

SPORTS

Clothing key to snow camping



INTO THE OUTDOORS

BY JAYSON JACOBY

Two of the most popular winter pursuits in Oregon's Cascade mountains are cross-country skiing and snowshoe hiking.

But most people make their trips on skis or snowshoes one-day affairs, opting to spend only the daylight hours out in the snowbound forest and leaving the overnight camping to the summer months when it's dry and warm.

It is kind of a pity, really. Some of the best trips can be made even more memorable by traveling deep into the wilderness with proper equipment and adequate preparation to enjoy a comfortable night under winter stars.

It's an experience that can't be matched by any summer-time excursion when the only real danger to be avoided is mosquitoes.

Surprisingly, camping in the snow isn't open to experts only. With sufficient equipment and preparation, anyone who can spend the night in the forest during the warmer months can do the same during the winter.

The most important — and absolutely necessary — requirement for snow camping is clothing. While even a beginner can have a great time in the snowy woods, serious cold weather gear is a must. If you don't have it or can't get it, don't go.

The most important dressing tip to remember for cold weather is never to bulk, but rather to layer clothing. The best way to stay warm is to create several layers of air between your skin and the outside air. This means wearing several lighter garments

instead of one bulky one. Layering also offers the advantage of removing one or more garments when you start sweating on the way to your camping destination.

The basics start with a good pair of long underwear. The various blends of cotton and synthetic polypropylene are a good choice, as they draw sweat away from the skin to keep the camper drier and warmer. Goose-down underwear is available, too, but it is both more expensive and more bulky than the blends.

Next, I like to wear a good cotton flannel shirt, either lined or unlined. Again, the advantages here are the ability to wick away moisture and the light weight.

After the cotton shirt, there are many choices for a covering layer. One essential requirement, though, is the ability to repel water and wind. Although in recent years there have been many advances in outdoor clothing such as waterproof fabrics like Gore-tex and new insulators such as Thinsulate, I still think shirts, sweaters and coats made of plain old wool are the best.

Again, layering is important. It is better, for example, to wear a wool sweater and a light-weight wool jacket than to wear one heavy wool coat. Wool fabric comes in many forms, some of which repel water as well as the more modern versions. Nothing can beat wool for wind protection and overall warmth.

For pants, the best choices again are either wool or one of the newer fabrics. Never wear cotton pants such as Levi's. Once they get wet, they'll probably never get dry without an electric dryer.

One point many people forget is to keep the head and extremities warm. Nearly three-

quarters of heat is lost through the head — even more when it's windy and raining or snowing. And cold hands and feet draw heat away from the body's core, which is the first stage of hypothermia, the dangerous lowering of body temperature and the biggest killer in the wilderness.

Wool is the best defense here, and hats, socks and gloves made from wool and polypropylene offer the best of both worlds — warmth from wool and the ability of the synthetic to draw away sweat.

In addition to clothing, a good all-weather tent and a sleeping bag rated for sub-freezing temperatures are both prerequisites for snow camping.

While the equipment may help save a life in the event of an emergency, the best way to make sure such an event doesn't happen is to be prepared. And this is where the real novices are separated from the prepared novices.

It is quite possible for someone with no snow-camping experience to safely enjoy the experience. But without BOTH the right equipment and preparation, it can also be a deadly one.

Next week I'll write about a good trip for the first-time snow camper.

Jayson Jacoby is a sports reporter for the Emerald.

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