

Winter backpack/training trip information sheet:

Saturday, February 24th we will do a winter backpack, meeting at 7:00 AM at BFH, returning Sunday at 10:30 AM.

We'll hike some of the most scenic winter trails in Ohio – from Clifton Gorge into the Fallen Timbers area of Camp Birch – about a 6 mile trek. Expect icy trails and frozen waterfalls. If temperatures are low, the trails will be empty of people. We also have several “outs” along the way in case of injury or poor preparation (and short drive times for parents making such a pickup). Fallen Timbers gives us additional options if we get into camp early enough – winter survival training, field games, etc.. Scouts may choose to:

- Camp in tents
- Camp in Adirondacks
- Try winter survival (no tent, no sleeping bag). If you do this, you *must* have a winter-weight sleeping bag with you in case you need to bail out.

We will also be doing a flag retirement that evening.

The “weather call” on this event will be:

- 1) Predicted wind-chills below -15°F (not a big deal in northern MN, but it is for southern OH – most folks don't have the overnight gear).
- 2) Rain and temps <50°F (hypothermia-city)
- 3) A snow travel emergency (due to driving hazards)

Otherwise, we'll be out in the weather, so prep accordingly.

Scouts **MUST** bring all the cold weather gear and sleeping gear they need, even if it is too heavy to carry. This will be a “supported” trip, so excess gear will get dropped at the campsite. We'll worry about weight after scouts gain experience (maybe another Smoky Mountain 4-day trip next Christmas break?)

Parents – a special note. Make sure the emergency contact info you include on the permission slip is correct for Saturday day and evening. These trips are challenging, and we may have individuals or the whole group pull out if our preparation for the conditions are not up to par. I'd rather learn lessons and try again wiser in the future.

Menu planning:

- Plan on menus that require only boiling water. Since we are short on meeting time to prepare, plan on bringing your own individual food (see notes later on), but expect on heating the water by patrols in patrol-sized pots or kettles (adults – same deal). This will reduce the total weight carried by eliminating individual cook gear and reducing the number of stoves.

Clothing:

Dressing for winter backpacking is a two-part challenge: Stay warm, but don't sweat as you exercise. Layers that are easy to put on/off is the way to do this. Here's how I'll dress for:

-- for +20 to +30 degree weather:

For hiking:

- Liner socks, wool socks, water-proof hiking boots.
- Synthetic briefs and trail pants for hiking
 - Add rain-pants as a wind shell when stopping for lunch
- Synthetic long-john tops & fleece sweater
 - Add a rain shell when stopping
- Thin gloves for when I'm stopped
- Stocking cap or balaclava (rolled up)

And for sitting around camp at these temperatures:

- I'll add a second layer of fleece under a rain shell.

For +10 to +20 degree weather (wind chill to -10),:

For hiking, I'd add to the list above:

- Synthetic long-john bottoms
- Wear my rainshell when hiking, and add a second fleece when stopped
- Might think about wearing my balaclava down
- Might hike with thin gloves, and keep heavy ones for camp
- Add fleece pants for hanging around camp

For +10 to zero, and windchills < -15 (first, we'd train for this before we did it, but here's the list so you get an idea)

- Switch to insulated hiking boots – same socks
- Layers on the bottom would be: long johns, fleece pants, and synthetic trail pants, adding a rain shell when stopped.
- Layers on the top would be : syn turtleneck, two fleece sweaters, and a rain shell.
- Balaclava over the face, with rainshell hood pulled up. Put on a stocking cap when stopped. Hike with heavy gloves, and pull mittens on over them when less active.

Use the guidelines above and modify for your usual condition. I tend to be on the “warm blooded” side, and like cold weather.

Hiking gear: Well waterproofed hiking boots that *fit* should do fine. If they are too tight to wiggle your toes in (or if you try cramming on extra socks) your feet will be cold because you cut off circulation.

DO BRING: A stout hiking staff or trekking staff/poles. This helps balance on icy trails.
STRONGLY CONSIDER: Purchasing a pair of instep crampons or “icewalkers”. You don't need \$40 mountaineering-grade stuff – just a \$6 pair of Icewalker cleats, or a \$12 pair of Get-a-Grip over-soles with carbide spike will do.

I can guarantee the trails will be steep, rocky and icy.

Sleep gear:

You *must* have a sleeping pad. Either a (cheap) closed-cell foam pad (not open-cell foam rubber) or an (expensive) self-inflating thermal pad long enough to insulate your shoulders to your buttocks from the ground. RidgeRest, Thermarest, NorthFace, and lots of folks make these. If you plan on attending northern tier, bite the bullet and get a good, compact, “ultralight” self-inflating type.

Sleeping bag: Recommended is a mummy bag rated to -10°F, plus a synthetic or cotton liner (to keep the bag clean and make it last longer). If you only have a lighter bag, try putting one or two cheap fleece blankets *above* you and *inside* your sleeping bag. Your sleeping *pad* provides the insulation below you – the bag/blankets take care of the top and sides. Don’t just pile blankets on top of your sleeping bag – this will compress the “loft” and actually make you colder. Try this at home on your porch for an evening first – don’t wait till we are in the woods to test this. Also, plan on wearing a stocking cap and perhaps a hooded sweater in the sack.

Moisture management in your tent:

Each person in your tent will exhale about 1 cup of water during the night. In cold weather, if this moisture cannot escape, it will condense on the inside of your tent, and run down the walls to the floor. Four-man tent? Then you’ll wake up in the morning with a full quart of water getting your bag and gear wet.

How to reduce this? When you hit the sack, unzip the windows of the tent at both the front and back, so air will move through the top of the tent, carrying moisture out, but leave calm air at the bottom where you’ll be sleeping (that way, you don’t need to factor in wind-chill for your sleeping bag) . Zip them back up in the morning so you don’t have to get dressed in the breeze.

Another form of moisture management: Make sure you have tightly sealed water bottles (Nalgene 1 qt wide-mouth bottles recommended). In the winter, you need to sleep with your water if you expect it to be liquid in the morning. Bad time to carry a leaky water bottle.

Food:

Keep the preparation simple (boiling water), but DO COUNT CALORIES – you need to make sure you have enough! Think fats and carbohydrates. Plan on 3000 – 4000 calories per day. (through-hikers on the Appalachian Trail are known for scooping peanut butter out of the jar with a snickers bar and calling that lunch – they keep hiking while eating).

Here's my plan:

Eat breakfast at home Saturday morning.

Snack: Trail mix: (M&Ms, nuts, raisins) & water

Lunch: 3 granola bars (or Logan bread), to scoop up 1/3 cup peanut butter and
2 packs instant soup (to add some salts back)

Snack: Trail mix: (M&Ms, nuts, raisins) & water

Dinner:

Simple, light weight, but expensive: a serves-two freeze dried entrée & hot cocoa, plus a few tortillas for trail bread.

If I plan ahead (and save money), I'll cook some mac-n-cheese or maybe a hearty stew at home before the trip, and freeze a meal's worth in a double zip-lock bag, I can then heat the food by dropping the sealed bag into boiling water, and eat the heated food right out of the bag (no dishes!!). I'm not worried about food weight on a one-day trip.

Breakfast: 2 pks instant oatmeal, fortified with a couple of pats of butter.
2 pks of instant cocoa, fortified with a pat of butter

The Checklist:

The separate Winter Backpack checklist has been developed as a *guideline* based on experience. This is a vehicle-supported trip, so don't be afraid to *add* gear to what is called out here, but if you choose to *delete* gear, it should be based on your own personal *experience* in winter camping.