

A SURVIVAL KIT THAT MAKES SENSE

by Tim Swanson

Hiking and backpacking are enjoyable and peaceful experiences that get us outdoors. However, every year, thousands of people get lost, injured, or die during wilderness trips. Experience and good judgment keep these things from happening, and a good survival kit can also create a more comfortable experience. I hike in the White Mountains of New Hampshire quite frequently with groups or by myself. Hiking 15-20 miles in one day is not uncommon in the mountains, and my overall goal is to reach the summit, and get back to the car.

One thing I have noticed in my experience from other survivalists and outdoors recreators it is rare for someone to mention that your ability to move is one of the most important aspects to success on a wilderness trip. If you can get yourself to your destination and back, then you have done your job and hopefully had a great time in the process. If you pack a heavy bag and can't hike comfortably, or if you have an injury and can't hike on your own, then this will be extremely detrimental to you and your friends' wilderness experience.

Survival kits can be a tricky thing to pack before a trip. We want them to be lightweight enough that they do not weigh us down or cause any inconvenience. I have found it very easy to make excuses as to why it is important to bring along completely useless items on a hike. Over the years, I got in the habit of removing things from my kit that I never took out to use.

My survival kit is now very compact, lightweight, and consists of only items that I have needed, used, or would never go without. When you create your own survival kit, it should be a personal and experienced decision. Go ahead and pack a kit that you think would work for you, go on a hike, and see how you feel with that gear. Maybe that 50 feet of snare wire only adds unneeded weight to your pack. Maybe you wish you brought along a saw. Or you realized that 10 protein bars were just too much for that 2 mile out-and-back hike.

These are the contents of my survival kit that I never go on a wilderness hike without:



Knife/Multi-Tool/Saw

A cutting edge is one of the most important survival tools due to its ability (along with your skills and knowledge) to carve various objects. If weight matters and I have to choose between a multi-tool or a knife, I opt for the multi-tool. I frequently use the other tools for projects while backpacking. A full tang, fixed blade knife offers more reliability when doing heavier cutting tasks such as batoning. Where I hike in the mountains, there's enough small and dead twigs where it would be rare to need to baton wood to break it down.



Headlamp with Extra Batteries

Having a good light is essential to navigate at night. I frequently do long trails where I am hiking down the mountain well after dark and need a bright light to see all the rocks and roots on the way down. Headlamps are superior to flashlights as they allow the ability to have both hands free. Practice changing your batteries with your eyes closed to simulate changing them in the dark.



Fire Starters

I bring a small package of stormproof matches and a small ferro rod. I will opt for the matches