

## **Sand Ridge State Forest - First Day Hike**

### **Check in at Kiosk in Visitor's Parking Lot**

55 miles of marked trails, ranging from 1.5 to 15 miles each, and 120 miles of fire lanes offer unequalled opportunities to the hiker in this area. For those who think central Illinois is one big corn field, Sand Ridge State Forest will come as a pleasant surprise. The forest is an island in a sea of agriculture. Just minutes southwest of Peoria, this 7,550-acre forest, the largest of Illinois' state forests, boasts sweeping expanses of native oak-hickory woodland, extensive pine plantations, sprawling open fields, grasslands and completely unique sand prairies. For a refreshing, invigorating taste of unspoiled nature and an opportunity to experience truly unique environment, Sand Ridge State Forest is ideal.

### **Self-Guided Hikes**

Yellow Trail – 14.8 miles

Red Trail – 11 miles

Blue Trail – 7.7 miles

Orange Trail – 5 miles

Green Trail – 1.75 miles

Brown Trail – 2.15 miles

White Trail – 1.25 miles

Red Diamond Trail – 5 miles



# Cold Weather Hiking — tips from the American Hiking Society

<https://americanhiking.org/resources/cold-weather-hiking/>

Hiking during the winter can be fun as long as you prepare with these tips. In addition to these tips and hints, remember to follow normal safety practices as well when hiking in the winter. Be sure of the gear you take with you and if you have any specific questions, ask a local outdoor expert so you can stay safe.

Just because the temperature has fallen like the leaves of a tree doesn't mean you can't have an enjoyable hike outside. With a little extra preparation, hiking in the winter can be every bit as enjoyable as hiking during the warmer months. If you have the gear for a warm-weather hike, you can easily modify it for the cold. Before you go, be sure to follow a few of these guidelines to stay safe and warm. Winter can be one of the most peaceful seasons to enjoy some solitude on the trail, but it also comes with increased risks that hikers need to prepare for.

## **Check the conditions**

Trail and road crews aren't as active in the winter, so it's always a good idea to check trip reports to get a sense of conditions on the trail and access to the trailhead before you hit the road.

## **Dress in layers**

While it is perhaps nice to have a huge, fluffy parka on the ski slopes, it really isn't practical for the trail. Instead, take several layers you can peel off or put on when you stop and go on the trail. Your base layer should be a wicking fabric that will pull your sweat away from the skin. Pack layers for every part of your body, not just your torso. Overheating is a dangerous threat since excessive moisture that isn't allowed to escape can freeze and cause hypothermia. If you ever wondered why some of your jackets have zippers under the armpits, they help vent sweat vapor and prevent your clothes from getting wet.

Pack extra layers for when you take breaks and in case you are delayed due to an injury or unforeseen situation. Could you survive the night if you had to? Check the forecasted low temperatures to be prepared for the unexpected. Carrying all of the 10 Essentials of Hiking is especially important in the winter.

## **Wear a hat**

Our heads are filled with oxygen-carrying capillaries which fuel our brains and consume one-third of the body's energy. During the colder months, it is important to keep your head covered to maintain function and not lose precious body heat. You may want to bring a warmer/heavier hat for rest periods.

## **Keep the breeze out**

An often overlooked jacket feature—a hooded jacket—helps seal out frigid air from around the neck and shoulders. Hoods also help with layering the head. When you stop for a break, throwing on a hood can help regulate your temperature during breaks.

## **Keep your water bottle warm**

Staying hydrated in cooler temps is just as important as it is in the summer. Take extra precautions to keep your water from freezing.

- A foam sleeve like a koozie will increase the time it takes water to freeze in a bottle. In very frigid temps, some hikers will even add an active hand warmer inside the insulative sleeve.
- Water tends to freeze at the top of a water bottle, so carry the bottle cap down to prevent the opening from freezing first. Ensure the bottle properly seals to prevent leaks.
- Start your hike with warm water instead of cold tap water to slow down the freezing process.

### **...Keep your water bottle warm**

- Nothing warms your body or your spirits like warm liquid on the trail or by a campfire. Vacuum-sealed water bottles and thermoses can help keep warm drinks steamy for hours, and they can also be used as standard water bottles.
- Sip water often to stay hydrated and also to check the state of your water. Is it starting to freeze?
- Do you hike with a hydration reservoir? Manufacturers make special hose, bite valve, and reservoir sleeves to slow down the water from freezing, but in many cases, reservoirs will freeze faster than traditional water bottles.
- Store soft-sided flasks or slim water bottles on the inside of your jacket – properly sealed, of course.

### **Watch your step**

Snow and ice are often synonymous with cold-weather hiking. Adequate footwear and traction are part of the 10 Essentials of Hiking, and snow and ice present various hazards in the winter. The conditions should influence what traction and flotation devices are used. In deep snow, snowshoes reduce how much a hiker sinks into the powder. On packed snow and ice, micro-spikes and other traction devices provide additional traction for better footing. Many brands design traction that can slip over shoes and boots, and different designs are suitable for different conditions, terrain, and activities.

Trekking poles are also highly recommended, especially in snowy and icy conditions. Poles provide more points of contact with the ground, which increases balance and traction.

### **Keep batteries warm**

Batteries in most electronics lose effectiveness in cooler temperatures. Pack batteries and electronics in interior pockets so body heat can keep them warm. This is especially important if you use any electronic devices as a primary form of navigation. American Hiking recommends hikers carry paper maps and a compass (and know how to use them) in the event a navigation device malfunctions.

### **Don't toss the sunscreen**

While this is most important if you are hiking in a snowy region, winter hikers often forget about the sun's glare reflecting off of white snow.

### **Protect your eyes**

UV-rated snow goggles or sunglasses that provide adequate protection from bitter wind and the sun's harsh rays should be used even when it's cloudy and not super bright at the beginning of a hike.

### **Pack freeze-resistant snacks**

It can be discouraging to take a snack break only to find your favorite snack hard as a rock and uneatable in cold temps. Chewy and gooey snacks often become hard to eat in winter conditions. Either keep these snacks in an interior pocket or pack snacks that are less affected by cold temps. You can test which snacks work best by putting various snacks in your freezer to see what gets too hard to enjoy out on the trail. Crackers, nuts, and solid chocolate typically work well. Warm snacks are even more appetizing when it's cold outside so consider stashing your next snack in an interior pocket to warm it up a little before your next snack break.

### **Be prepared for shorter days**

As early as October, dusk settles earlier and more quickly than in the summer. Have a good idea of the usable daylight hours before going hiking. Always carry a headlamp or flashlight with extra batteries.