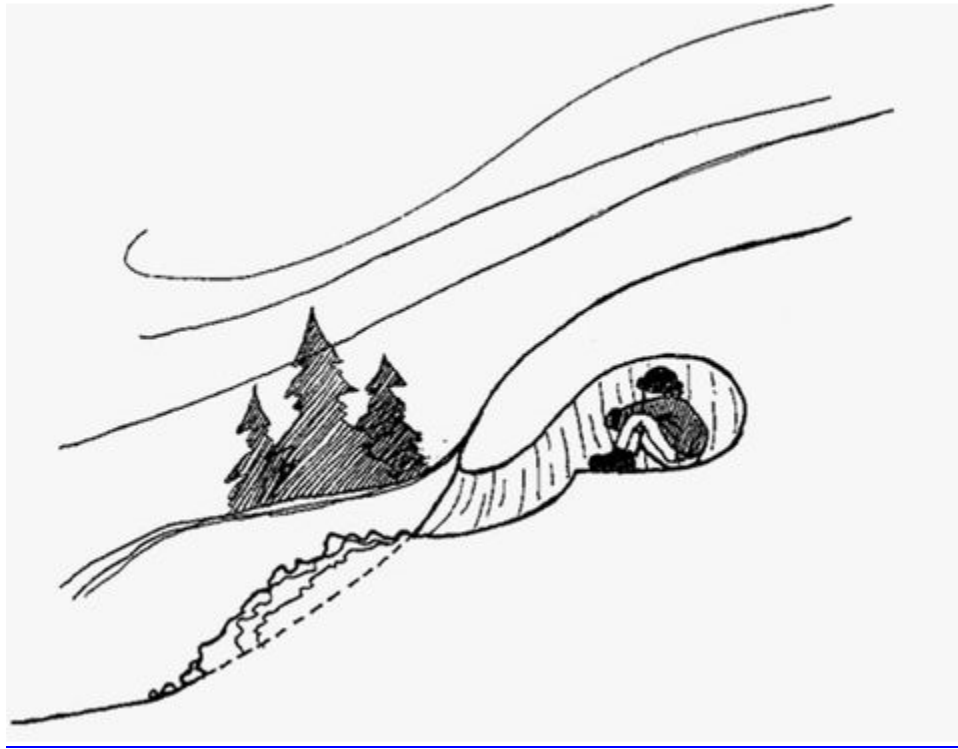


Snow Cave



[Photo: Alastair Mcdowell](#)

The snow cave is one of the quickest emergency shelters that you can build in the backcountry to escape impending bad weather. It requires the fewest tools and can be built with minimal exertion. According to Johnson, a snow cave is “the best shelter you can build, in the least amount of time.”

Scout a location. With any snow shelter, scouting a location is crucial. For a snow cave, your location will be determined by where snow depth and snow consistency is best. “You want to find a fairly big drift of snow — a place where the wind has piled up the snow,” says Johnson. Ideal snow conditions for building a snow cave are the same those for building a snowman. Snow that compresses and packs easily will yield a stronger structure and will be easier to build.

Hollow out a sleeping area. The next step is to dig. When you are hollowing out the snow bank, shape the inside of the structure like an upright bell. Johnson says that’s important because “the bell shape is very strong structurally and it prevents the roof from sagging due to your body heat.”

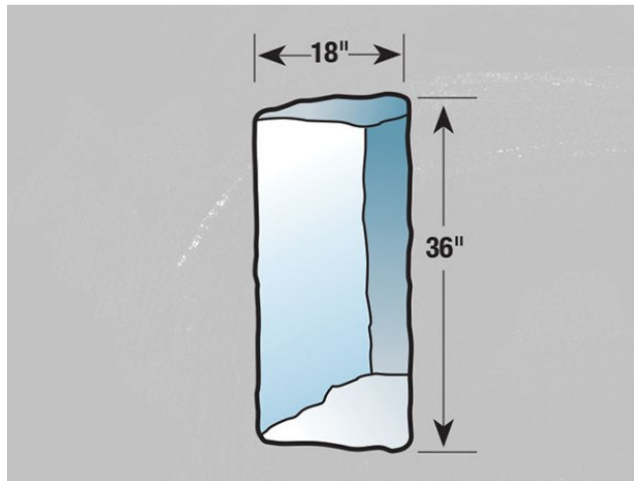
Dig up. When you are hollowing out the inside and building the bell shape, you want to start as low as you can and work up. This will allow you to make a sleeping platform inside the structure that sits higher in elevation than your entrance. Johnson stresses that this is key to keeping warm. “It creates a heat trap. So all the cold air moves out and all the warm air stays in. It is very much like the way that beavers build their lodges.”

How to Build a Snow Cave



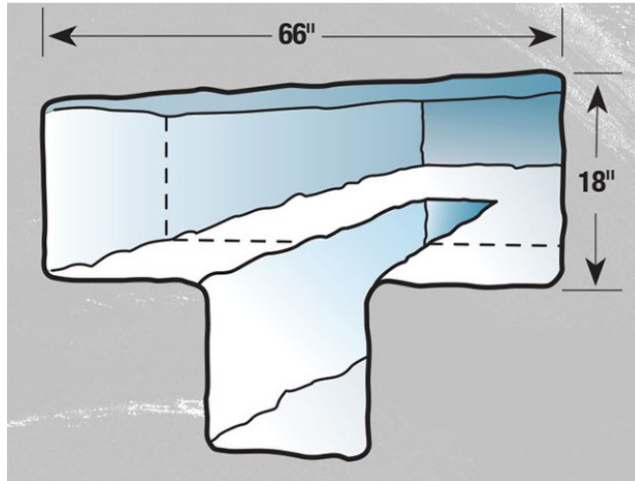
A T-shaped snow cave is a quick and efficient way to protect yourself from even the worst winter storm. Locate a large snow drift or steep, stable snow slope, and start digging with the instructions below.

1. DIG THE ENTRANCE



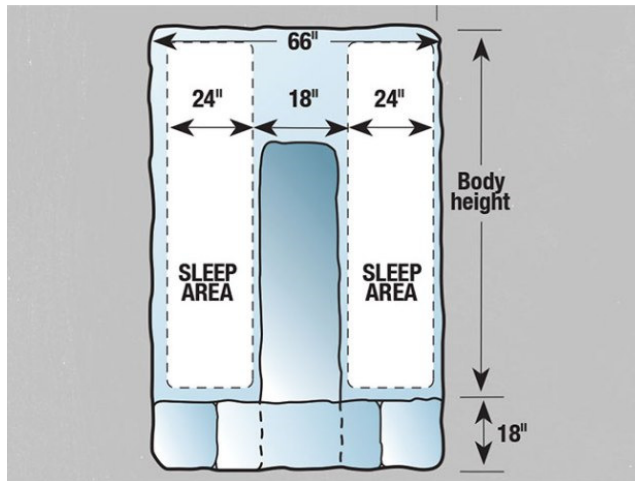
Dig an entrance about 18 inches wide and as high as your chest.

2. WIDEN INTO A T SHAPE



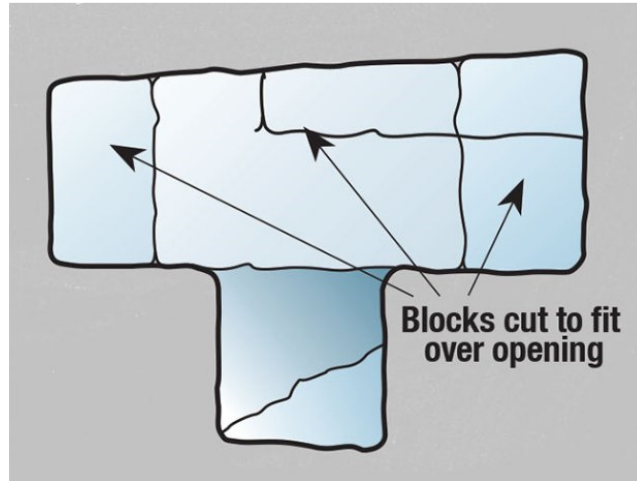
To make it easier to dig, widen the top of the entrance to form a T shape.

3. EXCAVATE THE INTERIOR



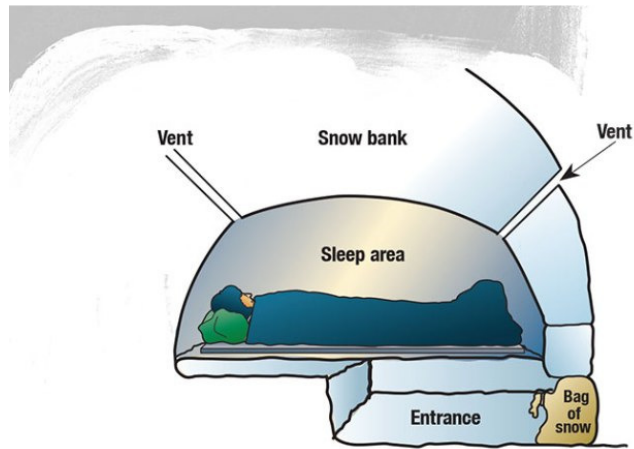
Dig several feet farther into the drift and excavate the interior of the cave. The floor of the cave will be at about waist level, so much of your digging will be upward and to the sides.

4. SEAL THE TOP OF THE ENTRANCE



When the interior space is fully formed, use blocks of snow, bags of snow or snowballs packed together to seal the top of the T.

5. POKE VENTILATION HOLES



Use a ski pole or shovel handle to poke several ventilation holes in the ceiling at a 45-degree angle to the floor. Use a bag of snow to seal the tunnel entrance.