

## WINTER CLOTHING NOTES

*By Larry Nelson*

Winter camping means camping in snow with temperatures below freezing. Winter camping can be a wonderful adventure but the techniques, equipment and skills may be quite different from that of summer camping.

I have put together ideas on how to dress, clothing to bring, sleeping bags and some other ideas on how to make your winter camping experience an enjoyable one. Remember one does not need to go out and purchase new and expensive equipment, but may be able to use what he/she already have at home. Also, some of the Warden families or your friends may have equipment they would be willing to lend, so don't be afraid to ask.

Winter clothing is a subject each individual must give considerable thought to before deciding what is best for him/her personally. Regardless of what equipment you bring, the key is "keep warm and dry". However, there are some definite rules that govern all winter clothing selections for wilderness travel.

1. Several layers of loose fitting clothing conserve heat better than single thick layers. Each layer traps air and this serves as extra insulation.
2. An outer wind resistant shell of poplin or duck cuts down on heat loss yet allows body moisture to escape without forming condensation – the enemy of heat.
3. Add or remove layers of clothing to regulate body temperatures and avoid excessive perspiration.

**NOTE:** In sub zero weather you could start out wearing all your layers of clothing and feeling just comfortably warm. As your movement produces body heat and perspiration starts, remove your outer layer of clothing and place in your pack or toboggan. If body heat continues to rise, remove second layer so that comfort is maintained. As soon as you stop, you will replace the clothing to avoid being chilled.

**REMEMBER:** Perspiration is absorbed by clothing – damp clothes lose insulating efficiency – wearer gets colder.

*A basic list of clothing suggested as a guide for winter wear is as follows:*

A. **Underwear:** - Probably the best type of underwear for use in winter camping is a suit of flannelette pyjamas. This improvised type of underwear is superior to regular types (long johns) because it is loose fitting and provides plenty of air spaces which is essential in cold climates. Tight fitting clothing which does not allow sufficient air space is to be avoided in cold weather.

**B. Pants:** - Wool pants with a smooth finish that will not hold snow or old style ski pants are ideal, but the new stretch ones are not recommended for bush wear. (I sometimes wear two pairs of pants provided they are not too restrictive). Jeans are definitely a NO, NO, and should be avoided. Any cotton clothing acts like a wick. Any part gets wet and the entire garment eventually becomes wet as any moisture will continue spreading. Be careful of any synthetic material that may melt if too close to the fire.

**C. Shirt:** - A light wool shirt, smooth and soft type, is the most comfortable and worn next to the underwear. (A buddy hug can be used). In sub zero weather, a second heavy wool outer shirt or heavy sweater is recommended.

**D. Parka:** - The parka (with hood) has advantages over most other types of jackets. Its roominess permits both freedom of movement and inside circulation of air, and helps to eliminate perspiration and dampness. It should be large enough to cover the buttocks and groin areas.

**E. Socks:** - Soft wool, smooth fitting and not tight with, of course, no holes or hard-darned spots. Two pairs, the outer pair a half size larger. The socks should be long enough to roll for dry snow or to pull up well on the calf when travelling through damp or melting snow.

**F. Mittens:** - Knitted wool mittens or mitt liners inside water repellent over-mittens are best. Finger gloves are not sufficiently warm in sub-zero cold even with an outer mitten. A pair of gloves (loose fitting) may be useful around the camp in milder weather.

**G. Headwear:** - A snug wool cap or toque that will pull down over the ears is perfectly suitable. A ski cap with ear flaps is also ideal. A wool scarf affords good neck and throat protection when sub zero winds are blowing. It can seal off the small openings at the top of a parka's zipper that always lets biting winds in.

**H. Footwear:** When choosing footwear, you should look for three things: 1) Comfort: 2) Warmth 3) Lightness.

a. **Moccassins:** For winter travel in the bush, the Indian moccassin is hard to beat, especially where the snow is mostly dry and powdery. When conditions change, the moccassin rubber is used to prevent wet feet and still give the best combination. Inside the moccassin, you wear 2 or more pair of heavy wool socks. The moccassins should be large enough to allow wearing these multiple pairs of socks without causing restrictions or binding.

b. **Paks:** Leather topped, rubber bottomed paks are the next best winter footwear; some have removable felt liners which give good warmth and comfort.

c. **Boots:** Insulated leather boots with gum sole are okay down to zero temperature. You cannot wear more than 1 pair of light and 1 pair of heavy wool socks together with these boots without restriction thus making them unsuitable for below zero temperatures.

d. **Rubber:** Rubber thermal boots offer comfort to zero, but with any amount of walking they will cause excessive perspiration since the rubber will not let the foot "breathe" and

condensation inside greatly reduces the insulation and comfort factor.

**NOTE:** Extra socks should be carried to allow for complete change and also one pair for sleeping in.

**H. Bedding:** When it comes to bedding, you have a choice of a sleeping bag or blankets. Which you select depends on a number of things: your own personal taste; how cold the nights are; how much weight you can carry; and what you have, or can afford to buy or make. Air space is the secret of good insulation. Whether it be blankets or sleeping bag, fluffy, loosely woven materials that provide tiny air pockets make the best sleeping gear. Down filled bags or bags with a combination of down and feather is a good choice. There are also a number of bags with synthetic fibers on the market. If in doubt about the quality of your sleeping bag, bring extra blankets. Wool blankets are the best.

**I. Nightwear:** - Suitable sleeping clothes will vary with circumstances and conditions – the period of hiking, the temperature and the type of shelter to be used. In any case a complete change of clothing is absolutely essential. Change from the skin out before turning in for the night. It is important that the head be out of the sleeping bag, otherwise breath will condense inside and form a layer of frost. A wool toque can be worn on the head. If there is a danger of frostbite, a piece of gauze may be laid across the nose and stuck to either cheek with a piece of adhesive tape.

**J. Mats:** - Air mattresses should not be used in the winter. Having a cold air cushion under the depressed part of your sleeping bag is not conducive to comfort. The two most popular types of mats in use are 5 cm (2 inch) thick polyurethane (open cell) foam and 3/8 to 7/8 inch thick polyethylene unicellular (closed cell foam). One of the best known closed cell brands is Ensolite. It has been found the unicellular foam is best because it offers the most protection from the frozen ground and does not absorb moisture. Open-cell mats are softer and compress better, but they do not protect as well and have a bad habit of absorbing moisture and creating puddles between the bag and the ground. It is a fact that not only the cold air above you can cause discomfort, but also the frozen ground or snow below. Without good insulation against the ground or snow, the heat transferred from the body will begin thawing out pockets where the hips, buttocks and shoulders hit. It is therefore important to have as much insulation under you as over you. Without this insulation, no amount of blankets will keep you warm.

***Some other hints that may make your winter camp enjoyable.***

Heavy clothing makes its weight felt and tires the wearer on a winter bush trip.

Give a great deal of thought to your selection of bush clothing.

Don't buy "gimmick" or gadget loaded items, they have no place in the wilderness, add extra weight and probably won't work under severe conditions.

Down insulated garments offer the best combination of warmth without weight, but they are expensive.

Synthetic pile insulation is good as long as it is not too heavy. The fibers of these fabrics aid in quick drying too.

Dry all damp clothing before a fire to restore insulating qualities and comfort.

Change into your second pair of underwear and spare socks for best sleeping comfort. Take your other clothes into the sleeping bag with you to keep them warm and use them as bedding or for extra warmth.

You will find that frost accumulates on the outer shell of your insulated clothing in very cold weather. This is very noticeable first thing in the morning on your sleeping bag. You should drape the garment over a pole, rope or other shelter support and beat it lightly with a small spruce bough to brush off the frost. A complete opening up and airing of your sleeping bag at this time is essential, small quantities of condensation will become frost crystals at once and can be brushed off leaving everything dry.

Never place any equipment too close to a fire or where sparks can fall on it. The heat test for drying clothes etc, should be only as hot as your face or back of your hand can comfortably bear.

### **PERSONAL KIT:**

#### **WEAR:**

Underwear (Flannel Pyjamas)

2 pairs woolen socks

Appropriate footwear

Flannel or wool shirt

Pants (wool or ski pants)

Wool sweater

Parka

Toque/Cap with ear flaps

Wool mitts with water repellent mitts over them

#### **PACKS:**

##### **Bedding:**

Pyjamas

Winter Sleeping Bag

Toque

Extra bedsocks

##### **Sleeping:**

Sleeping Bag (Suitable for Winter)

Ground Sheet

Mat

**Clothing:**

**2 pairs extra socks**

**Extra mitts**

**Extra pants**

**Extra footwear for around camp**

**Eating kit:**

**Knife, Forks, Spoon, Plate, Bowl, Mug**

**Toilet Kit:**

**Towel, Soap, Toilet Paper, Comb, Toothbrush and Toothpowder**

**Miscellaneous:**

**Belt/pocket knife, Matches (in waterproof container, Emergency Kit (in pocket), Flashlight,  
Small First Aid Kit, Sunglasses**