

Dear Scouting Parents:

Here are a few tips on winter camping to keep in mind when your son is preparing for camping trips this winter. For many people, the thought of winter camping brings up images of being cold, uncomfortable and miserable. With a small amount of preparation and the right equipment, your son will learn how to be comfortable, content and happy in his winter surroundings. He will also have the satisfaction that comes from learning the techniques for successful winter camping.

Clothing

The clothing for winter camping doesn't need to be expensive and it is not difficult to obtain but it is NOT clothing that most people wear routinely. Don't assume your new scout would have what he needs among his normal school and play clothes. Clothing that has the right characteristics for winter camping generally comes from two sources; outdoor sporting stores such as EMS, REI, LL Bean, Campmor , etc. or from military surplus stores. The former can be expensive but on-line stores such as campmor.com have reduced price sales and closeouts frequently which are a good deal if you plan ahead. Military surplus can be purchased at local stores and also on-line (e.g. Sportsmansguide, CheaperThanDirt, Barre Army-Navy Store, etc.) but again, you will need to plan ahead to find what you need.

The biggest difference between winter camping clothing and that which we routinely wear is the use of cotton. Cotton fibers become saturated when wet and lose all insulating properties. This makes COTTON NO GOOD for winter camping. Perspiration is one of the main ways that we get wet when exercising in cold weather. If a scout is wearing a cotton tee shirt and cotton briefs, he will quickly be wet and soon thereafter cold. Polypropylene underwear and socks are available at department stores including places like Target and Wal-Mart and this type of material has moisture wicking properties which move the moisture away from the skin where it can evaporate rather than be absorbed into the clothing. Look for trade names like CoolMax and others which are often in the athletic department.

Wool is the traditional material for cold weather as it retains its insulating properties even when wet. It is as good as any man-made fiber. Consequently, there are a lot of clothing items made of wool available thru military surplus. Use of poly underwear will usually prevent any itching from wearing wool next to the skin.

If you think about how much of our clothing is cotton these days (jeans, sweat shirts, cotton fleece, etc.), you can see the challenge in avoiding cotton and finding suitable clothing for camping. Jeans are the worst. When they become wet, they will be cold, impossible to dry, and frozen solid the next morning.

Layering clothing is important as each layer traps air which creates insulation. In addition, layering allows us to add or take away layers to maintain body heat without sweating and getting wet. The layers are as follows:

- Layer 1- Polypropylene long underwear
- Layer 2- Synthetic Fiber Pile or wool shirt
- Layer 3- jacket liner or fiber fleece
- Layer 4- Water resistant Parka Shell (Gore-Tex is the best)

The layering approach described above is much better than bringing a heavy Parka which would make a scout too hot while exercising and hiking.

Hat and mitts are essential and glove liners help provide a surprising amount of warmth when mitts must be removed for tasks requiring fingers.

Remember, it's all about staying warm and comfortable. It is not a fashion event. I would encourage you to purchase clothing for this purpose, keep it separate from his other clothing in a marked laundry bag (otherwise expensive CoolMax socks look much like cotton socks, at a glance, and disappear before the next trip). In addition, this clothing will receive some hard wear (stains, ash and smoke are common around the campfire). Go thru his clothing each fall and order replacements for those items he has outgrown. It can be frustrating to find he has nothing that fits the week before a winter trip.