

Learning Outside in Cold Weather at Wolf Ridge

Wolf Ridge staff have been teaching students and living in the cold for over forty years and in that time we have developed methods and behaviors that keep our students and ourselves warm and happy. Be assured that the safety of our students is one of our highest priorities. The information listed below refers to what you can do in preparation for a warm week at the Ridge and what you can expect from our staff while you attend.

What to Bring:

- Many layers for top and bottom: Adjust to temperature changes more easily and insulate your body with air that is trapped between the layers.
- Fleece, polypropylene and wool clothing: Cotton next to your skin is asking for trouble as it holds moisture; avoid this for socks as well as top and bottom layers.
- Warm hats that cover your ears.
- Mittens: Mittens trap the heat of your hands and keep your fingers warmer while gloves separate fingers and cool them down. GLOVES DO NOT WORK IN SUB-ZERO TEMPERATURES
- Warm winter boots - preferably with removable liners: Layer socks, but don't make your boot so tight you can't comfortably wiggle your toes. To dramatically increase the warmth of your boot, add an insole under the liner or your foot. Insoles can be cut out of scrap foam, wool felt or something similar.
- Outer layers of nylon (jackets, pants, and hats). Nylon outer layers will break the wind and thus nullify the wind chill effect.
- A scarf, face mask or neck-up/neck gaiter to cover your face and neck will keep your whole body warm as well as mitigate wind chill on your face.

While at Wolf Ridge:

- Dress in layers for every class. Always wear warm hats and/or hoods. Prepare for the wind. Remember classes are three hours long and weather can change significantly over three hours.
- Take out the liner of your boot every night to dry. Also, doing this in-between classes will help. Damp liners lead to cold feet.
- Keep all your clothes dry. If you return from class with damp clothing, hang it up to dry. There are also coin-operated dryers in the dorms.

- Avoid overheating. If you are hiking up a hill, getting very warm and think you will begin sweating ... take off a layer to maintain a comfortable body temperature.
- Take earrings out, so the metal doesn't conduct the cold into your ear lobe.
- If you feel dangerously cold, tell your teacher.
- Be aware of your friends around you and how they're doing.

Frostnip/Frostbite:

The precursor to frostbite is frostnip. Frostnip (also known as superficial frostbite) is when the very outer layers of skin begin to freeze, but you may not know it. This is similar to a paper cut you may get and not notice that it occurred until you see the cut. The most common places for frostnip are the cheeks, ear lobes and sides of your nose. All of these areas become red when cold. Frostnip is when a small white dot develops in that red area. If you see this on a friend, tell them and a simple warm hand placed over the site will quickly warm the area. Don't rub it.

Wind Chill:

Wind chill temperatures have risen to a greater level of awareness in the recent years. It is currently described as being the amount of time it takes exposed skin to freeze. Of course, none of us would stand facing a bitter cold wind without tipping our head down, turning our head to the side, etc. These simple measures dramatically increase your ability to deal with the wind. Once you have covered up with a wind proof layer, there are virtually no effects of wind chill.

Guidance and Help from Wolf Ridge Staff:

- Expect the teaching staff to review what clothing you have worn to class. They may ask you to return to your dorm room for more clothing or more appropriate choices of clothing.
- Stops are made periodically to assess students for warmth and other needs.
- Our teachers are trained to look for the signs of frostnip (the precursor to frostbite) and they are regularly scanning the faces of the group.
- Under windy, very cold teaching conditions the staff know the terrain and can move the group into areas that have more calm conditions.
- In addition to the heated buildings on the ridge top, Wolf Ridge maintains heated buildings in each valley below the ridge. In the event of emergency need for warmth, staff may take a child or a group to these buildings.
- Our staff are trained in measures to take if immediate warming of fingers and toes is necessary while out on the trail.
- Wolf Ridge maintains a small collection of winter clothing (hats, mittens, scarves, etc.). If needed, a student may borrow these items or a staff member may suggest this option.

The above measures cannot guarantee the prevention of a problem, but we know it can make the experience more enjoyable. In over forty years of teaching students in very cold conditions, we have had very few problems and we are quite confident that when properly prepared, the cold is a fun addition to the adventure and not a factor that precludes our staff or students from the learning and experiences at Wolf Ridge.

If you have any questions, please call your teacher at school or Wolf Ridge at 218-353-7414.