

Winter Camping – Tents and Shelters

"There is no such thing as bad weather,

just poor choices in gear & clothing."

TENTS:

- don't pitch your tent under trees (snow falls off boughs)
- whenever possible, set the door so it is 90 degrees away from the prevailing wind
- know how to set up the tent properly – practice before you arrive at camp
- use a tent that is as low as possible and sleep as close to each other as possible for warmth
- pack the snow with snowshoes before you pitch the tent and don't walk on the snow where the tent will be without snowshoes
- use deadmen and/or snow pegs that are clearly marked so you can find them again
 - *Deadman:*
The Deadman is an object such as skis, ice axes and logs that can be buried to serve as an anchor. Always remember to fasten your rope securely to your deadman and give the snow plenty of time to settle over your object.
- use an outside tarp to put the tent on to protect the bottom of the tent
- use an inside tarp (each person should have her own 5' x 7' or 6' x 8' small tarp) for inside the tent to keep you dry. Alternatively, one large tarp the size of the tent may be used for the same purpose.
- even if you're using 3 season tents, everywhere the poles cross you take twine and tie them together – it makes them stronger and the tent won't collapse
- dig a trench just outside the tent door – you can then sit inside the tent while you pull your boots on and off – less snow in the tent and easier for you!
- put an old towel at the door entrance to put wet boots on so the tent floor doesn't get wet
- have a man-made chamois or another old towel inside the tent to get rid of snow and moisture that does get inside the tent

Ventilation:

- use the smallest dome tent possible
- keep the door & window open as much as possible to let moisture out, especially while sleeping
- don't breathe into your sleeping bag as the water vapour goes into your bag and reduces the loft

SNOW SHELTERS:

Quinzhees:

- big hill of snow, then dug out in a 6' radius for 3 people – use twigs for measurement of snow depth
- use a curved roof for strength, not flat

Snow Cave:

- a bank of snow – taller than your own height
- T-shaped entrance about 4'
- cut blocks of snow and move out of tunnel
- wear raingear and spell each other off
- start digging dome and flat base for sleeping platform

- minimum 1' thickness over dome
- smooth dome so no drips later
- make hole in dome for ventilation
- fill in the T with snow blocks
- takes approx. 2 hrs. to make for about 4 people
- use sticks on top to gauge thickness of top of dome and don't dig further from underneath

Igloo:

- using an Ice Box Igloo-maker is the best method as it will work with any kind of snow
- Otherwise, you need fresh snow that had been sitting for 1 or 2 days
- snow feels like Styrofoam and will come out in blocks
- use carpenter's saw to cut rectangular, shallow blocks with straight sides

Snow Trench:

- use snow saw or carpenter's saw – straight sides or block won't come out
- lay on side very carefully
- blocks should be about 8" thick
- if not right snow conditions to make a trench, cover with branches or tarp for an emergency house

Trench shelters can be among the easiest to build. Simply find a slope, and dig out a trench into it. Make it kind of bell-shaped (wider at the bottom) and arrange some covering over it (I've always used an old blue tarp right at ground level). I've dug these into hillsides and tree wells (careful here, try and get a tree that's already dropped the snow from its branches, as it can be an unpleasant surprise).

Best suggestion is try a variety and see what you like. As you're learning though, maybe take a tent for backup. but the snow was frozen so hard we broke two shovels (metal blades) and a snowsaw trying to dig into it

Tent

Safe (reliable)
Quick set up time
Colder

Snow Cave/shelter

A lot of work
they take 2 people 2 hours to build and you often seem to get wet digging them out
Warm

Igloo

Who knows how to make one (the link actually makes the idea of an igloo sound good)
Warm
Reliable?

Snow Shelters

-save you the bulk of carrying a tent
-are warm
-are better at sheltering you from bad weather

- take along time to construct and to stabilize
- take a non claustrophobic person to stay in one

Tents

Remember that whatever you use is going to take more effort than you think. Even the simplest tasks will take twice the energy and time they would in the summer. When you are dealing with limited hours of light, you'll have to factor the amount of effort you want to spend building your shelter into what you have already spent reaching your destination.

I think taking a tent as backup is a wise move when you are a novice at snow shelter building.

a decent 4 season tent dug down a few feet into the snow will give good protection from wind etc. and with a good quality bag the resultant loss of insulation with a tent would be compensated for. Certainly in coastal and most Cascade conditions the potential for rapid climatic changes make relying on snow caves just not practical. The added benefit of using a tent is the fact that you can pretty well nail down the amount of time it will take to establish camp. A well pitched 4 season tent will withstand some serious wind and snow load and keep you comfortable.