



In this Dec. 13, 2009, file photo, a cloud forms over Mount Hood as seen from Government Camp, Oregon. The opportunity to experience the region’s dramatic landscapes dusted in winter white, often with no other people around, more than makes up for any minor discomforts while winter camping.

Tips for camping in the winter

By CAITLIN MORAN
The Seattle Times

SEATTLE — My first winter camping experience was a bit of an anomaly. Yes, I slept on snow, but it was an unseasonably warm February weekend near Mount Hood, with blue skies during the day and overnight temperatures that barely dipped below freezing. What’s more, my camping partners and I somehow managed to find enough dry, downed wood to build a robust fire that lasted until well after the sun went down.

Not every winter adventure since then has been as pleasant. There have been outings with single-digit temperatures, an overnight with several feet of fresh snowfall — and zero campfires. But the opportunity to experience our region’s dramatic landscapes dusted in winter white, often with no other people around, has more than made up for any minor discomforts.

Doug Terry, a Poulsbo resident who has taught winter travel and snow camping with the Kitsap branch of The Mountaineers since 2002, says solitude is the main thing that motivates him to venture out in the Olympics and Cascades throughout the winter.

“You’re out there by yourself, things are really quiet ... it’s pretty surreal,” he says.

Try Deadhorse Creek

Mount Rainier National Park; 2.5 miles round trip, 400 feet of elevation gain
Find the trailhead at the northwest end of the lower parking lot at Paradise. Overnight permits and food-storage containers required.

If you’re a regular summer backpacker, there’s no need to put your hobby on hold for half of the year. Here’s what you need to know to stay safe, dry and (mostly) warm.

Start small

Although snow camping draws on many of the same skills and knowledge as regular backpacking (don’t forget the 10 Essentials), venturing out for an overnight in the winter comes with some added challenges. Navigation, nutrition and hydration, and regulating your body temperature all become more complicated in the snow.

Start small by picking a destination that’s easy to reach and has plenty of flat, protected terrain for pitching a tent. Snowshoeing or skiing with a heavy pack uses up more energy than summer backpacking, so scale back your mileage considerably from what you’re used to during the warmer months.

Terry recommends staying

within a few miles of the car for your first outing, in case something goes wrong. He typically takes newbies to destinations near Mount Rainier’s Paradise visitor center, such as Glacier Vista or Deadhorse Creek Basin.

And, unless you’ve had the proper avalanche training, stick to trips with mellow terrain. Terry tells his students to avoid slopes that are steeper than 35 degrees and also teaches them to look for hazards such as tree wells, and moats that can form around large rocks during melting periods.

Get your gear in order

Assuming you’re not climbing to the top of Mount Rainier on your first winter outing, you can bypass the expensive four-season tent. A solid three-season backpacking tent is able to withstand typical winter conditions in beginner-friendly destinations around the Northwest. The setup process has a few extra steps, however: for the most comfort and stability, begin by stomping out a platform in the snow, bury your stakes “dead-man” style, and use guy lines in windy conditions.

Rather than a new tent, if you’re going to invest in one piece of gear for winter camping, make it a new sleeping pad. Your body loses heat rapidly when it’s lying on snow, and the more insulation you create, the better.

When selecting a sleeping pad, pay close attention to the R-value, a unit that refers to the level of thermal resistance. Terry recommends a pad with an R-value of 5 or higher, although some people pair a less-robust inflatable with a lightweight foam pad, which can also serve as a backup if the inflatable pad punctures.

A solid sleeping bag is another crucial piece of gear when camping on snow. Keep in mind that temperature ratings are subjective, and, to be on the safe side, you’ll want to choose a bag that’s rated 10 or so degrees below the lowest temperatures you expect to encounter. Make sure it’s cut to fit close to your body and has a hood that will cinch down around your face.

Still waking up cold? Try stuffing an empty backpack or extra clothing underneath your pad, or heat up a thermos of hot water before bedtime and keep it in your sleeping bag. Creature comforts such as down slippers and hand warmers can go a long way in making cold temperatures more tolerable.

Of course, all that extra gear adds up to a lot of weight. Terry advises his students to cut out ounces by sharing items such as stoves and tents — which has a dual benefit.

“When you’re looking at keeping warm, that second body really helps

out and might raise the temperature up 5 degrees,” he said.

Watch your water supply

So you’ve set up camp — now what? In order to get water for drinking and cooking, you’ll need to melt snow and then either boil it or filter the cold meltwater to remove pathogens. This process can take a while, so don’t wait until you’re already hungry to get started.

It’s an ongoing debate whether canister or liquid-gas stoves are a better choice for winter camping; whichever system you choose, bring plenty of fuel for melting snow. Prevent liquids from freezing by keeping them in your sleeping bag or using an extra pair of socks to insulate bottles and canisters.

The work of melting snow will be less cumbersome if you take the time to dig out a bench, table and “kitchen” countertop. A lightweight tarp is an extra bit of luxury that provides shelter from the elements and makes it easier to stay up and socialize when temperatures drop at night.

Finally, don’t forget about the principles of “Leave No Trace.” Be prepared to pack out all of your garbage and solid waste, and use a shovel to cover up whatever snow you dug out for camp. This way, the next person will be able to enjoy the same sense of solitude and pristine wilderness that you encountered.

Urban coyotes become research project

By ERIC MORTENSON
EO Media Group

PORTLAND — Coyotes are a fairly common sight in rural areas of the Pacific Northwest and Northern California, and landowners might instinctively reach for the rifle if they see one in the pasture or sniffing around the barn.

Put a coyote in a city, however, and residents are more likely to react in a way that ranges from trying to feed them to panicking over their pets and children. Coyotes sometimes lose their heads as well, becoming so habituated to people and urban environments that they trot down streets in broad daylight and snack on garbage or the occasional cat.

Many cities, Portland among them, now are home to thriving coyote populations. Researchers in Chicago a few years ago estimated Cook County there had 1,500 to 2,000 coyotes.

Zuriel Rasmussen, a student at Portland State University, is trying to learn more about how coyotes and humans coexist in cities. Rasmussen is a researcher and director of the Portland Urban Coyote Project, which maps coyote sightings and provides information in collaboration with the Audubon Society of Portland.

Rasmussen is pursuing a Ph.D in Earth, Environment and Society, a program



A photo taken in November 2015 shows a coyote exploring a Portland neighborhood in broad daylight.

offered through PSU’s Geography Department. She’s interested in science communication and public engagement, and the coyote project offers opportunities for both.

She comes at it from a rural perspective. She lived in Weston, near Pendleton in Eastern Oregon, until she was 12. Coyotes were part of the landscape there, and she was startled the first time she saw one in Portland.

“I was one of those East Oregonians surprised to see a coyote,” she said. “I thought

it was pretty cool. I was fascinated with how they were living in the city and how that’s even possible.”

The possible now is commonplace. Residents of the Portland metro area have reported 1,916 coyote sightings to Rasmussen’s project website just this year. Coyote calls keep USDA’s APHIS Wildlife Services hopping as well: From 2012 through 2015, officers responded to an average of 373 coyote “conflict” complaints in Clackamas County, which borders Port-

land, and killed an average of 30 a year, according to statistics provided by Kevin Christensen, of the Wildlife Services office in Portland.

Wildlife Services responded to an average of 222 coyote conflicts a year in Washington County, on Portland’s westside, and killed an average of 15 a year during the same time frame. Wildlife Services does not have a cooperative service agreement with Multnomah County, which covers most of Portland, but killed three coyotes that were acting

aggressively toward people and pets.

“One of the big things I’ve found is that the impact coyotes have on your life bears a lot on your attitude,” she said. In rural areas, they’ve been vilified — along with wolves — as something that threatens people’s livelihoods, particularly with livestock, she said.

In cities, they’re not seen as a threat to the way people make a living. Instead, they are “a glimpse of the wild in an urban environment, which is a different experience than seeing a coyote near your sheep pasture.”

Analysis of urban coyote scat shows their diet is primarily rats, mice, squirrels and rabbits, “pretty similar to a rural coyote,” Rasmussen said. They eat more garbage than their rural cousins, and about 1 to 2 percent of their diet is cats.

Part of her work involves advising city residents what to do when they see a coyote. She said urban coyotes can become habituated to humans, and people should “retrain” them to be wary. She recommends “hazing” them by yelling, using an air horn, shaking a coffee can full of rocks or other methods. People obviously shouldn’t feed coyotes, either directly or by leaving pet food or garbage accessible, and should keep a close eye on pets, she said.

“When they get used to being around people, those are the coyotes that cause problems,” she said.

SKI REPORT

Spout Springs Tollgate
CLOSED FOR SEASON

Anthony Lakes North Powder
New snow: 3”
Base depth: 34”
Conditions: Good snowfall all week, but early season conditions in place.

Ski Bluewood Dayton, Wash.
New snow: 7”
Base depth: 40”
Conditions: More than 2 feet of snow this week. Open daily, except Christmas, through Jan. 2

Ski Fergi Enterprise
New snow: 7”
Base depth: 25”
Conditions: Early season, but good coverage. Improvements made to lift and ski area for this season
Open daily Christmas weekend through Jan. 2.

Mt. Hood Meadows Government, Camp, Ore.
New snow: 10”
Base depth: 75”
Conditions: Early-season obstacles, but steady snowfall has created packed powder and good coverage.