



Troop 315 Cold Weather Camping Guide

"One has to lie deep in the snow to learn how warm and protective it is. A den in the snow confines the body heat like a blanket or overcoat. It is a snug place, no matter how the wind may howl. One who holes up in the snow understands better the mysteries of the woods in winter. He knows why the severe weather grouse squirm their way under soft snow and be quiet. He understands why the deer bury themselves in drifts, lying a half-day or more with just their heads sticking out. He learns something of the comfort of the bear in hibernation." William O. Douglas, 1950

This guide provides useful information to help you better prepare for Troop campouts during the cold weather months.

The information has been gathered from multiple sources including the Boy Scout Fieldbook.

Cold Weather Camping True or False

- ✦ Leather hiking boots will keep your feet warm – FALSE! The snug fit of the boot can limit circulation of blood in the feet, especially if you are wearing extra sock layers.
- ✦ Waterproof clothing is best for staying warm – FALSE! To keep you warm, your clothing must allow body moisture to escape. Moisture trapped close to the body wicks away heat through conduction and evaporation. Waterproof clothing is preferable only in wet or rainy weather.
- ✦ An open fire is the best way to keep warm – FALSE! If the heat of a fire warms you while you are wearing winter clothing, the insulation effectiveness of the clothing may be suspect. Clothing that protects you from the cold will also shield you from the heat of a fire. Wearing proper clothing, eating plenty of energy rich foods and drinking large quantities of water are the best ways to stay warm.
- ✦ Having a positive mental attitude has little to do with staying warm and having fun on a cold weather campout – FALSE! Having a positive mental attitude is probably the most important ingredient to maintaining your spirits and warmth.
- ✦ You don't need to drink water on a cold weather campout – FALSE! Cold air is very dry and it draws moisture out of your body every time you breathe. Winter temperatures may make you think you are not thirsty, even though your body needs water to ward off dehydration which can lead to hypothermia. Most people need 2-3 quarts of water each day.

Cold Weather Clothing and Gear

Use the following acronym to help you prepare your clothing for a cold weather campout.

C – Clean

Insulation is effective when heat is trapped by the dead air spaces created by your clothing. Keep your insulating layers clean and fluffy. Dirt, grime, and perspiration mat down the air spaces and reduce the insulating ability of your clothing.

O – Overheating

Avoid overheating by adjusting your layers to meet the outside temperature and your level of activity. Excessive sweating can dampen your clothing and cause chilling later in the day as your activity levels or temperatures drop.

L – Loose layers

A steady flow of blood is essential to keep all parts of your body warm. Wearing loosely fitting layers of clothing and footwear will allow maximum insulation and not impede your circulation.

D – Dry

Damp clothing and skin can cause your body to cool quickly in cold weather. Keep dry by avoiding cotton clothing (it absorbs moisture), brushing snow from your clothing before it melts, and loosening the clothing around your neck and chest to serve as a vent and prevent overheating. Body heat can drive perspiration through many layers of clothing so unless it is wet (snow, sleet, rain) don't wear waterproof clothing.

Boots

Your footwear should match the weather conditions and terrain of our campouts and must be able to keep your feet warm. Your boots keep your feet warm just like your clothes do, by trapping heat in dead air spaces. To do this your boots must not be tight fitting – you should be able to wiggle your toes with no problems – with the socks you plan to wear on. Again, layering is the key to warm feet. Start with a sock liner of wool, silk, polypropylene, etc. and add wool or wool blend or a heavy synthetic sock over top. *Cotton socks are not recommended since they hold moisture.* Many types of winter boots are available (at reasonable prices) depending on your preference, from Wal-Mart, Dick's, Tractor Supply, etc.

Headgear

Stocking hats are great for this time of year. A balaclava, a stocking hat that covers your head and neck leaving only your eyes exposed, is even better for the coldest of temperatures. Hoods on jackets also add to the effectiveness of your hat of choice. However, none of these will work if they are not worn! If your feet get cold, put a hat on.

Coat or Parka

Your coat should be big enough able to cover layers of clothing without restricting movement. This will help the air between the layers circulate to move moisture away from your body.

Coveralls or Snow Pants

Wearing an added insulating outer layer will greatly increase your warmth and help you stay dry. Again, the ability to wear these over layers of clothing is important. If you choose snow pants, bib overall construction helps keep the wind and cold off of your lower back.

Underwear

Establishing a good *base layer* is important. Polypropylene, wool, or other synthetic blends provide a good base layer. These materials will help wick moisture away from the skin. If possible, avoid cotton because it holds moisture and does not have any insulating value when wet.

Pants & Shirts

There are many sources for pants and shirts that work well for cold weather camping, especially those that carry military surplus clothing.

Shirts – Wool works very well here as do sweatshirts, flannel shirts, etc. Layering is the key to warmth.

Pants – Wool pants work very well as they insulate well and resist moisture. Jeans alone may become damp and cold. Wearing them under coveralls, bibs, or another form of outer layer is suggested. There are also several kinds of pants lined with flannel or fleece which give extra layers of protection.

Socks

Wool, wool blends and heavier synthetic socks are the best. Sock liners are also recommended to help move moisture away from the feet. Pack several pairs, more than you think you will need. Cotton socks are not recommended since they hold moisture.

Gloves or Mittens

Mittens are warmer than gloves but harder to work in. If you can, having both is the best answer. In either case they should be insulated and not overly tight. Remember gloves and mittens work by

trapping heat in the dead air spaces created inside them. If they are too tight, your hands will get cold. Thin cotton or unlined leather gloves will not handle the cold of a January campout.

Sleeping Gear

Sleeping bag – A mummy bag will be warmer than a rectangular bag, simply because of the amount of space the body must heat. A bag rated to 20 or 0 degrees, or lower, is suggested. Added warmth can be gained by placing a fleece bag liner or blanket(s) inside the bag. You can also nest two bags together to gain additional warmth. If you have a rectangular bag using a blanket around your shoulders will also block cold air from getting down inside the bag. If possible lay out your sleeping bag to dry in the morning as it will collect some moisture through the night. Do not sleep with your head inside your sleeping bag. All of the moisture you exhale will be absorbed by your bag causing it to be less effective at keeping you warm. Another hint is to throw in a couple of hand warmers. These will help heat the air in the bag keeping you warmer. Also, your sleeping bag's insulation needs to be "fluffy" to work. Fluff your bag when you get it out and never store your sleeping bag in its stuff sack between campouts.

Sleeping pad – It is essential to insulate yourself from the cold ground. A good rule of thumb is to have 2-3 times the insulation under you as you have on top of you. A closed cell foam pad works well and does not absorb moisture. Foam rubber insulates well but will absorb moisture. Wrapping the foam in a tarp will help resist the absorption of moisture. Wool blankets, etc may also be placed under your sleeping bag to increase your insulation from the cold ground. Another alternative is a self inflating pad made by Therm-a-Rest or Slumberjack or other manufacturer. *An air mattress will not provide the necessary layer of insulation.* Several products are available from Wal-Mart, Dick's, etc. If you do not have a ground cloth under your tent, be sure to place a tarp or piece of plastic under your sleeping pad to keep moisture from getting to your ground pad or sleeping bag.

Sleeping Clothing

NEVER wear anything to bed that you have worn during the day!!! This is to ensure you go to bed as dry as possible and do not chill during the night, and that you start the next day dry as well. Choose sleeping clothes that are comfortable and that will not be too warm. You do not want to sweat inside your sleeping bag. Wear a stocking hat (a dry one, not the one you wore all day) to keep your head warm and to help maintain body heat. Your head is an often-forgotten source of lost body heat. In the morning, change into your clothes for the next day. If possible hang your sleeping clothes up to let any perspiration dry and then put your sleeping clothes inside your sleeping bag.

Other Tips

- ✦ All of the warm clothes you bring with you on a campout will not keep you warm if they are not worn.
- ✦ Flames in tents are *not* allowed. Candles, sterno fuel, and other items are strictly prohibited. These provide little heat and are extremely dangerous. There are many safer ways to keep warm.
- ✦ Chemical hand, foot and sleeping bag warmers are handy to have in the event you get really cold. Be sure to follow directions and dispose of properly.
- ✦ Do not warm your hands over a steaming pot of water. Two things happen 1) the pores in your hands open allowing them to dehydrate more quickly (making them colder when you put your gloves back on) and 2) your clothes may become damp from the steam. You also may find yourself with hot water all over you if the pot gets tipped over.
- ✦ If your feet seem to always get cold while you sleep, try wearing socks or covering the end of your sleeping bag with your jacket, or a trash bag. Just remember to remove the trash bag in the morning to let your bag dry.
- ✦ Do not fully close the windows in your tent at night. This will allow your tent to "breathe" letting all of the moist air you exhale escape rather than forming frost on the inside of the tent and on your gear.

- ✦ Pack your clothes in zip lock bags. It is easier to pack each day's clothes in one zip lock than to sort through one for socks, one for underwear, etc. This will help keep your clothing together and keep it dry. Do not pack clothes that have just been taken out of the dryer. Even though they are "dry" there is likely some moisture still in them and if not they are warm and will cause condensation inside the zip lock if taken outdoors in cold weather.
- ✦ Drink plenty of water. Dehydration greatly accelerates the body's cooling process which will make you colder.
- ✦ Before going to bed, go to the bathroom. It takes energy to keep that liquid warm....energy you could be using to stay warm. For the same reason, if you wake up in the night and need to go, GO! Remember to close your bag when you get out so it retains as much heat as possible.
- ✦ If you use a Nalgene water bottle, fill it with warm water and put it in your sleeping bag with you. This will act as a warmer and if you wake up in the night cold, a drink may be just what you need to get warm.
- ✦ Plan menus that are rich in complex carbohydrates (potatoes, rice, pasta). These are good longer term energy sources. Avoid fats and sugars as they are quick sources of energy but can lead to a sugar low leaving you cold.
- ✦ Carry an extra trash bag or two for use as a poncho or storing gear in to keep it dry or to put over the end of your sleeping bag to help keep your feet warm.
- ✦ If your hands get cold your armpits are effective hand warmers.
- ✦ Know the signs of hypothermia and frostbite and how to treat them.
- ✦ *Use the buddy system. If your buddy is having problems find an adult immediately. We would rather be able to help you before the problem gets big, harder to solve, and potentially dangerous to someone's health.*

"There's no such thing as bad weather – only bad equipment."

THE FAMILY CIRCUS

By **Bil Kear**



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and
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"I have to go in. My mom thinks I'm cold."