

Winter Safety in the backcountry:

Winter is an awesome time to visit and experience the backcountry trails of the Haliburton Highlands and Muskoka's. The snow covered landscape provides breathtaking views of snow covered forests and majestic ice falls. Winter offers increased solitude and peace quite different from the activity of summer.

A trip during winter requires additional planning and preparedness by all members of your group. Your safety is your sole responsibility. Therefore please practice the following in planning your trip prior to your outing into the backcountry:

- Prepare and file a trip plan with family and friends ([see sample](#)).
- Check the weather forecast beforehand. Pay particular attention to impending temperature drops, wind chill, blowing snow and storm fronts.
- Dress appropriately, wear layers. Know how to avoid, recognize and deal with frostbite, hypothermia, and snow blindness.
- Take an emergency pack including maps, gps/compass, communication device, whistle, ice picks, extra clothing, first aid kit, flash light, fire starter, water, and high energy foods.
- Plan on being back to your vehicle or campsite an hour before sunset and gauge your trip accordingly.

Ice Safety - know the dangers of ice:

- Stay off the ice - avoid ice travel if at all possible. Ice conditions can be extremely variable, especially during the start of winter and again during early spring. If you plan to travel on lakes and rivers, check ice conditions prior to venturing far.
- Stay away from river and creek mouths, open water, slushy areas and pressure cracks on lakes.
- The strongest ice is clear blue in colour. White or grey coloured ice is weaker and thinner. Deep snow on lake surfaces can hinder hard freezing of ice and cause slush conditions.
- If you go out onto ice, always wear a PFD or floatation suit; carry floating rope and long pole.
- If walking, there should be a minimum of 6 inches or 15 centimeters of clear blue hard ice, otherwise stay off.
- If you are traveling by snowmobile or other vehicle, danger increases and added precautions must be taken. At least a minimum of 12 inches or 30 centimeters of clear blue hard ice is recommended to support the additional weight of machines.
- If traveling in a group, spread out.
- Ice climbing requires special gear and skills and is extremely unpredictable. Go with and attempt only under the supervision of a certified ice climber.

Hikers, Snowshoers, and Skiers – please stay off marked and groomed snowmobile trails

Hikers and Snowshoers – please stay off ski trails

Snowmobilers – stay on marked trails and watch out for:

- Obstacles in the snow
- Trees and branches on the trail
- Snow grooming equipment
- Oncoming sleds
- Other trail users (skiers, walkers)
- Wildlife (deer and moose often use trails)
- Trail wash outs and flooding
- Road crossings, bridges
- Unexpected corners, hills, stops
- Logging operations
- Don't drink and drive – 70% of fatalities involve alcohol
- Don't ride at night – 90% of fatalities occur after dark

Have fun and be safe to have the best experience that the winter can offer!