

# How Confident are You with Your Winter Survival Skills?

Are you're a Scout or the parent of a Scout that enjoys outdoor winter activities like skiing, snowboarding or snowshoeing? What would you do if you had an equipment failure in the backcountry and a day hike suddenly turned into an over-night winter epic. Can you identify dangerous avalanche conditions? Would you worry if your Scout was planning a trip into snow country. The Winter Camping Seminar is approaching and you can address all those concerns.

The seminar addresses all aspects of winter camping and outdoor travel in a condensed class room session that assumes basic backpacking knowledge and builds on that for a fun and safe experience in the Winter.

Topics addressed include:

- Special considerations for Winter camping, and required winter equipment.
- Clothing and layering for efficient and light packing.
- Sleeping systems to stay warm and dry surrounded by frozen water.
- Survival in Winter weather.
- Best practices for stoves and cooking in the winter.
- Avalanche safety and first aid topics unique to winter.
- Construction of an igloo.



There are two parts to the class, a Saturday classroom session and an overnight camp held at Steven's Pass, where the students will build an igloo and spend the night in it. Staff will be available to assist and direct the activity. The igloo construction has been systematized to make it predictable and consistent. This author has built and used igloos and other types of snow shelters in the past 30 years and paid attention to various printed methods of igloo construction but has never seen the process laid out in a simple easy to follow set of repeatable steps leading to a usable igloo. In other words, participants will learn a secret super-method to build an igloo that seems to be a bit of a lost art. The tools and methods can easily be adapted to other types of snow shelters.

A basic avalanche awareness session is incorporated into the class. This includes hands on work, digging a snow pit, examining the layers of the snowpack and subjecting the snow to

easily understood mechanical tests. On the mountain students will make an educated assessment of avalanche hazard in a safe setting from this analysis in the snow pit.



The Winter Camping Seminar has been running annually for many years. It's staffed by many returning instructors who are passionate about the outdoors and comfortable in the winter environment. To participate boys should be 14 years old or older. Younger boys may not have the attention span and ability to lift fairly heavy snow blocks to construct a snow shelter. Additionally, since the class is best suited for boys with a few years of Scouting experience, it is ideal as a leadership platform

which can allow more experienced Scouts to practice their camping and shelter building techniques and then use that knowledge in their troop to organize and teach a troop based winter activity which will introduce younger scouts to the winter outdoors. The class welcomes older Scouts that would like to assist as junior leaders. Adult leaders and Scouters are also welcome.

There is an economics and safety argument for taking this class too. A three-day AIARE level 1 avalanche safety course costs \$300 –\$400. Younger scouts are unlikely to participate in this level of a safety course. However, they may be exposed to avalanche danger while snowboarding or skiing in the backcountry or 'side' country near ski areas. While most of the skills taught in this class (with the exception of the secret super-methods for igloo construction methods) can be learned through other venues, the time commitments and expense are much higher and generally unavailable to boys under 18 and generally the classes are not operated by the Scout Council.

This year the class is being held on February 10th with the overnight trip scheduled for February 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>. The location for the class room session is still being finalized at this time. Cost for the class will be modest but check with Mount Baker Council for prices.

The seminar also sells snow saws and saw blade blanks made to custom specifications.