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## Snow camping (page 2): Options for shelters in the snowy wilderness

By **KAREN SYKES** **BIO**

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Three strong people can construct a cave in three to four hours with two people shoveling and another getting rid of the snow that is shoveled out. On a steep slope, the person getting rid of the snow throws it down slope. On a flat area, a tarp can be used to haul it away.

If conditions are poor, construction can take longer. Allow extra time for glitches such as digging into an unexpected obstacle like a rock or a tree and having to start over.

The snow cave may collapse during construction, but relax, snow caves are unlikely to collapse once they have "set up."

My husband, John, begins a cave by digging a slot (or trench) into the slope to a point where he's created a wall about 4 to 5 feet tall. He then establishes the cave floor level about 1-1/2 to 2 feet above the bottom of the trench.

At this point he cuts out a large snow block wide enough to span the trench by 6 inches on each side; this snow block is set aside and saved. The trench is continued into the wall another 2 to 3 feet, taking care not to destroy the ledge created by removal of the snow block.

The cave is then dug in the shape of a small igloo hollowed out of the snow. With the snow block replaced in the opening over the trench, your cave is complete. It is necessary to crawl under the snow block and up to the floor level -- this ensures there is no wind blowing in.

A small vent is punched through the ceiling and should be 12 to 18 inches thick. There are important finishing touches: Pointed areas on the ceiling will drip so the surface needs to be smoothed.



**An igloo takes longer** to build, requires more skill and you are more exposed to the weather during the construction process. We recommend igloo building on a clear, crisp day. The snow has to be of the right consistency to cut snow blocks. You can't work with dry snow. The ideal size for the blocks is about 12 by 18 by 6 inches.

The igloo is constructed in a spiral -- the first tier rising at a slant so the second tier will spiral upward. Bevel the top of each tier inward -- if the top of the tier is horizontal you'll end up with a vertical wall of snow. This is where an engineering instinct comes in handy. The final block must have an opening for ventilation and chinks must be caulked.

Also make sure you smooth down any drip points.

In the morning collapse igloos and snow caves by stamping them in so unsuspecting skiers won't fall into them. Once snow has set up, it's like concrete.

Having participated in and instructed many winter camping courses, my preference is the snow cave. It is easier and can be built under more variable conditions than the igloo. Always carry a tent as a backup shelter in case you run out of light before you have finished your structure.



**If you merely want** to experience camping in the snow without the hard work, you may prefer a tent. A tent is faster and easier to set up but it may be hard to stake out in the snow: Use snow stakes, or ice axes -- regular tent stakes will pull out of the snow.

Pack down a tent platform with snowshoes before you begin and pack the platform again by foot before putting up the tent.

Ensure adequate ventilation -- snow will accumulate on the tent during a storm and you may have to get up during the night to shake it off. Keep in mind a tent is colder than a snow cave -- the temperature inside a snow cave is about 32 degrees.