

## Think three days when you pack



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay



When you head up into the woods, think about being able to take care of yourself for three days in case something goes wrong. (Mark Rackay/Special to the MDP)

When you purchase a new backpack, it should come with a coupon for a free truss. I always thought the “rule of thumb” was that your pack, fully loaded, should weigh slightly less than a pickup truck. Just looking at my loaded pack sitting on the ground is enough to give you a double hernia.

I guess the reason my pack is so heavy is because I am constantly adding stuff to it. Stuff that I may or may not ever need, nor remember I have it, let alone ever find it in the pack should the time come I need it. Alas I get great comfort knowing that it is in there; somewhere.

For a survival situation I should have something to help me cut up some wood for a fire. One of those little, lightweight hand saws will do the trick nicely. I don’t need to lug around an axe, bit, 20-inch chainsaw and an extra gas can and two loggers. That is why the pack gets so heavy.

When the pack gets too heavy, it becomes very easy to leave it behind. If and when, and I emphasize when because you are going to need it someday if you spend time in the woods, that pack will not do you any good if it is sitting back in the front seat of the truck.

When it comes to the normal reasons we take off into the woods, hunting, fishing or hiking, it becomes more practical to think of a survival situation in terms of how long it will take the search and rescue (SAR) folks to find you. If you have done your homework, as we have discussed here previously, and you take some steps to help yourself be found, most lost persons are rescued within 24 to 36 hours. On the rare occasion, it might go 72 hours. This all assumes you have done your homework.

If you adopt the mindset that you might have to take care of yourself for three days, it makes a survival pack a little easier to carry. While it is necessary to carry a pack with some supplies with you, three days is enough.

You don’t need to plan on spending the rest of your life in the woods.

Most survival schools teach the mindset of conserving energy and waiting for SAR to find you. The skills of foraging for food, water, shelter, looking for landmarks and even walking, waste energy. Energy is something you need to conserve in a survival situation, not waste. Your mission is to stay put and stay alive. If you don’t know where you are, it makes no sense to keep going. Stay put.

It is late afternoon and you have decided you have not a clue where you are. You have already searched the surrounding area for familiar landmarks and found none. Pick a place to hunker down, like a blown over spruce tree or a thick growth of spruce, something with a solid canopy over the top of you.

Get right in your mind that you are going to spend the night, and it will be a long night. Accept it. Start collecting firewood, at least twice the amount you think will be needed for the night. Build a nice roaring fire; this means you need several methods of lighting a fire and some tinder. A road flare is magical at a time like this.

If you are warm and safe in your shelter amongst the trees, the night will pass. Think that the SAR team is doing a hasty search and planning all out for in the morning. In the morning, it is time for you to get noticed.

Look for an open spot near your shelter and build a monstrous and smokey fire. Throw lots of green branches on it once the flames have taken hold. The idea today is to get seen by a helicopter or search team.

Consider what you can do to get the attention of the search and rescue people. That fire is a good start. At night, the light or glow can be seen while during the day you will want much smoke. Experiment with available foliage to see which creates the thickest smoke cloud. Remember, your rescuers may come by land or air.

In the United States, we have the rule of three. Three whistle blasts, three gunshots, or three fires burning are all signals that help is needed. Blow a whistle for three blasts, evenly spaced and wait a few minutes. Try to repeat this every few minutes. Even when visibility is poor because of the snow, sound will still carry.

By late afternoon, turn your attention back to your shelter and gathering of firewood for the night. You will probably want to hydrate yourself so look

around for water. A small piece of tinfoil will melt snow over your fire, and it is good enough for a couple gulps at a time.

The second night should be easier than the first but keep a positive attitude. If weather has limited visibility, SAR may need some additional time to find you. Perhaps the helicopter has been grounded. If the weather is good, and you have not been seen, you may have to consider moving to a different location, otherwise stay put and keep the fires burning.

All you really need for this is some warm clothes, a good fire starter and tinder (flare) whistle and/or gun for signaling, and a few other items. If you had a responsible person back in town, who knew your starting point or camp, and general area you were in, they contact-

ed help and SAR is on the way.

You really don’t need to carry a 400-pound pack full of supplies, although it would be nice to have some things along with you. What you really need is a skill set and a mindset to make it work. Another way to look at this is with my overweight pack that has all kinds of stuff, you know I did not venture very far from the truck, so I should be easy to find.

*Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels around the world 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). For outdoors or survival related questions or comments, feel free to contact him directly at his email [elkhunter77@icloud.com](mailto:elkhunter77@icloud.com)*



# Select Winter Clearance

# Save 30%

10 SOUTH SELIG AVE

MONTROSE, COLORADO 81401

970-249-4226