

WINTER BACKPACK TRIP LEADER TRAINING

Wheeler Peak Wilderness, New Mexico

Typical Conditions Expected to be Encountered December/January Time Frame

Environmental & Route Conditions: The route stays mostly above 9000 – 10,000', where any direct sun or glare creates a need for strong sun block application. Much of the trail & camp conditions will involve movement over 3-4 feet of snow base; "Post-holing" could be a factor and Iced over trails could be encountered.

Temperatures: Average high in January, in Taos is 40 degrees F & average low is 10 degree F. We will mostly be above 10,000', Taos is @ 6965'. We will be experiencing colder temperatures the Taos averages.

Precipitation: Average annual precipitation is 12.1", average snowfall is 34". **NOTE THIS YEAR** – has been a wetter season than the average!

Daylight: Including twilight, we can expect approximately 9-10 hours of daylight – the sun tops the mountains late and drops below them early.

Ground Cover & Vegetation: Slopes are covered primarily with spruce, fir & pine w/patches of deciduous trees here & there. The ground will be covered by 3-5' of snow.

Sun Exposure: The route is high, so weather will generally be overcast & cold. Patches of sunlight during good weather will be welcomed.

Water Availability: There is a high alpine lake (frozen @ the time of year) & a small stream created by snowmelt (frozen during morning hours). Lots of snow can be melted as needed (requiring extra fuel). All water will require to be purified.

Wildlife & Insects: No insects or the usual "critters" that we would see in the other seasons at this time of the year. However, watch out for the Ravens and Canada Jays as they will be in abundance. Food items and colorful, flashy gear items will need to be properly stored. These critters are not called "Camp Robbers" just for any ole reason!

Remoteness: We may encounter others attempting to reach the summit of Wheeler Peak but with our camp set up well off-trail, it is possible we may not encounter anyone. Evacuation if necessary is a quick downhill route to our vehicles and Taos.

Natural Hazards: Trudging through snow-drifts, creating wetness in a cold environment is made-to-order for hypothermia. Avalanches or snow slides may be possible in steep areas, but these are usually controlled by the Forest Service. All water must be purified before use.