



10 ESSENTIALS FOR MULTI-DAY BACKPACKING

By Kevin Jackson

I have been involved in several backpacking trips all over the world and the one constant is the importance of adequate gear for the environment — regardless if we are leading a group through the Wind River Range in Wyoming or hiking the Overland Track in Tasmania, Australia.

For example, I recently led a five-day adventure through the Maroon Bells and Snowmass Wilderness outside Aspen, Colorado, and we experienced conditions that were both unexpected and hazardous. It was our essential gear that enabled us to enjoy the trip and cope with the freezing weather and heavy snowfall.

As a rule of thumb, you want to pack lightly and take only what you need. However, when confronted with a difficult situation there are certain items that should always be carried on any multi-day backpacking trip. Here is my list of the 10 essentials. (Of course, if you take regular backpacking trips, you should make your own list and share it with the rest of your party. A little planning means less worries and a better overall experience for everyone.)

1. Map & Compass. Prior to departure, you should understand the magnetic declination in the area you will be exploring as it will vary substantially the farther north or south you travel.

2. First-Aid & Safety Kit. Buy a pre-packaged one or build your own. Make sure it has pain relievers, bandages, disinfectant and notes on basic first-aid procedures.

3. Waterproof Lighter & Matches. Secure both of these in a Ziploc bag.

4. Water Purification. A filter works, but they clog and break so often that you should have a small bottle of iodine tablets or other water purification as back up.

5. Extra Clothing. One of the biggest killers in the woods is hypothermia, and it often starts when you get wet. I always carry an extra fleece top and warm socks in a dry sack for this reason.

6. Shelter. Be sure to pack for the environment you will be exploring. Items to consider are a tent, Bivvy bag, 5 x 7 tarp and an emergency space blanket.

7. Cooking Essentials. Stove, aluminum pot, Lexan spoon and fuel. Know your stoves fuel requirements and bring an extra canister in case of emergencies.

8. Sleeping Bag. Down bags are the warmest for their weight and takes up less volume in your pack.

9. Sleeping Mat. Air mattresses or closed-cell foam pads provide much-needed comfort as well as an additional layer of insulation from the ground. They also double as excellent splinting devices in emergency situations.

10. Duct Tape. This item comes in handy in a pinch and can be used to seal tents or punctured air mattresses.

Finally, the one thing you should never leave without is an in-depth knowledge of how to operate all the gear you are carrying. For example, take an orienteering course to get comfortable using the compass, and practice igniting your stove with both the lighter and matches (outside of course) before you embark on your adventure. Your knowledge is more likely to save you than gadgets. 

Kevin Jackson operates TST Adventures, an outdoor travel and training company in San Diego, California. To learn more about the areas they explore or to get involved in a program, visit www.tstadventures.com or call 858-309-2311.

> HOW TO PACK YOUR ESSENTIAL GEAR

Proper packing of your rucksack is extremely important. The first thing you should consider is the distribution of weight. Your heaviest items, such as food and clothing, should be packed in the middle of the bag where it will be closest to your back. Your lighter items, such as sleeping mat and tent, should be stored separately in the bottom compartment or securely attached to the outside. Use dry or stuff sacks to keep clothes and smaller items secure and to improve waterproofing and organization.

Another thing to consider is accessibility. Before packing everything away, take a few minutes to think about which items you'll need most often, or in a bad situation. Try and pack your rain jacket, torch, water, snacks, matches, spare socks and toilet paper in the top section of the pack or in external pockets.



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