



McLEANINGS

SNOW SLEEPER

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In a list of the top ten most important skills needed to ski big peaks, skiing is somewhere near the bottom. Assuming a magical transport to the summit with fresh legs and stout gear, the actual turning can often be done by anyone who is capable of skiing double black diamond runs at a ski resort. But if you can't first get up, there will be no getting down. Working backwards from the summit, things like avalanche assessment, route finding, pacing, teamwork and safety all come before turning skills, yet even before those, there is a skill that trumps all others—the ability to sleep in the snow.

On extended trips, no rest means no summit. After spending days in a cramped, two-person tent where the one thing that leaks more than your air mattress is your partner's bowels, all you'll want to do when the weather finally breaks is your laundry. If camping itself is exhausting, you're doing something wrong.

Part of successful snow-sleep is gear related and part is strategy. On the gear side, a good sleeping system begins with camping pads that keep you high and dry. For base camp, a thick down-filled inflatable pad delivers Princess-and-the-Pea-style comfort, but for higher on the mountain, a foam mattress and inflatable combo is warm, light, reliable and keeps your options open. Put the inflatable next to the snow and the foamie on top. For a sleeping bag, it's always better to err on the warm side.

If logistics allow it, indulge in Ultra Heavy Camping™. Forget cutting toothbrushes in half—bring along the cast-iron skillet, cheese bricks, and bacon. For extended base camping, take the time to stomp out a hard, flat tent surface, set up a cook tent and dig a foot-well for your vestibule. The more normal food and normal rest you can get, the better.

For sleeping strategy, the wild card is always



the weather. Instead of trying to second guess it, wake up early every day (like 4:00 a.m.), look out from the tent and then decide what to do. If it looks good, motivate and go for it. Late starts are the bane of expeditions. And for the sake of team sanity, never say "I told you so" when it comes to weather. Even if you told them so....

In camp, the guy who runs the stove and cooks gets all the glory, but chopping blocks of snow, prepping lunches, filling water bottles, cleaning dishes, topping off fuel bottles, coiling ropes and digging out tents all need to be done as well. If you're the Stove Master, plan what needs to be done ahead of time, and make the most out of your burn by multi-tasking. Melting snow and making meals for groups of people on a camp stove can be a painfully slow process, especially when there is powder to be skied.

It can be hard to get a good night's sleep if your tentmate is driving you nuts—although the feeling is probably mutual. Mindless humming, reciting *Monty Python* skits, asking incessantly if anyone has seen your lost stuff—these are motives for murder in a tent. The best bet is to chill out, enjoy the journey and try to disengage your brain. It isn't a waste of time, but a deposit in the energy bank that can be spent later.

Sleeping in the snow is an art form that, in large part, is what separates an expedition from a resort vacation. There's no magic trick in getting to the top of a peak, but being well rested is a good place to start. I once overheard a guide telling his tired, complaining client, "You're not the first person to climb Rainier without any sleep!" I say you have to walk before you run, sleep before you climb and climb before you turn. After all, the descent is the easy part—you can do it in your dreams.

Andrew McLean lives in Park City, Utah with his trophy wife, two red-headed daughters, one good dog and one bad dog. He's racked up first descents all over the world and laid arcs on all seven continents. In a past life he was an outdoor gear designer, and his current favorite color is persimmon. Photo: Tommy Chandler