



Nothing is of major importance to the winter hiker. A good selection of boots, socks, hat, gloves, wool sweater and pants can mean the difference of a warm, dry trip and a cold, wet one.

Photo by Kelly Laughlin

Pack common sense for cold weather

Don Ives
The Print
Winter hiking can be a very pleasant and memorable experience. With the falling of the snow comes beauty and description. A worn summer trail suddenly becomes a shining white carpet winding through a winter forest wonderland. A cold logging road, pitted for use, is transformed into a paved highway for both snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. A backcountry snow trip often has a calming effect that can hardly be believed in the tenseness of a team society.

Unfortunately, winter has its risks along with its pleasures. Snow often becomes a great sugar coating for a bad trip pill.

The inexperienced winter hiker should always be prepared for an emergency and know the skills necessary for basic survival before venturing into snow country.

The first and foremost rule of

hiking, whether in snow or not, is to "never go alone." Besides the fact that it's nice to have company, there are other reasons for this rule. If one hiker should suddenly become sick or injured, there is a much better chance of survival if he has a reliable companion to come to his aid. It is often easier to detect signs of hypothermia when traveling in a group, since early symptoms, drowsiness, and slurred speech, are often recognized more easily by others.

It is also important to notify outsiders of the trip, even if it is just a one-day outing. Leave a marked map and trip schedule. Many lives have been lost simply because the search party had no idea of where to look.

The second rule to remember when hiking in cold weather is to "wear adequate clothing." Wool is best. Although down filling is warmer, it is practically useless when wet. For those who are allergic to wool, dacron (a synthetic material) is equally good.

Even though both wool and dacron are warm when wet, it is best to stay as dry as possible. Warm, dry clothing is a must in cold weather. It is the best preventor of both hypothermia and frostbite that a person can have. In the case of frostbite, warm boots and mittens are essential. Because up to 80 percent of the body's heat is lost through the head area, a good knit wool cap can be invaluable in cold weather.

Although the average person can go for as long as a month without food and still not show any ill effects, most people prefer to eat at more regular intervals. In cold weather food is of major importance, because it has the amazing ability of warming the body from the inside out. For a short day hike, high energy snack foods are best. Dried fruits, granola, nuts and candy are some examples of good trail foods.

It is important to mention another physical need that is sometimes neglected. All too often, in cold weather, people tend to abstain from water as if it were a plague. When hiking or doing any kind of physical exertion, however, the body loses a generous amount of this liquid. Failure to drink in cold weather may result in stomach or muscle cramps, and could result in more disastrous affects. If there is no water available, do not eat snow. It will lower the core temperature of the

body and may lead to hypothermia. Always melt snow and drink it in liquid form.

The winter hiker should always carry a light survival pack which includes matches, a first aid kit, extra food and possibly extra clothing. He should also carry a map and compass and know how to use them because, remember, a well marked summer trail may

be totally obscured in snow conditions.

Finally, the most important piece of survival equipment that a hiker can carry is common sense. It costs nothing and takes up no extra space in a pack, but it can save a life. In panic, a person can run two hours, walk two hours, crawl an hour, and then from exhaustion lie down for eternity.

Cold brings peril for unwary hikers

One of the greatest dangers facing the outdoor recreationist in Oregon this winter is hypothermia, a condition in which the body loses more heat than it can produce.

Factors that involve hypothermia are: the temperature of the air, the wind chill factor and wetness. Air is a fairly good insulating material, but once clothing gets wet, the body very quickly loses heat.

"If you are to prevent hypothermia there are some things you must do," said Kevin Day, College nurse. "Anticipate the weather. Have several layers of clothing on. One of these should be wool, because when wool is wet it still acts as an insulator. Layering also allows you to vary sweating," Day said. "Another

thing is to realize that it doesn't have to snow or be freezing, the wet factor will do you in every time," he said.

Day also recommends that a person stop if you feel tired, weak, confused or shivering. Stop, build a fire or a shelter. The worst thing you could do is to keep moving.

Don't go alone, Day added. "With someone else you can share warmth and keep an eye on each other. Also make sure that someone knows where you are going and when you will be back."

"In this country one is especially vulnerable," said Day, "The weather changes so fast, and the woods are close to the city so a lot of inexperienced people get injured."

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