

Choose the right flashlight

Previously we talked about the evolution of the flashlight and the bulbs used in illumination. The next area of our discussion will hopefully decide what style of light will work best for your particular outdoor purpose.

Being the packrat that I am, I have a box of flashlights. Each one was purchased as the latest and greatest I can't live without type. That is, until I saw the next, newest model. I have at least, come to the conclusion that multiple lights are necessary for our applications.

You will need to decide whether you want a light that uses disposable batteries or has rechargeable capabilities. I use the disposable battery type, simply because I don't usually have a way to recharge batteries when in the wilderness. There are solar chargers available, but they require considerable time to operate properly. I will stick to carrying extra batteries with me.

The original flashlight in the arsenal is the long tube model like the Maglite. These are usually associated with security, police or professional first responder work. These lights give off lots of lumens but can be very cumbersome to lug around with you.

I like these as vehicle carry lights in the rechargeable model. Keep one in the truck for roadside emergencies or searching for lost cats. They usually come with a 12-volt charger, so charging on the fly is possible.

For general outdoor activities, the small handheld lights are perfect. Some run on AA or AAA batteries while others use the 123A types. Usually, the more batteries it uses, the brighter the beam. Read the packaging to find one to fit your particular needs.

These handheld lights will generally fit in a pocket. There are a few that offer an angled head, that can be worn on a coat pocket or pack strap, and throw a beam in front of you. This is a nice feature if you want your hands free.

Another option for hands free use would be the headlamp. These lights can come with a strap that wraps around your head, and have an adjustable beam that can be angled up or down, depended on the task at hand. Many of these also have a red light option that allows you to use the red light to help preserve your night vision. Some come with a green light that is preferred by hunters and for tactical operations.

The strap on headlamp uses a battery pack on the backside of the head strap. The drawback to me is the weight of the thing on your head. The positive is that your hands are free to perform other tasks.

There are smaller headlamps that just clip onto the bill of your cap. Generally, these do not offer the high output of the strap kind, but weigh much less. The biggest drawback of any headlamp is when you

stop to talk with another person. Your headlamp will blind the other guy unless you look away while talking to them. For this reason, look for a lamp that has a very easily accessible on-off switch.

In recent years, a wrist light has been developed. This light wears on your wrist just like a watch. One model even has a watch with it. The wrist light was originally developed with law enforcement and first responders in mind but its use to the outdoors people is being discovered.

I have one and use it regularly. It makes for great hands free operation of just about any task. If you are a hiker, hunter or backpacker, you may want to consider one of these in your pack.

Keep in mind that it does not take a lot of lumens to light your way. A lower output light, with a long runtime is probably what you are requiring for most outdoor activities. If you think there are times when you need lots of illumination, consider a light with several brightness settings.

Lastly, this brings us to batteries. I generally opt for the more expensive lithium batteries over the alkaline types. My lights live in a pack and may go long periods without use. Last thing I need is to discover that old Murph, borrowed one of my lights, ran down the batteries and let them leak, ruining my flashlight. Of course, you will only discover this fact on a moonless, cold night in the high country, while you are looking for a landmark to get back to camp.

I carry multiple lights with me. I have a headlamp, wrist lamp and a handheld beam. A good tip is to buy lights that use the same battery type. This will allow you to carry extra batteries of just one kind and not look like a walking battery store. I carry these batteries in an old prescription bottle that keeps them together and dry. Until next time, keep the batteries fresh and see you on the trail.

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Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay



These three lights in my pack go everywhere with me. If I watch the brightness settings, the lights will work all night on a single battery. (Submitted photo/Mark Rackay)



Powerful flashlights come in small packages these days. Bottom left is a rechargeable model that lives on my key ring full-time. (Submitted photo/Mark Rackay)

Opening day at Tellurdie Ski Resort



Skiers and snowboarders hit the slopes at Telluride Ski Resort on Dec. 7 for opening day. (Submitted photos/Telluride Ski Resort)