



Guide to... THE WINTER SEASON

Winter is wonderful, with sites and attractions much quieter and snowy landscapes sparkling; but whether you're planning to continue touring or lay up your caravan, here's everything you need to know

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Tour all winter

With a little planning and preparation, you can carry on caravanning all year

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CUT OUT
AND KEEP
GUIDE!



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Also available as a FREE ebook - see
www.practicalcaravan.com/know-how/ to download yours!



Campsites are emptier in winter, so you can enjoy the best pitches with the most spectacular views

CARRY ON CAMPING!

If you want to tour in winter, follow our guide to maximise memory-making, whatever the weather might choose to do. John Sootheran shows you how

THERE ARE PLENTY of benefits to all-year touring: sites are emptier (so you get the best pitches and views), popular attractions are quiet, and cold-but-sunny winter days can be unbeatable. Plus, there are all those magnificent Christmas markets and special events to savour.

I've been winter caravanning since 2011, and the only problem I've ever had is being too hot to sleep in the van!

So this really is the year to make the most of your investment and sample that wonderful feeling of being warm and cosy in your caravan, while the weather does its worst outside. Here's how...

Pick the right caravan

Most caravans are now suitable for all-year touring. Some might reckon that German models are unbeatable for this purpose, but they come with their own drawbacks, so we suggest you consider every suitably insulated and heated caravan.

Unlike summers spent basking outside the van, from October to April you will mostly be inside, so select a caravan with sufficient space to live indoors in comfort. This might preclude tiny two-berths.

If you have children, one of the many twin-lounge tourers could be a winning choice, so that adults and youngsters

have their own spaces. The extra inches of width you get with an 8ft-wide caravan make a huge difference to the sense of space you feel inside.

Pick a light, airy tourer to make the most of minimal daylight in winter. Modern vans usually feature large windows, and many are also fitted with sizeable rooflights. Good ambient, mood and spot lighting can really enhance a caravan interior.

Insulation

Those who are planning to head out in the worst weather conditions will benefit from a caravan with Grade 3 insulation.

'Make this the year to sample the wonderful feeling of being warm and cosy in your van, whatever the weather'

CUT OUT AND KEEP GUIDE!



Chatsworth Winter



Many popular visitor attractions, such as magnificent Chatsworth House (*left*), are much quieter in the colder months. Winter activities, like mountain biking in the Cairngorms (*below left*), are really exhilarating. Enjoy a walk on the beach in the autumn sun (*below right*)

Visit Scotland



Hendra



This official accreditation for four-season caravan use is otherwise known as BS EN 1645-1 certification.

The NCC manages this, and accredited caravans are embossed with an Approved badge. It makes hundreds of British and EU standard compliance checks on leisure vehicles. Part of the BS EN 1645-1 accreditation covers thermal insulation.

Each model is chilled to -15°C in a cold chamber. The doors and windows are then closed and the caravan heating turned on. Experts measure the time it takes for the interior to reach 20°C. The power required to keep the internal temperature at 20°C can also be measured.

Most manufacturers include BS EN 1645-1 thermal insulation grading in their technical specs. Some use the phrase 'Suitable For Four-Season Use'. From the 1999 model year onwards, caravans built to EU standards receive one of three gradings, indicating thermal insulation and heating performance:

■ **Grade 1** This specifies a minimum degree of insulation, but does not measure the effectiveness of the heating system. These are spring and summer caravans.

■ **Grade 2** This rating requires the same level of insulation as Grade 1, but adds a requirement for a heating system capable of maintaining the interior at 20°C when it is 0°C outside. These caravans may typically be considered for spring, summer and autumn use in the UK.

■ **Grade 3** This denotes a higher standard for both insulation and heating. The interior must warm from -15°C to 20°C within four hours and the water system must function within an hour of this. The van must be able to maintain a temperature of 20°C, and the water system must operate, when it is -15°C outside. These vans are suitable for use all year round.

Caravan sidewalls, floors and roofs are a composite construction. The walls and roof comprise a thin layer of GRP or aluminium on the outside and thin plywood or GRP on the inside.

Sandwiched between them is a thick 'insulative' foam core. In a modern Swift van, for example, the walls have 25mm of polystyrene foam insulation, the roof, 32mm. They are light, strong and efficient.

Caravans hold their heat quite well. In (unscientific) testing, a van heated to 20°C at 10pm had dropped to 8°C by 4am, with the outside temperature at 4°C. We advise keeping the heating on low (16°C) throughout the night.

Heating

There's an excellent choice of heating systems in caravans. Most function on gas and electricity, and combine the two for maximum output.

Truma and Whale make blown-air heating systems. These pipe hot air from a heater through ducting and distribute it around the caravan.

Alde, meanwhile, uses a wet system. Like domestic central heating, hot water is pumped around the caravan to radiators which are hidden behind the furniture, to warm the interior.

Both systems have their devotees. Some caravanners believe that blown-air heating can leave cold spots around the caravan, so they prefer the 'all-encompassing' heat from the Alde radiator system.

I have never found this, and I like the speed at which blown-air can heat a van. Alde needs more maintenance, has a potential risk of leaking, is heavier and >>



'Your caravan is an oasis of warmth, but you will still need winter gear'

Rigorous testing assesses the heating performance in caravans (*right*); Truma's system provides blown-air heat throughout the van (*far right*)



costs more; but it is quieter, and you also get heated towel rails with this system, which is a real bonus.

Whale has a clever heater unit, mounted underneath the caravan to save space.

Winter caravanners should check their van doesn't have exposed heating ducts underneath, because this will greatly affect the performance of the heater in very cold weather. Internal ducting is best and can be further insulated to raise performance.

All three systems also heat the caravan's hot water and feature handy LED control panels inside the van.

Cleverly, Truma and Alde systems can be controlled remotely using an app on a digital device. As long as you can get a Wi-Fi or 4G signal, you can turn the heating or hot water on in the van from anywhere, using Truma's iNet or Alde's Smart Control.

This way you will always get back to a lovely warm caravan, with plenty of hot water for a reviving shower.

Draughts and cold spots

If your caravan feels draughty, don't be tempted to block off the drop-out vents in the floor. These are crucial to allow the escape of heavier-than-air propane

and butane gases, should you have a leak. Instead, consider insulating the floor areas underneath the beds and sofas, and in the cupboards, with carpet or some specialist insulation material.

Wheel arches and gas-locker bulkheads are often left uninsulated, and these might benefit from additional lagging, too.

Gas choice

LPG is the most effective source of heat when you are out in your van. It delivers up to 6kW of energy, compared with electricity, which achieves 2kW or 3kW, where the campsite supply allows.

For touring in winter, it's essential to choose propane gas rather than butane. Propane vaporises (turning from a liquid to a gas) at temperatures down to -42°C, whereas butane stops 'gassing' at -2°C.

Calor and Flogas supply propane gas bottles (red in colour), while the refillable specialists, Safefill and Gaslow, use the Autogas bought on many filling-station forecourts (including Morrisons).

Autogas can be a mix of butane and propane, although in the UK, it is 100% propane all year round (www.mylpg.eu). Be mindful that if you refilled your gas bottles abroad in the summer, your gas

mix might not be ideal for a UK winter. Whichever gas you decide to use, don't underestimate consumption in winter and consider taking a spare bottle along.

Another point to bear in mind is that if you tour regularly in winter, you could make huge savings by purchasing Autogas at 67p per litre, rather than pre-bottled gas at £2 per litre.

Leisure batteries

You'll use more power if you are touring in winter, thanks to lower temperatures, shorter days and more time spent in the caravan. Low-season caravanners should consider upgrading their leisure battery to allow for this.

A 110Ah leisure battery is ideal, remembering that batteries do not perform as well in cold temperatures.

There's little point insulating your battery, because this will have no effect during extended cold periods. Shorter winter days and the low sun make solar panels significantly less effective, too.

Water systems

Frozen water and waste pipes are common problems during cold snaps. Guard against them by protecting your Aquaroll with an



insulated cover, for example, from the likes of Bags2Cover. These feature a thick, wraparound bag, plus an insulated base and hose cover, and we've known them to be effective down to -8°C.

Alternatively, simply bring your Aquaroll and submersible pump into the caravan overnight if freezing weather is forecast.

Inboard water tanks can be insulated with pieces of polystyrene, as can any external water and waste pipes, using lengths of split foam, which is typically used for domestic lagging.

All this aside, we always take a large water canister in the caravan, filled with drinking water, just in case.

Picking a pitch

When staying on a standard campsite, it's worth selecting a hardstanding pitch with hook-up. Choose a pitch that's easily accessible, where ideally you don't have to drive across grass (which is universally

recognised as the most slippery surface to drive on when wet).

Although a level pitch might not drain well, manoeuvring onto a slope can be tricky. If you park under trees, that brief shower might continue dripping on your roof. There's also the possibility of damage to the van if branches are blown down.

Consider insulating the pitch standpipe tap to prevent freezing. Old thick socks or a golf-club cover work perfectly. Next, lag the downpipe with split-foam lagging. You can remove both when you leave.

Direct-feed water hoses such as Truma's Ultraflow are great in the summer months, but they are difficult to lag in the winter, owing to their length. An Aquaroll might be a better choice.

Useful accessories

An awning is pretty much essential if you plan to tour a lot during the winter months – especially if you are keen on

outdoor pursuits. Awnings create an 'airlock', where you can remove all of your wet gear and those dirty boots, without letting out too much of the heat.

Condensation

Thankfully, condensation is less of a problem in caravans these days. The key is keeping the van warm and maintaining an airflow.

Damp traps with dehumidifying crystals are fairly ineffective in our experience, while mains-powered dehumidifiers are much better, but they are expensive, and they do need regular emptying.

A simple solution is to keep a towel handy for mopping the caravan windows and ensure that your mattress is resting on a breathable surface – wooden slats, not sheets of solid plywood.

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Top tips for winter touring

1 Chances are, your van will be a little oasis of tropical heat in Britain's icy winter, but be prepared, and take extra clothes: thick socks, your warmest pyjamas and a sweater. A winter-spec duvet (Tog 12) and a hot-water bottle are good ideas, too.

2 Special plastic covers can be obtained to partially cover external fridge vents in very cold weather.

3 Toilet chemicals can freeze, so store them inside the van. Alternatively, use sachet or tab chemicals.

4 Heat your washroom and – horror of horrors – leave the toilet seat up to minimise the risk of the toilet freezing.

5 Keep safe. Make sure you fit and maintain a carbon monoxide detector.

6 To avoid condensation creating mould in your mattress in winter, when you are leaving the caravan for the day, consider raising the sprung bed base, to allow warmer air to circulate all around the mattress.

7 Make sure your caravan is professionally serviced on an annual basis, ensuring in particular that the heating systems are all properly checked and maintained.

8 Be conservative when showering in the van, to avoid long delays while the water reservoir reheats.

9 Lag all of the caravan's external waste pipes with split-foam lagging and gaffer tape it in place.

10 Using electric heating at night always feels safer than relying on gas.

11 Insulate your caravan's fresh-water container to prevent freezing.

12 Consider packing a 12V water heater to hang inside your Aquaroll, to keep the temperatures above freezing.

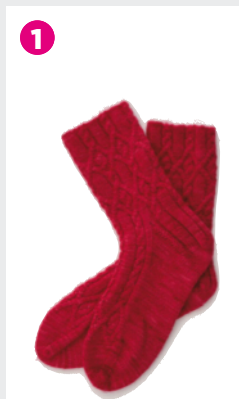
13 Straighten external waste pipes to ensure they run downwards, avoiding sitting water that can freeze and cause blockages.

14 Carry a small toolkit, a torch and spare fuses for the caravan's DC supply.

15 Always plug your cable into the caravan first, then the hook-up post. This way, you're not carrying a live cable in potentially wet weather. When decamping, unplug from the post first.

16 Keep your electric cable dry. If you are forced to link two cables, invest in a weatherproof cover to protect the join and keep it off the ground.

17 Always carry a set of grip mats from a company such as Fiamma – they will help you drive off if you start to get stuck.



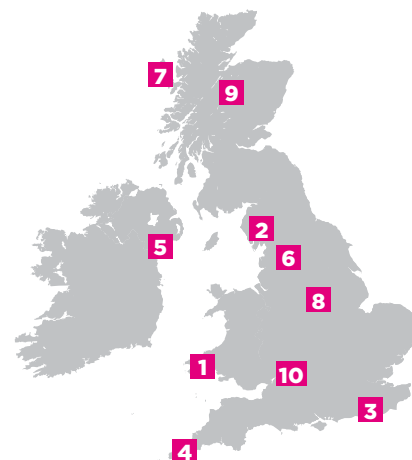


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WALKING THERAPY

You can't beat the restorative power of a good walk, especially in winter sunshine! Here are 10 of the UK's best hiking areas, and open-all-year sites to stay at



1 The Blue Lagoon, Pembrokeshire

Pembrokeshire, in south-west Wales, has an almost indecent number of the most wonderful walks, and we particularly like the two-mile stretch from the fishing village of Porthgain, heading south to the Blue Lagoon and Abereddy beach.

Starting from Porthgain harbour, you can simply follow the coast path and you'll soon be taking in staggering clifftop views.

This dramatic, wild coastline is formed of high cliffs that overlook the rocks of Cerrig Gwylan, which lie out to sea at the northern extremity of Traeth Llyfn beach (but do be wary of high tides here).

You can drop down to the beach itself, or continue towards the Blue Lagoon and

the beach at Abereddy. The Blue Lagoon is a former quarry, which has become a popular swimming and high-diving spot – albeit in the warmer weather!

Where to stay Trefach Holiday Park
 > trefachholidaypark.co.uk

2 Old Man of Coniston, Lake District

A choice for the connoisseurs, the Old Man of Coniston, in the Furness Fells, is one of the Lake District's most iconic walks and a real magnet for keen hikers.

You'll need to have a good level of fitness to tackle this challenge, however, because this is a proper hike, rising to an elevation of some 800m. But it's

well worth the effort – just make sure that you dress appropriately for the weather.

There are several routes, although most people choose to hike from Walna Scar to the Old Man via Goats Water or Low Water.

The Low Water route is shorter, at some five miles for the round trip, but steeper, while Goats Water is a slightly lengthier trail, at about 6.5 miles. The small mountain lakes, or tarns, are the perfect foil for the achingly beautiful fells. The zigzag to the top is exquisite and once you are at the peak, there is a roomy plateau where you can stop to take in the view.

Where to stay Coniston Park
 Coppice C&MC Site
 > www.caravanclub.co.uk

For info on how to stay safe on cold-weather walks, see www.adventure.com/features/cold-weather-hiking

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4



'The lakes are the perfect foil for the fells. The zigzag to the top is exquisite and at the peak, you can stop to take in the view'

3 Pooh Sticks Bridge, Ashdown Forest

What child, or adult for that matter, hasn't enjoyed playing a game of Pooh Sticks?

For the uninitiated, the rules are simple – you just throw your sticks into the water from one side of a bridge, then run across to the other side and wait to see whose stick passes under the bridge first.

Immortalised in AA Milne's stories about Winnie-the-Pooh, the inspiration for Pooh Sticks Bridge is at Hartfield, in the heart of the wonderful Ashdown Forest.

The pretty village of Hartfield, which was home to the author, is in East Sussex, a few miles south-east of East Grinstead, and a quick search on Google will direct you to the nearby Pooh Car Park.

From there, it's a 15-minute walk to the bridge. This does become busy, with Pooh fans eager to play, but everyone has a turn.

The forest itself, the original inspiration for the Hundred Acre Wood, is really beautiful and makes a fine walk for all the family.

Where to stay Apple Acres Camping
> appleacres.co.uk

4 Sennen Cove, Cornwall

The South West Coast Path, running from Minehead, in Somerset, along the coasts of Devon and Cornwall to Poole Harbour in Dorset, abounds with fabulous walking.

Although Land's End is a bit of a tourist trap, approaching across the cliffs from Sennen Cove is breathtaking. The crisp light reminds you of St Ives and the water is the richest blue. This is a gentle walk, good for all the family – but do hold on to small children near the clifftops!

Sennen is a beautiful cove with a lovely pub, an RNLI lifeboat station and a sandy beach. Occasionally, you might spot basking sharks and dolphins from the cliffs, and the rich green hillside contrasts beautifully with the wild Atlantic. On the way to Land's End, you'll pass the remains of *RMS Mülheim*, a German cargo ship that foundered here in 2003. Be sure to stop and take a photo at the famous Land's End signpost!

Where to stay Kelynack Caravan & Camping Park
> www.kelynackholidays.co.uk

5 Mourne Mountains, Northern Ireland

Reached by a walk of around six miles, the glorious peak at Slieve Donard is the highest in Northern Ireland, at 850m, and makes a challenging but rewarding introduction to the beautiful Mourne Mountains before you consider taking on some of the more difficult hikes in the area. You start at Donard car park and follow the path along the Glen River and the lush pine and oak forest – you cross bridges at various points, and you'll see a number of waterfalls.

There's a clear trail as you get further up the mountain. It takes around 2.5 hours to reach the peak, so this route is not really for the fainthearted, but the beautiful views (and sense of achievement) make all of that hard work very worthwhile.

As with all significant walks of this type, appropriate local advice should be sought before you depart, and do be sure to dress suitably for all weathers, especially when visiting in the winter months.

Where to stay Tollymore Forest Park
> www.nidirect.gov.uk





6



Getty/Darrell Evans/EyeEm

8



Getty/R A Kearston



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9

6 Malham Cove, Yorkshire Dales

As a particular favourite of ours, we have featured glorious Malham Cove, in the heart of the Yorkshire Dales, before in *Practical Caravan*. It's worth highlighting again, because this spectacular eroded limestone pavement, which sits atop a dramatic, amphitheatre-shaped cliff, must surely be one of the finest wonders of nature.

The limestone pavement was selected by TV presenter, keen hiker and President of The Camping and Caravanning Club Julia Bradbury as one of the UK's best walks, and featured memorably in the films *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, and *The Trip*, starring Steve Coogan.

It's easy to see why this spectacular area attracts many celebrity endorsements – in a region of numerous breathtaking walks, Malham really is a star attraction. There are plentiful trails to choose from, but the

7.5-mile circular route taking in Malham and Gordale Scar, with its waterfall, is very popular, and gives you the chance to explore two notable geological features.

Where to stay Orcaber Farm Caravan & Camping Park

➤ caravancampyorkshiredales.co.uk

7 Fairy Pools Walk, Skye

A hopelessly romantic name for a hopelessly romantic setting, the Fairy Pools are a series of exquisite azure pools at the foot of the Black Cuillins, which pepper this part of Allt a' Choire Ghreadaidh, in Glen Brittle, on the beautiful Isle of Skye.

They are a hugely popular attraction. So much so, you'll have to arrive early at the Fairy Pools car park to secure a spot.

It takes 20 minutes to walk to the first waterfall and the start of the Fairy Pools – here you'll find the highest fall and the

deepest of the pools. Many visitors stop to enjoy wild swimming here, but pack your wetsuit and take all the necessary safety precautions if you are tempted to join them – this is Scotland in winter!

Where to stay Manor House Touring & Glamping Park (adults only)

➤ www.manorhousetouringpark.co.uk

8 Kinder Scout, Peak District

The highest point of the Peak District in Derbyshire, Kinder Scout is understandably very popular with ramblers, who glory in this wonderful moorland plateau reaching some 2000ft above sea level.

The Kinder Scout and Edale Walk is a favourite circular route (so worth starting early), around eight miles long. It begins at Edale and will take approximately four to five hours to complete.

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'Walkers are spoiled for choice in the Cairngorms, as nature trails, wonderful views and impressive peaks abound'

Getty/Andrew Lockie

This scenic trail will take you past the dramatic waterfall at Kinder Downfall, on the River Kinder, and then up across Jacob's Ladder, an equally dramatic series of steep, zigzag steps that runs alongside the beautiful River Noe.

Rolling moorland and phenomenal views are what most characterise this walk, and on a clear winter day, it is said that you can see the peaks of Snowdonia – but binoculars are likely to be required!

Where to stay Beech Croft Farm
 > beechcroftfarm.co.uk

9 Loch an Eilein, Cairngorms National Park

Fishing, climbing, skiing, wild camping, canyoning – whatever your preferred outdoor activity might be, those looking for adventure will certainly find it in spades at the Cairngorms National Park.

Walkers are particularly spoiled for choice here, as nature trails, wonderful views and impressive peaks abound.

For an introduction to the area, try the circular walk around Loch an Eilein, which at 4.5 miles is a gentle stroll and great for all the family, who can enjoy the views, the wildlife and glimpses of the remains of a 14th-century castle built on a natural island in the middle of the loch.

Birdwatchers will also find there are many great viewing opportunities, even during the winter months, and should keep an eye out for ptarmigan, snow bunting and red grouse.

Where to stay Dalraddy Holiday Park
 > www.campinginaviemore.co.uk

10 Roman Way, Cotswolds

Running the entire length of the beautiful Cotswolds, the Cotswold Way National Trail stretches for an imposing

102 miles as it winds south from Chipping Campden through picture-book pretty villages, such as Snowhill and Painswick, before ending at the great architectural edifice of Bath Abbey.

There are lots of easy sections to choose from, ranging between four and 10 miles long, many of which are outlined in detail at www.nationaltrail.co.uk.

Alternatively, you could go the whole hog and challenge yourself to a marathon (perhaps that should be marathon times four?), covering the full 102 miles!

If not, the Birdlip to Painswick stretch is a good start, at some 8.5 miles, taking in Cooper's Hill, site of the famous annual cheese-rolling event, and the ramparts of an Iron Age hill fort at Painswick Beacon.

Where to stay Broadway Caravan and Motorhome Club Site
 > www.caravanclub.co.uk



DRIVE IN WINTER

Caravanning during the colder months can be really spectacular, but even experienced drivers need to adapt to the road conditions, says David Motton

WHEN WINTER WEATHER grips the country, you need to make sure that you're driving as safely as possible when you are on tour. Depending on where you live, you may have a blanket of snow, or perhaps snow is forecast. Either way, the driving conditions aren't always going to be easy.

Driving any vehicle in wintry weather can be hazardous, let alone towing a large and heavy caravan, with longer stopping distances and reduced grip.

The safety experts at IAM RoadSmart have some excellent tips for winter driving, many of which are pertinent for those

who are towing. We also have some advice of our own – read on for our guide to safe winter caravanning!

If you can, stay put

"The best advice is to avoid travelling in extreme weather," says IAM RoadSmart's head of driving and riding standards, Richard Gladman. "If [people are stuck], you'll just add to the problem – so listen to the travel advice."

We'd second that. If the weather is really bad, with snow and ice making driving conditions difficult, rethink your touring

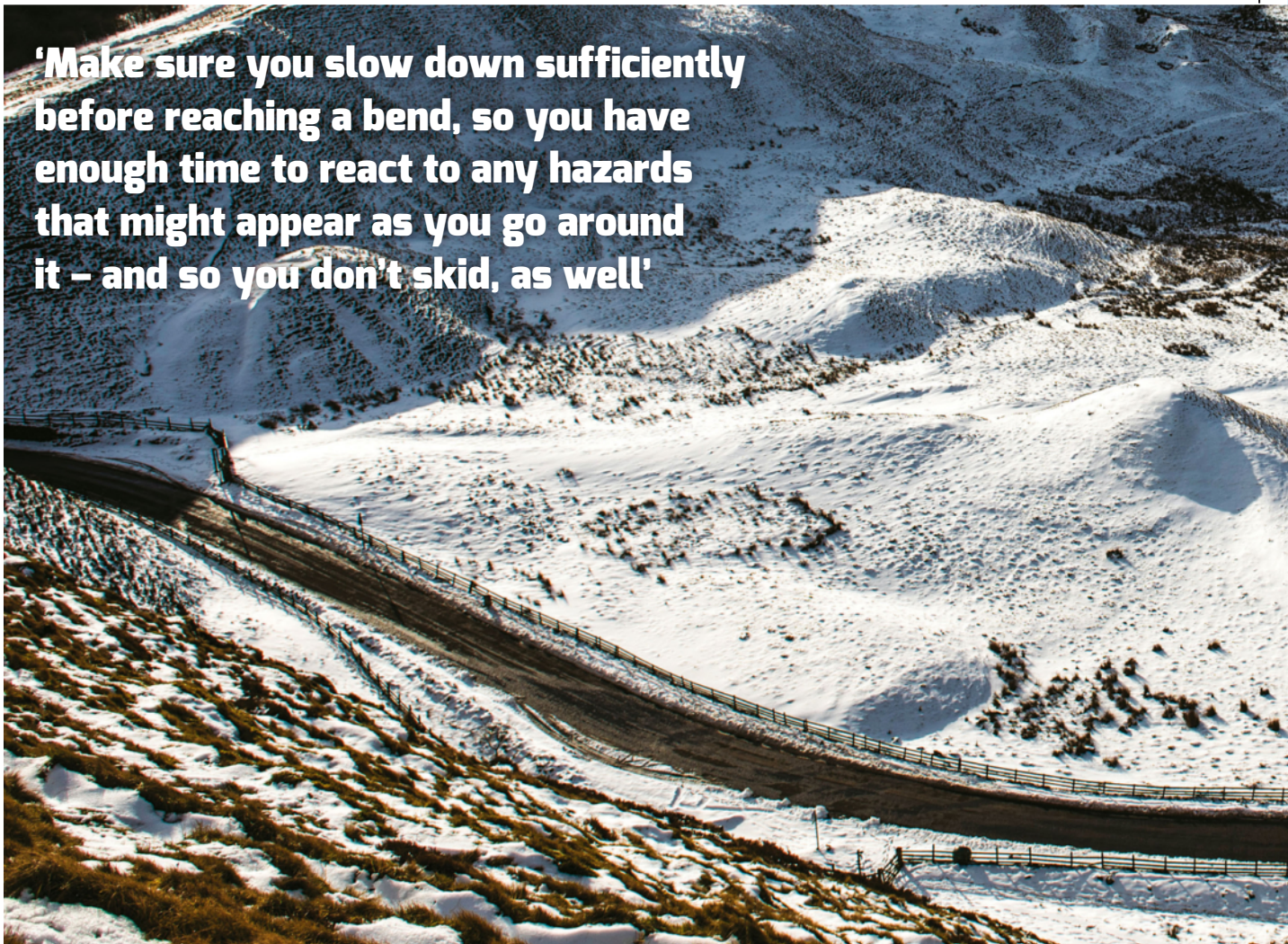
plans. Either delay travelling by a day or two until the weather improves, or cancel the trip entirely and rearrange it.

Plan ahead

"If you do have to travel in bad weather, plan your journey thoroughly. Think about where you are going and what it will be like all the way along the route. If you can, avoid travelling on less-used roads or country lanes, because these are less likely to be gritted," says Gladman.

Narrow country lanes can be quite a challenge when you are towing at the best

'Make sure you slow down sufficiently before reaching a bend, so you have enough time to react to any hazards that might appear as you go around it – and so you don't skid, as well'





of times, but become treacherous if you are driving in snow.

At this time of year, it's more important than ever to contact the campsite you are heading for and confirm the best way to approach it, which might not be the most direct route. Sat navs are not always right! The warden can also give you an update on the weather at your destination, to help you decide whether or not to travel.

Prepare your vehicle

Before setting off, clear all your windows and mirrors fully. Remove snow piled on both car and caravan as much as you can – a long-handled broom can help – because it can fall and blow onto the windscreen, or onto vehicles following you. Don't leave anything obscured.

Take your time

IAM RoadSmart's tips on how to drive in wintry weather are important, and apply just as much to caravans as to cars. "Start your car gently from stationary and avoid high revs. If the road conditions are extremely icy and you drive a manual car, you should move off in a higher gear, rather than first gear. You should stay in a higher gear to avoid wheel spin," says Gladman. He's right, of course, but starting off in

a higher gear than first might not always be possible with the weight of a caravan to drag forward. It can take careful balancing of the clutch and throttle to pull away when driving on a slippery surface.

"It's important to get your speed right when you are travelling in snow. Never drive too fast that you risk losing control, and don't drive so slowly that you risk losing momentum for getting up a slope.

"Increase your following distance from the vehicle in front of you. It may take up to 10 times as long to stop on snow or ice. Build this into your following distance – this will give you more time to slow down using engine braking, which is less likely to induce a skid.

"Make sure you slow down sufficiently before reaching a bend, so that you have enough time to react to any hazards that might appear as you go around it – and so you don't skid, as well. You should have finished slowing down before you start to turn the steering wheel," he explains.

Expect the unexpected

When you are touring in winter, it pays to be prepared for bad weather and delays. "At the very least, you should have with you a shovel, torch, blanket, jump-leads and a tow rope," says Gladman.

In addition, you should ensure your mobile is fully charged, with the number of your recovery organisation saved into it. A bottle of water and snacks are useful, and don't set out without knowing the locations of fuel stations along your way.

Tyres for the time of year

IAM RoadSmart's advice focuses on what you can do if you are about to set off on a journey. But there are steps you can take well before the worst of winter arrives.

Consider fitting winter tyres if you want to stay mobile all winter. They don't just make a difference when there's snow and ice about. They offer better grip once the temperature drops below 7°C.

Winter can be a magical time of year for touring, with quiet campsites and crisp, bracing weather. But when the cold bites hardest, safety has to be top priority.

So if you do have a winter break planned during icy conditions, pay close attention to the forecast before you set out. And if you decide to travel, take extra precautions to make sure that everybody stays safe.

**CUT OUT
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TOP TECH FOR KEEPING WARM

Paul Critcher picks out some brilliant winter kit



Kampa Diddy fan heater

After a cold day out, the last thing you want is to wait for the van to heat up. Enter the Diddy, a powerful, 1500W fan heater that will have you warm in minutes. Lightweight and just 21.5cm high, it has two heat settings. Safety measures include tip-over and overheat cut-outs.

Price £19.99 > www.awnings.co.uk



Outwell heated carpet

Delight in the warmth that this heated carpet delivers. Neatly quilted on top, the 150 x 100cm carpet simply plugs into the caravan electrics, so you can enjoy warmth underfoot in your awning when the temperature begins to drop.

Price £44.95 > www.outdooraction.co.uk



Tweed foot warmer

We all deserve a bit of luxury, especially on tour in the winter, and this foot warmer is just the thing to keep your toes cosy. Made from pure wool with a sheepskin lining, it makes a really comforting accompaniment to a cup of cocoa and a good book.

Price £49.95 > www.houseofbruar.com



Intelliheat heatpad

Imagine if you could control the temperature of your hot water bottle at the touch of a button. This modern alternative is a heatpad that delivers three hours of heat and has five digitally controlled temperature settings. It is also machine washable and tumble dryer safe.

Price £34.99 > www.dreamlanduk.co.uk



Microlite 1400 Winter Sleeping Bag

When the weather is cold, it's crucial that you stay warm in your caravan overnight – and this winter sleeping bag will help you do just that. It offers excellent heat retention and a two-way zip, and is suitable for those up to 6'4" in height. Two bags can be zipped together to form a good-sized double, too.

Price £39.99 > www.mountainwarehouse.com



Dreamland Velvety Heated Throw

There's nothing better than feeling cosy in your van as the pitter-patter of rain slowly wakes you. This 12V heated blanket, made from soft, slate-grey plush, is ideal for keeping you toasty. The 150W blanket has five temperature settings and auto shut-off, and is fitted with a 1.5m-long power cord.

Price £52.99 > www.lakeland.co.uk



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GUIDE!



SPOTLIGHT ON WINTER LAY-UP

Preparing your caravan for storage involves a few key tasks, says Sammy Faircloth, to avoid any nasty surprises come the spring



THOSE COLD, DARK winter evenings are not for everyone, and some of us like nothing better than to snuggle up at home in front of the fire.

Nothing wrong with that, but it is advisable to carry out some simple jobs before storing your caravan for the winter, or you could find it costing you when you return to it next spring.

Indoor tasks

■ Cleaning

It would be remiss to leave any caravan in a mucky state, so give it a thorough clean before

putting it away. Be very careful about which products you use on plastic fixtures and fittings.

Avoid household bleaches: these will damage the plastic. Products such as Thetford Bathroom Cleaner can be used not only in the bathroom, but also inside the fridge.

Alternatively, you could make up a solution of one teaspoonful of bicarbonate of soda in half a litre of warm water.

As a precaution, I take out removable carpets, cushions and upholstery, because these can get damp in colder months.

■ Drain-down

Draining down is one of the most important jobs. Water freezes at 0°C, of course, so it is essential to drain down your caravan before storing away. Any water that is left in the pipes will expand if it freezes, which can split them.

To drain down the water heater, switch off the pump and turn the yellow tap to the open or drain-down position. Once it has finished draining, open all of the taps, including the shower tap. If you have a single-lever mixer tap, make

sure that the lever is in the middle, raised position, to open hot and cold feeds.

For absolute peace of mind, you could use a Floë Caravan Drain-Down Kit. This connects to the water in-supply at the side of the van with a foot pump or a 12V tyre compressor. Make sure it is set to no more than 15psi. Then it quite simply blasts air through the pipes to push out any residual water.

Next step is to drain down the flush-water tank to your toilet cassette, which is >>

Indoor tasks



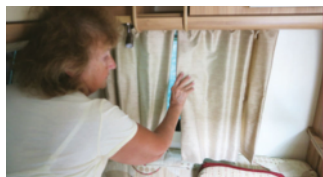
Don't forget to empty the flush-water tank to the toilet, as well as the toilet cassette



If you have somewhere to store them, remove the cushions and carpets, to avoid damp

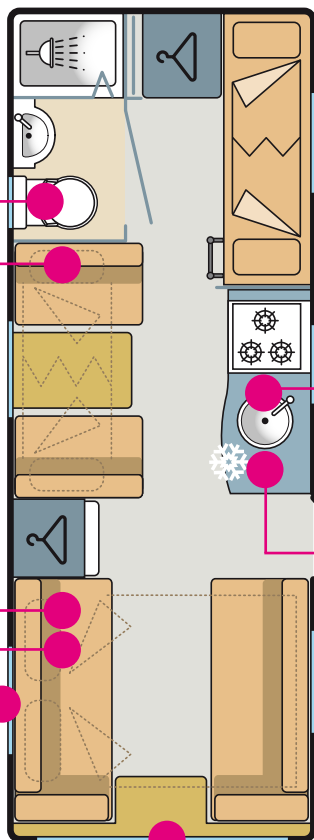


Drain the water heater by turning the yellow tap to the open or drain-down position



If you have curtains, close them rather than the roller blinds for winter storage, to prevent any strain on the spring coils

Damp traps work to remove some of the moisture during the winter months



For single-lever mixer taps, ensure the lever is in the middle, raised position to open both feeds



Place a plug in all sinks and the shower tray, to prevent nasty smells rising from drain holes



Mould likes to grow in sealed fridges over the winter months; leave fridge/freezer doors ajar



One teaspoonful of bicarbonate of soda in half a litre of warm water is a good cleaning agent



Oil-filled radiators run on particularly cold days and monitored regularly, can help to keep the damp at bay

often overlooked. First, locate the drain-down pipe, which is usually in the locker where the toilet cassette is housed.

Using a bowl or bucket, remove the plug on the end of the drain-down pipe and be ready to catch the water. It is surprising quite how dirty the water can get!

If there is no drain-down pipe, simply flush the toilet until no more water comes out, but make sure that you empty the cassette. It is also recommended that you leave the blade in the open position, to prevent the rubber seal from sticking to the blade.

To finish off, place a plug in all of the sinks, including the shower, to prevent any nasty smells from coming up through the drainage holes.

Fridge

Caravan fridge and freezer compartments must be emptied and the doors left ajar. If the doors remain sealed for any length of time, there is a risk that mould could grow.

Roller blinds

Blinds tend to be pulled down to improve security. However, leaving them in this position for long periods can cause a strain on the spring coils. My Bailey Orion comes with curtains as well as blinds, so I normally close these instead.

Dehumidifier

Damp is almost inevitable in winter, so install a dehumidifier or damp trap. In my first year of caravanning, I didn't follow this rule and I'll never

forget returning to the van in spring, to find mould growing on my wooden spoons!

Low-level heating

During particularly cold snaps, I run an oil-filled radiator on a timer to keep the damp at bay. This is only viable if your van is hooked up to a mains supply on your driveway – it is important to keep an eye on it. Leaving some types of heater running unchecked is unwise.

Outdoor tasks

Leisure battery

Leisure batteries will need to be monitored throughout the winter and, if left unattended, will fully discharge (12.2V or below). The battery can be maintained by hooking up the caravan to a 230V supply, which

is perfect if you store your caravan on the driveway.

By using mains hook-up in your garage or house, the caravan's built-in charger will keep the battery in a good state of charge. However, if your van is kept at a storage site, mains hook-up may not be an option.

One possibility is to remove the leisure battery and charge it at home. But if you have an alarm or tracker fitted, the leisure battery would need to remain in the caravan.

In that case it might be worth your while considering a solar pulse charger. Our Milenco Solar Charge maintained our leisure battery all through the winter, and could be used while the caravan was covered.

Whichever method you use to maintain your leisure battery,

Outdoor tasks



CLEANING Give your caravan a good wash and wax before storing away. Waxing helps to protect the bodywork



Look out for cleaning solutions specifically for overwintering

SECURITY Remove all valuables, such as TVs, radios and so on. Fit visible security products, for practical reasons and as a deterrent. If you're storing the van at home on your driveway, consider a security post

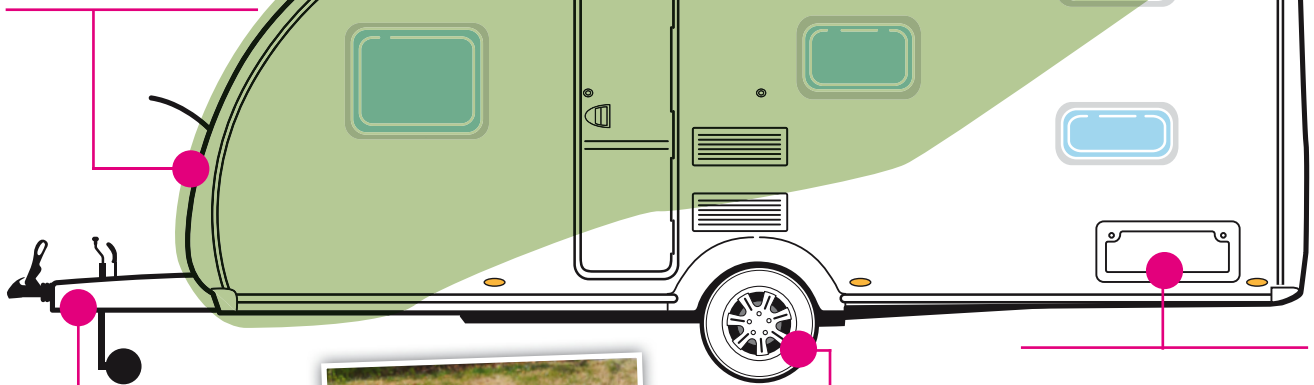
COVER It doesn't take long to pull a cover on or off, and if you have waxed your caravan, it will simply glide over it!



POWER Use a solar pulse charger to maintain your leisure battery if you have no access to mains supply



GAS Remove gas cylinders and place them in a cool, well-ventilated place



TOWING ELECTRICS Inspect and clean the van-to-tow car 13-pin electrical socket, and coat it with a water inhibitor, such as petroleum jelly



Spread out and clean your awning in a dry area. Tackle stains and spots with an appropriate cleaning product. Store it in a dry place

TYRES If you leave your tyres motionless for long periods of time, they can crack, particularly if left in direct sunlight. Use a wheel cover to prevent UV rays prematurely ageing the tyre

BATTERY Unless the 12V battery is connected to a caravan alarm system, remove it and store in a cool, dry place. Check it regularly and top up its charge levels when necessary. Remove batteries from battery-operated clocks, smoke detectors and so on

'It's a good idea to make a checklist for winter preparation, so you don't forget to carry out any important tasks'

it is always advisable to make regular checks that the reading does not fall below 12.2V. It can be a costly mistake to neglect your leisure battery.

Gas cylinders

Gas bottles can be left in the van's gas locker, as long as the valves are in the closed position or the regulators disconnected.

However, if the caravan is going to a storage site, you will need to check their gas cylinder policy, because some facilities do not allow gas cylinders to be left on-site. If you are storing a gas bottle at home, ensure that it is in a well-ventilated shed.

Brakes and tyres

The handbrake mechanism will sometimes seize up if left for extended periods of time, so

you should chock the wheels, lower the corner steadies and release the handbrake.

Also, tyre walls can suffer during long stints in storage, especially if they are exposed to sunlight. Over time, they can start to crack or bubble.

To avoid this happening, move the caravan forwards or backwards to take the pressure off the tyre wall.

If you have no room for these manoeuvres, you could safely jack up the caravan and manually rotate the tyre instead. As an extra precaution, cover the tyres with a wheel cover to prevent UV rays prematurely ageing them.

Wash and cover

Finally, complete proceedings by giving your caravan a good wash and wax – you could get

the family involved here! The wax will offer protection by forming a barrier to keep the shine in and the dirt out. Some firms have specialised agents for this, such as Fenwick's Overwintering Cleaner.

Covers are not to everyone's taste, and some storage facilities don't allow them. I find that they offer good protection from leaf mould, sap and bird mess.

It only takes a few minutes to pull the cover on and off (but always make sure that you wash your caravan before putting on its cover, to avoid scratches).

If you have waxed your van, you will find that the cover simply glides on! And when

you return next spring, there is nothing better than to reveal a sparkling, clean caravan, all ready for your next adventure.

Final thoughts

There are a number of jobs that need to be completed before laying up your caravan for the winter, so it's a good idea to make a checklist, so you won't forget any important tasks.

Finally, make sure that all of the caravan windows, doors and skylights are locked and if you have them, set any alarms or trackers.

You don't want any nasty surprises when you come back to the van in the springtime! **PC**



TOP WINTER GIFT IDEAS

Paul Critcher picks out some enticing winter treats



Storm cloud weather predictor

Now here's a novelty – the liquid inside the storm cloud indicates what the weather has in store for you. It's full of little crystals that freak out to match the weather. Note that the cloud takes about a week to acclimatise to its surroundings before becoming fully functional.

Price £29.99 > firebox.com



Hanpure Bluetooth beanie

Hanpure's Bluetooth beanie, with built-in microphone, gives you 10-12 hours of talk/music and more than 200 hours of standby. You can connect it to your Bluetooth devices in seconds, and the control panel makes it easy to switch songs and set the volume as you prefer.

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Nanopresso Elements Chill White

This portable espresso machine uses a patented pumping system to deliver fantastic coffee on the go. The hand-powered

Nanopresso is capable of reaching 18 bars of pressure, so you can enjoy an espresso whenever and wherever you like. It comes with a case made of durable EVA material and a soft fabric interior lining.

Price £69.90 (exc VAT)
> www.wacaco.com



Olight S2R Baton II

This rechargeable LED flashlight delivers a super-bright 1150-lumen output and is waterproof and impact-resistant. Robust and durable, it is ideal for outdoor use in all weather conditions.

Price £51.96 > www.ilightstore.uk



OCOOPA Hand Warmer

Having cold hands can ruin a winter walk, so be sure to pack the Ocoopa Hand Warmer before you set out.

It offers fast heating and three heat levels; it's also made from high-tech aircraft-grade aluminium, so it should last well, too. Best of all, it's rechargeable, and you can even use it to power your phone.

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