

Why You Need Snowshoes in Deep Snow

What would you do if you became stranded in deep snow country?

Perhaps your airplane crashed landed miles from civilization or your snowmobile quit running. While hiking an unexpected snow storm dumped three feet of fresh snow. Maybe your vehicle became mired in deep drifts during a blizzard

After waiting for a week more for outside help, you decide the only way you can survive is to get yourself out.

You could attempt what [James Kim](#) did when he and his family became trapped in deep snow in their SUV after taking a wrong turn in the mountains. Kim decided he would try to walk out for help. Plunging through waist deep snow for some eight miles without snowshoes, Kim was found sometime later; a victim of exhaustion and hypothermia.



Survival Snowshoe

James Kim was a very intelligent man who made a name for himself in the high tech industry. It is unfortunate that such intelligence does not often translate into [wilderness survival](#) smarts; the kind of intelligence that keeps a man and his family alive when they face nature at its worst (or best, depending upon your outlook).

Learn How to Survive from the Natives

When you are trying to survive in unfamiliar territory look at what the natives are doing. Those who have lived for generations in an area are the survival pros for that particular environment; they have to be or else they wouldn't have survived!

Do not disdain the specialized knowledge of the natives no matter how many diplomas you have earned from book learning. While those scraps of paper might come in handy for starting a fire in the wilderness, if you are really smart you will copy the best methods of those who live there.

The Native Snowshoe



Deep Snow

In snow country one example of a survival pro you would do well to study is the lowly snowshoe hare. Near the bottom of the food chain, just trying to survive, the snowshoe hare can teach you a thing or two about [winter survival](#) and traveling on foot in snow country. While the fox and the deer – and man – flounder in deep snow, a snowshoe rabbit travels upon its surface as though it were made of solid ground.

The bunny's secret? Big feet that distribute his weight on the surface of the snow allowing him to float without sinking in. Of course you are not equipped by nature with such large feet, but with a little thought and creativity you can come up with something that works just as well: snowshoes.

Making Snowshoes

It's quite easy to make snowshoes from simple materials you are likely to have at hand. Wearing a pair of homemade snowshoes you can travel over deep snow ten times as fast and with one tenth the effort.

Here's how to make a pair of emergency snowshoes from common materials:

To make these snowshoes you will need to have some kind of cordage. If you're near a vehicle such as a car, truck, snowmobile, or atv you've got it made because it is full of great materials for making snowshoes. Rip out some wiring, or cut the upholstery into strips for cordage. If not, you can use the hank of [550 paracord](#) you always have in your [survival kit](#), or a garbage bag, the 50-gallon drum liner I recommend carrying, a tent fly, your survival blanket, or even cloth strips from clothing.

Next find something to make the frame of your snowshoes with. In this case I cut some small alder saplings growing beside a swampy area (always carry a [survival knife](#)). Alders bend quite easily, though if it is very cold you may have to warm them some by the fire first in order to prevent breakage. Many types of smaller trees and branches will work just as well and you will have to experiment a bit to find what works in your area.

Bend the branch into a tight circular or tear-drop shape and tie the ends together, as shown the pictures.

To tie the pieces of wood tightly together follow these steps:

1. Lay one piece of wood over the other.
2. Wind the cord around the pieces two or three times.
3. Then wind the cord around on the opposite side two or three times. This will form an "X" of cordage that binds the two pieces together.
4. Next wrap the cord around the center of the "X" you have just made to form an X shape.

The two pieces should now be well-tied and immovable.

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Be careful not to make the snowshoe too large or you will have great difficulty in walking. For my 200-pound body I find that a pair of snowshoes about 14 to 16 inches wide by 2 to 2-1/2 feet long to be just about right. If you are smaller you may be able to use a smaller size snowshoe but it may be difficult to bend the sapling for the snowshoe frame into a tighter shape without breaking it.

Next add three cross pieces. The first and largest crosspiece should be when you place your foot when taking a step. Place it about two-thirds up from the tail of the snowshoe. The toes of your foot need to be able to swivel up and down with each step, using this cross piece as a kind of fulcrum.

The other two main cross pieces are tied at increments of several inches down from the first. These serve to hold your weight as you step down onto the snowshoe with each stride you take while walking.

Once you have secured the cross pieces to the snowshoe, you can weave in smaller branches and either tie them or let the pressure of the tight weave hold them in place.

In this project I made two snowshoes. On the first I used 550 paracord and weaved in smaller alder branches for the webbing. The frame of the snowshoe and adjacent sticks in the weave serve to hold the webbing much like you do when making popsicle stick objects without glue or nails.

For the webbing of the second snowshoe I cut strips from a large garbage bag (50-gallon drum liner) and also from common plastic shopping bags. These plastic strips were used for cordage in tying the pieces of wood together as well as for the snowshoe webbing.

Making Snowshoe Bindings

To make snowshoe bindings, place the ball of your toes on the main crosspiece of the snowshoe as shown in the picture. Tie one end of a cord to the left side the crosspiece, cross it through the bottom lacings of your boot, and then down to the other side of the crosspiece. The idea is to allow your foot to pivot in the snowshoe as shown. Until you actually try it, this is difficult to fully understand but should become obvious once you do it.

Types of Snow and Snowshoes

Snow has a great variety of consistencies according to the temperature and history of the snow. In the fresh powdery snow that is often present during very cold temperatures, you will want the snowshoe webbing to be closely spaced so that your weight does not cause the snowshoe to sink deeply. Because the snow is powdery, any that gets on top of the snowshoe will easily fall through the webbing each time you raise your foot for another step.

If the snow is melting, it will likely be sticky and heavy. In this case you might do better with a looser weave for the snowshoe webbing that allows the clumps of snow to fall through as you raise your leg for the next step. Otherwise the heavy snow may tend to accumulate on top the snowshoe as you walk. Heavy wet snow like this will generally hold your weight better than light fluffy snow so the weave of your snowshoe will not have to be so finely made.

In the last picture you can see how I strapped the snowshoe onto my boot and am ready to walk on top of the snow. On this day the thermometer stood at about 40F and the deep snow was wet, heavy and sticky; conditions that make a loose weave on the snowshoe ideal. Should I encounter dry powdery snow along the way, it would be an easy matter to stop at the nearest bush and add several small sticks into the webbing of the snowshoe.

Try Making Your Own Snowshoes

As with all things, only real experience can show you the details I am explaining here. Once you try making snowshoes you should be able to easily grasp the snowshoeing tips as outlined in this Survival Topic.

Making snowshoes in this manner will take some time. From gathering the materials to actual construction and testing it took me the better part of a day. Well worth the time and effort when the alternative is wading through deep snow for miles – especially when your life is on the line.