

Guide to Safe Scouting

XIII - Winter Activities

Winter Camping Safety

There is magic to camping in winter. It is one of the most advanced and challenging of outdoor adventures. Special considerations for winter camping include the following:

1. Leadership.

In no other camp is the type of leadership as important as in the winter camp. It is vital that a leader be an experienced camper with a strong character.

2. Equipment.

Do not attempt to camp unless completely outfitted. Even if equipment for winter camp is more expensive than for summer camp, Scouts must be adequately clothed, and leaders should ensure that blankets and other equipment are of suitable quality and weight.

3. Physical Condition.

A physician's certificate as to physical ability must be obtained by each Scout before preliminary training begins.



Tips for your next winter camping trip:

1. Use the buddy system for winter outings. Buddies can check each other for frostbite, make sure no one becomes lost, and boost the morale of the entire group.
2. Plan to cover no more than five miles per day on a winter trek on snowshoes. An experienced group can cover 10 to 12 miles on cross-country skis.
3. Always allow ample time to make camp in winter, especially if you plan to build snow shelters.
4. Fatigue encourages accidents. Rest occasionally when building a snow shelter; taking part in cross-country skiing or snowshoeing; or participating in other active winter sports. Periodic rests also help avoid overheating.
5. Pulling a load over the snow on a sled or toboggan is generally easier than carrying it in a backpack.
6. Snow is a terrific insulator. Snow shelters are much warmer than tents because they retain heat and keep out the cold wind. If you have adequate time for building snow shelters, you will spend a much more comfortable night sleeping in them than in a tent.
7. Snow is the greatest thief in winter, swallowing up small dropped items. Tie or tape a piece of brightly colored cord to small items so they can be seen in snow. Some items, such as mittens, can be tied to larger items, such as a parka, to prevent them from being dropped and lost.
8. Melting snow in a pot to get water may cause the pot to burn through or may scorch the snow, giving the water a disagreeable taste. Prevent this by adding a cup or two of water in the bottom of the pot before putting in the snow to melt.
9. Punch a hole in the top of your ice chisel and string a stout cord through it. Before trying to chisel a hole in ice, anchor the cord to something large or too heavy to be pulled through the hole so you will not lose your chisel in freezing water when the ice is penetrated.

10. Always test the thickness of ice before venturing any distance from the shore. Ice should be at least 3 inches thick for a small group; 4 inches of ice is safe for a crowd. Since ice thickness can vary considerably, it is best to stay near the shoreline of large lakes.
11. Use alkaline batteries in flashlights. Standard batteries deteriorate quickly in cold weather. Tape the switch of your flashlight in the "off" position until you are ready to use it. This will prevent it from being turned on accidentally while in your pack or on your sled.
12. Encourage everyone in your group to wear brightly colored outer clothing so that each person will be more visible, especially during severe weather.
13. Small liquid-fuel stoves are much better for cooking in winter than fires, which are difficult to build with wet wood. Gathering wood that is frozen to the ground also can be difficult, if not impossible. A pressure/pump-type stove is essential in winter.
14. Always use a funnel to refuel a stove so you won't frostbite your fingers by accidentally pouring fuel on them. Fuel evaporates at a high rate of speed and quickly removes heat from anything it touches.
15. Place a stove or fire on a platform of logs or rocks so it will not melt through the snow.
16. Never light or use a stove inside a tent or snow shelter. A tent may catch fire, and vapors in a snow shelter may lead to carbon monoxide poisoning. Neither of these potential mishaps is worth the risk.
17. A windscreen is essential for using a stove in the winter. Even a slight breeze will direct the heat away from its intended mark.

References: *Okpik: Cold Weather Camping*, *Boy Scout Handbook*, *Scoutmaster Handbook*, and *Camping Sparklers*

Winter Sports Safety

Beyond camping, a number of cold-weather activities present challenges to the Scout and leader, such as cross-country skiing, ice skating, sledding, snowmobiling, ice fishing, and snowshoeing. Essential ingredients for fun include skill training and an awareness of the hazards unique to these activities. Snow conditions, hazardous terrain, special clothing needs, and emergency survival are important issues for a safe and successful experience.

Be sure your winter outdoor activity always follows these guidelines:

1. All winter activities must be supervised by mature and conscientious adults (at least one of whom must be age 21 or older) who understand and knowingly accept responsibility for the well-being and safety of the youth in their care, who are experienced and qualified in the particular skills and equipment involved in the activity, and who are committed to compliance with the seven points of BSA Winter Sports Safety. Direct supervision should be maintained at all times by two or more adults when Scouts are "in the field." The appropriate number of supervisors will increase depending on the number of participants, the type of activity, and environmental conditions.
2. Winter sports activities embody intrinsic hazards that vary from sport to sport. Participants should be aware of the potential hazards of any winter sport before engaging in it. Leaders should emphasize preventing accidents through adherence to safety measures and proper technique.
3. Suitable clothing for the activity and environment should be worn at all times, and equipment should include gloves and helmets when appropriate.
4. Winter sports activities often place greater demands on a participant's cardiopulmonary system, and people with underlying medical conditions (especially if the heart or lungs are involved) should not participate without medical consultation and direction. For participants without underlying medical conditions, the annual health history and physical examination by a licensed health-care practitioner every three years are sufficient. The adult leader should be familiar with the physical circumstances of each youth participant and make appropriate adjustments in the activity or protection as warranted by individual health or physical conditions. Adults participating in strenuous outdoor winter activity



should have an annual physical examination. It is recommended that the medical assessment be performed by a licensed health-care practitioner knowledgeable of the sport and the particular physical demands the activity will place on the individual.

5. For winter sports such as skiing, snowboarding, snowmobiling, etc. that utilize specialized equipment, it is essential that all equipment fit and function properly.
6. When youth are engaging in downhill activities such as sledding, tobogganing, or snow tubing, minimize the likelihood of collision with immobile obstacles. Use only designated areas where rocks, tree stumps, and other potential obstacles have been identified and marked, cleared away, shielded, or buffered in some way.
7. All participants should know, understand, and respect the rules and procedures for safe winter activity. The applicable rules should be presented and learned before the outing, and all participants should review them just before the activity begins. When Scouts know and understand the reasons for the rules, they will observe them. When fairly and impartially applied, rules do not interfere with fun. Rules for safety, plus common sense and good judgment, keep the fun from being interrupted by tragedy.

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