

## Info ~ Line



### Gearing Up For Survival

by Corceigh Green

Survival is a growing concern for Independent Americans especially in the wake of last year's hurricane season. Independent Americans know that circumstances can conspire to put good people in bad situations. Should you find yourself in a bad situation, you may want to have some survival gear to help you live through the situation. In essence, what you want on hand during a crisis is a classic "survival kit".

Usually, some kind of carry bag stuffed with the latest gadgetry and shiny widgets guaranteed to pull your fanny from the fire, survivalists all have their ideas of what they need to carry with them in case their view of the ultimate survival situation arises. When you consider that your life may at one point depend on this gear you'd better believe that you better not just stuff some light-weight bag with cheap Chi-com gadgets from the local China-mart and set it in the truck and forget about it. In the first place, most of the cheap gadgetry is made too poorly to function well enough for any length of time. If your cheap Chi-com knife cuts bark from trees and fashions fishing spears for a couple of days before the chinsy metal dulls and the mild crap cannot be sharpened, then you could be in a lot of trouble for the rest of your stay in the wilderness. Of course, you may never know that your tools are not up to the task of keeping you alive until you pull them out of the tattered remnants of your light-weight bag and break them in the course of normal use.

Obviously, attitudes about survival kits and equipment has to change. Survival kits are not just something you throw together cheaply and forget about. I've even read a posting on the internet by a moderator who had stocked up on some supplies and had never used them. He was getting older and had the thought that he might feel silly if he got through life and never used any of the survival equipment he spent a lot of money on. You don't have to wait until an emergency or until you get through life to use your gear. You need to be familiar with your gear and know that it will work. This means that during camping and hunting outings, you need to use the gear that you are staking your life on. If it breaks, replace it with better equipment. If you use it up, rotate it. If you spend a lot of money on it and never use it, you should feel silly.

Don't take the above information about cheap equipment the wrong way. This has nothing to do with being a yuppie. I have nothing against cheap prices. What I am talking about is cheaply made or inferior products. I am sure that you could get by on some of the Chi-com slave labor products, most are too poorly made to be of any kind of service in an emergency, however. Buy what you know to be quality products. This means gear that you have used, are familiar with and know to be an adequate product. Don't be lured toward a product with a cheap price tag unless you have some extra money and you want to try some new gear. Of course, you should always shop for bargains. Bargains doesn't mean cheaply produced products. It means a well made product with a good, affordable price tag.

Now, for the gear you need for your survival kit. Bear in mind, knowledge and skills are far more important than just storing gear. Gear becomes important when you know what to do with it and how it can help you in any given situation. As I seem to keep stressing in this article, use your gear and gain experience with it. In this way you will gain knowledge and skill.

First on our list for a survival kit is the ability to carry your equipment. Different people under differing circumstances will use different methods for this. Most people go with a backpack. Backpacks are convenient. They are worn across the back which is most convenient when moving across rough terrain and/or carrying a rifle. Backpacks can also hold more gear which means you can carry more with you. Drawbacks concerning backpacks is that you tend to store all your gear in them.

I don't have to tell you about storing all your eggs in one basket. If something should cause you to drop your pack, all your gear goes with it.

Your backpack needs to be of high quality. No light weight nylon packs made for carrying a small amount of objects around for the day. Your pack must be made of sturdy canvas or the newer synthetics like Cordura. Your pack should also have a frame. The frame will help to position and more comfortably carry the load. Frames can be internal or external. External frames are more stable and are less likely to allow your pack to shift position. This makes for more comfortable hiking and carrying of your gear. Internal frames are more maneuverable and can be more readily carried while crawling or climbing and are less likely to hang on brush. Your pack needs a waist strap and shoulder straps. I have used packs with and without padded shoulder straps. I advise to get the padded shoulder straps, especially if you may be carrying a lot of gear. Waist straps may be padded or unpadded.

Other methods for carrying gear include butt-packs, web harnesses, vests and pockets. All of the rules of quality that apply to backpacks also apply to these. The advantages of the other methods of carrying gear is that they are easier to manage and more likely to be carried with you at most or all times. The disadvantage is that you can't carry as much gear in your pockets, butt-pack or vests. Which means you may have to leave something home or back at the camp. This usually means tents and sleeping bags. Not good, if you need shelter in a hurry. In my neck of the woods or winter anywhere, having a sleeping bag with you is a huge advantage. You don't need a backpack to carry one with you, so even if you decide a backpack is too bulky for your survival kit, make arrangements to carry a sleeping bag.

The first on my list of gear to stuff into the survival kits I carry are the tools necessary to build shelter, build other tools, clean and dress game and gather food. This includes an axe or hatchet, two or three knives, some cord or leather thongs and an e-tool.

An axe is handier to pack than a hatchet. An axe can do more. As an example, I once got my chainsaw bound in a tree trunk. All I was carrying at the time was a hatchet and I wound up cutting the tree down with the hatchet. I wish I had been carrying an axe! The next day my wrist

was too sore to accomplish some of my basic chores. I wrapped the wrist in elastic bandage and John Wayne'd my way through the next few days, but had I been in a real survival situation that heavy chopping with a tool made for light chopping could have been detrimental.

It is the long handle of the axe that makes it's carry inconvenient. There are smaller axes with shorter handles on the market that are still larger than hatchets. They are better suited for carry, but still allow for heavy chopping tasks. You may wish to look into one of these. They can be carried on the belt or strapped to the pack.

Knives are the focus of most survival kits. They are the tools that accomplish the most jobs at camp, in the field or in a survival situation. They are used for cutting cord, carving fishing gigs even, and inappropriately, cutting wood and digging roots. Many Americans remember the knife from the *Rambo* movie series and equate it with the perfect survival knife. Not true. Rambo's knife was plagued with some inadequacies. First and foremost, Rambo's knife sported a hollow handle allowing our hero to carry small items like matches and fishing hooks plus line. Hollow handle knives lack full tangs, which make them weak and likely to break when pressure is applied while sawing, chopping wood or during heavy cutting tasks. Always stick with full tang blades.

Secondly, Rambo's knife blade was too long for intricate work. Unless your blade is strictly for combat choose blades 7 inches in length or less. These blades aren't glamorous, they are working blades that allow you to dress game, sharpen sticks, set traps and carve tools. Choose a blade that is easy to work with.

The first knife I want on hand is a Swiss type army knife. This knife doesn't have to have a lot of gadgets on it. Generally, the saws are too small to really do any wood work with anyway. All you need for this knife is at least one knife blade, a can opener and a bottle opener. The purpose of the knife blade is for tasks already mentioned. The can opener is an obvious advantage. There are other ways to open a can, but a can opener will ensure no spillage and the can may be re-used to carry water, foraged food and to cook if it is not destroyed. Although most bottled drinks come with twist off caps these days, it is still possible to run across an old fashioned pressed on cap. Aside from running across older, pressed on bottle caps, it is possible for bottles to crack across their mouths making twisting off

the cap a process than can break off the stem and mouth of the bottle as well as cut your hand. It is possible to gently lift the cap off with a bottle opener in this case.

The second knife I want on me would be a lock back folder with a belt sheath. I can carry this knife on my belt or in my pocket. The blade should be of a skinning design ending in a clip point with the clip starting on the rearward end of the blade near the ricasso. The upward curve of such a blade provides for an extended cutting edge and a good sharp point used for puncturing bark or leather when preparing shelters or repairing/manufacturing clothing and shoes not to mention dressing game. It is important that this blade be a lock back. Many non-locking folders have folded on people while being used to puncture holes in objects. This even happened to me once while I was improvising a carry-pouch from newspaper. The blade sliced through my trigger finger, which is much worse than slicing even my freeway finger. Moral of the story, for heavy use choose a lock back. You can't afford that kind of injury when faced with a survival situation.

My third knife is a fixed blade belt knife. It should have between a 5 and 7 inch blade which can be worked easily while carving or skinning and is strong enough to sharpen some thick stakes, peel logs, cut branches and clear a camp site (with help from your axe). One of the best multi-purpose utility knives developed is the Bowie. I see no reason to change this design. It is a clip point whose clip begins forward on the blade closer to the point. The blade has little vertical distal taper, so the point is not as needle sharp, however, the blade has a longer spine making the blade stronger in case you absolutely *must* do some prying with it.

Cord or strips of leather comes in very handy in this portion of your kit. These cords will be used for lashing when building a shelter and to lash spears and fishing gigs to poles. They may also be used to build bows and fire drills. In fact, there are so many uses for cord and twine that listing them all may be an impossibility. Carry lots. You'll find you always need more.

An e-tool, or entrenching tool should be considered for every survival kit. Basically, this is anything that can dig a hole. You'll have to be careful of quality with these tools as well as the others. There are military surplus folding shovels that do a great job and there are Chi-com copies that fall apart almost upon opening. The

military surplus is becoming harder to find and more expensive. If you can't pick up the surplus, don't buy the copies. Good alternatives are ordinary gardening trowels and take-down mattocks. If you need to move a lot of dirt (and you may) the mattocks will rip into packed earth like a backhoe. You'll need to shovel that dirt out of the way, however. Anything that can move earth will do for this. A trowel, Douglas fir bark, a flat board or a canteen cup will work fine.

With the above portion of your kit you will be able build shelters, clear camp sights and build necessary tools for the procurement of food, water and build camp tools. As an extra to the above, I'd suggest carrying a military surplus waterproof poncho. These are lighter to carry than tents and can be quickly fashioned on sight as a tent type shelter. You don't need to bring anything extra other than cord. Fashion tent stakes from materials on sight and lash the poncho in place. The poncho may be worn when hiking in wet weather and used as a ground cover as well.

You will need a fire building kit in your survival kit as well. Whatever circumstance has stranded you in the situation you find yourself in, it is probable that you are going to have to have a fire to at least cook food if not provide heat to remain alive.

Gear for this portion of your kit is simple and very inexpensive. I have already talked about carrying some cord for use in making a fire bow. This can be obtained from your shelter building and camp portion of your kit. I carry all other fire starting components in the fire building kit. The fire drill is not for everyone and should not be relied upon except by those well practiced with it. Even for those practiced with it, time and circumstances may dictate that quicker methods of fire starting be employed. For this, I like to carry some strike anywhere matches and a small sandstone to strike the matches on, a magnesium/flint and steel fire starter like those made by Montana Antler Craft, dry tinder (paper, cedar bark, used gun cleaning patches and/or petroleum jelly soaked cotton balls), some dry kindling, a candle stub, tootsie-pop suckers and a lighter.

The purpose of the strike anywhere matches, magnesium/flint and steel fire starter, and lighter is obvious. It is to create spark that will ignite the dry tinder. When you need a fire it is usually because weather conditions are bad. Dry tinder and kindling will

be most likely hard to find. It is always good to have some with you to help start a fire under adverse circumstances. These items can be replenished easily in the field. A candle stub can be lit and placed under some moist or wet tinder and kindling to allow the flame to dry them out and ignite them. Tootsie-pop suckers use tightly rolled paper sticks as stems which make good kindling. They are wrapped in wax paper which is good tinder and their sugary edible portion provides a shot of instant energy to the blood stream which could come in handy as you are shivering and trying to get a fire lighted. This kit should be wrapped in aluminum foil and placed in a zip lock bag to be wrapped in more aluminum foil and placed in a second zip lock bag. This will keep your tinder and kit dry.

Once you are set with the tools you need to clear a camp site, gather wood, build a shelter and start a fire you need to concentrate on food and water. While many tend to concentrate on food first, water should be your top priority. You need at least one canteen to carry water with you, a canteen cup for cooking and catching water and a water filter. For water filters that will fit in your survival kit I recommend that you look over our *Projects For Home And Life* column in the July/August 2004 issue of this magazine. The above water filter is the most highly effective you can carry and surprisingly affordable because you need only purchase the filter element and construct an easily manufactured body. This unit will last for a couple thousand gallons if treated right. Your alternative here is to purchase a Katadyne or Pur unit. They are good units and effective, yet they are very expensive. Don't trust the \$14.95 straw filters sold in the sporting goods departments. They are effective to a point, but don't filter enough contaminants and bio-hazards out of your drinking water.

Besides carrying a canteen (I prefer carrying two) you may wish to carry one of the hydration units that act as a water bladder and strap to your back. These units come with a straw that fits over your shoulder that you can drink from on the move. I prefer canteens due to their carry method and they come with stainless steel canteen cups that you can cook in or even dig with if necessary. Don't select the aluminum canteen cup as they are not as sturdy. If you are carrying a backpack canteens may be the way for you to go as well. The hydration unit may interfere with carrying a backpack. The advantage of the hydration units is that they carry a

lot more water. The advantage of the canteen is that it is a complete system.

You cannot carry all of the water you need with you. This is why you must carry a water filter as well. You must also be able to recognize signs of water in arid regions and collect water in the field.

Like water, it is unlikely that you will be able to carry enough food with you for more than a few days. It does help at the onset of an emergency to have food on hand. This will allow you to set up a shelter and build a fire without having to hunt or trap food. The best food to carry are dishes that you like to eat and is light enough to carry in your kit. Dehydrated foods are lighter than canned foods. The Ramen style noodles that are sold in grocery stores for as little as 10 cents a package are excellent for survival kits. They are light, deliver a lot of carbohydrates necessary for survival conditions and contain a bouillon based seasoning pack which delivers necessary fats. Sardines are heavier to carry per calorie, but deliver protein and necessary fish oils. Dried protein sources are jerky treats. If you dry your own jerky you will save a phenomenal amount of money. Six of the noodle packages will last you 2 to 3 days depending on what else you find in the area and are incredibly light.

If your stay in the field is extended, you'll need to gather food. Become experienced at foraging by gathering wild foods in their seasons now before you have to tomorrow. Wild foods are great supplements to your monthly grocery bill. They are delicious and provide excellent nutrition. Just in case you're no expert right now include a deck of wild foods identification cards in this portion of your kit.

Animals are also excellent sources of protein. Bringing tools along to hunt and trap game should be essential to most kits. Deadfall traps and figure four triggers are easy enough to make in the field. Some wire and locking loops for snares help immensely. A .22 LR pistol and a combo shotgun/rifle with hunting ammunition should be carried as well. Remember that cord in the camp/shelter portion of the kit? It comes in handy for improvising a bow for hunting small game as well. Haven't you ever built a bow when you were a youngster? What kind of a kid were you growing up!? Fishing equipment should take the form of line, fish hooks and sinkers. Poles and fish spears can be improvised in the field as well as fish traps.

Some thought should also be given in case you wish to be found and rescued. This may not be the case in every situation, but such cases have arisen more often than those requiring evasion. It is necessary to call attention to yourself if you require help or rescue. Most of this portion of the kit has already been taken care of. Fire can call a lot of attention to yourself. Keep a fire blazing brightly at night and add green wood and boughs in the day for smoke. An axe can be used to clear an area of trees and arrange logs in an SOS message. One last item for this concern would be a signal mirror placed in a medical kit. Signal mirrors are quite effective at catching the attention of aircraft, foot traffic and vehicles. They are also very handy when caring for wounds and shaving.

Speaking of medical gear, it would be prudent to carry some gear to tend to wounds. Band-aids are handy for closing small lacerations. Gauze and medical or electrician's tape help to staunch blood flow. In a pinch the tape can be cut and used as butterfly bandages in place of sutures. Sutures may be necessary to close nastier wounds. Tweezers or splinter forceps are handier than you might think. You are bound to get a few splinters and there's nothing like the relief of removing a fine cedar splinter from a festering sore. These items can be stuffed into an emergency surgery kit. These kits contain wound probes, sutures, suture needles, hemostats, scalpel and forceps. Add a bottle of aspirin, any medication you may have a prescription for and stronger pain killers you may have access to.

The clothing on your back also plays a great role in your survival. Most people do not give their clothing enough consideration in the summer. Your immediate area may differ in climate, but my area in the mountains experiences some very cold weather even in the summer. Overnight lows in July has reached 39 degrees above zero Fahrenheit. Daytime highs has been as low as 45 degrees in July. This is because rain fronts can block out the sun and weather patterns often move in from the Gulf of Alaska. If you are planning on hiking the mountains of the inland Northwest bring appropriate clothing even in the summer!

Cotton is out except for jeans. Cotton absorbs water which destroys its insulating property. Wear wool, leather or Gor-Tex. Bring at least a sweater. A good, warm coat will help get you through the night and a

sleeping bag rated for winter temperatures will stave off hypothermia. While hiking or doing work, open your clothing or take off shirts and sweaters at the first signs of perspiration. Avoid getting your clothing wet and wear your waterproof poncho when out in the rain.

This forms a small survival kit with a bit over the bare minimum needed for survival. This kit should see you through most situations. As you can see it does not require a great deal of gear to survive. Mental attitude and knowledge are the factors that will allow you to survive. Be certain you know what to do with your gear and what your gear can do before you venture out with your kit.

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