

# Laacke & Joys

## WINTER CAMPING CLINIC

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### ADVANTAGES:

- \* Campsites are less crowded, greater opportunity for solitude.
- \* No bugs!
- \* Traveling over snow in some areas can be easier than in summer.
- \* Using a sled to carry lots of gear is easier than backpacking it.
- \* Cold weather lets you bring more fresh food requiring refrigeration.

### Getting Started:

- \* Get experience camping in more temperate weather first.
- \* Ease in gradually by camping in late fall or early spring.
- \* Check the weather forecast. Avoid extreme cold snaps and storms.
- \* Make sure your vehicle is winterized.
- \* Have an easy bail-out for your first winter camping experience.

### Concerns:

- \* Staying warm & dry/ avoiding hypothermia and frostbite
- \* Staying hydrated/ your water needs may double or triple
- \* Dangers of traveling on snow & ice in the mountains (avalanche, glacier crevasse, etc.)
- \* Keeping your liquids from turning into solids

### Clothing:

- \* Dress in layers (3 "W's") – NO COTTON!
  - 1st layer – "wicking", synthetic long underwear next to skin
  - 2nd layer – "warmth", insulation layer (fleece, down, etc.)
  - 3rd layer – "windproof/waterproof" outer shell layer (preferably breathable)
- \* Remember your head, hands, and feet. Use the same layering strategy.
  - Head – balaclava/mask, fleece hat, hood
  - Hands – liner gloves, fleece or wool gloves, shell mitts
  - Feet – polypro liner, wool or fleece socks, boots
- \* Use gaiters to keep snow out of your boots and to keep lower legs dry.
- \* All zippers should have large zipper pulls that can be used with mittens or gloves.
- \* Be prepared to add or remove layers to prevent excessive sweating, or to keep from getting chilled.

### Shelters:

- \* Lots of options: 4-season nylon tents, canvas wall tents, single-wall tipi-style tents, snow shelters (bring a shovel)
- \* Fiberglass poles are prone to break in cold weather.
- \* You will need to anchor your tent with "deadmen" instead of stakes.
- \* Winds are generally stronger in winter; you will need to choose a site that is protected from wind and anchor your tent well.

### Sleeping:

- \* Get a good cold weather bag rated to 0 degrees or colder.
- \* Use a full-length sleeping pad under your bag that insulates well.
- \* Eat before going to bed – you need fuel to stay warm.
- \* Use a hot water bottle to warm your bag (boiling water in a lexan Nalgene bottle).
- \* Remove all your clothing from the day and put on dry clothes to sleep.
- \* Dress to sleep warm, but not so warm that you will sweat.
- \* Put your boots in a plastic bag and into the bottom of your sleeping bag to stay warm (or bring chemical hand warmers to warm your boots in the morning.)
- \* Use a pee bottle to avoid having to go out in the cold at night.

### Cooking/Food:

- \* You will need to consume more calories than normal to stay warm.
- \* Snack often.
- \* You will need more fuel for your stove in winter than in summer for melting snow and boiling water (8 oz white gas/person/day).
- \* Your stove needs to work well in below freezing temps (liquid fuel stoves typically work better than canister-type stoves)
- \* Set your stove on something hard or it will melt down through the snow (shovel blade, license plate, stove base, piece of plywood)
- \* Use a windscreen to improve fuel efficiency of your stove.
- \* Bring fire starter and/or pre-formed fire logs.
- \* Have lots of simple, easy to prepare foods ready to eat.
- \* Serve a lot of warm foods (oatmeal, hot cocoa, soup, stew, etc)
- \* Eat a variety of foods that provide carbohydrates, fats, and proteins.
- \* Cut your cheese, meats, and butter into smaller chunks before leaving home in case they freeze solid during the trip.

### Water:

- \* You will need to stay well hydrated- winter air is very dry.
- \* Bring a tool for breaking through the ice to reach liquid water.
- \* Use a lid when melting snow (& MSR Heat Exchanger) for fuel efficiency
- \* Put a second pot on top of the lid of the pot in which you are melting snow to begin melting more snow.
- \* Bring melted snow to a boil and you will not need to purify further.
- \* Store wide-mouth water bottles upside down buried in the snow to prevent freezing.
- \* Use insulated water bottle covers/ store water bottles in your tent.
- \* Bring a vacuum bottle to keep water hot for later drinks/soup.

### Light:

- \* It gets dark early in winter; you will need to provide lots of light.
- \* Warm batteries work better than cold ones.
- \* Lithium batteries work better in the cold than alkaline.
- \* LED lights save on batteries.
- \* Candle and liquid fuel lanterns work better than batteries and give off heat as well.
- \* Headlamps give you good hands-free lighting.

### Travel:

- \* You will carry more weight than a comparable summer trip.
- \* Use snowshoes, skis, sleds, and trekking/ski poles for travel.
- \* May need crampons and ice ax for travel in the mountains/ on glaciers.

#### Waste:

- \* Pack it in. Pack it out! ("Leave No Trace" ethics)
- \* A pee bottle can really save your butt!
- \* Think ahead of time about how you will handle solid waste. Check with land managers or park rangers for any specific regulations.

#### Personal Care, First Aid, and Safety:

- \* Look out for the "umbles." Hypothermia causes people to stumble, fumble, mumble, and grumble.
- \* Watch the other members of your party for signs of mild hypothermia.
- \* Use baby wipes and waterless hand sanitizers in addition to hot water hand washing. Avoid passing germs especially in food.
- \* Don't forget sunglasses, sunscreen, and lip balm. Sunburn, windburn, and snow blindness can be problems in winter.
- \* Take a wilderness first aid course and be prepared to handle emergencies.
- \* Take a mountaineering course to learn about avalanche safety and glacier travel if camping in the mountains.

#### References:

- \* "AMC Guide to Winter Camping" by Stephen Gorman. 1991.  
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- \* "Backpacker Magazine – Winter Hiking & Camping" by Michael Lanza.  
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- \* "Mountaineering – The Freedom of the Hills" 7th Edition. 2003.  
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- \* "NOLS Winter Camping" by Buck Tilton and John Gookin. 2005.  
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