

The Ten Essentials

By Scott Stoddard

"DON'T leave home without it." But what good will a green plastic credit card do you 20 miles from the nearest paved road? What do you really need when out away from civilization?

Experienced outdoor enthusiasts know what items are most important to bring - even for short walks or hikes out of base camp. The "10 Essentials" are items that cannot be improvised from materials lying on the forest floor. To be found without these few items, even only a few miles from camp or cabin, can spell disaster.

The standard list of 10 essentials varies slightly depending on which source you go to. The Boy Scouts have their list, the Sierra Club has another, and the Mountaineers in their outdoor bible, *Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills*, have come up with another variation. They all incorporate the same basic items.

The following list is not to be considered cast in concrete - each survivalist should customize his or her own kit for the barest minimum of supplies. Note that the first three items are for finding your way, the second three are for your protection, and the last four are for emergencies.

1. A MAP of the area you will be hiking, canoeing, or camping should be detailed enough so that you can find man-made items like trails, unimproved roads, power lines, etc., and natural features such as rivers, streams, hills and other terrain landmarks that will guide you. A U.S Geological Survey Topographical map has all of these features and more. For an index to topo maps in your home state contact: U.S. Geological Survey, Map Distribution Section, Federal Center, Box 25286, Denver, CO 80225; (303) 236-7477. A 365 page book titled, *The Map Catalog*, (Every kind of map and chart on Earth and even some above it), is available from: High Country Enterprise, P.O. Box 746, Saguache, CO 81149; (719) 655-2432.

2. A map without a COMPASS is almost useless unless you possess a sixth sense in direction finding. I prefer the liquid filled "Silva" or "Suunto" compasses. These have straight edges that are useful in plotting bearings. Military lensatic compasses are more bulky and don't have a clear base making map reading through the compass impossible. With both map and compass you should be able to "orient" the map by lining up magnetic north on the compass with the magnetic north arrow printed on the map. Once you do this, you'll be able to identify terrain features and plot your course.

3. Be sure that the FLASHLIGHT you bring doesn't have a switch that is easily turned on and off. You may find that it has been accidentally on all day, and when you need it the batteries will be already worn out. In that case don't put the batteries inside the unit until you are required to use it. Even if you have the most advanced, water proof machined aluminum light source, bring a spare bulb and spare alkaline batteries just in case. A Mini-Mag Lite will fit in the smallest of 10 essential kits but may not be adequate for all-night travel. Headlamps are useful for cave exploring and when the hands are otherwise occupied.

4. On one trip to the top of an 11,000 foot peak I forgot my SUNGLASSES and I nearly went snowblind. After tiring of looking through my balled-up fists I finally had to cut slits in some cardboard and jury-rig some Eskimo sunglasses. Sunglasses are available today that stop 99 percent of ultraviolet light. Polycarbonate lenses with "wraparound" designs provide more protection against wind and side glare. Glacier glasses are recommended for snowy conditions. They usually have polarized lenses and leather side shields to block out the side glare. Buy some retaining straps when you purchase your sunglasses. Croakies or Chums cost less than \$5 and will prevent damage or loss of your expensive eye wear. Add some sunscreen to your kit for total solar protection.

5. EXTRA FOOD and WATER. This category puzzles me a bit. Does it mean that I should have two water bottles filled with water and two bags of trail mix? The amount of water you bring should be determined by the length of the trip and the temperature and physical demand put on your body. Water should be used as needed and not rationed out,(i.e.,a few ounces now and no more for another hour). If your body needs water, it needs it now not three hours from now! Water purification tablets might help you use other water sources. As far as food, some hikers throw cans

of sardines or tuna fish into their packs knowing that they wouldn't eat it unless there was an emergency. Normal trail foods (dried fruits, nuts, and granola) should be eaten at regular intervals to resupply the body with energy. Pemmican is one of the most concentrated high energy foods you can carry. See the Oct. 1991 ASG issue on page 57 for directions on its preparation.

6. Once again, the EXTRA CLOTHING you bring is determined by the time of the year and the weather. A breezy summer hike may require only a poncho for rain protection and a light nylon wind jammer for possible cold. A day snow hike gets more complicated. An extra jacket or sweater may do, but if you will be in extreme mountain conditions, a bivouac sack, insulation pad, and a winter sleeping bag may be the only thing that will save you should the weather go bad. In normal conditions you should at least throw a metalized space blanket into your kit. This with a poncho can be used to rig up an improvised lean-to shelter. Tape the space blanket to the poncho for support, tie the poncho to trees to form a lean-to and then build a fire in front. The space blanket will reflect the heat of the fire back on to you.

7. Expensive WATERPROOFED MATCHES have always seemed a little too gimmicky for my taste. Strike anywhere wood matches are a lot cheaper and can be stored in a waterproof container such as an empty plastic 35mm film can. If they're too long, just clip off the ends to the right length. A more convenient item for starting fires can be found at your local liquor or convenience store. Throw-away plastic cigarette lighters work well and some have adjustable flames in case you need "blow torch" action. Other fire sparkers such as the flint/magnesium bars on key chains are good back-ups should you lose your matches or lighter.

8. FIRESTARTERS. In this category you can include a regular paraffin candle (store inside a plastic bag so it doesn't melt in your pack), commercial firestarter tablets, Sterno, or my favorite - Hexamine tablets that are available at most Army/Navy surplus stores. Hexamine tablets won't evaporate like Trioxane Fuel Bars do when the wrapper is ripped, and come six tablets to a small cardboard tube.

A firestarter is used only when conditions make it difficult to start a fire. Preparation is the key to fire building. You need plenty of kindling sticks or pieces of wood split thin with your knife to make the larger diameter branches catch. Most people begin their fires with inadequate supplies of tinder and kindling and are frustrated when they can't get a three inch thick log to catch fire.

9. A POCKET KNIFE is your most important 10 essentials item. Among other things it helps in first aid, food preparation, and fire building. As long as you have a knife you can make fire. Striking steel on any flint-like rock will produce sparks that can catch fire in carefully prepared tinder and kindling - materials you have gathered and prepared using the knife. More elaborate versions of pocket knives contain a treasure chest of useful tools: saws, tweezers, scissors, screwdrivers, awls, toothpicks, can openers, etc A good Swiss Army knife will bring out the MacGyver in all of us. Don't forget this item!

10. A FIRST AID KIT really isn't one item but a collection of items that can contain the bare minimum of bandaids, aspirin, and iodine or on the other extreme contain suture kits, chemically activated cold packs and prescription drugs. This is where you will have to really do some customizing and personalizing. I store my first aid items in a plastic Zip Loc bag so that I can see everything inside and protect them from the weather. Along with an assortment of bandaids, gauze pads, and Steri-Strips, are the following: insect repellent, sunscreen, lip balm with SPF 21, triple antibiotic ointment, small bottle of Hibiclens Surgical Scrub, Aspirin, Diasorb tablets for diarrhea, Actifed (decongestant), Bonine (motion sickness), and Benadryl (antihistamine). Other items that are helpful are: a needle for splinter extraction, moleskin or Spenco Second Skin for blisters, Ace bandage, small needle-nose pliers, single-edge razor blades, and Calamine cream for insect bites.

The "11th" item of the 10 essentials most people carry is toilet paper. Other "essentials" I bring include: an Air Force type signal mirror, 50 feet of parachute cord, mini-Leathermantool, and plastic fluorescent marking tape for trail marking. You might want to add a pocket signal flare and other items such as a smoke generator for signaling.

Your 10 essentials kit can be packaged in a number of ways. The most convenient is a small day pack. Day packs will hold your water bottle, extra clothing and food for most daytime trips. Get one made out of Cordura nylon with padded straps.

For extensive mountain bike rides many cyclists like to use waist packs or fanny packs to store their emergency gear and a banana or two. A waist pack is generally cooler to wear and provides for a lower center of gravity. Water is normally carried on the frame of the bicycle, so the packs can be smaller and lighter.

The last essential that needs to be taken on all your trips into the wilderness won't fit in a survival kit. It's called common sense and is a prime commodity in both the city and in the outdoors. If it looks like rain - don't go. If it looks too high - stay back. If it's getting dark - get back to your base. By avoiding unnecessary problems and dangers you will save on your own personal wear and tear, and probably get back home in one piece. However, if something does come up, at least you know you've got those 10 important items stowed away in your rucksack.

(This article was optically scanned from :American Survival Guide / January 1992