

Ways to Keep Warm At Night

BY IAN MITCHELL

Well Scouter Rod, you'll be pleased to know that I have put to good use the things you taught me about winter camping. You see, my brother has ventured to northern Alberta where he has just finished his first winter camping trip.

In preparation for the adventure, and since he had never been a Scout or Venturer in his younger years, he called looking for advice on keeping warm at night. As I passed on the small tidbits of knowledge I was able to recall from the many winter experiences I had in our troop I decided that they may well be useful to others campers; after all, along with good food, being warm at night always ensured that my camping trips were enjoyable.

So, here are my self-prescribed secrets to keeping warm at night in wintry temperatures. I have no scientific evidence to back up my theories, only first hand knowledge that comes from experience. None are very expensive or complicated and yet when combined they will keep you "as snug as a bug in a rug".

1. Insulate Underneath You

The ground is cold and so you will lose body heat if you are in contact with it. You should have three times more (in insulating value) under you than you have on top. Make sure you never come in direct contact with the ground. Stay on a foam pad or closed-cell self-inflating pad. You can also use blankets, piles of newspaper, small evergreen tree boughs or a piece of carpet to help insulate underneath you. **Do not use a blow-up air mattress in cold weather.** Air mattresses only increase the amount of air that you need to heat up in order to stay warm.

Cooking In Cold Weather

Cooking in cold weather usually takes about twice as long as normal. Always use a lid on any pots that you are cooking in as this will help to keep in the heat and decrease the overall heating time. Be sure to start hot cleaning water before you start eating; the pots and utensils must still be cleaned. Try to keep your menu to tasty one-pot meals. Things like stews, chili, and hot beans tick to your ribs, lessen the cleaning time, and provide good sources of energy and fuel for your internal furnace.

2. A Sleeping Bag Doesn't heat You; You Heat It

So the rule is: "**Thickness is warmth.**" If you're cold, add some more insulation (blankets, clothes, more newspaper).

3. Fluff Up Your Bag

Always fluff up your sleeping bag before using to create the thickness that is important in keeping you warm. Be sure to unroll the bag several minutes before crawling in.

4. Do Not Sleep with Your Head in the Sleeping Bag!

Your breath contains moisture (small drops of water). If you close your bag, with your head inside, the bag will get wet and you will be cold.

5. Wear a Ski Hat to Bed

The established fact is that body heat is lost through exposed skin. Wool, fleece, or acrylic hats are best. A full face hat works well for those who don't get that closed in feeling when wearing one.

6. Change Clothes

Never sleep in wet clothes or clothes that you have worn during the day. Even perspiration will chill you at night. Wear a layer of dry underwear, loose pants, wool or wooly dry socks, and a fleece or hooded sweatshirt. No cotton!! Cotton clothing holds water and will make you cold. Cotton sweats are just like the name implies: they absorb your body moisture and trap it next to your skin (making you cold). Cotton is fine for hot weather, but it can make you very uncomfortable in cold weather.

7. Ventilate Your Tent

Leave the back or top flaps of your tent open about 10 cm. This will allow the moisture from your breath to escape out of the tent and not collect on the sides. Closing the tent up will not keep it warmer.

8. Eat Before Bedding Down

A high calorie food (nuts, cheese, etc.) before you go to bed will increase your metabolism (moves your blood faster), helping keep you warm. Your stomach is your furnace and will generate heat while you sleep. Before going into the tent, drink some warm cider or hot instant cocoa to hydrate you and give you some carbohydrates for your inner furnace. **NO FOOD IN THE TENT, THOUGH.** Critters still prowl for food in winter.

9. Go to the Bathroom Before Bed

This saves you a trip in the middle of the night, keeping the heat in your sleeping bag. However, if you wake up in the night with a full bladder, get up and empty it. You waste body heat keeping a full bladder warm.

10. Put Tomorrow's Dry Clothes Under Your Bag

This heats up clothes for tomorrow's cold morning and also provides more insulation. These articles should remain in plastic until you are ready to wear them.

11. Keep It Dry

Keep all your sleeping gear dry. Unzip your bag during the day and let it air out. This reduces the moisture in your bag. Keep your sleeping clothes separate and do not wear them during the day. By night they should be dry and you should change into them from the clothes that you wore during the day. Pack all clothes in zippered bags. Put your sleeping clothes together in one and store it in your sleeping bag until used, then lay them out to dry before repacking.

12. Drink Water

Dehydration can seriously impair the body's ability to produce heat. Drink fluids as often as possible during the day and keep a small water bottle or canteen with you at night.

Other Concerns

Tent Placement.

Whenever possible, place your tent in a location that will catch the sunrise in the morning. This will help to melt off any ice and evaporate any frost or dew that may have formed during the night. The sun will also warm your tent as you awaken in the morning. Remember, cold air sinks. Try to place your campsite on slightly higher ground than the rest of your surroundings and choose a protected site if it is snowing or the wind is blowing.

You'll find many other winter camping tips in Chapter 8 of the *Fieldbook for Canadian Scouting*. If you have other tried and true hints or tips for winter camping forward them to us for sharing another time. X

— Ian Mitchell is the national Director of Program for Scouts, Venturers and Rovers.

Misconceptions About Winter Camping

Myth #1: Leather hiking boots will keep your feet warm. — FALSE

The snug fit of most leather hiking boots can limit the circulation of blood in the foot, (especially with thick socks on). Overboots cut generously enough to hold your foot and shoe are much more effective. The cloth stitching in leather boots can also wick moisture into the shoe. Nothing is worse than wet feet in cold winter.

Myth #2: Waterproof clothing is ideal for cold weather camping. — FALSE

To keep warm in the cold, your clothing must allow body moisture to escape. Moisture that is trapped too close to the body can wick heat away through evaporation. It is better to layer your clothing in cold weather. Wool, Gore-Tex™, and polypropylene garments work nicely in the cold. Always wear insulated underwear.

Myth #3: Winter camping does not require much preparation. — FALSE

Arctic conditions exist when the wind is blowing and the temperature drops below -7 degrees C. It is very important to prepare and even over prepare. I've never heard anyone complain about being too warm or having too many dry clothes on a winter campout.

Myth #4: Mental attitude has little to do with winter camping. — FALSE

A positive mental attitude is the most important ingredient in the success of cold weather camping trips. The demands of winter will drain your energy and you'll have to rely on yourself to keep your spirits high.

Myth #5: In cold weather, tasks can be done just as quickly as in warm weather. — FALSE

Every effort in cold weather takes longer to complete. Be sure to bring some winter patience with you when you camp in the cold.

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