

SNOW ACTIVITIES AND GAMES

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The benefits of planned activities on any camping trip are many. Scouts often have more fun if there are activities and games, there are generally fewer behavioral problems (idle hands...), and they promote participation and camaraderie. Well-chosen activities can provide opportunities to learn new skills, improve confidence, and provide a sense of adventure. Here are just a few ideas that can be used during winter camping trips.

As with any Scouting event, no activity should be started without first considering the risks and possible hazards. In the winter setting, the first priority is ensuring the Scouts (and leaders) stay dry. Hence, snowball fights are generally discouraged or banned. Immediately end any activity or game when you see Scouts getting wet or behavior getting out of hand; then move on to plan B.

Snow Games

✧ Jump Snow Hurdles

Lightly pack a bunch of basketball-size snowballs and then use them to build a course of hurdles to jump over in a round of follow the leader.

✧ Rope Tow

Put two teams together for a slip-sliding variation of tug-of-war. Tamp down a wide, shallow trench in the snow to serve as the midline. Then, take up positions at the ends of a long, thick rope and let the tugging and towing begin. Whichever team pulls the entire opposing group over to its side of the trench wins.

✧ Strike Out

For this pitching contest, first mound up snow to create three bases and a pitcher's mound. They should each be about 2 feet high and 20 feet apart. Next, build a tin can pyramid on each base. The challenge is to knock down the stacks in order from first to third base by throwing snowballs from the pitcher's mound. The player who succeeds with the fewest pitches wins.

✧ Hat Trick

Once you've built a plump, frosty snowman to stand sentry in the camp, make a game of topping him off in style. Take turns trying to land a hat on his head by throwing it Frisbee style from 10 or so feet away.

✧ On A Roll

Have players pair up for a contest in which the object is to finish with the biggest snowball. The contest ends when the teams can no longer roll their entries or when you run out of snow.

✧ **Skiing or Snowshoe Relay**

Build an obstacle course through trees, around rocks, and over mounds of snow. Have the patrols line up at the start line. One member from each patrol goes out at a time. When a member has passed the finish line, the next member goes out. The patrol to finish first wins.

✧ **Winter Slide**

Find a hill for sliding down on toboggans. This is just fun at any age. Make sure there are no obstacles and that you have a safe run-out.

✧ **Shovel Sliding**

Use your shovel as a sled.

✧ **Snow Sculptures**

Create a wintertime zoo out of snow. Have a patrol competition with each patrol building a snow sculpture. Turtles are an easy sculpture for young Scouts.

✧ **Animal Tracking**

Before playing this game, have the Scouts make animal paws that fit over the bottom of their shoes. Paws carved out of wood or leatherworking make good projects. Some excellent animals for this game are bears, wolves, rabbits and buffalo. Set aside a home stake for the animals. There can be as many buffaloes, bears, wolves, rabbits, and hunters as desired. Give the animals a head start so that they have plenty of time to make their trail of tracks in the snow. Release the hunters. When a hunter sights an animal, they must give a loud “halloo” and stop until the pursued has taken the animal paws off. Then the game becomes a race of hunters and hunted. The hunters try to tag as many animals as possible. Each animal tries to escape capture by the hunters. Bears may climb trees. Buffaloes depend on their swiftness and strength. Wolves and rabbits depend on their speed and cunning. The hunters score 5 points for each animal captured.

✧ **Snow Tag**

This game is best when played in deep snow. Use shovels to create a large wheel with spokes pattern in the snow. The rules are similar to a regular game of tag. “It” takes his place at the hub of the wheel. The other players scatter around the circumference or rim. “It” counts down and when done gives the command “ready”. “It” then runs out one of the spoke paths and tries to tag one of the other players. Two players cannot pass each other on the narrow paths. “It” tags a player by holding him long enough to repeat “snow wag, snow rag, snow tag”. The boy who is tagged becomes “It” and takes his place at the “hub”. And another round of the game begins.

✧ **Run a Klondike Derby**

Set up course of a half dozen “towns” with a fun skill competition or game at each. Patrols pull their sled from town-to-town demonstrating their skills and receive “gold nuggets” based on their performance. Skill competitions can be based on any Scout skill, but winter oriented skills are more appropriate. Consider the following or make up your own: Blind Sled Race, Snowshoe Relay, Spear throw, Fire Building, Snowball toss for distance or accuracy, Ice rescue simulation, First Aid (cold illness), Hasty Shelter Building (build a tarp shelter), or Blind tent pitching (one sighted member directs others).

✧ **Snowball Battle***

Split the players into two equal groups. Draw two lines about 30 feet apart. Erect one Patrol Flag in each camp. To bring the opponents' flag across the two lines into your camp ends the game and is a victory for the team that captures the flag.

Any boy who is hit in the chest or back by a snowball is out of the game but is allowed to coach his team members. No tackling. No ice balls. No wet snowballs. No tripping. No striking.

* **Note:** Snowball fights or battles are generally banned while snow camping. They are best played when there is a cabin or lodge to which wet or disgruntled Scouts can retreat. This game should be reserved for Venture Crews or more mature Scouts.

Other Snow Activities

✧ **Build Snow Shelters**

Learn how to build different snow shelters: Quinzee, Snow cave, Igloo, Trench, or Wind walls.

✧ **Construct Camp Gadgets**

Enhance your campsite by constructing a Kitchen with waist-height "counters", cubbyholes for gear storage, and a wind wall for more efficient cooking. Carve chairs (insulate with your ground cloth and sleeping pad for comfortable sitting). Make a Dining "room".

✧ **Learn and Observe Winter Ecology**

Identify and follow animal tracks, Look for bird nests (easy in deciduous forest), Learn and observe animal winter-survival techniques, Botanize (identify plants in their dormant state).

✧ **Hone Your Winter Camping Skills**

Learn different ways of obtaining water.

Construct an emergency snow shelter.

Practice Leave-no-Trace snow camping skills.

Dig an avalanche pit and observe the snow layers and different snow types. Simulate and practice avalanche rescues, beacon or probe (use a dummy, not your Scoutmaster).

Find a safe slope and practice self-arrests with an ice axe.

Practice staying dry.

✧ **Take a Hike**

Use your snowshoes or cross country skis. Practice your winter navigation skills. Learn to use a GPS receiver.

✧ **Learn Ancient Scout Skills**

Practice the trailing, tracking, or stalking skills required for Second Class up until 1972 (from Boy Scout Handbook, 7th edition, 1965). During the winter use buddies to mark and follow the trails. Specify definite, safe boundaries.

Trailing, Requirement 2a. *Follow for half a mile a trail made with trail signs or by a person wearing tracking irons (whatever they are - use snow shoes) or dragging a whifflepoof (or sled).*

Tracking, Requirement 2b. *Follow for a quarter mile the track of a person in soft ground or snow, reading the meaning of the track.*

Stalking, Requirement 2c. *Follow another Scout who knows that you are stalking him for a distance of half a mile, without being seen by him.*

✧ **Participate in Ranger-lead Programs**

Many National and State Parks have winter ranger walks. Yosemite has a great snowshoe tour (free snowshoe rentals) leaving from the Badger Pass ski area.

✧ **Ice skating.**

Ice skating on the rink in Curry Village, Yosemite NP, has one of the finest views found anywhere. Do Not ice skate on reservoirs. Fluctuating water levels, even in winter, cause unsafe ice.

EVENING ENTERTAINMENT

Evening entertainment in the winter camp starts earlier. And it must often be put on in a limited area that does not lend itself to the skits and stunts that are favored during other seasons. Add variety to the evening program by planning a different feature each night. Hold certain things in reserve in case the camp is weather bound for an entire day.



Winter Entertainment Ideas

- ✧ Songs
- ✧ Story Telling. Poems by Robert Service (e.g. Cremation of Sam McGee) are always popular.
- ✧ Reading Aloud
- ✧ Handicraft Projects
- ✧ Whittling
- ✧ Magic Tricks
- ✧ Card Games
- ✧ Scout Yells
- ✧ Star gaze. Learn the winter constellations. The early nights are often dazzlingly clear and crisp.
- ✧ Recognition and Presentations

And of course, patrol competitions always liven up the activity.