally start getting the feet wet and cold after less than 15 minutes in the snow (depending on temperature, the colder it is, the longer the feet stay dry). Low top shoes will not keep the snow out of the shoes. Gaiters can be made from plastic bags and a strong tape like duck tape. Do not cover the bottom of you shoes with plastic, doing so will cause you to lose almost all of your traction (and you will fall down!).

Unless your parents are planning to buy some of the items on this list anyway, do not run out and start spending lots of money on cloths and equipment. If all your pants are jeans, for example, bring three or four pairs and change frequently. If you are in doubt or have questions, call one of the troop leaders for advice.

I edited some of the last comments, we do not have much need for wool pants here in Southern Arizona (unless we go up in the mountains, which is not that often, unless you are skier, in which case you already have what you need).

When taking my hot weather troops up into the snow I used the above and I made sure to plan the activities which makes snow camping fun. I am refering to sledding (in one form or another), games like capture the flag (try in a foot or more of snow in a hilly area-use a wash for no-man's land-its great fun). Snow ball fights, etc. These activities lead to one of my favorite quotes about Winter Camping (I am of course refering to the messy Winter Weather I grew up with in Detroit) is: If you are NOT WET, you are not having FUN. So be sure everyone has plenty of extra dry clothing and go have fun in the snow!

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The MacScouter Scouting Resources Online web site is provided by
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