

Winter Wilderness Travel

“I love the deep silence of the winter woods. It is a stillness you can rest your whole weight against... so profound you are sure it will hold and last.” — Florence Page Jaques

The BWCAW in the winter is a truly unique experience, whether traveling by dogsled, skijoring, skiing, or snowshoeing. Visitors who come to the wilderness during this time of the year have a very different kind of experience than those that visit during the summer season. You are less likely to run into other visitors and can experience a sense of solitude and self reliance in a way that few other places allow. Winter wilderness travel requires a high degree of preparation, planning, skill, and self-reliance.

Winter temperatures in the BWCAW average 15-20 degrees Fahrenheit, with overnight lows from zero to 7 below zero. During severe cold spells, daily highs can remain below zero, with low temperatures falling into the 20 to 30 below zero range. Wind chill exacerbates the cold, and blowing snow can make travel difficult. Average snowfall is 50-60 inches, with 70-90 inches along Lake Superior. Snow depths in late February to early March may be 15-25 inches with some higher terrain receiving over three feet.

Winter conditions make self-reliance, good judgment, and knowledge of your limits critical. Whether you are dog sledding, skiing, or snowshoeing, it is important to plan well and prevent hypothermia and frostbite:

- Be prepared for extreme cold, windy or wet conditions. Dress in layers to remain comfortable by adding or removing clothing depending on conditions and your energy level. Change into dry clothing as needed.
- Drink plenty of water and eat often. Avoid alcoholic beverages. Alcohol causes the body to lose heat more rapidly, even though one may feel warmer after drinking.
- Avoid open water and thin ice. Never walk on ice less than four inches thick.
- Hypothermia is a dangerous lowering of the body temperature. Warning signs include uncontrollable shivering, disorientation, slurred speech and drowsiness. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in extremities such as fingers, toes, tip of the nose and ear lobes. If symptoms of either condition are detected, get medical care immediately!

Wilderness rules and regulations (see Page 5) apply year-round. Even though the BWCAW has a beautiful white protective coat on in the winter we still need to take care to Leave No Trace.

TRAVEL PERMITS

Permits are required year-round for all visitors to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. For day or overnight travel from October 1–April 30, it’s easy! Fill out a self-issued permit at any Superior National Forest office, or at a BWCAW entry point. Carry one copy with you during the trip and drop the other copy in the permit box at the entry point.

Choose a Campsite

- Bury human waste in snow 200 feet from water, campsite, summer trails and portages (pack out toilet paper and all personal waste items).

- When lakes are open, camp at designated sites using firegrates and latrines.
- When lakes are frozen, camp on ice in a sheltered bay, or in a natural forest opening. Locate camp at least 200 feet from trails or summer campsites, and out of sight of other groups.
- Make just one trail connecting the shoreline to camp.
- Bury human waste in snow 200 feet from water, campsites, summer trails and portages (pack out toilet paper and all personal waste items.).

Campfires

It is preferable to make a campfire on the ice to minimize fire scars on rocks and shorelines. Use base logs or a portable fire pan for your campfire on the ice. Use a campstove or fire pan for a campfire on land to avoid leaving fire scars on vegetation or rocks.

- Collect only dead and down wood far from shorelines, trails or campsites.
- Make sure your fire is out cold to the touch when you leave.
- Scatter ashes in the woods away from the shoreline and cover the campfire scar with snow.

Live Vegetation

Do not cut green vegetation for tent poles, bedding for humans or dogs, or to create new dogsled trails.

Reduce Dog Impacts

- Keep dogs under control at all times.
- To avoid damaging or “girdling” trees with rope when staking out dogs, use webbing straps around trees and attach dog picket line to webbing.
- Tether teams out on the ice with ice screws to avoid damaging shoreline vegetation.
- Never bring hay or straw for bedding because they introduce non-native plants.
- Scatter dog feces in the woods at least 200 feet from the water’s edge. Keep the entry points clean for others by picking up feces before and after hitting the trail.



TRAVEL TO AND FROM CANADA

All U.S. citizens are now required to present a passport book, passport card, or WHTI-compliant document when entering the United States. See CPV.gov for identification document examples.

Please Note: Children under age 16 will be able to continue crossing land and sea borders using only a U.S. birth certificate (or other form of U.S. citizenship such as a naturalization certificate). The original birth certificate or a copy may be used. See the Department of Homeland Security’s website listed on page 16 for more information on the changing travel requirements.

ENTRY INTO CANADA

If your trip to the BWCAW will include entry into Canada, you should contact the Canada Border Services Agency at least 6-8 weeks in advance of your trip to obtain a Remote Area Border

Crossing (RABC) permit. For information visit the Citizenship & Immigration Canada (CIC) website at www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca, or call 613-944-4000 and enter 1-1-2 to be redirected to the CIC Call Centre. Permits are required for overnight and day use entry. Please check with www.ontarioparks.com for your permit needs.

FISHING IN CANADA

If you plan on fishing in Canada, including the Canadian side of the border lakes, you must have a Canadian fishing license. Non-resident fishing licenses are available through the mail by calling the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources at 1-800-667-1940.

For more information visit www.mnr.gov.on.ca/MNR/fishing.

REENTRY INTO THE US FROM CANADA

If you enter the United States from Canada on your BWCAW trip, you must report to a Customs Border Protection (CBP) officer for inspection at the Grand Portage port of entry or designated inspection locations in Grand Marais, Crane Lake and Ely every time you enter the U.S. from Canada by boat. For more information about the Customs and Border Protection call 1-877-227-5511 or visit www.cbp.gov/travel/pleasure-boats-private-flyers.

“What we are doing to the forest of the world is but a mirror reflection of what we are doing to ourselves and to one another.”

— Mahatma Gandhi