FIELD GUIDE · NO. 28

Layering System

Several lighter layers let you adjust as you go — and help you stay dry, which helps you stay warm.



FROM THE BOOK

1. Rather than depending on one heavy coat, several lighter layers let you adjust to changing conditions. If you start to sweat on an uphill hike, remove a layer before you overheat so your clothing stays drier. When you slow down or the temperature falls, add it back.
2. Moisture is a problem because water conducts heat away from the body far more efficiently than air. Wet clothing (from rain, snow, or sweat) loses much of its ability to trap warm air. Put on a rain jacket before the rain begins, not after the layers underneath are soaked.
3. Wind carries heat away faster than still air. Getting out of the wind — behind a rock, into trees, under a tarp, or into a vehicle — is often one of the quickest ways to feel warmer.
4. A warm hat, dry socks, and well-fitting gloves often add more comfort than people expect. Change into dry socks after walking through wet grass or snow.
5. Food and water help your body produce heat. Do not skip meals, and drink water even if you do not feel thirsty in the cold.
6. Respond while you are only slightly cool. Waiting until you are shivering makes recovery harder. Add a layer before the temperature drops, and remember that sitting or sleeping on cold ground pulls heat away — a pad or other insulation underneath matters.

PRACTICE IT

On your next cool walk, start with layers you can add or remove, and actually shed a layer before you sweat. Notice how much drier — and warmer — you stay.