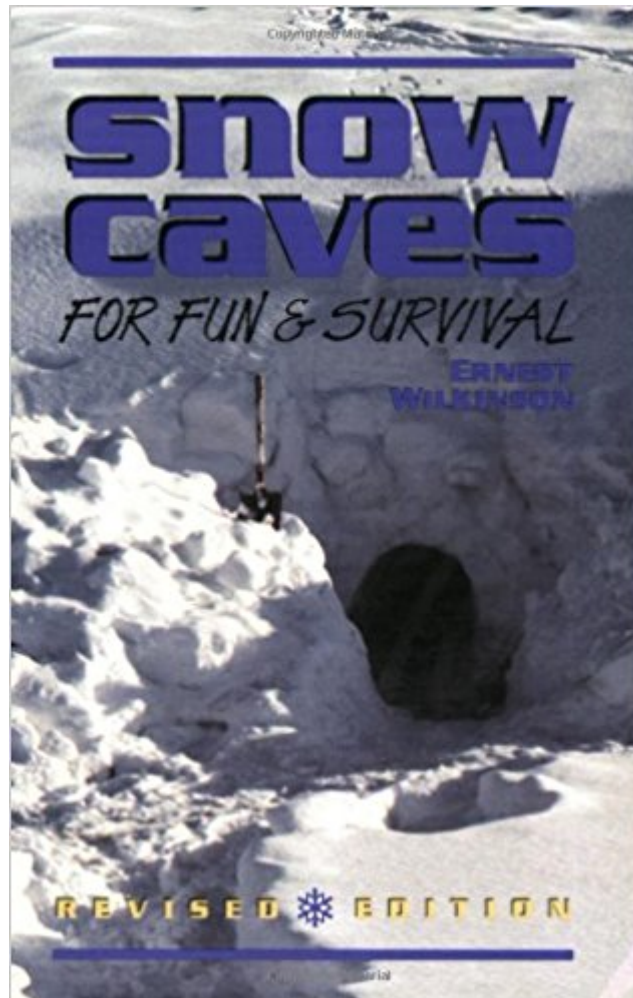




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Snow Caves For Fun And Survival



Synopsis

Ernest Wilkinson has spent many winter weeks outside in the Colorado mountains. His observations, based on his experience alone and with the groups he takes on cross-country tours, demonstrated to him that the methods of snow cave construction described in winter survival manuals were unsatisfactory. He accordingly developed his own techniques that save precious time and energy and increase comfort and safety. They are so effective that he no longer even carries a tent in the mountains during the winter. He gives detailed instructions for other types of snow shelters including igloos and lean-tos. Chapters on winter safety, winter camp foods, clothing, and camp tools round out this key to outdoor winter survival and fun.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Ernest Wilkinson has worked as a rescuer, has trained mountain lions, coyotes, and badgers for "Wild Kingdom" and other educational TV programs, and leads summer and winter tours in the Colorado mountains.

I have helped build snow caves as emergency shelters in the past, and didn't think they were particularly effective. But that was before I read "Snow Caves For Fun and Survival" and tried out the book's techniques. A group of Boy Scouts and volunteers were on our annual winter survival skills training day in the foothills of the Cascades in Central Oregon. When it comes to snow caves, the conventional wisdom from most survival manuals, is that the builder tunnels sideways and up into a snow bank, shoveling the snow out through the entrance hole. Naturally skeptical (because of

my newspaper training) I asked my 17-year-old son, Dan, to construct one such shelter by himself, using a small shovel and trowel. More than two hours later, his cave was finished, but Dan was wet, tired and cold. Despite working hard, his cave was not a particularly effective survival shelter. Dan would have had a rough night ahead of him if he had to stay in that cave. Based on that and other experiences, my opinion of snow caves as emergency shelters was lukewarm at best. Then a friend recommended "Snow Caves For Fun and Survival" by Ernest Wilkinson, and I've changed my mind. Most people with some basic tools, and using the techniques Wilkinson writes about, could successfully make a snow cave survival shelter. Author Wilkinson is a former Search and Rescue member, and an experienced Colorado mountain guide, specializing in snowshoe treks and winter camping, according to the book liner notes. This backcountry experience lead Wilkinson to develop his own shelter-making techniques that save time and energy and increase comfort and safety. Wilkinson's snow cave technique is simple: cut out blocks from the front of the drift to the width of the cave. Excavate. Dig a cold well, and carve out benches on the sides for sleeping. When all this work is done, use the removed snow blocks to create a front wall. There is plenty of room for two people to work simultaneously, and you don't need to get wet during construction. Best of all, the cave is quick to make, which places it in the effective survival shelter category. This simple technique is just one of the practical winter camping/survival tips you'll get from reading "Snow Caves." Igloo and lean-to construction are also discussed, as well as avalanche danger and how to avoid it. While the book's main focus is shelters, there is a wealth of information on all aspects of winter camping in deep snow. Other sections deal with the proper clothing to wear, what kind of insulation a winter sleeping bag should have; firestarting tips; and equipment to take along for added comfort. If you recreate in areas that have deep snow, or are looking for a winter camping reference book, "Snow Caves" would be a top choice. If you don't know anything about deep snow survival techniques, reading this book would be a great place to start. Then, check out your local community college, or parks and recreation district, and see if someone offers classes in winter survival. Ready, study, and then, practice what you've learned.

"How many rabbits have you seen sitting by a fire to keep warm?" So begins Snow Caves for Fun and Survival, in which Wilkinson demonstrates how people can learn from nature and survive in the wilderness without a fire by using materials at hand- snow, fallen logs and tree branches, whether it be on a winter camping trip or during an emergency situation. Rabbits and birds burrow in the snow and so can humans! Diagrams and photographs aid in the explanations of how to build snow caves, igloos, and other temporary shelters that could save your life. This book would appeal to two groups:

those interested in winter camping and those interested in learning basic survival techniques. For the serious camper there are chapters on Food, Clothing, Tools and Gear. The author draws on this experience as an outdoorsman and describes his own close calls: how to dry out your clothing after accidentally falling into freezing water, etc. This reviewer spent the first 25 years of life in Minnesota and thought I knew all there was about snow, but I learned a lot from this book. I wish the topic of cave-ins had been dealt with in more depth, since as a small child I was instructed by my parents about the danger of snow collapsing on me.

This book offers very specific advice on how to build shelters in snow or from snow. I found it very useful and accurate, but do not depend on this book alone for snow survival. Another good book for young people is the Opik: Cold Weather Camping book. I think the 2 together make a great pair. The shelters do work and the designs are proven, but make sure you practice these in a controlled environment before you try to build on in an emergency.

This book and a couple shovels are all you need to dig a snow cave. After reading this book I purchased several other "winter survival" books and they hardly cover the subject at all. Cave collapse will be on your mind no matter what, but if you build according to his guidelines there will be minimal sagging. The gear discussion is a little dated but snow is pretty much timeless. If you travel/ski/snowboard in snow you should know the methods described in this book in case of an unplanned overnight stay.

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