

Strengthen your survival pack

Know which items to take so your trip to the outdoors is safe and successful



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Every year, I write an article about carrying a survival pack and provide a starter list to get folks thinking about what to bring.

I cannot stress enough the importance of having a pack like this with you, together with the knowledge to care for yourself while in the woods. Generally, I submit this column to coincide with the beginning of the big game hunting seasons here in Colorado.

My purpose is to save lives. I cannot begin to tell you how many people I have helped carry out in a body bag because they succumbed to exposure, had a heart attack, injured themselves and had no way to summon help. The other ulterior motive might be that I, like many of you, wait all year for hunting season, and want to spend it in the mountains.



This is a good start for some items to have with you just in case your trip to the woods turns into a disaster. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

that I, like many of you, wait all year for hunting season, and want to spend it in the mountains hunting, not on rescue missions.

The best way to start this might be to share one of my experiences where I learned something the hard way, my chosen method of self-education. This goes back 10 years to a late season elk hunt.

I had intended to only head about a half mile up the hill and glass around from higher terrain. I left my pack (containing all the survival essentials) on the seat of the truck. I was only going to be gone for a few minutes so why bring the extra weight up the hill, right?

Once at the top of the hill, it was obvious that the viewing would be much better if I went over one ridge. Off I went, oblivious to the thickening clouds around me. As you can probably guess, I spent a night in a thick stand of spruce trees while a series of snow squalls blew on through.

I was lucky because I had survival skills and immediately got into some shelter, rather than try and walk back the several miles to my truck. Had I carried my pack with me, I could have enjoyed something to eat over a fire. I got lucky. Someone else could have been writing this story.

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Begin with making a small survival pack. Keep it small and lightweight so you can carry it with you all the time. It will not help you if it is sitting in the truck. Probably 90 percent of the missions that search and rescue conducts are for folks who have no survival kit with them. Being unprepared turns a minor inconvenience into a life-threatening four-alarm emergency.

Let's take a look at the basics to include in your pack:

- Compass, maps and GPS with extra batteries
- Signal mirror and whistle, sound making device to help searchers locate you
- Knife and multi-tool
- Flashlight with extra batteries — I prefer lithium as they hold power better in the cold than alkaline, don't leak, and last longer. I also carry a small headlamp for walking and using for tasks
- Fire starter-waterproof matches, metal match and flares; carry at least two types and some tinder for wet conditions. I use the product called Wet Fire.
- Drinking water-a hydration bladder or camel back works well
- Life straw — this is a small, personal water filtration device. You can safely drink from a puddle with

one of these.

- Food- — high energy foods, power bars, nuts, trail mix, jerky.
- Cell phone and extra power source. These extra battery chargers can be had for around 10 bucks, are very small and weigh mere ounces.
- Rain gear or poncho because Colorado weather changes by the minute.
- Space blanket bivy — much better than a blanket as you can crawl into a bivy to stay warm, like a sleeping bag.
- Duct tape — good for just about anything from first aid to repairs.
- Toilet paper — you just never know about how old those snacks were.

My personal first aid kit contains the basic life-saving items. A tourniquet, Israeli compression bandage, Celox gauze, a couple band-aids, are the major items. The kit carries just the basics to save a life. All the other things I can deal with back at camp. Again, if the kit becomes too expansive, you will not lug it with you, and it does no good sitting at home when you are in the woods.

Keep your cell phone off during the day. The phone will use up its battery while constantly searching for service. Turn it on when needed and carry an extra power supply.

If you do need help, make certain you contact 911 with your phone. Many people make the mistake of calling someone back home and having them make the call. When you make the call, 911 personnel will get a GPS ping on your location that will save many hours for search and rescue folks in finding you.

If you have no service, try moving around to higher locations. If all else fails, send 911 a text. Sometimes a text will go through when a call will not. Remember the motto: Call when you can and text when you can't. The good folks at the 911 centers can receive texts and reply to the text conversation.

Have a responsible contact person back home. This person should have names, descriptions, vehicle and personal information of everyone on the hunt.

Make certain this contact person knows your itinerary and where your camp is. Notify them of any changes and have set check in times. Instruct them to call the sheriff's office if you are overdue. Information they provide to search and rescue folks will save countless hours searching for you.

Again, make sure this is a responsible person.

Choose someone who will be available 24/7 for the entire duration of your hunt to receive updates from you. Schedule a call-in time with this person for routine check-ins. For the several hunts I take each year, my wife is my call-in partner. She knows my trip itinerary for every step of the trip.

For those of you who carry a GPS, turn it on and use it whenever you are away from your vehicle or camp. Before you start out, take a GPS coordinate of your starting point. We once had a man who brought a GPS but did not turn it on until he was lost. He was able to give us his exact location but had no idea where his truck was parked. Needless to say, we found him quickly and it was a happy ending.

At your starting point of your hunt each day, leave a note. This note, which is sometimes referred to as a "backpacker note" can be left on the windshield of your vehicle, tied to the tent or taped to your ATV. Just state which direction you went off on foot and the area you plan on hunting in. This gives search and rescue a great start on finding you, again, saving time that could be life-saving.

One thing for certain here in Colorado: The

weather is going to change. I have seen temperatures drop 40 degrees in 30 minutes and sunny skies turn to raging blizzards. Carry some extra clothes along. It might be a balmy 50 degrees in the morning. A front can push through, bringing rain changing to snow, all by afternoon. Prepare for the worst and hope for the best.

I have a personal travel companion on all my hunting trips. His name is Mr. Murphy, of Murphy's Law fame. He loves to come along and try to mess up my hunts. Perhaps he will visit you sometime. If he does, having this pack along will make Murphy's stay a little easier to take.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and the Delta County Independent, an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a director and public information officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

For outdoors or survival related questions or comments, feel free to contact him directly at his email elkhunter77@icloud.com.