

Head, Shoulders, Frozen Toes – Not at Okpik!
By
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During my 2004 Christmas break, I had the honor of attending the coldest of the three High Adventure Camps, Northern Tier. You might ask why go to Minnesota in the middle of the winter to a snow camp when you live in a ski resort. I'll tell you why. Northern Tier has the best program I have experienced in winter camping (and I have attended several!) When I arrived at Northern Tier, bundled in my puffy coat and 50 layers of polar fleece (making me an invalid when it came to moving my arms), I wondered if I was making a mistake, envisioning my friends lying on the beaches on the Bahamas, able to bend their arms. Later in the week, I realized I had missed nothing and had been given the opportunity of a lifetime. During that week, I slept in a snow cave (quinzee), went dog sledding, cross country skied, went snowshoeing, and slept under a natural shelter consisting of a fallen tree and lots of snow.

The amazing staff of Northern Tier is committed to providing winter adventure to youth, from every region. I spent a glorious week with a crew from Texas. They arrived in cotton sweatshirts, some never having seen snow before. Convinced they would freeze and have a miserable time, I hurried back to my camp to determine how many of my polar fleece tops I could share with their crew. As I emerged, I saw the Texans making their way up to the Supply Depot. I hurried up to them and entered a large room filled with every kind of necessary winter accessory, all available for participants to borrow. From -5 degree sleeping bags to Mukluks (boots), they had everything. I watched as the crew was fitted with boots, socks, wind layers, fleece, and more. The entire fitting ordeal was handled quickly and efficiently!



The biggest adventure of all was on the last night, which was also New Year's Eve, when the weather dropped below zero. During my week I had tagged along with a wonderful Venturing Crew from Texas. A girl in the crew, Mary, and I longed to earn the challenging "Zero Hero" award, which is presented for spending the night in negative temperatures. All week the temperature hovered just above zero, and on New Year's Eve, it dropped. Scheduled to sleep in cabins (with heaters) for New Year's Eve, Mary and I decided to forgo the comfort and sleep outside. Yes, it was quite chilly. Yes, I felt somewhat dimwitted for giving up a heater and a mattress. But the cool night was forgotten the next morning, when Mary and I proudly marched into the store and each received our patch, one that I will treasure for a lifetime.