



ASK THE EXPERT

How to Survive a Blizzard

BRIAN KUNZ | DEPUTY DIRECTOR, OUTDOOR PROGRAMS

Kunz knows how to handle extreme winter weather conditions. For more than two decades he has led some of Dartmouth's most adventurous undergrads on the DOC's Quebec Mountain adventure. The 10-day expedition, held annually during spring break, includes skiing, snowshoeing and camping in the Groulx Mountains of northern Quebec, where temperatures regularly drop to -36 degrees Fahrenheit. Earlier in his career Kunz traversed the entire country of Norway from south to north on skis—a route roughly equivalent to the distance between Florida and Maine. Without proper training, a cold-weather outing can quickly turn into a life-threatening situation, so Kunz recommends the following tips to prepare for your next winter adventure.

—Gayne Kalustian '17

THINK AHEAD

The first steps of any successful winter outing are taken before you head outside. Kunz recommends checking the weather forecast and dressing for the worst possible weather conditions: "Footwear is especially difficult because you cannot have your feet freeze or get injured. Protect your feet from moisture, slush, rain and snow. One type of footwear is not going to take you through an entire 24-hour experience, no matter where you are." You'll also want to bring a sharp and sturdy knife, basic first aid kit, and a map and compass.

FIND SHELTER

"Weather forecasting is not a precise science," warns Kunz. "Should you run into trouble, assess whether you can navigate to shelter, a road or a cellphone connection, but don't overwork to get out and don't panic. Traveling in deep snow without skis or snowshoes is exhausting. Walking on frozen ground, firm snow crust or ice is treacherous, and you don't want to fall and injure yourself." Kunz suggests packing a plastic or nylon tarp to use as an emergency shelter from snowy conditions.

STAY DRY

One of the most critical skills for surviving severe winter weather is protecting yourself from moisture as the temperature drops. Depending on the severity of the situation, hypothermia can start to set in within minutes. "Conserve energy and don't work up a sweat that will dampen your clothes and reduce their insulative properties," advises Kunz. "Keep yourself from being soaked. Your boots can freeze. You can get frostbite. Your core temperature can drop if your torso gets wet, so get out of desperate conditions."

FOCUS

After you locate a safe, dry shelter, focus on meeting your body's most basic needs: water and warmth. Kunz recommends carrying protected matches. "Assess what resources you have with you and figure out how to use those resources to keep yourself warm and comfortable," he says. "Ideally you'll have a small container made of metal that you can melt snow in and warm water. Try to stay hydrated. You can get by for three weeks without eating." Most importantly, Kunz adds, "keep a positive attitude and never give up."