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Cold weather observing, from page 2

your feet will still get cold if you've cut off the circulation to them by squeezing them into boots that are too small to accommodate the extra socks. I wear a size 10 shoe, but my Pac boots are size 11. A larger size also allows me to place an additional wool inner sole under the boots' inner liner boots. Try on boots and outer layers while wearing the inner layers and socks you plan to wear while observing to find items with the proper fit.

Don't forget your head

Always wear at least one cap in cold conditions. An uncovered head rapidly radiates body heat away. A hood is even better, but often gets in the way. That's why I often wear a balaclava and a watch cap.

Temperature ratings

Temperature ratings for cold weather gear assume the wearer is actively exerting himself/herself. Wearing a parka rated for -40 degrees might seem excessive when it's in the twenties, but experience has demonstrated that additional layers are still needed for a sedentary activity such as astronomy.

Boots rated for -100 degrees are quite comfortable when the temperature is in the

teens or below, especially if you're standing on cold ground or snow, but not if they've become moist from being worn in the car on the way to the site. Always remember to take the liners out of pac boots after an observing session to allow them to dry out, especially if you plan to observe the following night.

Stay hydrated

Keep well hydrated but avoid caffeine. Caffeine is a diuretic and reduces blood volume, making it more difficult for the body to maintain a normal temperature. I usually take bottled water and a half-gallon of decaffeinated coffee with me on cold nights.

Moisturize!

Cold conditions are often very dry conditions. Don't forget the lip balm, etc. I often find that any exposed skin gets dried out during the winter. A little moisturizing lotion when I get back to the house usually helps to keep my hands from becoming too badly chapped.

Chemical handwarmers

Chemical handwarmers are another good item to have, but aren't a substitute for wearing adequate layers of clothing. My parka has

two pockets inside over the kidney area that are designed to hold handwarmers. This is an nice feature worth looking for in a heavy-weight parka. Handwarmers can also be used as eyepiece case heaters.

Stay fueled up

Keeping warm in freezing temperatures requires the body to burn calories at a great rate. Eat well before you head out to observe and bring some high-carbohydrate snacks to stoke the fire a bit during the night. For extended observing sessions during the colder months, a thermos of hot soup can really make the difference between an enjoyable outing and a cold and miserable one.

Car sense

If you have to retire to your car to warm up, please beware of carbon monoxide poisoning. Never sit inside a stationary car with the windows rolled all the way up while the engine's running. Duh. ★