



BUILT TO LAST

PROPER
TRAINING AND
QUICK THINKING
ALLOW ANYONE TO **BUILD**
A PERFECTLY COMFORTABLE
SHELTER, EVEN IN THE DEEP, DEEP SNOW.

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Photographs by Patrick Schneider

**FREEZE-O-REE
WEEKEND**
Short Hills, N.J.

17

When faced with the harshest winter conditions, there's only one thing you can do: fall back on your Scout training.

For the Scouts of Troop 17 of Short Hills, N.J., that meant working together as a team, thinking on their feet and wearing the right clothing during a daylong winter competition called the Freeze-O-See.

On a wintry day at South Mountain Reservation in northeast New Jersey, 27 Scouts were divided into four patrols. Each patrol was given a 30-gallon garbage bag, an 8-by-5-foot tarp, 100 feet of clothesline, a folding saw, a pocketknife and a copy of *The Boy Scout Handbook*.

With those items, they had to put together sturdy winter shelters in only three hours.

With a blanket of newly fallen snow on the ground and the temperature hovering in the 20s, the Scouts were tested in many different ways, with only their knowledge of winter camping to fall back on.

Peter Saudino, Jack Turner, Will Ryan, Hunter McIntosh and Brian Cariddi stay warm in a shelter built with a tarp and rope.

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Clothing Is Key

Dressing correctly topped the list. Because cotton is a poor choice for wet or chilly weather, 13-year-old Peter Saudino knew enough to wear wool and to dress in lots of layers.

"I had one main jacket on top of them," Peter says. "I also had some light snow pants as well as gloves and a hat."

After a recent snowstorm, the Scouts didn't know what they'd find in the woods. They had to use their imagination and make the best use of their surroundings in designing their shelters.

A downed tree lying at an angle inspired Andrew Vollavanh's patrol to build a tepee-shaped shelter.

"It really lent itself to that style," says the 16-year-old Life Scout. "We laid sticks against it and used leaves to keep the cold out."

Conor Mahon's patrol found two fallen logs. They used them as a foundation for their shelter.

"Then we chose to find medium-size logs that we could put on top of the two logs," 12-year-old Conor says. "We covered the gap with more logs and bark and leaves."



Above: Peter Guarino collects branches to use in his shelter. (Unless it's a true emergency, always use limbs that have already fallen off a tree.) Below: Scouts carry supplies to the site of the shelter-building competition.

Using the Land

Peter's group found a spot where a tree had fallen and created a pit in the ground.

"We draped the tarp over it and anchored it into the ground and made it into a lean-to," he says.

Keeping your shelter warm and dry is an essential survival skill for any winter campout. The Scouts were trained to take advantage of what was around them.

Peter Sanna, 15, and the rest of his patrol used their saw to cut logs to the right length for protection from the cold.

"Then we spread a layer of leaves and bark on the floor for insulation and to cover up the little holes that the logs didn't cover," he says. "The shelter was pretty much completely covered and safe."

Had they not known their knots, the Scouts would have been in real trouble. But because they had trained over and over again, they were ready for the challenge.

"We usually have knot competitions at the meetings, and that helped a lot," says 12-year-old Jonathan Salinardo, whose patrol built its hide-out against a large boulder, tying the tarp to four trees and making a stick wall around it.

Each design may have been different, but one thing all the patrols had in common was a reliance on teamwork.



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Above: Gabriel Bongiorno works to get a fallen branch just the right size for his shelter. Below: Gregory Boland gathers larger debris for his.

Working Together

Patrol leader Bobby Dries, 14, found that spreading the work around kept the team members focused.

"Everyone had to do an equal part so that no one felt left out," Bobby says. "I separated kids and sent them to do different tasks."

It's easy to get dehydrated even in cold weather. Troop 17 knows that in conditions like these, you must drink water regularly, not just when you're thirsty.

"Water is critical," says Peter Sanna. "I make sure that everyone brings enough water to last the whole day."

With the proper training, it's possible to build a relatively comfortable winter shelter with only the most basic supplies.

Even if you have only three hours,

"it seems like a long time," says Peter, "but when you're working out there, it goes by fast." +

It's easier to stay warm if there isn't a lot of extra space. Arom Kim, Andrew Thom and Peter Sanna (left to right) find their temporary home quite comfortable.



Troop 17's Tips for Building Winter Shelters

1. Look for a safe spot, preferably out of the wind.
2. Clear the ground of any large rocks.
3. Gather leaves and branches into two separate piles. Use them for protection from the wind.
4. Fasten your tarp to a secure post, such as a nearby tree.
5. Anchor it snugly with your knot-tying skills.
6. Insulate the floor and any openings with smaller leaves and branches.



The Scouts lay down long pieces of wood to create a roof (above), before filling in the gaps with leaves and twigs (below).

Learn to build your own winter shelter at:
boyslife.org/links/wintershelter

