



# COLD NOSE & WARM TOES

**C**old... a relative term. To folks living in Florida or Hawaii, 50°F (10°C) may be "cold." Alaskans might not consider it "cold" until the temperature dips to below 0°F (-18°C). Those of us living in the Mid-Atlantic States experience the bone chilling "cold" of 30°F (-1°C), especially when the temperature is coupled with the regional dampness, but most people will agree that MINUS 30°F (-34°C) is definitely cold – really, REALLY cold.

Text and photos By Tilly Dorsey



When I signed up for a dog sledding trip in Minnesota in February '03, I had not expected it to go to -30°F (-34°C), but it did. Having been to northern Minnesota a few years earlier, I did not recall such cold temperatures, but a few days before I left for my trip with Voyager Outward Bound, a friend had warned me, "You know, it's going down to -20°F (-29°C) up there!" Perhaps it was my total lack of comprehension of how -20° felt, but I dismissed her warning. Besides, I was packing my wonderful alpaca boot socks – no need to worry.

I met with the rest of my companions at the Voyager Outward Bound base camp in Ely, Minnesota. We sorted and organized our gear, packed up the dog sleds and headed out into the Boundary Waters Wilderness. In winter, it is an area of frozen lakes covered with wind-blown snow. The main inhabitants are the wolves. Their tracks in the snow mark their progress as they hunt an elusive deer, and their voices echo in the distance of the black, black nights.

The sled dogs were eager to run as we headed off across the first lake. They settled into a rhythm, and we continued through the day searching for a sheltered spot in which to set up our camp. By 4:00 p.m., the sun was beginning to set. The air grew steadily colder, and we hurried to set up the cook tent, chop wood for the fire, and chop a hole in the ice for water. That hole ended up being over four feet deep, and we did not reach water until well after dark. Gathering in our small cook tent for a hot meal, we all held cold



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hands near the little Yukon wood stove and hung wet mittens and socks up to dry. Interestingly enough, I was the only one who did not need to hang her socks.

After dinner, we retired to our sleeping accommodations. Now, I have to admit that the sleeping arrangements caused me some anxiety. I had thought we would have a tent in which to sleep as well as eat, but no! No such luxuries on this trip!

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brought more tiny icicles to my nostrils. The group leader, Suellen, seeing my worry, assured me that I would be “sandwiched” between herself and another and to let her know if I got cold. So, I descended into my double sleeping bag, alpaca socks still on my feet, my body clothed in layers of “polypro” and polar fleece, a hat on my head and gloves on my hands, and I pulled the hood snugly around my face. It took a while to get used to the confinement of a “mummy bag,” but I finally drifted off to sleep.

#### **Cold Enough for Ya?**

During the night, I remember waking and asking Suellen if there was supposed to be snow under the tarp. It was falling on my face! That was not snow, she informed me, only frozen





**The cook tent. By the time we settled in for a hot meal, we were all exhausted, and the strenuous activity meant that socks and mittens were very damp – all except for my alpaca socks. They were dry.**

condensation that had accumulated in thick layers around the “hole” I had so that I could breath. Suellen asked if I were OK... was I cold? Well, my feet were nice and warm, but some rearrangements had to be made to keep the “snow” off my face.

The next morning dawned bright and clear – and very cold. During breakfast, we took bets on the temperature. The lowest guess was -20°F (-29°C). Not having prior experience but knowing my own frozen breath had kept me awake during the night, I did not dare to venture a guess. It did not surprise me, however, when the thermometer read -25°F (-32°C)!

That next day was something of an “epic.” We started out from base camp right after breakfast with the intention of making an eight to nine mile loop

that involved crossing several lakes and making some very difficult and hilly portages. Unfortunately, we were only about one and a half miles from getting back to camp when – because of a mis-marked portage on the map – we had to turn back the way we had come. At this point, it was 4:30 in the afternoon, the wind was picking up and light snow was falling. Out came the headlamps. We put on extra down jackets and made the push back to camp, back-tracking all the way.

Arriving back at camp at 9:30 p.m., my job was to get the fire going. By the time we settled in for a hot meal, we were all exhausted, and the strenuous activity meant that socks and mittens were very damp – all except for my alpaca socks. Not believing they could be dry, Suellen demanded that I

take off my socks and hang them by the stove. When I took off my socks and handed them to her, she was dumbfounded. They were dry! What was even more amazing to the whole group was that I had been wearing only one light pair of liner socks, my alpaca socks and felt-lined canvas mukluks. Everyone else had as many layers on their feet as they had on their bodies, yet my feet had stayed comfortable all day while the others had suffered with cold, wet toes. I took that opportunity to brag about the wonderful attributes of alpaca fiber.

That night, the temperature dropped to a bone-wracking MINUS 30°F. Arranging only a tiny hole barely large enough for my nose, I managed to keep the frozen condensation off my face. My alpaca socks kept my feet warm all

through the night – and for the rest of the trip – and what a trip it turned out to be!

I learned how to “mush” (drive the dogs and sled) and I learned that I could survive -30°F in a mummy bag. I gained a deep appreciation for those who venture forth in such extremely cold temperatures, and was very thankful that I had alpaca socks to keep my feet warm! The socks performed so well that I sent some to Suellen to try on her training run for the Arctic Quest trip, and I gave some to a friend to take on his Everest climb. Suellen has raved about the socks, and I have agreed to outfit all four women making the Arctic Quest trip in January '04 with a supply of alpaca boot socks.

I am still waiting for a report from Everest, but expect it will be positive.

As for my nose, well, I came home with a tiny spot of frost nip on the very end of my nose – maybe AFCNA can come up with a product to keep noses as warm as toes!

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## AFCNA at Arctic Circle

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The Alpaca Fiber Cooperative of North America (AFCNA) has very generously donated alpaca fleece pull-overs to the Arctic Quest Expedition. For more information on this ambitious expedition, visit the web site [www.arcticquest.org](http://www.arcticquest.org).