



Any of these items can be used to signal for help in an emergency. Make sure you have several of them in your pack when you head outdoors. (Photo by Mark Rackay)

## Signal, when you want to be found

I was working in my shop the other day, minding my own business, when I heard my wife of many years call my name. Fortunately, I am able to distinguish between the many tones she uses when calling me. This time was the, "I need a chore done" rather than the more pleasant, "lunch is ready."

Quickly, I exited the shop through one of the alternate doors. (Tip for married guys: Never get caught in a room with only one point of ingress and egress.) I was able to



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

make it to one of my many hiding places before she saw me.

Normally, my wife gives up the search and heads off on her business. When it is really something she wants done, she will enlist the support of two tracking dogs, Jack Russells, with noses that can point me out at a hundred yards.

The search and rescue business can be the same way.

Recently, we had a search for someone on the plateau that did not want to be found. This makes our job nearly impossible.

These are usually people who are run-aways, people contemplating suicide, or those who do not know they are missing.

I state the last one rather seriously because of a hunter who was missing, unbeknownst to him, we were called upon to find. He had missed his scheduled call back home, and his family reported him lost. When we woke him from an afternoon nap in his camp, he was quite surprised to know he was missing. Sometimes teenagers don't check voicemail.

If Murphy should ever cause you to become lost, or injured and needing help, making yourself as visible to rescuers as possible is paramount. Consider what you can do to help them identify your position and draw attention to yourself.

The most common response summoned rescuers will provide is for a ground search. This usually includes responders on foot, ATVs and an assortment of four-wheel drive vehicles. These folks will have medical supplies, rescue equipment and other items appropriate to the situation, depending on weather and conditions.

Depending on the nature of the emergency, there may also be air support in the form of fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. The helicopter is usually used in medical emergencies and for evacuation of injured people. Air support usually does not fly at night or during other times of limited visibility. In wooded and thickly vegetated landscape, an aircraft is not the ideal search tool.

If you happen to be the person who Murphy struck, take some time to consider your environment. What must I do for ground people hiking or driving the trails that cross the area, to see or hear me? How will the people in the aircraft see me here? Make yourself as visible as possible and create as much noise as you can, to draw attention to your location. Picture in your mind what the people looking for you are seeing as

they search.

Start by finding a large flat and open area, very close to the place you decide to take shelter. Stay away from trees and dark shadow areas, as well as cliffs and rock outcroppings. Choose an area large and open enough that you can easily be seen from the air or the ground.

Burying yourself in a big cluster of spruce trees may keep you warm, but makes it difficult for searchers to see you. Never hide from searchers unless you don't want to be bothered by those life insurance premium payments any longer.

Always carry several signaling tools with you in your pack. Most are lightweight and do not take up much space. Begin with:

- Flashlight — Have a flashlight with as many extra batteries as you can bring. The flashlight is excellent for signaling at night. There are personal strobe lights, especially used in sea rescues, available. If space permits, one of these can be a lifesaver.

- Signal mirror — Everyone should have a signal mirror. The mirror can be used to signal aircraft and ground searchers by redirecting flashes of sunlight. A pilot can see the flash of sunlight directed at him from the ground from several thousand feet in the air. I have seen this work first hand. I carry a metal mirror, rather than a glass one, so I don't cut myself when I trip over my own feet.

- Fire — Have a fire, day and night, for both warmth and a visual aid for searchers. Build the fire as large as you can safely make it. Remember that during the day smoke is more visible than the flames themselves. On a hot fire, throw green branches to make more smoke. Having a large fire in an area where one would not normally belong draws attention. Three separate fires, spaced evenly apart, are a distress signal to the air, but this is not always practical.

- Whistle — Yelling does not carry very far in the woods and will strain your vocal chords in short order. You can blow on a whistle much easier and without strain. The universal distress code is three evenly spaced noises, and the whistle works well for that. Responders will answer with two blasts if they hear your signal.

- Gun — The gun is my favorite tool for signaling, along with extra ammunition. The gun is my personal American Express Card because I never leave home without it. Here again, three evenly spaced shots. The responders will answer with a single shot if heard. When the hunting seasons are on, this is probably best used at night because during the day, other people may just assume it is a hunter shooting at game and not a person needing help. I can't count the number of people we have walked out using this method over the years.

Remember that you don't have to do these things one at a time. If you can have fires and blow whistles at the same time, by all means do it.

Be ever-vigilant for any type of response. Any color flash, noise or movement — on the ground or in the air — is a potential rescuer. Rescuers will be making noise, seeking a response from you, so stay alert.

When you don't want to be found, it is another story. I hear dogs barking and heading my way. This must be a big chore she wants done, so I better find a better hiding place.

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](mailto:info@mcspi.org).

Find your **HIDDEN Treasure!**

The Montrose Daily Press Local Market Place Find everything you know you want - and even things you didn't

**MONTROSE PRESS**

[montrosepress.com/classifieds](http://montrosepress.com/classifieds)

**DELTA-MONTROSE HOMEHEALTH**  
70 Stafford Lane • Delta, CO

**WE OFFER:**

- Skilled Nursing
- Home Health Aide Services
- Speech Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Medical Social Worker

- Dietitian Services
- Certified Wound Care
- Patient Remote Monitoring System

**AND COMING SOON:**

- Certified Foot Care
- Lymphedema Therapy

**CARE IS JUST A PHONE CALL AWAY**  
**970.874.2463**