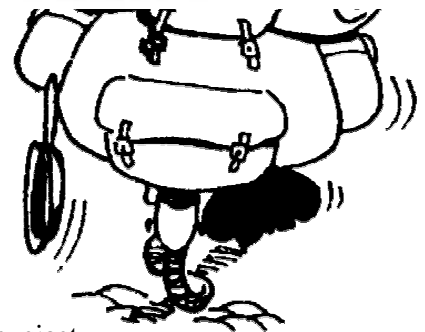


The Ten Essentials.

For as long as you are involved in Scouting or the outdoors in general, you will hear repeated references to “The Ten Essentials.” Even the old-timers, people whose experience would make you think they could survive in the outdoors indefinitely with nothing more than a Rambo knife, have their own version of the Ten Essentials. These are items which are generally felt to be necessary to have with you any time you venture into the outdoors. Whether it’s a one-hour nature hike or a week-long trek through the Sierras or the Adirondacks, your Ten Essentials should be with you every step of the way. But what exactly are the Ten Essentials?



Every book on the outdoors, every magazine for the outdoor enthusiast, and every Scouting manual has a list of what comprises the Ten Essentials and the first thing you’ll notice is that each list is slightly different. To make it even more confusing, most of them have more than ten items listed. There are as many different versions of the Ten Essentials as there are people who put together such a kit, so who is to say what



should be included and what should not? For example, I have several different lists myself that vary according to the terrain, the time of year, and how long my hike is supposed to last.

In order to give everyone a starting-off point for the creation of their Ten

Essentials kit, I’m going to provide a basic list of things I think everyone should carry when they go out on a hike. The items marked with an asterisk (*) are those that should be carried on each and every outing. These I consider non-debatable. Those without asterisks can be considered “optional” items that can be added or subtracted as the situation dictates.

With the exception of a Buddy, none of the items are necessarily listed in order of importance. I don’t want anyone to get the idea that any of the Ten Essentials are less “essential” than any of the others. Together, they comprise a unit upon which one can depend to get them through an unexpected night alone in the wilderness.

Ten Essentials Plus

I emphasize that these are the items that *everyone* should carry individually. Dear Old Dad or Dear Old Mom should not carry one set for the entire family. Remember “getting lost” means being separated from other people. The best Ten Essentials kit in the world does you no good if it is on the back of someone who is searching for you. Each person should have his or her own Ten Essentials kit.

Let’s first consider how to carry these items. There are two basic choices: a small backpack or a fanny pack. Your choice will depend on the type of outing and the amount of stuff you decide to carry. For example, if you’re on a five-mile hike in the summer in an area you know well and which is close to civilization, a fanny pack to which a couple of quarts of water can be attached is adequate. If, on the other hand, you are going out during the winter into a remote area with which you are less familiar, you might want to use a small backpack so you can include some extra warm clothing. On a backpack trip, I strap my fanny pack, which includes my Ten Essentials and water bottles, on top of my backpack so I can get to it without having to rummage through my backpack. That way, it will be easily accessible for those times when I am going to take a little “side trip.” O.K. Let’s take a look at those Ten Essentials...Plus.



Ten Essentials Plus

1. Buddy

This is the first and most important item that a Scout or anyone else venturing into the wilderness should have. Solo camping and hiking are dangerous undertakings. Make sure your buddy has a Ten Essentials kit and that you both have an understanding that you will never lose sight of one another.



2. Whistle

This is your most reliable signaling device. The sound of a whistle will carry much farther than a voice. It doesn't require batteries or sunlight or anything extra. Thirty minutes of yelling for help will wear out your voice; thirty minutes of blowing a whistle won't. The universal signal for help is three blasts on a whistle. Most outdoorsmen recognize it and respond to it quickly.



3. Water

Each person should carry a container of at least one liter of water. Dehydration can occur quickly in the outdoors, leading to weakness and worse, mental confusion. Canned soft drinks are not suitable substitutes for water. They make you thirstier, add more weight, and create more nuisance trash for you to carry back out.



4. Food

Everyone should have sufficient food to get them through a night in the woods. Many forms of wilderness survival food (energy bars etc.) are available and very convenient. Experiment with a few of them until you find the one that tastes the best to you. If it does no good to have food in the pack that the person carrying it will not eat. Rotate food bars of this type every couple of months so they remain fresh.



5. Space Blanket

Just because it's 100 degrees in the daytime, don't think that the night won't get cold. It is not uncommon for there to be a forty-degree variance from day to night, especially in the desert, so a space blanket can be a real life-saver. They are lightweight, compact, and will easily fit in any kit.



6. Poncho

Most people who die when lost in the outdoors succumb to exposure, meaning loss of body heat. One of the quickest ways to lose body heat is to get wet. At the first sign of rain, find shelter immediately, wrap up in a poncho, and wait out the storm. Staying dry is the key to staying warm and staying warm is the key to surviving.



Ten Essentials Plus

7. Matches

Getting a fire going can do a lot for morale if you are lost at night because it accomplishes so many things. It provides warmth, light, and a way to heat food or even just plain water. It can also serve as a signal to those who may be searching for you. Carry your matches in a waterproof container and don't forget to include something to strike them with – a small strip of sandpaper will do.



8. First Aid Kit

A small first aid kit with adhesive bandages, moleskin (for blisters) and an antibiotic ointment is a must for every hiker. Add to this kit to suit your own needs and skills. Nowhere have I seen greater individuality in the outdoors than in the stocking of first aid kits, so feel free to create your own. Just keep in mind that you need to keep it as light and compact as possible.



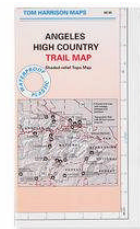
9. Knife

One of the multiple-blade/tool types is best. Be sure the person carrying it is properly trained and qualified to carry a knife and make sure that the blades are kept sharp.



10. Map & Compass

I list both of these items together because they are so integrally tied to one another in terms of need and function. Give me a map and compass and not only can I pinpoint my exact location, but I can find my way back to civilization by a route that is walkable. Unfortunately, not enough people know how to use these all-important tools properly. Make sure you do.



11. Hat

70% of the heat lost by the human body on a cold day is lost from the top of the head, so a hat in cold weather is essential. A wide-brimmed hat also keeps the sun off the face and neck and out of the eyes, preventing both sunburn and "squinter's headache."



12. Flashlight

It probably won't be much of a help for signaling at night, but if you have to do any traveling along an unfamiliar trail at night (like to the bathroom...), you'll find out the meaning of the word "essential." A small, inexpensive flashlight can easily be kept in your kit. Be sure to check the batteries each time before you go on a hike.



Ten Essentials Plus

13. Signal Mirror

A small mirror can be used to signal both ground search units and aircraft circling overhead. The flash of light can be seen for miles and may be the item that will get you rescued the quickest.



14. Sunglasses

Get the kind that will block out the damaging ultraviolet rays. These can be one of the most important items you have, depending upon the topography. For example, a bright sunny day on a field of snow can be deadly if you don't have a good pair of sunglasses. Snow blindness is not just something that happens to people in movies. It happens to the day hiker as well. Likewise, bright, flat desert sands can produce the same effect and a good pair of sunglasses is essential. However, I don't like to wear sunglasses in forest or scrub brush country. They tend to create a monochrome type visual field and there are some creatures that are already masters of disguise (such as rattlesnakes) that I want to have every opportunity to see well in advance.



15. Sunscreen

Sunburn can turn a wonderful day's hike into a nightmare that evening. Use the waterproof type with a sun protection rating of at least 15 SPF depending on your skin type.



16. Insect Repellent

You'd be surprised how a few mosquito bites can ruin a trip. In the evening as the sun starts to go down, many insects come out and it is at that time that you'll wish you had something to protect yourself from the greedy little bloodsuckers. I have lost many a night's sleep because I forgot to take insect repellent with me on regular trips.



17. Toilet Paper or Tissues

We don't have to go into much detail here. Either you have these items or you don't. It's your choice. Personally, I like to carry a small packet of tissues, the kind you get at the store for 25 cents.



18. Nylon Cord

If you have to construct a quick shelter, 50 feet of nylon cord will be one of the handiest items you can carry. Depending on the strength of the cord you carry, it can also be used in rescue efforts.



There they are – the Ten Essentials Plus. These items can be carried very easily by even the smallest of hikers. With them and the knowledge of how to use them, you greatly increase your odds of surviving even the most difficult of outdoor mishaps. Each person should participate in the creation and stocking of his or her own kit and should be well versed in how and when to use each item. Boy Scouts live by the motto “Be Prepared,” and with a well-stocked, carefully designed Ten Essentials kit, you will be.