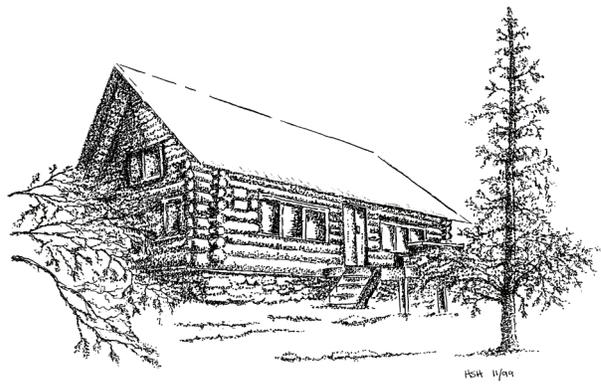


RIDGE LINES



GREEN MOUNTAIN CLUB
BURLINGTON SECTION

WINTER 2004-2005

Enjoying Winter Safely

By Pete Antos-Ketcham, GMC's Education Coordinator

(This is part of a longer article that appeared in *Trail Talk*, the newsletter of the Montpelier Section. We're reprinting it here, with Pete's permission, because his thoughts and suggestions deserve a wide audience!)

My first encounter with the winter outdoors was a camping trip planned by my Boy Scout troop. Our leader asked us if we wanted to "test ourselves." Of course, we said yes. Our "planning" consisted of picking a weekend in December and we were simply instructed to "bring lots of clothes." Off we went into the leafless December woods with our excitement building at the thoughts of braving the elements. The inch or two of new snow on a bed of leaves crunched under our sneakered feet. Once we reached the campsite we were told to construct lean-to shelters for the night and gather lots of firewood. We built a rather large campfire - okay, a near bonfire. With the fire, plus lots of food, hot cocoa and clothing, we were having a great time.

Eventually bedtime rolled around. As my fellow scouts unfurled their big cotton sleeping bags bearing the emblems of their favorite soft-drink, super hero, or cartoon character, I became concerned about staying warm through the night in our open shelter. I went to our leader and voiced my concerns. He said, "Don't worry, all you need to do is put on as many of your clothes as you can and a hat and you'll be just fine." That's just what we did. We weren't aware of the potential peril that lay before us.

Thankfully, I fell asleep. Unfortunately it didn't last very long. I awoke to the sounds of my bunkmate tossing, turning, and groaning. We were soaking wet, shivering, and cold! What was going on? Was it a December rainstorm? Did my canteen open and spill over me? No; we were drenched in our own sweat. It soaked our cotton layers and sapped our body heat, leaving us cold, uncomfortable, awake at 2AM, and in a potentially dangerous situation.

We woke up the scoutmaster and assistant leader, and they rebuilt the fire and instructed us to remove the wet clothing and replace it with what dry clothing remained. Needless to say, we didn't get back to bed. We ended up sitting by the fire, groggily waiting for the sun to rise so we could pack up and go back to our heated homes.

I still wonder to this day if any of the other scouts on that trip ever went on another winter overnight. Luckily for me, I learned a thing or two about winter camping before I went out and "tested myself" again. Now, I share this story with others to illustrate an example of critical things not to do when heading into the backcountry in winter. Small errors or bad decisions when it's cold can quickly turn into life threatening situations. Planning, preparing, and ensuring you have the proper clothing and equipment are essential.

How to prepare for a winter hike:

Dress like an onion. Always dress in three distinct layers. Start with a base layer made from wool or one of the many synthetic materials out there like polypropylene. This will "wick" moisture away from your skin. Next, add an insulation layer of wool or synthetic material like fleece to help trap and keep warmth against you. Your top layer should be a waterproof and windproof shell made of nylon or another synthetic and breathable material. Breathable fabric is key to help keep your moisture levels down.

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More tips on staying safe in the winter woods – by Pete Antos-Ketcham

Stay comfortably cool. Add and remove layers depending on your activity level. Carry extra clothing in case you or someone in your party becomes wet from sweat, melting snow, or an accidental fall into a stream.

Put the summer hiking boots away for the season. You'll need a pair of insulated boots. Felt-lined pac boots are sufficient for lower elevation snowshoe travel. For higher elevation travel or travel above treeline, a plastic mountaineering or "double boot" may be advisable.

Fuel your body. Winter outdoor activities don't call for diet food! Plenty of food and water are critical to maintaining energy levels and warding off the two main threats of cold weather: hypothermia and frostbite. Bring plenty of high-calorie snacks like gorp, chocolate, cheese, and peanut butter. Keep in mind that the demands of breaking trail may cause you to work harder than you do in the summer.

Your natural inclination is not to drink when it's cold – fight this! A good way to get liquid and sugar and keep warm at the same time is to bring along a thermos of hot chocolate or hot Tang. Avoid caffeine; it dehydrates you and dehydration can hasten the onset of hypothermia.

Keep an "eye on the sky." As we all know, weather changes rapidly in Vermont. Elevation influences temperature. You'll lose three to five degrees Fahrenheit for every 1000 feet of elevation climbed. When you add in the factor of wind chill and exposure above treeline, the temperature could be much lower. Remember: Rain is possible every month of the year, and it will be nearly impossible to stay warm if you get soaked. Always carry a waterproof shell to help you keep dry should you get caught in an unexpected winter rain.

Know where you're going. *Know the area well.* Go there in the summer and become as familiar with it as possible. In winter the trail and the woods will look very different and signs and blazes can be buried in deep snow. Contact the GMC to find out if the trailheads to your route and your potential bail-out trails are plowed in the winter. Make sure you know how you'll get out of the woods in an emergency.

Walk lightly. Unless a trail is very well packed or has only a few inches of snow, you'll need snowshoes or skis so that "post-holes" are not left in the trail. When post-holes are frozen and filled in with fresh snow they become a tripping hazard for other hikers. Also, making post-holes as you walk is extremely fatiguing and unpleasant.

Hypothermia—know the signs. Warning signs for hypothermia include: the inability to keep fingers and toes warm, uncontrollable shivering, stumbling, extreme fatigue, trouble with fine motor skills (e.g., unzipping a jacket), slurred speech, vision problems, forgetfulness, confusion, and fainting. I tell folks to watch out for the "umbles." Pay attention for mumbling, fumbling, and stumbling.

The best way to deal with hypothermia is to prevent it by staying well hydrated, well fed, and dry.

Frostbite. Like hypothermia, frostbite can be prevented by awareness of the conditions that cause it. Avoid exposing skin, getting wet, wearing clothing that constricts, or dehydrating yourself. Be cautious of the wind. Check with people in your party to see if anyone has had frostbite before, because people who've been frostbitten are more susceptible to cold injuries.

Leave No "Waste." Leave No Trace practices are just as applicable in the winter as during the rest of the year. The cold weather will preserve your waste until spring. Make sure you take the time to dispose of it properly so as not to have it appear in trails or campsites in the spring when the snow melts. Always bring a shovel to dig out privies on the trail in the winter and use them. If no privy is available, use your shovel to dig down to bare ground and dispose of your waste in the "cathole" fashion, if possible. Make sure you are 250 feet (75 adult paces) away from trails and water.

Other reminders:

Daylight hours are short in the winter. Darkness can come on suddenly. Begin your trip early in the day and be prepared with a headlamp just in case.

For safety, never hike alone in winter. Plan on a group size of four to ten people.

Be prepared to keep warm with nothing more than the equipment you carry. Never count on a wood fire or stove to keep you warm.

Plan to encounter winter weather at the higher elevations anytime from early fall through late spring.

If you're not an experienced winter hiker, make your initial trips day hikes in areas that you're familiar with from your summertime hiking. Go on trips with experienced winter hikers or sign up for a GMC Introduction to Winter Hiking and Backpacking class. Enjoy Vermont's beautiful wild areas in the winter - but be safe!!

*For more information about enjoying the winter safely, see **Winterwise – A Backpacker's Guide** or the **AMC Guide to Winter Camping**.*

BURLINGTON SECTION ANNUAL MEETING AND DINNER

Date: February 5, 2005

Place: Faith United Methodist Church
on Dorset St. in South Burlington

Times: 5:00 – Social Hour

6:00 – Supper

7:00 – Business Meeting

8:15 – Program

Directions: Take exit 14E off I-89. Turn right on Dorset St. Go 0.3 miles from the Kennedy Dr./Dorset St. intersection to Faith United Methodist Church (on the right). There's plenty of parking. The cafeteria is at the far end.

Reservations: Fill out and mail the form on page 8

Program: Mexico to Canada: A Journey on the Pacific Coast Trail

Join Dave Blumenthal and Lexi Shear as they share their adventure of a lifetime: a thru-hike of the 2,700 mile Pacific Coast Trail from Mexico to Canada. Hear about the 6 months of planning and then the challenges of crossing the Mojave Dessert, climbing Mt. Whitney, and surviving a rare typhoon in Oregon. After the presentation, you can look at watercolor drawings in Dave's trail sketchbook and examine their special lightweight gear.

Dave began hiking when he was only an infant. He was in his teens when he first dreamed of hiking the PCT, and his 2000 end-to-end hike of the Long Trail whet his appetite further. (Drawings and watercolors from Dave's LT trail journal now illustrate the Long Trail Guide.) Dave designed and made some of the lightweight equipment he and Lexi used on the PCT thru-hike. When he's not hiking, Dave is a free-lance product and furniture designer and has taught art classes at the Gailer School and CCV.

Lexi fell in love with the wilderness on a month-long trip to Alaska. She's a graduate of UVM's Field Naturalist Program (and she carried multiple field guides in her pack as she hiked!). Lexi, formerly with the Trust for Public Lands, now does conservation planning and ecological assessments. Both Dave and Lexi are ardent bikers, hikers, and skiers.

Sustainable Living Course Offered

Do you wonder how you might live better with less stuff and less waste? Get together with other Burlington Section members for a free nine-session discussion course on "Choices for Sustainable Living" sponsored by the Vermont Earth Institute. The discussion course works like a study circle or book group: it's facilitated by participants with start-up assistance from VEI. Participants use an anthology of writings by some of the best-known authors to explore topics including ecological principles, sustainable communities, sustainable business and economy, sustainable food, sustainable buying, and sustainable lifestyles.

There will be a presentation about the course on Thursday, February 3rd from 6:30-7:30pm (location to be determined) at which time you can learn more about the course, sign up, and purchase materials (\$16 - \$18). Bring your calendars so we can schedule meeting times and dates. For more information, go to vtearthinstitute.org. To register, contact Laura Philipps at 863-4147 or laurap300@yahoo.com.

First and Third Monday Fitness Walks – When you start feeling beset by early darkness and cold and the first twinges of cabin fever, start your work week with a short, invigorating walk, from 5:30 to 7:00 PM. The walks on the first Monday of every month will be in the Burlington/South Burlington area. Call Brenda at 658-5869. On the third Monday of every month, walks will be in the Underhill/Jericho area. Call Maeve at 899-4327.

Ridge Lines

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Tips on Healthy and Delicious Backpacking Food

From Deb Brown: *Delicious Suppers*

Here's the basic system:

First - Plan your backpacking meals around hearty staples like 10-minute brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, bulgur, healthy ramen noodles and/or instant bean mixes. (I like Fantastic Foods refried beans, black beans, and instant chili.)

Second, add some flavor. Either pack salt & pepper or a more varied spice kit, or add spices to the bags of ingredients before you leave for your hike.

Now, give yourself extra protein by bringing cheese, nuts, or instant beans to add to your meals. (Think of Broccoli Cashew Rice, Sesame Noodles, Rice and Beans, Pasta with walnuts or pine nuts.)

For even more flavor, add dried veggies. Buy them at a local health food store, or dehydrate them yourself!

Now, here's a sample recipe:

Spirals with Pesto and Sun-dried Tomatoes

At home, put spoon-sized pasta in a bag (about 4 ounces per person) and add sun-dried tomatoes, dried toasted pine nuts, onion flakes, dried broccoli, and dried mushrooms (or any similar combination). If you don't like big chunks of the tomatoes, slice into smaller pieces first.

In two smaller bags, put some pesto (dried, fresh or in a tube) and some parmesan cheese. (Parmesan cheese keeps *much* better than moister cheeses like cheddar.)

Addng olive oil will give you more flavor and calories. If you want to bring some, use a small (1oz) Nalgene bottle or buy some little foil packages of oil at a deli or salad bar.

Put the two smaller bags and the olive oil container inside the pasta bag so all elements of the dinner are together. (You might also want to stick a clove of garlic in the bag!)

On the trail, slice up the garlic and sauté it briefly in olive oil. Then add only the amount of water you need to cook the pasta & veggies (about 400 ml per serving).

Dump in the contents of the pasta bag and boil about 2-3 minutes. (If your stove is a "blow torch" model, you may need to hold the pot a few inches above the flame.)

Turn off the stove and cover. Your dinner will finish cooking by itself, and you'll save fuel.

When you're ready to eat, pour any extra liquid into your mug for a yummy broth. Stir the pesto and cheese into the pasta, plus salt and pepper if needed.

Tasty, healthy, one dirty pot, and no fork required!

From Sue Girouard: *Breakfast to Get You Going*

At home, make single-serving bags of the following ingredients:

1/2 cup or so old-fashioned oatmeal (Old fashioned oatmeal takes a little longer but doesn't get "gluey" like the quick kind.)

1 T. or so chopped walnuts or almonds

1 T. or so raisins or "craisins" or other dried fruit

1 T. or so brown sugar

pinch of salt if desired

On the trail, dump contents of bag into just under 1 cup of water. Bring to a boil and cook 4-5 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Next issue: How to make your own dehydrated trail food at home!

Burlington Section to Host GMC Annual Meeting

The Burlington Section will host the 2005 statewide GMC Annual Meeting, along with the Sterling and Laraway Sections. The event will take place June 10-12 at Smugglers' Notch Resort. The highlight of the weekend will be the grand opening of the new Lamoille River Suspension Bridge. We're looking for volunteers to meet & greet, register attendees, sell tickets, lead hikes and have a good time. Let us know what you can do and we'll find a job for you. To volunteer, contact section president Sue Girouard at 802-644-5941 or sueg@sover.net. Watch for more information in the next issue of *Ridge Lines*!

New Members

The following people have become members of the Burlington Section of the GMC over the last few months.

Ken Antonich, Daniel A. Bagley, Thomas F Beach, Keri Berg, Allison Brophy, Jean Cannon, Suzanne Daningberg, Margaret A. DeVolt, Meg Dunham, Geoff Elder, Carolyn Elliott, Terence Fallon, Margaret Faucher, William Faverzani, Sandy M. Kim, Martha Lang, Ronald Leavitt, Beth and David London, Jason L. Morin, Cynthia A. Moyer, Louise & Joe O'Brien, Matthew Palubinskas, Sallie Provost, Ruth Ravey, Jesse D. Robbins, Bill Rucker, Stephen & Judith Selin, Pauline Sherwood, Ann Smith, Mike and Pat Sutliff, Swift-Herzog (we didn't get a first name), Carol Talley, Jeffrey H. Tarbox, Courtney Thompson, Ellen R. & Scott E. Turnbull, Larissa Urban

Welcome!