

Build A Winter Wagon

Why shoulder a load when you can easily slide along behind you?

In winter, backwoods travel can be trying. Dealing with the cold can add 20 pounds of extra fuel, clothing, and equipment to your normal backcountry load. Plus, deep snow slows your pace. In these conditions, trudging 6 miles feels like running a marathon. But there's an energy-saving alternative to toting a mammoth pack: plunk all that gear on a sled, strap on a harness, and make like a husky.

Towing a loaded sled demands considerable stamina, but with the weight off your back and sliding along the snow, you'll travel farther, and faster, and you'll be able to take longer, more comfortable strides, regardless of whether you're on skis or snowshoes. By increasing your range and load-hauling capacity, sleds open the backcountry to more extensive exploration. You can cover more ground in a weekend.

Keep in mind that sleds are best suited to open, level terrain. On tight trails through dense woods, it's difficult to maneuver a sled strung out six feet behind you.

For arctic traverses and serious glacier travel, a commercially made sled offer premium performance, and materials, at prices approaching \$500. For backwoods escapades closer to home, improvised sled make more sense. For about \$20, a drill and, hacksaw, you can put together a dependable, versatile sled, that will track smoothly and, more important, stay off your heels on the descents.

MAKING A SLED

- 1.) To determine the length of the PVC pipe, add 3 feet to the measurement of your ski from binding to tail, or your snowshoe's full length. These tubes will hold the sled at bay on downhill runs, so the back of your ski doesn't smack the front of the sled when you take a full stride. With long legs you may need 6 1/2 feet of clearance, some with short legs may only need 5 or 5 1/2 feet, most folks will need about 6 feet. PVC pipe come in 8 feet lengths and can be trimmed with a hacksaw.
- 2.) Drill two holes in the front rim of sled as far apart as possible. Thread the rope through the holes, leaving an equal length trailing from each side.
- 3.) Thread the loose end of the rope through the pipe, and tie or rig them to a hipbelt. If your hipbelt is an external frame model with grommets on the side, you can improve sled control and minimize lateral movement by drilling a hole near end of each pipe, and securing them to the grommets with a clevis pin. Pull the rope taut and tie a big knot in each end to keep the rope from sliding back down the tubes.
- 4.) Drill six holes around the lip of the sled (3 on each side) for gear lashing points

LOADING THE SLED

To prevent diving and tipping place the heaviest part of your pack along the back and bottom of the sled. To keep out snow, cover your pack with a tarp. Secure the load with rope or bungee cords. When spotty snow or a steep incline forces you to carry your pack, simply unhitch the pipe and lash the whole contraption to your pack, like a turtle shell.

- 1.) Two lengths of PVC pipe 1/2 or 3/4 inch
- 2.) A hipbelt from a backpack, or a fanny pack
- 3.) A child molded plastic sled. Look for one with an upturned front 3-4 inch sides, long and wide enough to fit your pack (about 48 inch by 14 inch) and should have runner or ridges on the bottom. Even small raised ridges markedly improve in tracking.

