

MOUNTAIN-HIKING.COM

CATSKILLS WINTER DAY-HIKE CHECKLIST^{V.1.0}



WHAT TO PACK | WHY TO PACK | HOW TO PACK



WINTER

MORE DANGER
MORE GEAR
MORE CHALLENGE
MORE BEAUTY

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- 4. Pre-Planning
- 5. Clothes
- 6. Traction
- 7. Food & Hydration
- 8. Tweaks
- 9. Packing
- 10. Master Checklist

DISCLAIMER

WINTER HIKING IS POTENTIALLY DEADLY

PROCEED ON ANY COLD WEATHER HIKE AT YOUR OWN RISK

This guide does not address the risks intrinsic to winter hiking which include exposure to lethal weather, frostbite, hypothermia, deadly terrain, slips, falls, bone breaks and concussions in isolated areas where no help is available.

Cell service is *not available* in remote areas. In the event of any injury, hypothermia can follow quickly –and potentially death. It does happen. Every wilderness hiker should count on having to self-rescue.

Before venturing into the wilderness, even on well-known and popular trails, you must have appropriate knowledge, skills, gear and experience.

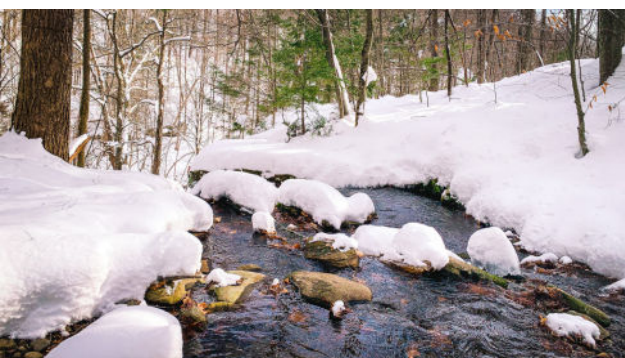
Never hike alone. A group of at least three is always advised.

This PDF lists common winter day-hiking gear. It should be used in conjunction with your own research, self-education, and in-person training.

One PDF ain't it.

RECOMMENDED

WINTER DAY-HIKE CHECKLIST



This is what I currently pack on my winter day-hikes in the Catskills

This checklist is dialed-in for the **Catskills** where only two summits (Slide and Hunter) are higher than 4,000 feet, and no summits are above the tree line.

This list should not be used to prep for any hike in the Adirondacks – or for hiking in any other mountain range.

The winter-specific items listed here are all *in addition* to The 10 Essentials and a basic mountain hiking kit.

This checklist builds on the blog post [Winter Hiking Gear: Survive & Thrive in the Cold](#) which you should review before continuing.

Pre-Planning

- ☐ Pack [The 10 Essentials](#)
- ☐ Pack a [basic mountain hiking kit](#)
- ☐ Research **route, terrain, elevation gain**
- ☐ Research **sunrise/sunset** times
- ☐ Plan a **very early start**
- ☐ Use a [hiking pace formula](#) to calculate your total hike time
- ☐ Check [weather reports](#) to make sure no storms are on their way to your chosen hike location
- ☐ Double-check you have the correct [emergency phone number](#) in your phone – hint: it's not 911!
- ☐ Send route plan, timing and correct emergency number to a **trusted party**

CLOTHES

Winter hiking requires many more layers than three-season hiking

Dress like an onion. Layering is the best way to control your body temperature and stay dry. Wearing several thin layers gives you way more control than wearing fewer thicker layers.

Personally, I run hot. Whether or not I'll wear thermal leggings and/or a mid-layer depends on forecasted temps and windchill.

Below 15°F (-9°C) I would probably wear all the following items, except the puffy. Above that temperature, I will start to strip away layers. Only you can know you.

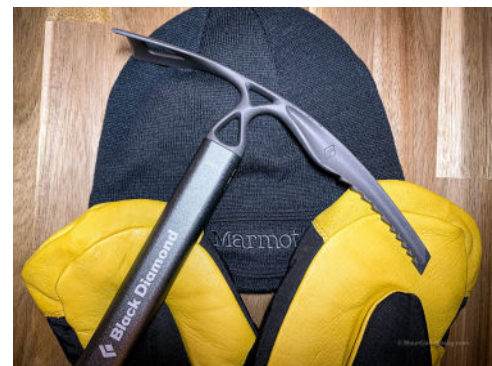
Everyone is different. Experience is the only way you'll find out what works best for you. Experiment with different clothing combinations. For example, some people hike with just a base-layer and a puffy.

Warning: Do not wear cotton of any kind. Cotton kills. It holds moisture like a sponge, rather than draining and drying. Deadly.

Top Tip: Plan to start your hike feeling a little cold. Dress for how warm you'll be after hiking for 20 minutes. That way, you won't have to stop and remove/repack a layer.

Checklist

- ☐ Liner socks
 - ☐ Wool socks
 - ☐ Thermal base-layer for legs
 - ☐ Thick synthetic hiking pants
 - ☐ Waterproof hiking boots
 - ☐ Gaiters
 - ☐ Base-layer for torso, long-sleeved
 - ☐ Synthetic (quick drying) tee shirt
 - ☐ Mid-layer (fleece or similar)
 - ☐ Puffy
 - ☐ Rain shell / hard shell
 - ☐ Buff / neck gaiter
 - ☐ Wool hat (plus spare wool hat)
 - ☐ Gloves (plus spare gloves)
 - ☐ Mittens (on super cold days)
 - ☐ Sunglasses
 - ☐ Chapstick
- You should pack all the above items in case conditions change.*
- ## Optional Items
- ☐ Balaclava
 - ☐ Ski Goggles



TRACTION

Proper winter traction is crucial for your safety

At the very least, you should pack mountain-ready **microspikes** like Hillsounds or Kahtoolas — not Yaktrax!

Crampons are necessary on only a handful of Catskills trails, but they are more commonly used now than previously.

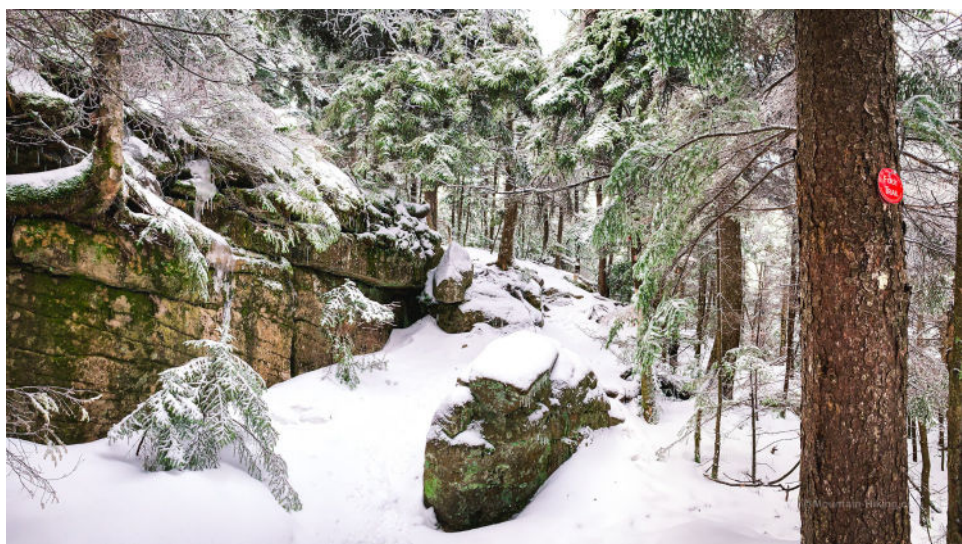
Crampons require special mountaineering boots and specialist training.

I do not own a pair of crampons and have no winter mountaineering knowledge.

Top Tip: When there's more than 8" of snow on the ground, switch to snowshoes to prevent post-holing.

I bring my ice axe on hikes when research or previous-hike-knowledge tells me it might be handy.

Ice axes are dangerous tools to carry and use. Research! Make sure you know how to carry and use your ice axe safely.



Checklist

- ☐ Microspikes
- ☐ Snowshoes
- ☐ Crampons
- ☐ Ice Axe
- ☐ Trekking Poles
- ☐ Snow Baskets

FOOD & HYDRATION

On winter hikes, you burn more calories, and faster

Fluids

Warning: dehydration will hasten the onset of hypothermia.

In winter, many hikers switch to Nalgene bottles for carrying H₂O. Personally, I've had no issues with my reservoir. I keep the feeder tube blown clear between sips, and the mouthpiece tucked inside my jacket so it doesn't freeze.

If you're using bottles, store them upside-down so ice forms away from the mouth. Insulate with a spare sock or foam beer-can-cooler. I bring a sports drink on all my long hikes because I've had legs cramps a few times; I figure it's due to electrolyte loss.

Foods

You burn up to a third more calories while hiking in the cold. More if you're snow-shoeing. Even more if you're breaking trail!

My trail mix is two mini-Snickers, Peanut M&Ms, licorice, and maybe some Skittles. I do also have emergency food (KIND bars and such) in my backpack apart from whatever I've packed to eat for the hike.

Checklist

- ☐ Full Water Reservoir
- ☐ Full Nalgene (insulated)
- ☐ Gatorade (insulated)
- ☐ Hot Coffee/Tea

- ☐ Trail Mix
- ☐ Sandwich / Napkin
- ☐ Soup / Spoon / Napkin
- ☐ Fruit

- ☐ Post-Hike Car Soda

- Eat before you're hungry
- Drink before you're thirsty

< Snickers will freeze solid

< Reese's Peanut Butter Cups will not freeze solid

TWEAKS

Hike smarter this winter

Whether it's snacks, lunch, or spare batteries, **keeping more items on your body** means less rummaging in your pack. Most upper body winter clothing will have pockets for stashing things.

Batteries especially hate the cold. Keep those close to your torso.

If you own a **personal locator beacon** (PLB), you should bring it. Don't own a personal locator beacon? Think about owning a personal locator beacon.

I sometimes pack a **shortie pad** (two sections of a closed cell foam pad) so I can sit for lunch without my tuckus freezing.

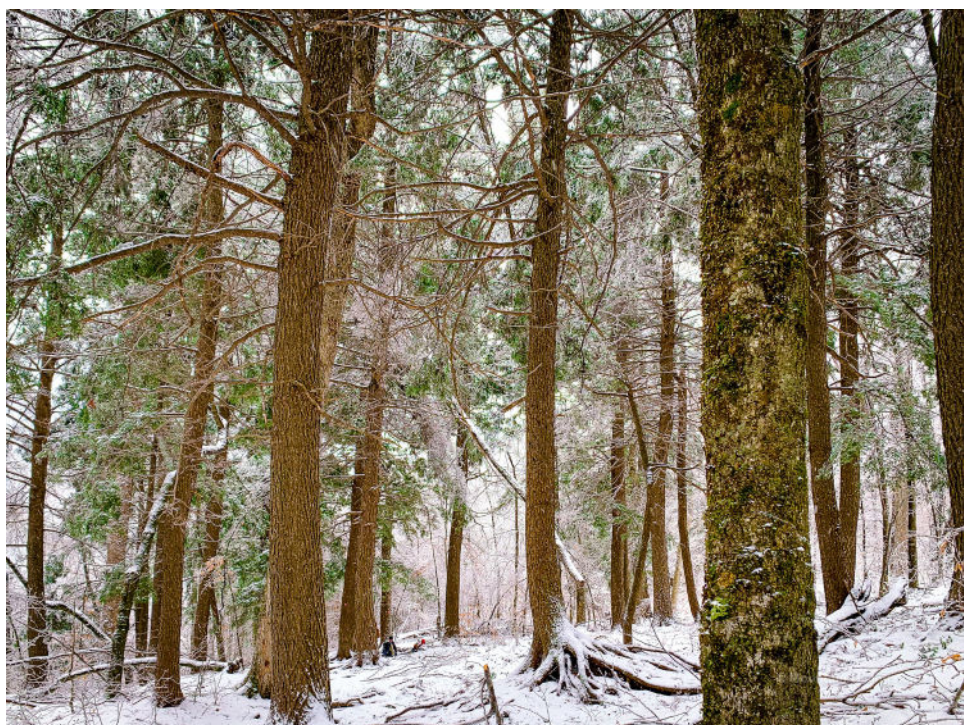
I carry **chemical hand warmers** but haven't had to use them yet.

Top Tip: On very cold days, your summit sammie may freeze solid. Thaw it out by stashing it next to your torso for a while (maybe a good while) before you need it.

My Experience: At 20°F (-7°C), I find I can stop for five minutes before the cold starts to work on my hands and back. Enough time to eat lunch. Below 5°F (-15°C), if I stop at all, the cold immediately starts to eat my mood. I eat lunch while hiking.

Checklist

- ☐ Map and compass — on body
- ☐ Shades — snow blindness is real
- ☐ Spare batteries — on body
- ☐ PLB — on body
- ☐ Face mask
- ☐ Hand warmers
- ☐ Shortie pad
- ☐ Post-hike socks and shoes



PACKING



More gear means more weight — and a brand new center of gravity

On winter hikes — with snowshoes, traction, and extra supplies — you'll be packing many extra pounds of gear.

Not only will this slow your pace, and make you tired sooner, it also changes your center of gravity. By a lot.

I first noticed it in 2019 as I was hiking up a steep incline on [Halcott Mountain](#). I leaned back just a little too far, and my heavier-than-usual pack almost pulled me right back down the slope.

It's not just the extra weight. It's how that weight is distributed.

As you pack, try to pack heavier items lower and pack lighter items higher. This keeps your center of gravity lower. You'll be more stable.

Attaching snowshoes and other items to the *side* of your backpack will keep your center of gravity closer to the front of your body.

On steep inclines, lean forward more than you think you need to.

WINTER CHECKLIST



Pre-Planning

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- ☐ Check [weather reports](#) to make sure no storms are on their way to your chosen hike location
- ☐ Double-check you have the correct [emergency phone number](#) in your phone – hint: it's not 911!
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Clothes

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- ☐ Buff / neck gaiter
- ☐ Wool hat (plus spare wool hat)
- ☐ Gloves (plus spare gloves)
- ☐ Mittens (on super cold days)
- ☐ Sunglasses
- ☐ Chapstick
- ☐ *Balaclava*
- ☐ *Ski Goggles*

Traction

- ☐ Microspikes
- ☐ Snowshoes
- ☐ Crampons
- ☐ Ice Axe
- ☐ Trekking Poles
- ☐ Snow Baskets

Food & Hydration

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Tweaks

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- ☐ Face mask
- ☐ Hand warmers
- ☐ Shortie pad
- ☐ Post-hike socks and shoes

My Amazon Lists

Many of these items are listed on my [Amazon Hiking List](#) & [Winter Gear List](#)

Disclosure: if you click through, at no additional cost to you, I will earn a commission if you make a purchase.

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