



Winter Backcountry Camping



NPS / JACOB W. FRANK

Winter brings a special beauty to Glacier National Park. Limited access and a prohibition against snowmobiles provide for silence and solitude and self-reliant visitors find a wondrous and peaceful setting. Backcountry camping is a challenging and rewarding way to explore Glacier's winter environment. A free backcountry use permit is required for all overnight trips. In an effort to provide solitude and enhance wilderness values, only one backcountry camping party will be permitted in a specific area on the same night.

Obtaining Your Permit

From November 20 to May 1, permits may be obtained up to seven days in advance of your trip. We recommend that you call ahead, so that we can make arrangements for a time and place for you to pick up your permit. (406) 888-7800

Permits are generally issued at:
Park Headquarters located in West Glacier
Monday–Friday

Appar Visitor Center
Saturday and Sunday

Equipment

Winter camping in Glacier National Park requires clothing for a wide range of weather conditions. Conditions can rapidly change during an 8 hour period. Temperatures can fall from 50° F to well below zero, and sunny days can turn to rain or snow with white-out conditions. Always travel with a compass or GPS device and adequate maps to cover your route.

Backcountry campers will typically need cross country skis or snowshoes for safe and efficient travel over the deep snowpack. Be sure to have emergency repair parts for such equipment so that a broken ski or binding doesn't create an emergency. On steeper routes, ski skins provide a real advantage for uphill travel.

If you are traveling in the higher elevations and steeper terrain, avalanche transceivers, probe poles, shovels, and the knowledge of their use are a must for each party member.

A self-contained campstove is highly recommended because dead and down wood will mostly likely be covered by snow.

A four-season sleeping bag and insulated pad are a must. The most common options for winter campsite shelter include a four season tent, or snow caves, trenches or igloos when snowpack permits.

Winter Mountaineering

Weather conditions make winter mountain climbing especially challenging. Along with the inherent dangers of snow and ice-covered slopes, avalanche danger increases. Ice climbers will find Glacier's frozen waterfalls very technically demanding.

Submitting a voluntary climbing registration form is strongly recommended. The climbing registration form and other information pertinent to your trip is available at visitor contact stations.

Avalanches

Avalanches are a real danger in the mountainous portions of Glacier. Be sure to check the latest avalanche advisory for Glacier National Park. Avoid areas in old avalanche paths and stay off steep, open slopes and cornices. If you must cross a steep, open slope, travel up and above the steep area or well below the bottom. Travel one at a time, loosen pack straps, remove ski poles and fasten all layers of clothing. If an avalanche should occur, discard all equipment and make swimming

motions toward the surface. The survival rate is only 50% after a burial of only 30 minutes. A sole survivor should not go for help unless it is only a few minutes away. Mark the last place the victim was seen, and search directly downslope, probing the snow with ski poles or anything available. Each member of a party traveling in avalanche terrain should carry a shovel. Avalanche transceivers and probes are strongly recommended.

Winter Backcountry Camping Regulations

- Group size is limited to a maximum of (12) persons with a two night limit at any spot.
- Wood fires, other than personal wood fuel camp stoves, are prohibited. Gathering dead and down firewood for personal camp stoves is allowed, but be aware that dead and down wood is usually under snow during the winter.
- Camping is not allowed (unless in a designated campground) within 100 feet of roadways, trail corridors, creeks, or lakes. Camping is prohibited on vegetation and saturated soil freshly emerging from snow cover.
- Dig out and use pit toilets whenever possible. Wag bags are available with most winter permits, and provide a convenient way to remove human waste from the backcountry. When they are not available, human waste should be disposed of at least 100 yards from water sources, trails, roads, campgrounds, and developed areas. All toilet paper and other garbage should be packed out.
- Oversnow machines are not permitted in the park.
- Pets are not permitted on trails or anywhere in the backcountry. All unplowed roadways are “trails” in the winter.
- Fishing regulations for Glacier National Park are available at visitor contact stations.
- From April 1 to November 30, all food, garbage, and equipment used to cook or store food in winter undesignated campsites must be suspended at least 10 feet above the ground and four feet horizontally from a tree trunk or other object, or secured in such a manner as to be completely out of reach of bears (suspended over a cliff, etc.), or secured in a bear resistant food container at all times except during preparation or consumption.
- Storage sites and food preparation areas must be at least 100 feet from camping and sleeping areas.
- From December 1 to March 31, the food storage regulations listed above are recommended but not required, unless specifically mandated by the permitting official due to known bear activity.
- Your backcountry use permit is valid only for the dates, locations, and party size specified. It must be in your possession while in the backcountry.

Violation of these regulations may result in the issuance of a violation notice and/or revocation of the backcountry use permit.

Leave No Trace

Challenge yourself to learn and practice the following Leave No Trace techniques, that apply to winter camping, so the wilderness character of Glacier may endure:

Plan Ahead and Prepare

Check weather forecast and avalanche advisory, select the appropriate equipment, and inquire about travel routes and conditions. Use a map and compass instead of landmarks.

Camp and Travel on Durable Surfaces

Durable surfaces include established roads, trails and campsites, rock, gravel, dry grasses, or snow.

Protect riparian areas by camping at least 200 feet from lakes and streams. Avoid areas of freshly emerging vegetation and soil.

Good campsites are found, not made. Site alterations are not necessary. Keep campsites small.

Dispose of Waste Properly

Pack it in, pack it out. Pack out all litter and refuse, including uneaten food scraps.

Use toilets when possible. Otherwise dispose of human waste at least 100 yards from water sources, campgrounds, trails and developed areas. Pack out or burn toilet paper.

Leave What You Find

Avoid damaging live trees and plants. Campsite alterations are prohibited.

All natural features and cultural artifacts are protected and should be left undisturbed. Feeding wildlife is harmful and illegal.

Minimize Use and Impacts of Fire

Wood fires are prohibited. Self-contained campstoves are highly recommended.

Respect Wildlife

Never feed animals. Feeding wildlife damages their health, alters their behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers.

Be Considerate of Other Visitors

Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience.

Other Information

If you end a trip early, contact a ranger, in person or by calling (406) 888-7800, to cancel your permit so other backpackers can use the campsite(s).

For further information write:

Information

Glacier National Park

P. O. Box 128

West Glacier, Montana 59936

For emergency assistance, call 911.