

SURVIVAL CAMPING

A PRACTICAL FIELD GUIDE TO CAMPING, BUSHCRAFT & EMERGENCY
PREPAREDNESS

Appalachian Traders | Survival & Preparedness Resources

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CHAPTER 1 — THE SURVIVAL MINDSET

Survival starts with your mindset. When something goes wrong outdoors, panic can make a bad situation much worse. Your first job is to slow down, think clearly, and figure out what needs to be done.

A simple way to remember your priorities is: **STOP — THINK — PLAN — ACT**

- **Stop** and take a breath.
- **Think** about what happened and what resources you have.
- **Plan** your next steps before using valuable supplies or energy.
- **Act** on the plan.

Your priorities can change depending on the situation, but shelter, water, warmth, communication, navigation, and medical needs should be addressed before worrying about comfort.

DON'T MAKE THE SITUATION WORSE

Avoid making decisions simply because you are scared or frustrated. If you are lost, rushing through unfamiliar terrain can make it harder for rescuers to find you. If weather is getting worse, continuing deeper into the woods may create additional problems. Use what you have and focus on solving one problem at a time.

THE RULE OF PREPARATION

The best survival situation is the one you prepared for before it happened. Before leaving:

- Check the weather.
- Tell someone where you're going.
- Know your route.
- Bring enough water.
- Bring emergency supplies.
- Carry a way to communicate.
- Know basic outdoor skills.

CHAPTER 2 — CHOOSING A SAFE CAMPSITE

Where you sleep can make a major difference in your safety and comfort. A good campsite should provide protection from weather while keeping you away from obvious hazards.

LOOK UP

Before setting up your shelter, look at the trees above you. Avoid areas underneath:

- Dead branches
- Dead trees
- Trees that are leaning dangerously
- Damaged trees
- Areas showing signs of recent storm damage

A branch can fall without warning, especially during wind or storms.

LOOK DOWN

Look at the ground before setting up. Avoid:

- Low areas that could collect water
- Areas beside streams that could flood
- Unstable slopes
- Loose rocks
- Animal burrows
- Areas covered with sharp debris

A slightly elevated, relatively flat location is often a better choice.

CONSIDER THE WEATHER

Think about where rainwater will travel. A location that looks dry during good weather can become a drainage channel during a storm. Consider wind direction, rain, temperature, shade, sun exposure, and drainage.

KEEP YOUR CAMP ORGANIZED

Know where your important equipment is. Your flashlight, water, first-aid kit, communication equipment, and other emergency supplies should be easy to find.

CHAPTER 3 — ESSENTIAL CAMPING & SURVIVAL GEAR

You don't need to carry your entire house into the woods. The goal is to carry equipment that solves multiple problems.

BASIC GEAR

- **Backpack:** Carries everything else. Choose one that fits properly and can handle the weight you plan to carry.
- **Tarp:** Useful as shelter, rain protection, ground cover, gear cover, and wind protection.
- **Knife:** Helps with basic camp tasks. Always handle it carefully and follow local laws.
- **Cordage:** Paracord or strong cordage for shelters, gear organization, and repairs.
- **Metal Water Bottle:** Carry water and heat or boil water when designed for it.
- **Fire Starter:** Carry more than one way (ferro rod, waterproof matches, lighter).
- **Flashlight or Headlamp:** Essential after dark; carry spare batteries or a backup light.
- **Navigation Equipment:** Compass, map, GPS device or phone when available.
- **First-Aid Kit:** Keep basic medical supplies accessible.
- **Duct Tape:** Useful for temporary repairs and emergency fixes.

Think Multipurpose: "How many problems can this item solve?" A tarp, metal bottle, cordage, knife, and fire starter can all have multiple uses.

CHAPTER 4 — BUILDING AN EMERGENCY SHELTER

Shelter protects you from the environment. Rain, wind, cold, and heat can become serious problems when you are exposed for long periods.

TARP SHELTER

A tarp is one of the easiest emergency shelters to learn. Basic steps:

1. Select a safe campsite.
2. Find suitable trees or supports.
3. Secure your ridgeline or support.
4. Attach the tarp.
5. Stake or secure the corners.
6. Adjust the shelter for wind and rain.
7. Insulate yourself from the ground.

GROUND INSULATION

The ground can pull heat away from your body. Use appropriate dry materials or a sleeping pad to create a barrier between yourself and the ground.

KEEP YOUR SHELTER DRY

Try to keep wet clothing and equipment organized so they don't soak your sleeping area. Your shelter doesn't need to be complicated; it needs to keep you reasonably protected from the conditions.

CHAPTER 5 — FIRECRAFT

Fire can provide warmth, light, cooking capability, and a psychological boost. But fire can also become dangerous quickly. Always follow local fire regulations and restrictions.

CHOOSING A FIRE LOCATION

Use an established fire ring when available. Keep fires away from tents, dry vegetation, overhanging branches, and flammable materials. Clear the area around the fire.

BUILDING THE FIRE

A basic fire uses three types of material:

- **Tinder:** Small material that catches easily.
- **Kindling:** Small sticks used to build the flame.
- **Fuel:** Larger pieces of wood that keep the fire burning.

Start small and gradually increase the size of the material.

WET CONDITIONS & PUTTING THE FIRE OUT

Look for protected areas where wood may have stayed dry. The inside of larger pieces can be drier. Never leave a campfire unattended. When finished, let it burn down, add water, stir the ashes, add more water, and make sure everything is cool before leaving.

CHAPTER 6 — FINDING AND TREATING WATER

Water is one of your highest priorities. You can go much longer without food than without safe drinking water.

FINDING WATER

Possible sources include streams, springs, lakes, rainwater, and snow. Never assume clear water is safe to drink.

FILTERING & BOILING

A portable water filter removes many contaminants depending on the type. Boiling is effective for killing many disease-causing organisms; bring water to a proper boil and follow public-health guidance.

STORE WATER SAFELY

Keep treated water in a clean container. Don't contaminate clean water by using dirty bottles.

CHAPTER 7 — CAMP COOKING

Camping food doesn't have to be complicated. Simple meals (oatmeal, rice, beans, dehydrated meals, canned foods, pasta, jerky, nuts) are easier to prepare and clean up.

FOOD SAFETY & STORAGE

Keep raw and cooked foods separated. Wash hands, clean equipment, and don't leave food scraps scattered. Store food properly to avoid attracting animals and never feed wildlife.

CHAPTER 8 — NAVIGATION

Getting lost can turn an enjoyable camping trip into an emergency. Learn basic navigation before your trip.

- **Carry a Map:** Physical maps work when phone batteries die or signal is lost.
- **Learn Your Compass:** Identify north, take/follow a bearing, read a map, and identify landmarks. Practice at home.
- **Use Landmarks:** Pay attention to roads, streams, mountains, trails, buildings, bridges, and distinctive terrain.

CHAPTER 9 — WEATHER & ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Weather can change quickly. Check the forecast before leaving.

- **Thunderstorms:** Seek appropriate shelter; avoid exposed high areas and isolated tall objects.
- **Extreme Heat:** Stay hydrated, rest when needed, and avoid unnecessary exertion.
- **Cold Weather:** Stay dry, protect from wind, use proper clothing/insulation, and watch for hypothermia.
- **Flooding:** Never assume a stream is safe to cross simply because it looks shallow; water levels rise quickly.

CHAPTER 10 — BASIC FIRST AID

A first-aid kit is essential. Basic supplies include bandages, gauze, medical tape, antiseptic, blister treatment, gloves, scissors, and an emergency blanket.

- **Cuts:** Clean minor wounds and cover with appropriate dressings. Monitor for infection.
- **Burns:** Cool minor burns with clean, cool running water. Do not put ice directly on burns.
- **Sprains:** Stop using the injured area and assess. Severe pain or deformity requires professional medical attention.

CHAPTER 11 — WILDLIFE & CAMP SAFETY

Wild animals generally want to avoid people, but careless practices create problems. Secure food, clean cooking areas, and store scented items appropriately. Never intentionally approach, corner, feed, or handle wild animals. Wear appropriate clothing, check for ticks, and remove them promptly.

CHAPTER 12 — EMERGENCY SIGNALING & COMMUNICATION

Communication can make the difference between a long night and a quick rescue.

- **Cell Phone:** Useful, but service isn't guaranteed. Keep charged and carry a power bank.
- **Two-Way Radios:** Useful for group communication when cell service fails.
- **Whistle:** Requires less energy than yelling. Three repeated whistle blasts signal distress.
- **Flashlight:** Helps rescuers locate you at night.
- **Tell Someone Your Plans:** Provide destination, route, expected return time, and vehicle info before leaving.

CHAPTER 13 — WHAT TO DO IF YOU BECOME LOST

Getting lost is a common wilderness emergency. **DON'T PANIC.**

- **STOP:** Stop moving and take a moment.
- **THINK:** Think about where you were last certain of your location.
- **OBSERVE:** Look for landmarks, trails, roads, or streams.
- **PLAN:** Decide whether staying put or moving is safer.
- **SIGNAL:** Use your whistle, flashlight, phone, or radio.

Conserve resources, protect water, stay warm and dry, and stay in one location when safe to make it easier for rescuers.

CHAPTER 14 — SETTING UP A ONE-NIGHT SURVIVAL CAMP

Set up your tarp before darkness arrives, ensure you have enough drinking water, prepare fire materials in advance, keep food organized, and ensure your flashlight, map, compass, first-aid kit, and communication gear are easily accessible before going to sleep.

CHAPTER 15 — BUILDING A 72-HOUR EMERGENCY KIT

- **Water:** Drinking water, filter, purification supplies, containers.
- **Food:** Ready-to-eat meals, energy bars, canned/dehydrated foods, snacks.
- **Shelter:** Tarp, sleeping bag, emergency blanket, ground insulation.
- **Fire:** Lighter, waterproof matches, ferro rod.
- **Tools:** Knife, cordage, duct tape, flashlight, multi-purpose tools.
- **Medical:** First-aid kit, personal medications, gloves.
- **Communication & Navigation:** Cell phone, power bank, radio, whistle, map, compass, GPS device.

CHAPTER 16 — SURVIVAL CAMPING SKILLS TO PRACTICE

Practice shelter building, fire starting, compass/map navigation, water treatment, backpacking/packing efficiency, and outdoor cooking before you actually need to rely on them.

CHAPTER 17 — FINAL FIELD CHECKLIST

- ☐ Weather checked
- ☐ Route planned
- ☐ Someone knows where you are going & return time communicated
- ☐ Backpack & weather-appropriate clothing / rain gear packed
- ☐ Water packed & water treatment equipment packed
- ☐ Food packed & food storage planned
- ☐ Tarp/shelter packed & sleeping gear packed
- ☐ Fire-starting equipment packed
- ☐ Knife packed & cordage packed
- ☐ Flashlight/headlamp packed & extra batteries packed
- ☐ First-aid kit packed
- ☐ Map packed & compass packed
- ☐ Phone charged, power bank packed, radio packed if needed
- ☐ Whistle packed
- ☐ Emergency supplies checked
- ☐ Vehicle checked
- ☐ Local rules and fire restrictions checked

FINAL THOUGHTS

You don't need to own thousands of dollars of gear to become better at survival camping. Start with the basics. Learn how to stay warm, stay dry, find and treat water, start a fire, navigate, and communicate. Most importantly, practice. The goal isn't to be afraid of the outdoors, but to become comfortable enough with basic skills that you can stay calm and make good decisions when something doesn't go according to plan.

Prepare before you need it. Practice before it matters.