

# THE CHALLENGE OF WINTER CAMPING



## OKPIK PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

### **OKPIK**

The word OKPIK (ook'-pic), which means Snowy Owl in the Inuit language, has identified the Winter Camping program at the Charles L. Sommers High Adventure Base since it began in 1971. Representing innovation in the field of winter camping, the OKPIK program has grown to nationwide proportions. Since October 1984, OKPIK has been the approved name and symbol for the Boy Scouts of America's National Cold Weather Camping Programs.

The Charles L. Sommers National High Adventure Base, located 22 miles northeast of Ely, Minnesota, is the site of Boy Scouts of America's National Cold Weather Camping Development Center. At this site from December through March each year, Scouts, Scouters, and Venturers can participate in a variety of exciting cold weather adventures. The Charles L. Sommers base also serves as a national BSA resource for cold weather related development and information.

## OKPIK PROVIDES

For your winter camping experience, OKPIK provides the necessary camping and cooking equipment, food, skis, snowshoes, and sleds. Mukluks and supplemental outer clothing are also available for those people who need them. Please note that items such as hats, socks, and long underwear are not available for issue. These items must be provided by each participant and are generally stocked in the Trading Post for those people who didn't bring them. **Everyone is required to bring a sleeping bag, even if only a summer weight or "3-season" bag.** OKPIK will provide a supplemental sleeping bag to the people who need it.

## WHAT TO BRING

We provide OKPIK participants with supplemental clothing but we can't provide everything. Therefore, it is important that you plan carefully, using the equipment list as a guide. Some items are required; other items are recommended if you have them available. If you have something not on the list but are comfortable with it, or want to try it out, bring it along. The OKPIK staff will instruct you in how best to use what you brought and will outfit you with the supplemental clothing you need.

As you prepare for OKPIK, there are several important points to remember about insulation and how to stay warm. Later sections of this handbook explain these points in greater detail and should be referred to as you make decisions about what to bring. Briefly, some of the more important points to remember are:

1. Wool is a much better insulator than cotton. Even when wet, wool retains much of its insulating value while cotton loses all insulating value when wet. Do not use cotton blue jeans or t-shirts for winter camping!
2. Down, even though a good insulator, is difficult to use in a field-type situation. Once it's wet, it has no insulating value and is difficult to dry. Use down as an insulator only if you're familiar with how to handle it.
3. Synthetic fibers and fabrics are excellent insulators. Polypropylene, Thermax™, Polarfleece™, Hollofil™, Quallofil™, and Thinsulate™ are several examples of the many appropriate synthetic fibers.
4. Wear clothing loose and in layers as illustrated later in this handbook.
5. To learn more about the fun of cold weather camping use the OKPIK: Cold Weather Camping manual, published by the BSA as your resource. Clothing, gear and food outfitting are discussed as well as cold weather safety and first aid, shelters, travel methods and equipment making. The manual is available from the BSA and the Northern Tier High Adventure Trading Post.

## GROUP GEAR LIST

Most of the gear needed by the group for cooking, shelter, and travel such as stoves, pots, tents, sleds, and skis are provided for you. However, there are a few items the group must provide.

- \_\_\_\_\_ First aid kit, one for each group of 8 people
- \_\_\_\_\_ Ground sheets - one 30" x 72" per crew member - waterproof plastic or nylon
- \_\_\_\_\_ Compass(es)

## The Inuit

THE PEOPLE WE KNOW AS THE "ESKIMO" LONG AGO DETERMINED HOW TO LIVE AND ENJOY A SUB-ZERO ENVIRONMENT. OUR METHODS ARE PATTERNED AFTER THEIRS, THE ONLY DIFFERENCE BEING IN DETAILS OF MATERIALS, FOOD AND EQUIPMENT.



**GOOD CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT** - These are essential for your enjoyment of the outdoors in the winter. The base furnishes many pieces of equipment so that a one-time use will not be expensive to you. In this folder, various items of clothing and equipment are described as well as the reasons for their use.

**WINTER** - Short days, deep snow and cold, clear, dry air characterize our winter. The beauty of snow-covered terrain and the hushed silence of frozen lakes provide a unique setting for those who answer the call of winter camping. Learning to live in and enjoy the snow country is a challenge that requires preparation and training. But once you have answered this call and have slept beneath the stars and the northern lights arrayed against a black velvet sky, or listened to the distant howl of a hunting wolf, snow camping will become an unforgettable experience which calls you back again and again.

**TEMPERATURE** - This indicates how much of the system you will need. In warmer situations, only part of the system may be needed. The winter camper adds or takes away individual items to maintain personal comfort. In extreme cold, the entire system may be in use. Clothing items worn inside the sleeping bag including a knit cap also add warmth.

**FIRE** - Nowhere in the winter clothing or sleeping systems will you find any provision for fire to provide body heat. Fire in the winter is a "false god" in regard to warmth. The body itself is like a big furnace. You stoke your furnace with good food; it burns the food and provides the heat which your heart circulates through your body. Layers of insulation determine how much of that heat is retained and how warm you will feel. Fire is useful for turning snow into water, for its cheerful glow, and for heating water in an emergency. Extreme care must be taken around an open fire not to get too close with synthetic fiber garments which can shrivel or melt just from reflected heat.

**WHAT KEEPS YOU WARM?** - When you really study what keeps you warm, it becomes clear that it is you! Your body produces all the heat you need. Your clothing is designed to hold in whatever heat you need to feel comfortable under a variety of conditions and activities. You will notice all our clothing is loose. That is because

tight clothing constricts the flow of blood so the body heat cannot move around - just like when a faucet is turned off. That is why tight boots mean cold feet and a tight belt means cold legs.

# C O L D

C.O.L.D. - That is an easily-remembered key to keeping warm.

**C** - Keep yourself and your clothes **CLEAN**. Dirt and body oils which build up on clothing destroy its insulating properties.

**O** - Avoid **OVERHEATING**. Clothing is designed to be taken off or added to in layers to maintain an even body heat.

**L** - Wear clothes **LOOSE** and in **LAYERS**.

**D** - Keep **DRY**. Wet clothing removes body heat 240 times faster than it will dissipate through dry clothing. Wet is trouble.

**VENTILATION** - To regulate the amount of heat, yet not get overheated and wet with perspiration, adjustments can be made to loosen up the waist, the cuffs and the neck opening, allowing more heat to escape.

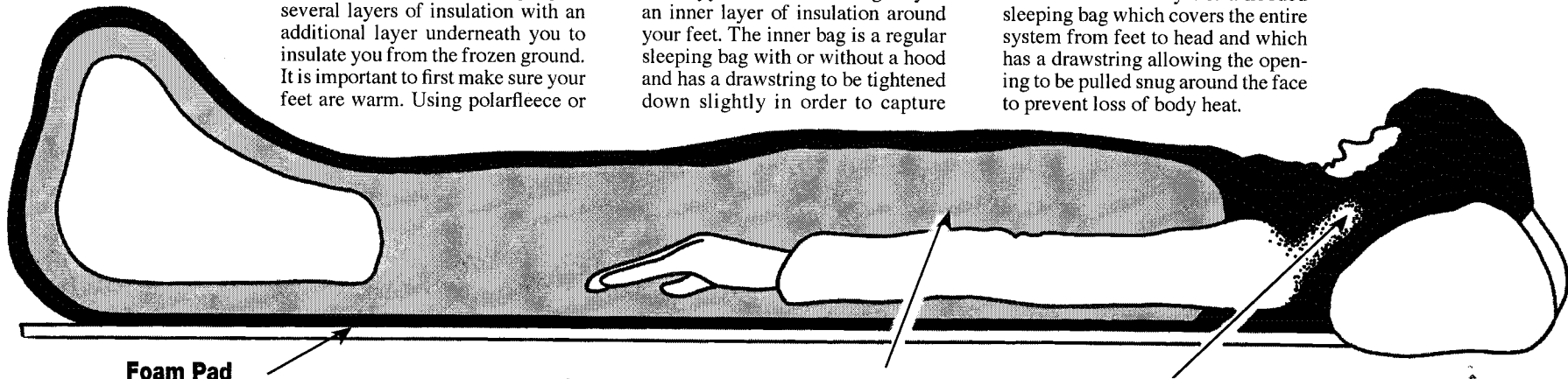
**WET, WINDY, COLD** - This is the combination that spells danger to the winter camper. We avoid it by keeping dry, getting out of the wind when possible, and wearing the correct clothes.

## Your Sleeping System Is Designed to Keep You Warm

Essentially, you are sleeping in several layers of insulation with an additional layer underneath you to insulate you from the frozen ground. It is important to first make sure your feet are warm. Using polarfleece or

other types of booties will give you an inner layer of insulation around your feet. The inner bag is a regular sleeping bag with or without a hood and has a drawstring to be tightened down slightly in order to capture

heat. The outside layer is a hooded sleeping bag which covers the entire system from feet to head and which has a drawstring allowing the opening to be pulled snug around the face to prevent loss of body heat.



**Foam Pad  
Stops Cold From Below**

**SLEEPING PADS** - These are essential for insulating the body from the cold ground. They come in three types: 1. Closed cell foam; 2. Open cell foam, used with a closed cell pad; 3. Insulated air mattress or Therma Rest® style pad.

**Three-quarter Bag, or Bag Liner**

**Hooded Outer Bag Covers Everything**

**TYPES OF BAGS** - Inner bags and outer bags may be made of synthetic fiber which can be stuffed compactly for travel. These are particularly tailored for long distance trips in the winter. The cold weather outer bag is very warm and while somewhat bulky, can be compressed down into a servicable size for travel.

**Your Sleeping System Works Best When Kept Clean And Dry**

## Your Clothing Is Your Key To Winter Comfort

**HEADGEAR** - This is personal preference but it is always a good idea to have at least two stocking or knit caps & one for use under a parka hood and one for use in the sleeping bag. Soft, insulated caps with ear flaps are good, but should be loose-fitting.

**EYE PROTECTION** - Goggles are best, but sunglasses and homemade snow shields will reduce glare from sun off the snow, a situation which can cause "snow blindness."

**SCARF** - Wool or synthetic fiber makes an excellent cold weather protector, but make sure it is plenty long.

**PARKA** - The anorak or pullover should be windproof, should reach almost to the knees, and be large enough to fit over all the other garments. It should have a hood.

**HAND COVERING** - This is a personal preference which can be made up of any loose-fitting combination of the following: wool gloves, wristlets, wool mittens, insulated mittens, leather over-mitts or wind and waterproof expedition mitts.

**JACKET** - A lightweight wool or fleece jacket used in combination with other outer garments makes a better "layering" system than one thick, heavy jacket. A hood for extreme cold is a welcome addition.

**VEST** - This insulated garment keeps the vital organs - heart and lungs - warm. Best style has a flap in back to protect the kidneys. Detachable sleeves convert a vest to an insulated jacket.

**SWEATER** - Wool or fleece synthetic.

**SHIRTS** - Wear full-cut, loose wool or synthetic fiber.

**LONG UNDERWEAR** - May be wool, wool-and-synthetic fiber, and/or synthetic fiber. Keep a spare set for emergencies and to sleep in.

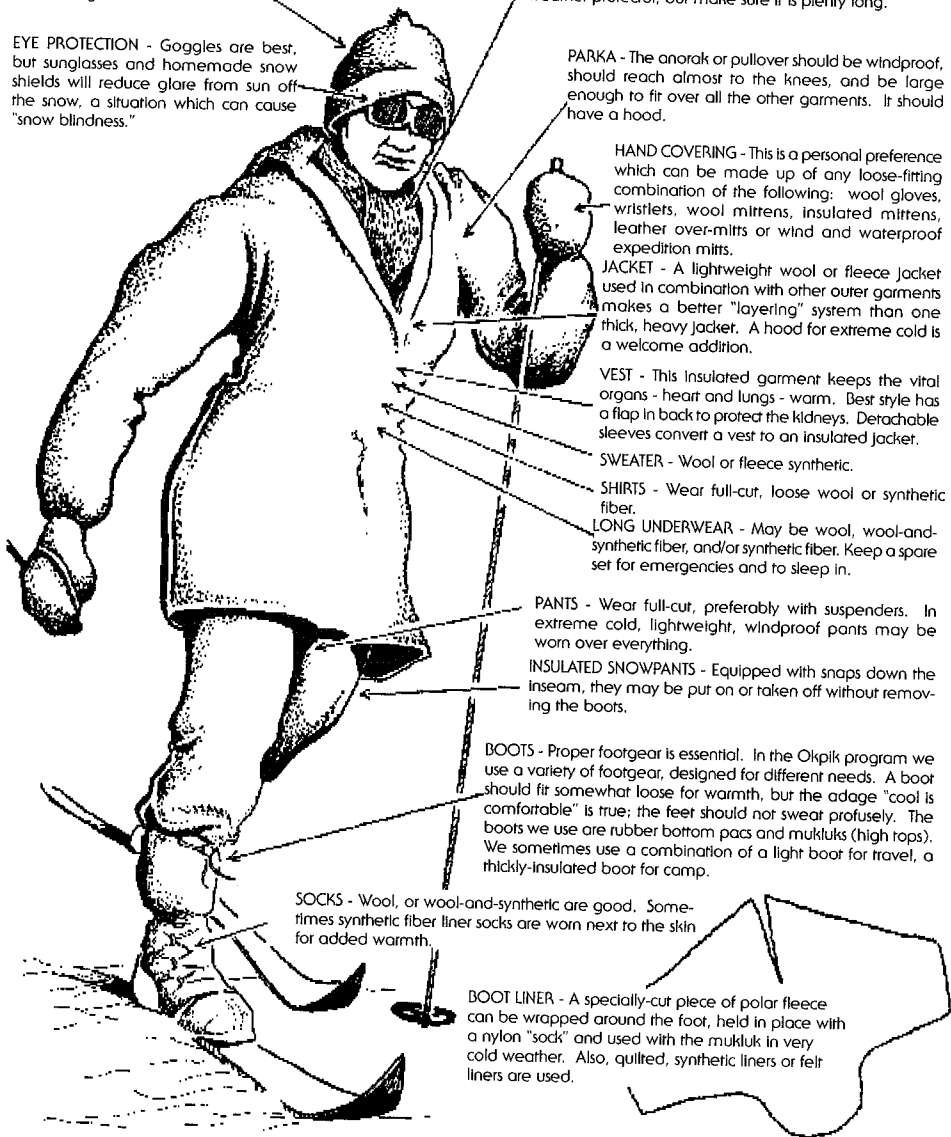
**PANTS** - Wear full-cut, preferably with suspenders. In extreme cold, lightweight, windproof pants may be worn over everything.

**INSULATED SNOWPANTS** - Equipped with snaps down the inseam, they may be put on or taken off without removing the boots.

**BOOTS** - Proper footwear is essential. In the Okpik program we use a variety of footwear, designed for different needs. A boot should fit somewhat loose for warmth, but the adage "cool is comfortable" is true; the feet should not sweat profusely. The boots we use are rubber bottom pacs and mukluks (high tops). We sometimes use a combination of a light boot for travel, a thickly-insulated boot for camp.

**SOCKS** - Wool, or wool-and-synthetic are good. Sometimes synthetic fiber liner socks are worn next to the skin for added warmth.

**BOOT LINER** - A specially-cut piece of polar fleece can be wrapped around the foot, held in place with a nylon "sock" and used with the mukluk in very cold weather. Also, quilted, synthetic liners or felt liners are used.



## PERSONAL EQUIPMENT LIST

When packing for OKPIK, consider protection for each part of the body. PLEASE BRING THESE ITEMS:

A COMPLETED Northern Tier Health and Medical Record Form signed by a Doctor in the last 12 months (this applies to both youth and adults). The parent or guardian of the youth must also sign the form. This form was provided to the adult advisor in the fall.

Sleeping bag. If you have a cold weather camping sleeping bag, bring it. Otherwise a summer weight or "3-season" bag is adequate as we will provide a supplemental bag to use with yours to make an extreme cold weather sleeping system.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 2 Winter stocking caps, - one spare, facemask type is best
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2 - 3 pairs of mittens with outer shell (mittens are warmer than gloves)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2 - 3 Sweaters and/or shirts, preferably wool or polar fleece. No Cotton
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1 Winter jacket, preferably hooded
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2 pair of long underwear tops (synthetic such as capilene or polypropylene) (no cotton long underwear) 3-4 pair for a Holiday stay.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2 pair of long underwear bottoms (synthetic such as capilene or polypropylene) (no cotton long underwear) 3-4 pair for a Holiday stay.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2 pair of pants, 1 pair preferably wool or an insulated snowpant. Do not bring blue jeans.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2 or more pairs of light liner socks (preferably synthetic, i.e. polypropylene - not cotton)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2 or more pairs of heavy insulating socks (preferably wool or synthetic, - not cotton)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Toiletry articles (toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, towel, comb, etc.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10 feet 1/8 inch nylon cord
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cup, bowl and spoon preferably all plastic or lexan (remember plastic can become brittle at extreme low temperatures)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Towel and Swimsuit for use in the Shower and Sauna after your trek

### RECOMMENDED ITEMS:

These items are optional, depending on personal preference and what you have available.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Insulated vest
- \_\_\_\_\_ Extra socks
- \_\_\_\_\_ Scarf or neck gaiter
- \_\_\_\_\_ Warm boots such as Sorels, "moon boots," shoe pacs (preferably with removable liners)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Closed cell foam pad
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pocket knife, matches, bandana, and other items you normally carry while camping.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sunscreen, Chapstick, foot powder
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sunglasses
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pocket flashlight, headlamp, or glow sticks
- \_\_\_\_\_ Skis or snowshoes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Camera and film
- \_\_\_\_\_ Small package baby wipes for personal cleanliness (keep in pocket near the body to keep thawed)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pee bottle - Large mouth plastic 1 quart bottle w/ a leak proof cap to be used at night when nature calls

**OKPIK PROVIDED PERSONAL ITEMS:** If you own any of these items & would like to use them, you are encouraged to bring them.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Sleeping bag for extreme cold temperatures (will be used with your summer or three season bag)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Closed cell foam pads
- \_\_\_\_\_ Supplemental outer clothing & wind clothing
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mukluks and foot wraps
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cross country skis and poles
- \_\_\_\_\_ Snow shoes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Water bottle and water bottle bag w/strap

## TRAINING

Before leaving the warm shelter of the base, training is given by the OKPIK staff in the following areas:

- **CLOTHING:** Review of the C-O-L-D equation listed in this handbook and how it can help you stay warm and comfortable.
- **EQUIPMENT:** How to safely and properly use the proper equipment in cold weather.
- **COLD WEATHER SAFETY AND FIRST AID:** How to prevent and treat hypothermia, frostnip, frostbite and dehydration.
- **FOOD:** The importance of food and water in maintaining body heat and energy.
- **WILDERNESS MANNERS:** How to minimize the impact of wilderness use.

## ACTIVITIES

All groups set up camp at either an established or wilderness campsite. Once that is done, there are a number of activities to choose from. Participants are encouraged to try several different activities but because of limited daylight hours during the winter months, there may not be time to try all of them. Your group may decide to spend most of the time traveling to a remote site, building shelters, and setting up and living in a winter camp. The activities available are outlined below:

**SHELTER-BUILDING:** Although there will be shelters available at some of the campsites, we highly recommend that you learn to build your own. Probably the best shelter to learn to make is the quinzee (pronounced "kwin-zee"), which is a Native American shelter used by the Athapaskan Indians. It is made by piling snow, packing it, then hollowing out the pile. Another type of shelter you may want to try is the thermal shelter, which uses a framework of poles with snow over it.

**SKIING:** Skiing is, of course, one of the more popular activities. There are several miles of ski trails in the area that OKPIK participants can use. We provide instruction to get you started and a map of the trails. If you would rather forge your own trail, that's fine too!

**SNOWSHOEING:** If you would like to travel a bit slower or in more rugged terrain and take in some of the sights and sounds of the "northwoods" winter, snowshoeing may be the way to go.

**ANIMAL TRACKING:** Winter is the perfect time to see what animals are up to and how they live. Tracks in the snow can be like a storybook. There are many to be seen, including the snowshoe hare, fox, wolf, moose, deer, otter, and members of the weasel family.

**WINTER GAMES:** What more perfect place for fox and goose or snowshoe soccer than a frozen lake?

**ICE FISHING:** Nearby lakes offer Northern Pike, Walleye, Rainbow Trout and Splake. The challenge is there for those who are up to it! If you have your own equipment, bring it. We offer a limited selection of fishing items in the Trading Post.

**DOG SLEDDING:** Each group attending OKPIK will be visited by a musher and a dog sled team. A demonstration of dog sledding will be given and rides will be offered for youth and adults.

## TRADING POST

Northern Tier maintains a well-stocked Trading Post with patches, souvenirs, sundries and camping supplies and equipment. Participants spend an average of \$40 each. If major items are desired, such as Polar Fleece jackets/vests, ski hats, mittens or socks - more money will be required.

## AWARDS

Each participant will receive either the OKPIK Winter Camping emblem or the Cabin Stay emblem to wear proudly on the right pocket of their uniform. Bizhew, Zero Hero, Ski Trek, Snowshoe Trek, Musher Camp and Dogsled Trek awards are available if the requirements have been met.