

OUTDOORS +

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When it looks like this outside, better make sure your rig is up to the travel requirements. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/ Mark Rackay)

Get the rig ready for winter

It was late November, and I was off on a day fishing trip with my Dad. We had hiked about 5 miles into a canyon with hopes of some late-season trout to stink up our creels. The weather had been moderate for as late in the season as it was. That should have been the warning shot across the bow.



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Around 2 in the afternoon, it clouded up and began to rain. By 3 the rain had turned into a heavy and wet snow, as Dad and I were hightailing it back to the car. It was near dark when we reached the car, both of us cold, wet and tired. Dad turned the key in the ignition and presto; nothing. The old battery was as dead as a free lunch.

This was a time before cell phones, and battery jumper boxes weren't yet invented. The three of us had to hoof it another 7 miles to a gas station. I say the three of us, because Murphy was along, laughing all the way. All during the walk, my Dad muttered "phrases" that I am sure he did not learn in church.

As we are heading into the winter season here in Colorado, it is a pretty good time to make sure the old 4-wheeled sleigh is ready for the task. One of the obvious things to look into is the car battery.

I purchase new batteries for my truck every two years. Period. I don't care about warranties that reach out six or seven years. Batteries do not die in town or in your garage. Batteries die when you park your truck up in the mountains, 120 miles northwest of nowhere. All that warranty is good for up there is kindling for your survival fire. Buy new and get good quality batteries with lots of cold cranking amps.

The new battery does not make a difference when you return to the truck, only to find Murphy left the lights on. A set of jumper cables is helpful if you have some other vehicle to help get you jump started. I like to carry a portable power pack and make sure it is fully charged.



Whatever vehicle you head out into the backcountry with can leave you stranded. Make sure you have some equipment and supplies along to save yourself. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/ Mark Rackay)

You can get one of these for around 50 bucks, but it is far better than a warranty.

Tires are the next area of concern. Highway tread or standard radials are fine for around town, but not when you head into the backcountry. Start out with good snow tread tires and be sure they are properly inflated.

A good set of chains is a must, especially if you get off the beaten path. Make sure the chains fit your tires. I carried a set around for two years that were too small for my tires. I got a larger set of tires and never thought to check the chains. Fortunately, Murphy never noticed.

Be sure to keep up on the regular maintenance of your vehicle. We don't do tune-ups with the frequency of cars from years gone by. This does not mean you should forget about checking plugs, fuel filters and wires. Aside from just getting you home, your vehicle runs more efficiently with everything fresh and adjusted properly.

I would also recommend driving on the top half of your fuel tank during the winter months. The extra fuel can keep the car warm if you find yourself stranded in a blizzard. Cars don't run out of fuel

in the driveway of the Rip and Run gas station. Cars choose the end of the road, 17 miles from cell service to use the last of the fuel from the tank.

A storm back in 2016 dumped 2 feet of snow and brought 50 mph winds along with it. More than 200 people were stranded on I-70 for upwards of eight hours before being rescued. This demonstrates the importance of carrying some survival supplies with you.

I am not so worried about being stranded on the interstate or other major state highway. There will be others stranded there and emergency services will respond in a timely fashion once the storm lets up. Having some basic supplies would transform such a stranding into an inconvenience.

Getting stranded on a road less traveled by is a major concern for outdoor folks. For those of you who spend time in the mountains recreating during the winter months, pay close attention to your survival gear. Getting stranded on the Plateau during a snowstorm could turn into a life and death struggle, with help possibly days away.

Carry some extra heavy clothing and footwear for everyone with you. I keep a

couple of those military wool blankets in the truck. A vehicle is not insulated very well, and the temperature will drop very quickly inside if you are stranded.

Do not to stray away from your car. Your chances of walking out in a blizzard and living to tell about it are very slim. It is better to bundle up and stay put until help arrives.

If you choose to run the engine for warmth, try keeping it to five to 10 minutes per hour. Be certain that the exhaust area is clear so the deadly fumes do not come into the car. This is the main reason for driving on the top half of your fuel tank.

I keep a plastic tote in the truck with the following items:

- Small first aid kit and necessary prescription drugs.
- Flashlight with lots of extra batteries. Lithium batteries are best in cold weather.
- A couple of those eight-hour survival candles. These give off a fair amount of heat in a closed area.
- A bunch of non-perishable food and lots of drinking water. A full belly fights the cold better than an empty one.
- If you have pets or kids, pack food and things for them, too.

Bring your cell phone with you anytime you head out in the winter. An extra battery pack is a good idea, so the phone has a good charge when you need it. If you find yourself stranded and without cell service, try texting. Call when you can and text when you can't.

I realize that we talk about winter vehicle safety every year. Hopefully it serves as a reminder for some. Every year, we go out to rescue of people stranded in the backcountry, and most do not have the basic survival supplies. Some of those people paid the full price, plus tax.

There have been several times I have been stranded in my outdoors career. So much so that I carry some extra food for Murphy. After that stranded trip with my Dad, we started carrying some extra food with us. Nothing worse than hearing Murph complain about an empty stomach.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org



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