

WINTER TECH-TIPS
Secrets to staying warm and keeping winter fun
By Jack Roberts

Winter.....and Ice.....and Snow.....OH MY!!.....BRRRRRR!!!

The secret to enjoying ice climbing in winter can be found in the little and simple things that can and do make all the difference between an enjoyable day out and a day never to be repeated again.

The following are tips to employ to beat the winter blues.

1. Dress in layers. Wearing multiple layers allows you to control your sweating and thus by having dryer clothing you will stay warmer. Have warm clothing in reserve for when you stop moving and begin to cool down. A base layer with stretch fleece on top with a windshell over that usually suffices for the brisk walk in. On top of that pull on an insulated belay jacket.
2. Keep your hands and feet warm. Keep the blood running through your fingers and toes. Don't grip the axe handle quite so tight and keep handwarmer packets handy for gloves and boots. Wearing a wool or fleece cap keeps your toes warm and changing into dry gloves after the approach keeps your fingers warm. Always wear mini-gaiters or "puttees" to seal the gap between the tops of your boots and pants.
3. Bring hand-warmer packets. I've said it once and I'll say it again.
4. Keep the internal flame going. Eat food every 30 minutes to maintain your energy level and your body warmth. Slow-burning food like peanut butter/honey sandwiches or cheese and salami or Gel packets really work well in the cold.
5. Shorter pitches to stay warmer. Sometimes long pitches can save time because fewer gear transfers are necessary but when the weather is nasty or cold it helps communication, morale and keeps everyone warmer if the pitches are shorter than 60 meters in length. It might not seem like much but if everyone can communicate and keep moving then the day really does go by more quickly.
6. Balaclava. This article of clothing goes with me everywhere. It seals the neck from losing heat and keeps me warm and cozy during those long belays.
7. Really warm insoles. Lose of heat through poor insoles is a common reason people get cold toes and can't feel their feet. Keep a pair of warm, foam insoles especially for those winter climbs and be sure the fit isn't so tight with them in that you cut off blood circulation to the toes.

8. Down belay jacket/sweater. Take an insulated jacket or sweater up the climb with you. Something small, compact and down that you throw on over everything else can make you a lot warmer and happier. Follow the pitch in it and then hand it off at the belay.
9. Strings on everything. Don't take your hands out of your gloves if you don't have to and you don't have to if you have "strings and things" on zipper-pulls, Swiss Army Knives, chapstick etc.
10. A Thermos or two. It might seem a bit heavier than a water bottle and it is definitely more expensive but the ability to have a hot drink of your favorite beverage whenever and wherever you are will more than compensate you for the monetary expense. Sometimes I have two with me and my thermos-less partner is just red with envy because they either can't drink the cold liquid in their water bottle or it is frozen solid.
11. Extra clothing; Extra gloves, cap, etc.
12. Visually and physically inspect all clothing for rips, tears, lack of waterproofing etc. prior to leaving for the day's climbing.