

EQUIPPED FOR SURVIVAL

By Art Seely

In a wilderness survival situation, the difference between life and death often comes down to you, your training and your survival kit. Do you have the necessary supplies to survive, and do you know how to use them? Of course, different situations and individuals will require different supplies. Obviously, desert survival requires somewhat different supplies than snow survival. Individuals with different skills and training will also require different supplies. One individual with extensive training and practice might require far fewer supplies than an inexperienced individual. Whatever contents you decide to carry in your survival kit, it is imperative that you know how to use them and have practiced with them before trying to use them in a survival situation.

Whatever you select for your personal survival kit, there are basic considerations for each item:

1) Is it effective? Simply stated, does it adequately perform the job you intended? If you carry a water purifier to provide you with safe drinking water and it is 90% effective in removing toxins and bacteria from the water, is it truly effective? Is dying, or getting ill only 10% of the time, acceptable performance? Is a firestarter that produces only 1,100°F of heat, can only be used when completely dry in a windless setting and requires a high level of hand dexterity something you want to bet your life on? Remember, if and when you need to use an item from your survival kit, your life may depend on how well it works.

2) Is it reliable? Certain items carried in survival kits may work beautifully some of the time but fail under certain circumstances. These items lack the reliability necessary to be included as part of a survival kit. A survival knife that is extremely light and compact but can crack when a twisting force is applied lacks the necessary reliability. A strobe light that can be rendered

inoperable by a light-to-moderate impact when dropped similarly lacks reliability.

3) Is it suitable for long-term storage? In a perfect world, we would all have time to go through and check all the items in our survival kits for damage or deterioration every year. Unfortunately, in a high percentage of real-life situations, this is not done. Thus, we must consider how each of our kit items will be affected by long-term storage under conditions that often include extreme heat and cold, vibration, moisture, rodents and insects, etc. Batteries deteriorate, MREs can be attacked by rodents, some plastics become brittle, alcohol in firestarter or heater mixtures can evaporate, etc.

4) Is it suitable for survival situation use? Can you use it if your mental or physical capabilities are reduced by hypothermia, frostbite, bulky gloves, shivering, panic, etc.? This is the most overlooked consideration I find when looking at individual survival kits. A Bic-type disposable lighter with a child-guard may work fine in your home, but how would it work if you were in total darkness, wearing heavy gloves and shivering?

5) Other considerations:

- Does it have multiple uses? Often, the survival item (or even the package it came in) may have several different applications in different survival situations. The simplest example is your oversized, orange, heavy-duty garbage bag, which has well over a dozen different survival applications. In a

snow survival situation, it can be stuffed with dry leaves or pine needles to make a ground pad or blanket. It can be filled with snow or ice and hung in bright sunlight or near a fire to provide a supply of drinking water. You can cut out the end of the bag to construct a tube tent, or place slits to use it as a raincoat or windproof jacket. It can be split to provide the roof of a trench snow shelter, or you can tie all or some of it in a tree near your shelter to act as a signal for rescuers. In a desert survival situation, it can be tied over a tree branch to collect water or split to con-

struct a water still. These are just a few of the many uses for your orange trash bag, but they demonstrate how many varied ways one item in your survival kit may be used.

- Is it compact and lightweight? Whether you carry your survival kit in a backpack, duffel bag, vest or other type of container, size and weight become important considerations. Sometimes, bulky items such as sleeping bags and blankets can have their



Photo courtesy of Snow Operations Training Center, L.L.C.

bulk reduced by compressed packaging. There are many other important items that cannot be significantly reduced in size, however. Similarly, there are many common survival items that can be reduced in weight. This may be done by removing unnecessary accessories or packaging and sometimes by changing the materials used to manufacture the item. Just be careful that in trying to reduce weight or bulk you do not compromise the function or reliability of the item. Carrying a down sleeping bag rather than a synthetic fiber-filled bag can cut the bag's weight by up to 50%, but in a damp or wet environment, it may lose all or most of its insulating value, where the heavier synthetic-filled bag will lose little or none.

One final note: Whenever you close up your survival kit after inspecting, restocking or borrowing an item from it, remember that the next time you open that kit, your life may depend on it! ■

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