

Staying Warm in a Sleeping Bag

While the temperature rating of a sleeping bag is important, it is just as important to do the things that will keep you warmer in whatever bag you have. Mike Conkey, a Northern Tier OKPIK winter camping instructor, suggests the following.

1. **Stay dry - complete dryness.** Before you go to bed, change into dry sleeping clothes reserved for use in your tent and bag only. Air your bag out whenever possible to remove any moisture. The best policy here is to follow the Philmont "sleeping clothes" requirement. This requirement will be explained in detail at the Watchu Mountain Adventure.
2. **Make sure you have a stocking cap available in your sleeping bag.** The biggest heat loser is your head. The first thing someone who is "cold" should do is to put their cap on.
3. **Don't pull your sleeping bag over your head and breathe inside.** You can easily exhale a pint of water into your sleeping bag during the night. This creates dampness and spoils point #1, complete dryness. A related issue is to make sure your tent is adequately vented. If your tent is not vented, exhaled water can condense on the tent and drip onto you and your sleeping bag.
4. **Stay hydrated.** Your body needs water and fuel (food) to generate heat. On a cool night, a light snack and long drink of water before bed will help you stay warm. A long drink of warm or hot water would be even better. On those cold high mountain nights, fire up the stove; get everyone to have a hot drink before they head to bed. It will pay dividends on those chilly nights.
5. **Always use a ground pad.** The ground is cold and lying directly on it leads to heat being wicked out of your body. The thickness of the pad is a comfort issue - a half-inch thick closed-cell foam pad will insulate you from the ground.
6. **Know your own physiology.** If you chill easily, then plan for that. If you don't easily chill, then less preparation is necessary. Socks, long underwear, or a sleeping bag liner are all ways to "lower" the temperature rating of your bag.

The Watchu recommendation for Philmont is a good *synthetic* bag with a temperature rating of 25 degrees and weighing less than 3 pounds. Down bags should only be used by the very experienced backpacker who understands the limitations of down. Also recognize that temperature ratings are not absolute - they are best used to compare bags from the same maker. A 30-degree bag from one maker may be warmer than a 20-degree bag from another.

Point is, many factors, of which the bag's temperature rating is but one, must be considered in choosing the right bag for you. Google "sleeping bag ratings" for endless insights and opinions. Check <http://www.slackpacker.com/sleepingbag.html> for a synopsis.

Phil Fact: Waite Phillips' twin brother, Wiate, died at age 19 of appendicitis while the two of them were travelling throughout the West, working a variety of jobs to support themselves. The location of a memorial to Wiate at Philmont was known only to Waite's son, Chope Phillips.

For friendship,

Wiate Phillips

Conway, Iowa (1883 - 1902)