

Cold Weather Hints for Hikers (from Multiple Sources, Including John Dietrich, Tom Elliot, and Dr. Bob)

1) YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE for knowing the forecast! Be aware that strong winds from any direction will exacerbate the cold (especially on exposed skin) and will make the bridge crossings highly unpleasant. Northwest winds mean that hikers will be hiking into the wind on the stretches from Chain Bridge to Great Falls OUTBOUND and (much later) from the National Airport / Four Mile Run intersection to Bluemont. Southwest winds mean that hikers will be hiking into the wind on the stretch from Key Bridge to Gravelly Point and on to the National Airport / Four Mile Run intersection.

2) REMEMBER THAT WATER FREEZES. For this reason, DO NOT USE A CAMELBAK IN TEMPERATURES BELOW 30 DEGREES – the sip tube will freeze, leaving you with NO WATER (but plenty of dead weight to carry). Similarly, water bottles should not be openly exposed on a hipbelt or in a mesh pocket on a daypack, as the screw caps will freeze on – storage in an inside jacket pocket is usually adequate to prevent freezing. If it's above 25 degrees, storage inside a daypack is probably adequate – but definitely not below 25 degrees.

3) REMEMBER THAT BATTERY LIFE IS SHARPLY REDUCED IN COLD TEMPERATURES. Cell phones should be charged to the max BEFORE arrival at St. Agnes, and (as noted elsewhere) used sparingly during the hike – do NOT plan or expect to charge at the gym before you start hiking. 50-Milers (actually anyone planning to hike to Bluemont) need headlamps or other lights with FRESH batteries installed in them. A flashlight with used batteries that worked just fine in your bedroom at 72 degrees, will be dead in an hour at 20 degrees, when you need it most. Lithium batteries weigh the least and perform the best in cold weather – they're worth the expense.

4) Clothing – This is BY FAR the trickiest issue for long hikers to deal with, requiring well-considered compromises between weight and warmth. The more clothes you're wearing, the warmer you'll be – but also the faster you will become fatigued from carrying all that weight (and believe it, a pound in the morning feels like 5 pounds when struggling through the last two or three Bluemont Loops). Folks who overdress tend to fade at 25 to 30 miles, just from carrying all the weight. Some hints:

- Dress in layers that can be shed as needed as the day warms up, and added as need when the temps go down or the wind kicks up. Carrying a lightweight daypack gives you a place to put removed items til the next support stop. Bring extra choices in your support duffel, so you have options at the Support Stops.
- Wearing dark-colored exterior clothing will get the most heat benefit from the sun, if there is any on Hike Saturday.
- If the wind is really howling, try to obtain and wear a very lightweight, “throwaway” plastic rain suit as your outermost cover. This will totally block the wind. Do not wear

one of those rubberized rainsuits or coats – they weigh too much. Even a disposable poncho tied around yourself with a belt, or tucked into your pants, can be a lifesaver.

- Other accessories to consider are thin facemasks or scarves, neoprene gloves, and wraparound (close-fitting) sunglasses or ski goggles. Note that only well ventilated ski goggles work for hard hiking – regular ski goggles will quickly fog up, and will have to be removed or constantly wiped off. A few adults like to hike with hiking poles, but they're not needed by Scouts. Hand- and toe-warmers (chemical hot packs) are helpful, though they're usually not critical if the hikers are hiking HARD (but if you routinely experience cold hands and feet, consider bringing a supply of warmers).
- Be aware of “dumb” choices. Baseball caps, shorts, cotton clothes, heavy winter jackets, heavy daypacks, etc.; these have all been seen on previous ASHs.

5) If you're suffering from the cold, be sure to get soup or hot chocolate at the Support Stops, and if necessary take a break in a heated warming tent or in a heated car. At the least, try to get out of the wind during your stops. Stay Hydrated! – Dehydration and Hypothermia go hand-in-hand (something very few Scouts understand).

6) Finally, do NOT walk yourself into a frostbite or hypothermia crisis! - if you or a buddy need help, get it; don't wait. EVERYONE should monitor their hiking buddies and fellow staffers for signs of frostbite and hypothermia. Critical spots are EARS, nose, fingers, and toes. Expect to be asked about this at every Support Stop – and answer truthfully!

Hike On!

[2018 Update]