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From cupping hot coffee mugs on frosted rocks, to plodding the tail end of sodden trails back to basecamp,

camping in the cooler months is a tight-knit blend of serene winter scenes and cosy, creature comforts.
In this episode of the Snowys Camping Show, Ben and Lauren strip back the layers to reveal how to stay warm during brutal outback winters. Be it HotSpots in pockets, or hot coals under camp chairs – our gear gurus bivvy down on how to best harness the heat beyond our backyards.

Shortcuts:

Mentioned in this Episode:

Podcasts:
Ep1 – Staying Cool & Comfortable When Camping
Ep8 – Unexpected Wind & Rain When Camping

Ep9 – Dealing With Tent Condensation
Ep 11 – Sleep System Ratings with Sea to Summit
Ep45 – Fire Ban Seasons with the CFS
Snowys YouTube:
How to Sleep Warm When Camping
Products:
Coghlans Disposable Hand Warmer
Clif Energy Bar
Rainbird Stowaway Adult Jacket
Keen Targhee II WP Mid Men's Boot
Keen Pyrenees WP Mid Wmn's Boot
Hiking socks
Bridgedale Expedition Heavyweight Comfort Men's Boot Sock
Sherpa Fingerless Fleece Gloves
Gloves
Beanies
OZtrail Heavy-Duty Poly Tarp
Oztent King Kokoda HotSpot Chair
Oztent Redgum HotSpot Heated XL Sleeping Bag
Companion Portable LP Gas Camp Heater
Annexes
Tents
Gasmate
Coleman All Terrain XL Single Airbed
Sea to Summit
Sleeping bags
Sleeping mats
23Zero Alaska Black 1100 Sleeping Bag
Nalgene Wide Mouth Rectangular Bottles
Other:
Survival: How to Make a Coal Bed
Australian Gas Association (AGA)

Cold-Weather Camping

Previously, Ben and Lauren discussed how to handle unexpected wind and rain when camping (Episode 8) and sleep system ratings with Dean from Sea to Summit (Episode 11). Dating back even further, our outdoor experts discussed in Episode 1 how to stay cool and comfortable when camping.
As the weather takes a 180-degree turn to brisk, bitter, and bitey conditions, Ben and Lauren draw on these previous episodes to further detail the many ways we can stay toasty outdoors.

Thermals

An obvious place to start – thermals are an ideal, insulative layer for winter dressing. From simple, to multi-striped 90s-vibes, they're available in different designs and blends of fabric. While those with a polypropylene construction dry faster, they are also quick to become smelly. On the other hand, merino thermals tend to better regulate body temperature and boast odour-resistant qualities, therefore lasting multiple wears. Lauren also finds she can wear merino thermals for longer, while polypropylene has her feeling clammy.
As with most things, timing is everything – and that includes sporting a thermal! During the colder months, it's been advised that four o'clock in the afternoon – while the sun is still up, and our body is warm – is the most ideal time to put on a thermal. This is because a thermal's primary purpose is to retain warmth – and while we naturally attempt to warm up only when we feel cold, this is much harder to do than trap the warmth we're already radiating in the warmer parts of the day, leading into the chilly evenings.
This approach should also apply to our head, hands, and feet – calling on beanies, gloves, and socks.

Beanies

In a previous YouTube video on the Snowys channel, Ben detailed the ways in which to sleep warm. Within it, he references the fact that we lose a significant volume of heat from our heads.
In light of this, beanies are wise to wear in the colder weather, helping to trap and retain the heat that escapes from this area of our bodies.

Gloves and Pocket-Warmers

For Lauren, fingerless gloves go further than standard designs, proving functional in carrying out the tedious tasks during the colder parts of the day without the need to remove them.
Cranking the heat even still are pocket-warmers. Roughly the size of a chewing gum packet, "clicking" the pouch instigates a chemical reaction that releases heat to warm patches of our body through our pockets. While some pocket-warmers are disposable, there are reusable versions available that can be simply reset with boiling water.
When first activated, pocket-warmers are almost too hot to hold in a bare hand. One "click" provides enough heat to see cold, numb little hands through a cold, wet, school footy game.

Snacks

Our metabolism keeps our body warm by using energy to process the food we take in. A high-calorie snack provides higher energy levels – thus requiring more from our body to process, and generating more heat.

Jackets and Layering

While down- and synthetic-filled jackets are ideal for providing warmth in the bitter, brisk weather, Ben and Lauren recommend dressing in multiple layers. Instead of a single t-shirt underneath a large, padded jacket, multiple layers may include a quality thermal, a thick fleece jacket, and a windbreaker.
On windy days, wearing softshell wind-stopping garments will prevent cold drafts from creeping up and underneath clothing. A versatile option is a standard rain jacket, battling both rain and wind. Given its insulative qualities trapping heat effectively, often less layers are required when incorporating a windbreaker or rain jacket into your cold weather attire.

Warming the Bottom-Half

So, you have the top-half covered (literally) – but what about those frosty toes?!
As for our upper body, adequate layers are important on our bottom half too, such as socks and thermals. In the shoe department, Lauren recommends pull-on, heavy-duty footwear such as Blundstones or leather hiking boots, instead of sneakers. The breathable mesh and sponge-like construction of the latter have them less likely to bolster our feet from the cold, sodden surfaces.
Second to a good set of leather shoes to keep the heat in, Lauren recommends the campsite-friendly Ugg boot: Crocs, with a double layer of heat-holder socks. After kicking it about the campsite during dinnertime duties, simply slip off the Crocs and climb straight into bed with snug feet!

Wind

A brisk winter breeze can often be what turns a campsite from comfortable to cold. To help mediate wind, it’s recommended to create some sort of windbreak.
Lauren describes what camping with her grandparents in New South Wales was like as a child. Every cold, crisp morning, she’d dart across from the tent to where the campfire was surrounded by a canvas tarp windbreak. The tarp had trapped the heat released by the active campfire to create what felt like a heat bubble.
On a recent hike too, Lauren describes the patches of warmth she felt when passing clusters of trees. From these experiences, she emphasizes how effective windbreaking the campfire area can be in harnessing heat, especially if wind is the main cause of the cold. In Episode 8, Ben and Lauren discuss how to employ tents and vehicles as windbreaks at the campsite too.

Campfires

Ben’s top trick when piling up the sticks: don’t go overboard. Instead, only burn the kindling and tinder needed to cook and stay warm. Too much wood on the fire can mean the flames are too large for us to stand much closer than four metres, which defeats the purpose of a warming, comforting campfire.
Another way to add fuel to the fire… is to not. Instead, Lauren describes a campfire reflector

device – shaped as a half-moon and positioned across the back of the fire. The reflector works by rebounding warmth and light back to the main area, radiating heat and prolonging the efficiency of the campfire too.
The true minimalist he is, Ben also suggests building a similar structure from scratch using a lightweight frame and tin foil. Okay, Ben. Okay.

Don't go overboard when piling kindling and tinder onto the campfire – if the flames are too large, this defeats the purpose of standing close to a warming, comforting campfire. Credit: Earthwell

Coals Under Camp Chairs

Safety Ben will say not to do this – but Lauren backs this clever camping hack with everything she's got.
The heating method works by burrowing a small hole in the earth underneath camp chair and shoveling in hot coals. With no danger of embers, sparks, or flames, the heat rises and permeates throughout the base of the chair, warming our backsides like a hot bath!
The native Americans took a similar approach to creating a warm bed. In digging a hole, filling it with hot coals, and covering it with soil – they introduced what could be deemed the first 'electric' blanket!

HotSpot Chairs

As seen in the Oztent range, HotSpot chairs feature strategic pockets at the back and base to

fit hotspot pouches – some as large as wheat bags. Oztent has also released a HotSpot sleeping bag, offering the same heating technology. With six available pockets, the HotSpot pouches have the potential to add substantial weight to the top of the bag.
The hotspot chair and sleeping bag works just as efficiently using separately available heat packs, though these would require heating with a second appliance. In the same realm, Lauren also recommends draping either sheep skin or woollen blankets over camp chairs, preventing any loss of heat from out the back.

Blankets

In Episode 45 – Fire Ban Seasons with the CFS, the importance of keeping a blanket in the back of the car during the summer was discussed in the context of bushfire safety. For this reason, a woollen blanket is a wise investment for its dual-use.
Be it a thick or thin construction, blankets pack conveniently enough in with the rest of the camp tackle and make a substantial difference to the warmth and comfort of your seating when draped over a camp chair.

Tent and Annex Heating

Before elaborating on how to best heat a tent or annex with a gas heater before bedtime – Ben prefaces by reminding us that a bioproduct of burning LPG gas is carbon monoxide. Odourless, a build-up of this product in an enclosed, unventilated space has the potential to go undetected and send a camper into an endless sleep. The Australian Gas Association (AGA) provides a diagram on their website of what is deemed and enclosed or adequately ventilated space to house a gas appliance – for example, areas with a roof must have only three walls, while a space with four walls must have an open roof.
In an annex with an open side, gas heaters can be efficient at keeping the space warm. That said, a personal heater won't be as effective in maintaining warmth in a large space.
Gasmate have designed a gas heater unit with a duct that threads its way into the tent. While it has its shortcomings, the design is different to other gas heater models in having its combustion unit external to the tent, piping the heat inside. Caravans and camper trailers tend to have portable diesel heaters, which also work on the premise of its combustion unit sitting outside the sleeping area and feeding the warm air through a duct.
Nonetheless, a tent is essentially two layers of thin fabric, uninsulated – which by default means that the area will cool down rapidly unless warm air is pumping into the space at a consistent rate. For this reason, Ben recommends either considering some form of ducted heating, or heating the sleeping space with a personal heater prior to climbing into bed and switching it off once snug in your sleeping bag.

Maintaining Body Warmth While Sleeping

As discussed earlier in the podcast, warming ourselves up from an already cold, chilly state is difficult. When we consider how to maintain warmth through our sleep systems, Lauren and Ben emphasise that the standard PVC-constructed air mattresses filled with air are the least effective option. Essentially, our body heat travels straight into the void, with nothing to

retain or insulate the heat against our bodies.
In Episode 11, Ben and Lauren chatted with Dean from Sea to Summit about sleep systems. Dean confirmed that any sleeping bag with an official European Union (EN) standard comfort rating has been determined on a sleeping mat with an R-value of four. Considering this, purchasing a sleeping bag with an official EN comfort rating for sleeping atop a mat of an R-value less than four will likely mean experiencing less warmth than what is indicated.
The R-value is the measure of thermal resistance – in other words, the mat's ability to resist the transfer of temperature from one side to the other, preventing the cold or heat from the ground from reaching the sleeper on the mat. Considering this, sleeping on a mat with an insulative R-value of six in winter doesn't mean that doing so in summer will having you feeling too hot.
For those who own a sleeping mat of an R-value less than four, Lauren recommends lining it with a woollen blanket or underlay from an op-shop. This helps provide further insulation, especially for those sleeping on air mattresses. Other options include flannelette sheets, with the same material often found lining some sleeping bags and used for winter pajamas.

Liners

Despite what some may assume, layering too much between our bodies and the quilt or sleeping bag providing insulation can often be counter-intuitive. This is because insulation works by trapping our body heat – and given the heat radiates from us, the more layers between our bodies and the insulative later, the less heat escapes to be trapped. As a result, we can't keep warm as efficiently.
In light of this, Lauren suggests applying blankets or extra layers on top of our sleeping bags as opposed to rugging up in jackets and layers within it. While wearing multiple layers underneath can potentially make the sleeping bag redundant, it ultimately depends on how efficient the layers of clothing are against the efficiency of the sleeping, as well as how cold the outside temperature is. When it comes to the heating technology of sleeping bags, the fill of two bags could be the same – only one is padded with more, having it the warmer option. In that, Lauren clarifies that an effective sleeping bag isn't determined by whether or not it traps heat, but more by *how well* it does so.
Our body can only produce so much warmth, and our clothes can only offer so much insulation. Sleeping bags, however, are designed to trap body heat and warmth, technically more effective if more body heat is radiated back to us within the bag. Ultimately, the theory behind a well-tested sleeping bag is that less layers are required if they work efficiently – but they operate more efficiently if more warmth is generated.
Any sleeping bag brainiacs in the audience? Let us know your thoughts in the comments below.

Hot Water Bottles

For greater efficiency, a hot water bottle should have a quality, leakproof seal. For the lightweight hikers or minimalist packers (like Ben), a drink bottle can also double as a hot water bottle.

Managing Condensation

Essentially, managing condensation involves applying the opposite approach to what one may assume – allowing cold airflow into the space and warm air out. This is necessary especially if the environment is already wet, as hot air needs to escape to prevent the "sweating" or build-up of moisture.
In Episode 9, Ben and Lauren outline in more depth how to manage condensation when camping.

Thanks for listening, tune in again for next week's episode!

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If you have any questions for Ben and Lauren, make sure you head over to our Facebook group and let us know as we'd love to hear from you.
Catch you out there!