

A lot of hikers pack away their gear for the winter, but that's just when some of us get most excited about hiking. There are substantial rewards for winter hikers - stunning vistas, glissading, the amazing stillness of a snow covered forest.

Of course winter presents unique challenges too, and meeting those challenges are part of the fun for experienced hikers and one of the barriers for novices. I know I won't convince everyone to keep hiking all winter long, but I wanted to put together some advice and resources for those willing to try.

## The Layer System:

**"There's no such thing as bad weather...only bad clothing."** With proper clothing and a couple of test runs, you can put together a clothing system that will keep you nice and cozy in even the worst weather. In fact, one of the biggest challenges with winter hiking is managing sweat and keeping yourself from overheating.

You'll need a clothing system that keeps you comfortable across a wide range of activity levels (from standing still to strenuous exertion) and in various circumstances (calm and sunny to windy and snowing). "Comfortable" means you are neither cold when neither standing still nor sweating when active.

Sweat evaporates very slowly in the winter (look up "absolute humidity") so even a little sweat can leave you cold and clammy once you stop exerting yourself. Keep yourself cool by pacing yourself and removing layers.

Also remember that some standing around is inevitable, be it waiting for slower members, stopping for lunch, or waiting for the train or car shuttle. And of course if you or someone else is injured, it can be a long wait in the cold. The proper clothing (and gear) needs to keep you comfortable across all those circumstances.

## The Basic Layering System:

- **Base layer** - moves sweat away from your skin to keep you dry; usually wool or another wicking fabric
  - Most people only wear their base layers while moving (or it plus an additional thin layer or wind breaker) since that is all it takes to keep you warm.
- **Insulating layers** - provides most of the warmth; its often a layer or two of fleece or wool
  - These layers are added or removed
- **Shell** - protects you from wind, rain, and snow. Generally Gore-tex or another fully waterproof/breathable material.
- **Big Puffy Jacket** - A big puffy down jacket (or high-end synthetic) makes it easy to throw on when you stop.

**Soft shells** are a nice addition but not necessary. They are used instead of a traditional shell while active in slightly harsh weather. They provide some protection from wind and water ("resistant" but not "proof"), but are more breathable than traditional shells and generally stretch and flex better.

**Cotton has no place in your cold weather wardrobe**, even in socks, underwear or bras. It will absorb sweat, trap it next to your skin, and keep you cold and damp all day, leading to hypothermia once you stop moving.