

Your annual survival pack reminder



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

I have a fellow posse member, and a good friend outside of the posse, who carries the survival pack to the extreme. Whenever you head out for an outing with him, you don't need to bring anything, as he has duplicates of everything. For our purposes here, we'll call him Scott.

When not on a mission up in the hills, Scott wears those special pants with all the pockets. These are the same pants we had as kids where you carried all your toys, baseball equipment, camping gear, and food in the pockets, only his are the adult version.

Scott carries flashlights, chargers, cell phone, sandwich, first aid kit, checkbook, wallet, change of clothes, extra jacket, 10-speed bike ... need I go on? I don't know how he walks around in the things as they must weigh a hundred pounds. His pants arrive on the scene 15 minutes after he does.

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 for this article 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 ulterior motive might be 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.

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% of the missions that search and rescue conducts are



Sometimes Scott overloads his pack and pockets with survival gear, but he is a pretty good guy to have along on a hunting trip. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

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 camelback 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, including a tourniquet, Israeli compression bandage, combat gauze, a couple Band-aids, and some Tylenol.

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, and we can't all bring a Scott with us.

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 looking for you.

Again, make sure this is a responsible person. Choose someone who will be available 24/7 for the 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 lifesaving.

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.

For some of you, this annual article is just a quick reminder, and for others, it is a starting point. As you read this, I am out on a call out for an overdue archery hunter and Scott is on the mission with me. He has been at our staging area for around 15 minutes, so I assume his pants will be coming along shortly.

Be safe out there this season.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for several saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world 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

10 SOUTH SELIG AVE MONTROSE, COLORADO 81401 970-249-4226