

WINTER CAMPING

December 2007

Now that the summer is over, our camping will be done in colder wetter weather. Here are a few suggestions that may help our scouts be better prepared for the winter camping. Listed are both state-of-the-art materials and their alternatives. The high-tech stuff works well, but is expensive. Most scouts are still growing, so I do not recommend spending a lot of money for clothing that will not fit them next year. Sleeping bags, backpacks, tents, etc. will last for many years. Quality in these items will be rewarded in the long run.

Camping equipment comes in a large variety of types and materials. I'll start with some comments on the various types and how they are suited for winter camping.

CLOTHING

The Norwegians have a saying, "There is no bad weather, just poor clothing."

"COTTON is COLD." It offers minimal warmth, absorbs and retains water. It is fine for summer weather, but **it is not a good choice in cold damp weather**. Cotton jeans and a sweatshirt are probably the worst choices for winter camping.

A **wool/synthetic** blend is much warmer than cotton even when wet, launders easily, wears well, may be easier to find, and less expensive than 100% wool and doesn't scratch as much.

Wool retains warmth even when wet, wears well, will stretch as the boys grow, and is less expensive than some synthetics. I look for wool camping sweaters, hats, gloves etc. at yard sales.

Polypropylene is the new hi-tech synthetic. It may be slightly warmer than wool, even when wet. Wicks moisture away from the skin (dry is warmer), is light, soft – and can be found for a fairly inexpensive price, especially in the larger discount chains.

RAIN GEAR

Plastic ponchos/rain coats shed water, collect perspiration on the inside (which makes you wet anyway) and tears easily. They are **not** recommended unless you want a disposable garment.

Coated nylon performs like plastic, but is more durable and a little more expensive. A nylon rain jacket with ventilation across the chest and/or back to help remove condensation is very good and doesn't have to be too expensive. This is what I recommend.

Gore-Tex and similar breathable waterproof fabrics are good but expensive. I question whether it is really worth the added expense. It certainly is not economical if the scout is still growing.

SLEEPING BAGS

Mummy bags are warmer and lighter than rectangular bags. They are more confining too, but that's usually not a problem for boys. Mummy and rectangular bags are about the same price.

Cotton stuffing is really not worth considering. It's too cold, damp, heavy and bulky. Cotton is an indoor sleeping bag.

Synthetic fibers are light, compressible, warm even when wet, last a long time, and are available in all price

ranges. The longer the fiber strands the warmer and more expensive it is. There are many brands of synthetic fiber. The latest and greatest brands change all the time. Ask a dealer to compare them. The price difference between bags using the same fiber is in the cut of the bag and any special features that it may have.

Down is used as the benchmark for measuring warmth. It is the warmest, lightest, most compressible, and most expensive of all fillings. But, it is worthless when wet. Goose down is warmer than duck down.

I recommend a synthetic mummy bag rated in the 15-25 degree range. With sleeping bags, you usually get what you pay for. The discount chains have lower prices and lower quality. That said, don't rule them out. A Tenderfoot scout will probably have "trashed" his first sleeping bag, regardless of quality, before he takes it to collage.

Gain current market knowledge from specialty camping stores such as REI, Hudson Trails, EMS, and Casual Adventure, to name a few local ones.

Make sure to store your bag unrolled (hung from a hook or in a closet is fine) or in a large porous airy bag (e.g., laundry bag). This lets it dry and prolongs the life of the insulation.

Sleeping bags stuff sacks should be used to protect the bag and keep it dry when camping. Place the bag inside a heavy-duty trash bag then place the trash bag into a nylon or cloth stuff sack. The trash bag will keep the sleeping bag dry and the outer bag (stuff sack) will protect the plastic from rips and snags. Wet sleeping bags are NOT much fun. For longer than weekend camping trips, add a second nylon bag. This second bag goes inside the plastic bag to protect the plastic from punchers, i.e. sleeping bag goes inside a nylon bag, which goes inside a plastic bag, which goes inside another nylon bag. This ensures 100% waterproofing.

SLEEPING PADS

Sleeping pads are NECESSARY in cold weather to prevent the loss of heat through convection to the ground. The bottom of a sleeping bag is compressed when you lay on it and loses most of its insulating dead air space. Even a down bag will get cold on the bottom.

Air mattresses are comfortable in the summer (not the winter). They offer no insulation and can be colder than no pad at all. Plastic beach rafts are for the beach.

Open cell foam pads are soft, warm, and bulky, and act like sponges when they get wet. They are okay for winter camping, but usually for much colder temperature than we get around here. Their disadvantage is their bulk and the fact that they absorb moisture at night. They also can be heavy.

Closed cell foam pads are warm, give some padding, do not absorb water, are lightweight, and inexpensive. They should be about 3/8" thick to do the job and last a long time.

Self-inflating air mattresses (with foam inside) offer comfort and warmth and compress into a small package. They are also more expensive. They come in all thicknesses, lengths and weights. Three-quarter lengths are good for backpacking. Over 2" in thickness is a luxury.

TENTS

There is a large range in tent quality, size, weight, style, and price. They are too numerous to describe all of the makes and models, which change each year. There are some real good buys at some of the larger discount chains. What they lack will probably be small carrying size and light weight. For special backpacking tents, the

expense can be significantly more.

Some things to look for that make a good scout tent are:

- Size: 2 to 3 people
- Weight: 7 to 8 pounds or less
- Type: free standing or uses few stakes (4 or less)
- Features: rain fly, floor, and nylon zippers

Individual tents are the least necessary item that a scout needs, since the troop generally has a supply for the scouts to use and share.

BACK PACKS

There are two current designs that are popular for camping. One has an EXTERNAL frame and the other has an INTERNAL frame. Both types are good. The external frame packs tend to be lighter and feel better with a heavy load. The important point is that the pack "feels good" on the person wearing it. Let a specialty camping store help fit the pack to the scout. Sports Authority has good prices on JanSport and Hudson Trail packs (two good quality manufacturers).

Some things to look for are:

- **Size: should hold 4000 - 5000+ cubic inches** to contain everything a scout needs.
- **Weight:** the lighter the better
- **Padding:** should have padded shoulder straps
- **Fit:** has to be comfortable, not too big, not too small, adjustable fit is important for growing scouts and accommodating different layers of clothing. **IMPORTANT - make sure the hip belt fits.**

MESS KITS

Every new Scout usually buys a metal mess kit with a bowl, cup and frying pan. **DON'T DO IT!** Instead look for something in **PLASTIC**. Plastic is lighter, less expensive and **MOST IMPORTANT** it doesn't cool the food as fast as metal. Lexan and polycarbonate are the new state of the art plastics that are excellent and affordable. Also, the kitchenware section in any grocery has a good selection of containers that will serve as excellent mess kits. They will need a bowl/plate, cup and at least a spoon. I use a 16 oz. plastic measuring cup and a Lexan spoon. They work for 99% of all the food that is eaten on a campout.

WATER BOTTLE

A durable plastic (Lexan and Nalgene are examples) one liter bottle is best. One liter soda bottles work well, too.

WHAT TO BRING when Winter Camping

A HAT is essential. A wool or wool blend stocking cap will provide warmth even when wet. Most of the body heat is radiated from the head and neck. The body shuts down the circulation of warm blood to the extremities when it gets cold. Keeping the head and neck warm is the best way to help keep fingers and toes warm, too. If the hat has a wind or waterproof shell, that's even better.

A wool or wool blend *sweater* will greatly improve the warmth of a jacket. It will do so even if wet. Most of the boys don't keep their coats zipped. A pullover sweater is hard to unzip.

A *raincoat* of coated nylon (preferable with vents for perspiration) or a poncho is a must in wet weather. A large heavy-duty trash bag will work in a pinch. It can serve as an emergency raincoat and can be worn under a light jacket to protect the bag.

Pants are pants. They make Gore-Tex insulated pants but they are too expensive for just camping. If you can find wool or polypropylene long johns that are inexpensive AND get them to wear them, that's good. Sometimes you can find inexpensive rain pants to provide a waterproof outer layer. Ski pants are good but usually too expensive.

Boots & socks. The problem scouts face with boots is growing feet. The most economical thing you can do is shop in large discount chain stores for the cheapest leather boots that fit. Any leather boot can be waterproofed with a liberal application of a product called "Snow Seal."

You do not need insulated boots. Socks can do that job just as well. Buy boots large enough to wear with both heavy synthetic or wool socks and light synthetic liner sock, and still not be tight. Tight boots reduce the circulation of warm blood which brings heat to the toes. Make sure to bring both pairs of socks when you shop.

When they out grow these winter sized boots, they can still use them with summer weight socks.

Wool gloves with ***rubber outer gloves*** will keep their hands warm and dry. You can get heavy rubber gloves at a gardening store or use kitchen dishwashing gloves. The kitchen ones don't last long but they are cheap and good for doing KP, too.

Mittens are warmer than gloves. Mittens worn over gloves are even better, so get mittens large. Mittens and gloves should be long enough to protect the wrists where heat is lost from blood flowing close to the surface. Old socks with finger holes cut in them work well as wrist warmers. Remember this is winter camping ... if you are warm and dry, then you look good.

Garden gloves with leather palms are a good idea for protecting their hands when feeding sticks to the fire and moving hot pans. They also add protection while gathering brush or handling saws, knives etc. when gathering fuel. These do not melt and scorch as easily as synthetic and wool gloves do.

LABEL EVERYTHING. Use a permanent marker for all fabric and plastics, and scratch the scout's initials in everything else. It's hard to tell one mess kit from another when they have been left out over night. All clothing looks alike. This is especially true for uniforms.

EARNING EQUIPMENT

An excellent way to reward them with new equipment is to have them earn it. My suggested way is by cooking a family meal and afterwards cleaning up all the pots and pans in the sink. They have to do the same thing when they are camping. In camp they will wash with a wash tub of soapy water then rinse with water poured from a cup and sterilize with boiling water. Practice at home will make it a lot easier on a cold dark night.

SCOUTING EQUIPMENT RESOURCES

LOCAL and WEB RETAILERS:

EXCELENT PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE

REI <http://www.rei.com/>

EASTERN MOUNTAIN SPORTS <http://www.ems.com/>

HUDSON TRAILS <http://www.hudsontrail.com/>

CASUAL ADVENTURE <http://www.casualadventure.com/>

GOOD PRICES

DICKS <http://www.dickssportinggoods.com/>

Note – This web sight is not the same as the retail store but carries the same merchandise.

SPORTS AUTHORITY <http://www.sportsauthority.com/>

DISCOUNT PRICES – LIMITED SELECTION

BJ's WHOLESALE <http://www.bjs.com/>

COSTCO WHOLESALE <http://www.costco.com/>

WALMART <http://www.walmart.com/>

TARGET <http://www.target.com/>

MAIL ORDER – EXCELLENT PRICES and SALES:

SPORTSMANS GUIDE <http://shop.sportsmansguide.com/>

SIERRA DESIGN <http://www.sierradesigns.com/>

CAMP MOR <http://www.campmor.com/>