



Glacier National Park Press Kit

Winter Use

Winter is an especially beautiful season in Glacier National Park. Visitors will find a wondrous and peaceful setting for self-reliant winter activities. Silence and solitude are available because access is limited and snowmobiling is not permitted.

Access

The main access to Glacier, U.S. Highway #2, is maintained, but the Going-to-the-Sun Road is plowed for 12 miles along Lake McDonald. The North Fork Road from Columbia Falls provides primitive access to the North Fork area and the Polebridge Ranger Station, but it is a gravel road with a delayed plowing schedule. U.S. Highway 89 provides access to the St. Mary area and often an additional eight miles to the Rising Sun area within the Park. Weather permitting, the road is plowed into the Park boundary at Sherburne Dam is often passable. Winter visitors must ski or snowshoe the additional six miles. Visitors should check for local conditions on these roads as snow may close them at anytime. Drivers should be prepared for winter driving conditions at all times.

Winter Activities

Cross Country skiing and snowshoeing are usually best enjoyed from mid-December to April. Please refer to the Park bulletin "Cross Country Skiing" for more information. Guided ski trips in Glacier are available from private guide services located outside the park.

Photography can be very rewarding, and many beautiful winter scenes are accessible. Deer are the most commonly seen animals but elk, moose, bighorn sheep and mountain goats are also present on their winter ranges. Predators such as mountain lions, wolverines, wolves, and lynx are present, but are seldom seen and difficult to photograph.

Automobile camping is limited to a few sites at Apgar picnic area and St. Mary Campground, with no amenities provided.

Backcountry camping is a challenging but rewarding way to experience Glacier's winter environment. A permit is required for all overnight trips and may be obtained up to seven days in advance of the trip from a District or Subdistrict Ranger by calling Park Headquarters at 888-7800 or at the Apgar Visitor Center on weekends 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For the period from November 20 to May 1, these special regulations are in effect:

1. Wood fires are prohibited in all backcountry areas because dead and down fuel is covered by snow.
2. Party size is limited to 12 people with a two night limit for any one spot.
3. Camping is not allowed within 100 feet of roadways, trail corridors creeks or lakes. (Unless in a designated campground).
4. Campers should use pit privies where available. Where they are not available, human waste should be disposed of at least 100 yards from lakes, streams, trails, roads or developed areas. Toilet paper should be burned.

At the completion of their trip, campers are to check out with a ranger, in person or by telephone.

Climbing is especially challenging in the winter due to weather conditions, avalanche risk and the inherent dangers of snow and ice covered slopes. Please register all climbs with a ranger so you can receive the latest information pertinent to your trip.

Wildlife viewing can be very rewarding but remember that survival during the long winter is difficult for Glacier's wildlife, and human contact may add unnecessary stress. Please avoid approaching or startling any of the animals or birds. Remember, all park animals are wild, potentially dangerous, and should never be fed. Bears sleep for most of the winter, but sometimes awaken for short periods of time. As always in bear country, exercise extreme caution, especially with food and garbage.

Weather - Glacier's weather is very unpredictable! Visitors can expect numerous overcast or rainy days, especially on the west side of the park, with the possibility of extreme variations in temperature. Strong winds are typical on the east side of the park. Wind greatly accentuates the effects of temperature - the chill factor - which increases the danger of hypothermia and frostbite. Visitors should be prepared with proper winter clothing. Snow depths vary greatly with elevation, exposure and wind patterns. Depths of 2-3 feet are common for lower elevations in January and February; depths of 10-15 feet are common in the high country.

Avalanches are a real danger in the mountainous portions of Glacier. Be sure to check the latest avalanche advisory for the area you wish to enter. Avoid areas in old avalanche paths and stay off steep open slopes and cornices. If you must cross a steep, open slope, travel up and above the steep area or well below the bottom. Travel one at a time, loosen pack straps, remove ski poles and fasten all layers of clothing. If an avalanche should occur, discard all equipment and make swimming motions toward the surface. A sole survivor should not go for help unless it is only a few minutes away. The survival rate is only 50% after a burial of only 30 minutes. Mark the last place the victim was seen, and search directly down slope, probing the snow with ski poles or anything available. Each member of a party traveling in avalanche terrain should carry a shovel, and beacons are strongly recommended.

Information and Emergencies

For information check the Apgar Information Center on weekends, and Park headquarters (near West Glacier) and the Hudson Bay District Office (near St. Mary) on weekdays. Other ranger stations are only open intermittently during the winter, and you should check before going to them.

Park Headquarters	406-888-7800
Hudson Bay District Office	406-732-7700
Glacier's web site	www.nps.gov/glac/home.htm
After hours emergencies:	911

Accommodations

No lodging facilities are open within the Park itself, however, hotels and motels are available in the surrounding area communities of West Glacier, Coram, Columbia Falls, Essex, East Glacier, etc.