

# A Winter Skills Camp for Polar Bears

by Sharon Bird Anderson

**L**ast February, over 200 Scouts, leaders and visiting Beavers and Cubs gathered at the Fredericton District Winter Scout Camp at Yoho Lake for a weekend camp called "Operation Freezeup." It proved to be colder than most of us expected.

The reality of outdoor survival in a harsh New Brunswick winter hit us hard on Friday night after arriving at camp. As the sun dropped below the horizon, so did the temperature, until it rested at a bone-chilling  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$ . With a shiver, most youth unpacked their bags and moved into cabins. The more hardy ones set up tents, looked nervously at each other and said, "We can do this!"

Shortly after supper, all Scout troops gathered inside the Fredericton District Scout Lodge at Yoho Lake for registration. Some outdoor warm-up activities worked off excess energy, before everyone broke into groups and took part in several discussions that reminded youth about winter dressing (layering clothes), cold weather first aid (mostly frostbite and hypothermia), footwear and how to stay warm at night.

An outdoor campfire (complete with skits, cheers, songs and stories) warmed everyone's spirits. It proved the perfect way to end the evening.

## Life in a Deep Freeze

Saturday dawned cold. During the night the temperature had levelled off at  $-21^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Our first challenge of the day: breakfast. Although we probably could have mixed the frozen orange juice with some coaxing, we opted for hot drinks instead. No one complained. Our eggs had frozen during the night, eliminating fried eggs from the menu, but our hard boiled eggs

served two purposes. First, we used them as hand warmers, then second, we shelled and ate them.

After struggling to clean up the dishes — some Scouts just wanted to chisel the scraps from their plates — all troops joined up for a round-robin of activities.

Each outdoor session ran for approximately 45 minutes. We created patrols by mixing Scouts from different troops to encourage new friendships to blossom. Patrols were given a schedule according to their grouping: A, B, C or D. Our morning activities included many skill-building stations.

## Winter Survival Kit

Scouts had to snowshoe 300 metres to this station, which leant an element of realism. When members arrived at the station, they discussed the merits of including various items in a winter survival kit. For example,

how would you prioritize the following items? A large orange garbage bag, matches, fire-starter, a pocketknife, water purification tablets, bandages, and sunglasses.

After choosing or discarding assorted objects, they assembled their own winter survival kit, which they took with them wherever they went for the rest of the weekend.

## Lay and Light a Fire

Several Venturers and Rovers organized this session; it began with these senior youth carefully explaining and demonstrating various fire-building techniques. Then each youth had to gather kindling, smaller pieces of wood, and finally larger pieces to make two different types of fires.

## Stoves and Lanterns

Scouts were shown differences between naphtha and propane camping



Photo: Alvin Ashfield

**"Aahhhh. There's nothing like a mug of hot chocolate around a campfire."**

equipment and fuels, then received instruction on various cleaning and field repair techniques.

We stressed safety aspects of working with stoves and fuels throughout the demonstration. Particularly, we showed Scouts how naphtha fuel has a very low freezing temperature, meaning it gets extremely cold before it solidifies. It can cause a serious cold burn if it touches skin during winter camps.

#### Meals and Nutrition

At this popular station Scouts first learned about the high calorie requirements of their bodies in winter. (For example, a strenuous day out on the trail snowshoeing might burn up 5000 calories, while a similar trip in summer might only burn 2500.) After learning nutrition-basics, Scouts gathered in small groups and prepared a high energy snack over either an open wood fire (which they had to prepare) or a Coleman stove.

You might want to plan this as the last station in the morning, so it leads neatly into lunch. Individual groups can prepare their own lunches by making stews and hearty soups.

#### Break for Warmth and Lunch

If your camp is as cold as ours proved, you might want to eat all meals inside, so Scouts have a chance to warm up. We found that our Scouts wanted to stay outside, so after the last station, everyone broke off into their patrols, returned to their main camping site and prepared lunch. Allow an hour and a half for meal preparation and cleanup, before starting your afternoon program.

#### Winter Shelters

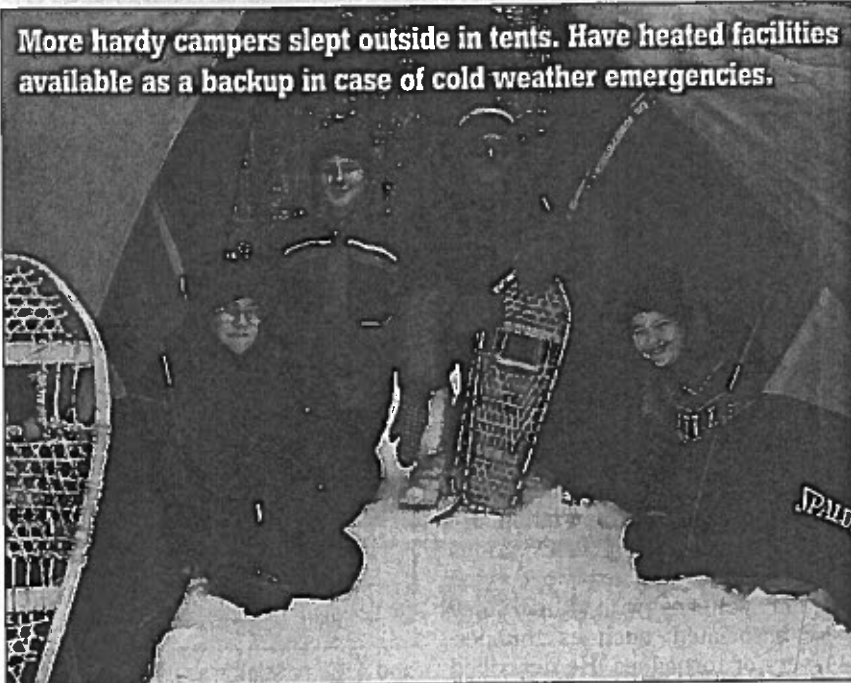
During this session Scouts visited several different sites where Venturers and Rovers had prepared various styles of winter shelters. These included tents, quinzhees, igloos, as well as different styles of heavy plastic and tarp shelters. We discussed the benefits of each style and talked about insulation values of snow.

If possible, give everyone an opportunity to build a quinzhee and sleep outside in it. Building and preparing it might take all afternoon, but it would be a highlight of the camp.

#### Winter Crafts

We organized two separate craft stations, offering many different items related to winter survival and camping. Our first involved making wog-

**More hardy campers slept outside in tents. Have heated facilities available as a backup in case of cold weather emergencies.**



gles designed by the Scouts. You might want to make snowshoe-shaped woggles or some other woggle shape that reminds you of winter.

Another craft project involved making different types of fire-starters. The first used individual egg cups from an egg carton; we filled these with dryer lint, then poured hot paraffin wax over the lint. (You could recycle old candles by melting them down, instead of using the paraffin wax.)

Another easy fire-starter for Cubs or Scouts involves cutting newspapers into strips, then rolling them and tying them with a string. Dip each little newspaper roll into wax, let it dry and you've got an excellent fire-starter. (See diagram p. 10)

If you're looking for an easy fire-starter that will get larger logs burning, simply dip cotton balls into petroleum jelly. Make sure each cotton ball is thoroughly saturated in petroleum jelly, then put them in a film canister. You should be able to pack 30-40 fire-starters in each film canister. These are outstanding fire-starters and will work in almost any weather. A soaked cotton ball will burn like a giant wick for at least five minutes.

Three wick emergency candles are also easy to make if you prepare in advance. Buy some candle wick at a craft store, and short, flat 10-15 cm diameter cans with lids. (Throat lozenges are sometimes sold in these cans.) Cut three wicks for each can, long enough so they sit on the bottom. Pour paraffin wax or recycled candle wax into the cans while a Cub or Scout holds the wicks in place.

(See diagram) Position the wicks around the can so they can be lit individually or together. One candle provides light, while three burning candles could melt water in a can during an emergency.

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**B**efore running your winter camp, check out the *Fieldbook of Canadian Scouting*. Not only does it feature a chapter on winter camping, but it includes a wide range of topics that relate directly to cold weather activities. Some include:

- How to build a snow trench, igloo, snow cave and quinzhee.
- Avoid hypothermia and other winter first aid emergencies.
- How to conduct ice rescues.
- How to pitch a tent on snow.
- Snowshoe basics.
- Map and compass activities.

What a gold mine of outdoor knowledge! Get yours today.