

# Contents

PREFACE	9
The Tao of Cold	9
INTRODUCTION	13
How to Use This Book	15
One Last Thing . . .	15

## **Part I: Winter Hiking**

### Chapter 1

<b>Where to Go</b>	<b>19</b>
CAN I GET THERE?	20
POPULAR VS. LITTLE-USED TRAILS	21
GUIDEBOOKS AND MAPS	22
PERMITS AND REGULATIONS	23
DECIDING WHERE TO GO	24

### Chapter 2

<b>Clothing and Gear</b>	<b>27</b>
COOL DUDS FOR COLD DAYS	28
TODAY'S TECHNICAL CLOTHING	33
WINTER BOOTS	39
A PACK FOR WINTER	42
FITTING A PACK	46
LOADING A PACK	48
POLES	49
ICE AX AND CRAMPONS	50
SNOWSHOES	53
SKIS	57
OTHER GEAR	59
TRAVELING LIGHT VS. SAFETY	61

### Chapter 3

<b>Water and Food</b>	<b>63</b>
DRINK HEAVILY; BE A GLUTTON	63
CARE FOR A SIP OF ICE BLOCK?	66
TREATING BACKCOUNTRY WATER	67
WHAT TO EAT	69
HOW MUCH WATER AND FOOD TO BRING	70

Chapter 4

**Getting Around 71**

THE CHALLENGES OF WINTER	71
THE HAZARDS OF WINTER	80
FINDING YOUR WAY	84
STAYING WARM AND DRY	91
HIKING ABOVE TREE LINE	94
GETTING BENIGHTED	95
GOING SOLO	99
CHILDREN AND WINTER	102
SMILE THROUGH YOUR TEARS	104

Chapter 5

**Weather 105**

WEATHER AND DECISION-MAKING	105
READING THE SKY	107
WHAT'S THAT THERMOMETER SAY?	108
WIND	111
STORMS	114

Chapter 6

**Backcountry Ailments 117**

BLISTERS	118
HYPOTHERMIA	120
FROSTBITE	122
RAYNAUD'S DISEASE	123
IMMERSION FOOT	124
FALLS AND TRAUMA INJURIES	124
SUNBURN AND SNOW BLINDNESS	126
ALTITUDE ILLNESS	127
MANAGING EMERGENCIES	128

**Part II: Winter Camping**

Chapter 7

**Trip Planning 133**

CHOOSING A DESTINATION	133
CHOOSING PARTNERS	135

Chapter 8

<b>Clothing and Gear for Camping</b>	<b>137</b>
THE CLOTHING	137
THE GEAR	141
HOW MUCH TO CARRY WHILE WINTER CAMPING	153

Chapter 9

<b>Eat More; Drink More</b>	<b>155</b>
EAT MORE . . .	155
. . . AND DRINK MORE	157
COOKING SNOW	158

Chapter 10

<b>The Campsite</b>	<b>161</b>
THE PERFECT SPOT	161
MAKING CAMP	162
STABILIZING YOUR TENT	164
COOKING	166
STAYING WARM AT NIGHT	167
CONTROLLING CONDENSATION AND DAMPNESS	170
CONSTRUCTING SNOW SHELTERS	172
APPENDIX A: RESOURCES	175
APPENDIX B: BIBLIOGRAPHY	177
APPENDIX C: GLOSSARY	181
INDEX	185

# Preface

## The Tao of Cold

hat you have picked up and opened this book, even if tentatively, is a bold first step. You have begun the journey. You already have an inkling of a truth that I will confirm for you now: *Cold is your friend*. Do not shrink away from it. Embrace it. When the temperature passes stealthily through that magical threshold of thirty-two degrees Fahrenheit, or zero degrees Celsius, it opens doors for us into a new realm.

This revelation does not come easily to us humans, who must compensate for our inadequate natural defenses against the cold by donning artificial skin and fat merely to survive. We don't have the fur of polar bears or the blubber of seals. Yet, we have lived in middle and upper latitudes around the world—places with winter—for thousands of years. We've learned not only how to survive in cold environments but how to thrive in and enjoy them.

Why even hike and camp in winter? Granted, it's an acquired taste. And the very need to ask some questions precludes an easy answer. The pleasures of winter are at once tricky to convey to the uninitiated and self-explanatory to the participant. The joys of winter hiking and camping are spectacular, subtle, and sometimes elusive. Few silences are as complete as a windless landscape stilled by a thick comforter of snow. An ice- and snow-covered mountaintop above tree line will forever redefine "white" in your mind. The low, cool light of sunny winter days throws almost perpetual long shadows, lending the natural world a sharpness and contrast that you won't see on summer days when the high sun bleaches everything flat.

I referred earlier to the temperature at which water freezes in part because the book you hold addresses the outdoor world in its frozen state—mostly, anyway. Put on a warm hat, because much of what follows in these pages will take place below freezing—or just barely above it. This book ostensibly offers advice on what to do and what *not* to do when hiking and camping in the backcountry in winter. However, in reality, the skills transmitted are relevant in any season and environment where snow, sleet, freezing rain, or just-plain-cold rain may fall and where temperatures may swing wildly from just above freezing to well below freezing. This book makes frequent reference to "winter hiking," although in many places, you'll often be on snowshoes or touring skis. Chapter 2 covers these modes of transportation.

Across the breadth of climates, latitudes, and elevation ranges that exist in the United States, winter exhibits a multitude of personalities, sometimes resembling spring and fall—and occasionally, in select places, making cameo appearances in summer. Learn to recognize and coexist peacefully with those many faces of winter, and you will possess knowledge and skills directly applicable to heading into many mountain ranges in spring or autumn or climbing a high peak in any month.

Developing winter skills is basically just adding layers of sophistication to your three-season hiking and camping skills—earning a master’s degree in deeper cold on top of your three-season bachelor’s degree. Once you’ve earned it, the calendar will no longer limit your outdoor adventures.

If your interest lies only in hiking in winter, but not in sleeping outside overnight, you may think Part II of this book is irrelevant to you. I hope you rethink that position. Day hiking in the summer, especially on an all-day outing that takes you miles from any road, requires a certain degree of preparedness for emergencies: carrying extra food, clothing, and water, for instance. Get benighted in summer, and you may spend an uncomfortable night outside—but you won’t likely freeze to death. The winter day-tripper, though, must accept a hard truth about this game: Accidents happen—the winter environment arguably presents more risks and more opportunity for accidents than does summer—and spending an unplanned night outside in winter without being prepared for it could, to put it delicately, conclude your winter hiking career. On a winter hike that will take you far from roads, especially a relatively difficult hike, you *must* be ready for the worst—being stranded outside for the night—and know how to get through it safely. Even if you never plan to sleep outside in winter—or at least, not deliberately—the information in Part II is as relevant to you as your own beating heart.

There’s another, deeper reason I opened this Preface talking about the temperature at which water freezes. The transformation of water from liquid to solid is a metaphor for the transcendence we achieve with that first step toward seeing winter as an invitation rather than a rejection. The real, underlying agenda behind this book is to convince you that, in many ways, temperatures below freezing (or moderate temperatures below freezing) make heading into the backcountry *easier*. Many experienced four-season outdoor adventurers will tell you the ideal temperature for moving through the backcountry is in the low to mid-twenties Fahrenheit: If dressed properly, you won’t perspire too heavily, yet it’s not so cold that you’re uncomfortable or at risk of losing fingers or toes, plus there’s no danger of getting wet because everything’s frozen. Modern technical clothing and gear make getting outside in winter a relatively comfortable experience. Then, of course, there’s another significant benefit of winter hiking and camping: no bugs.

Indeed, once you have shed the self-limiting negative bias toward winter that many of us harbor, you realize that, in many ways, winter is a more inviting time of year to venture into the forests and mountains than summer—that cold is your friend. Marry that attitude to the skills you glean from this book, and you’ll have the business of heading into the backcountry in deep cold down . . . cold.

*Michael Lanza*

## **A Note About Safety**

Safety is an important concern in all outdoor activities. No book can alert you to every hazard or anticipate the limitations of every reader. The descriptions of techniques and procedures in this book are intended to provide general information. Nothing substitutes for formal instruction, routine practice, and plenty of experience. When you follow any of the procedures described here, you assume responsibility for your own safety. Use this book as a general guide to further information. Under normal conditions, excursions into the backcountry require attention to traffic, road and trail conditions, weather, terrain, the capabilities of your party, and other factors. Keeping informed on current conditions and exercising common sense are the keys to a safe, enjoyable outing.

*The Mountaineers Books*