

Daypack Tips.....What's In Your Daypack?

Whenever you are getting ready for a trek in the woods, it is recommended that you carry the so-called ten "essentials." Your ten may be different from my ten, depending on where you are hiking, with whom, the time of year and, of course, how much chocolate you are willing to carry. My personal "ten" is more like twenty-something. Whatever you end up bringing for your "ten," try to bring items that serve double-duty. Here are some tips and an explanation of some of the things in my pack, based on my experience and my personal needs:

1. Navigation Bring a map and compass and know how to use them. My compass also has a mirror which I can use for emergency signaling. It also has a lanyard long enough so I can use it while it hangs around my neck. I also bring my GPS unit with a set of fresh as well as extra batteries. My GPS unit is loaded with the appropriate maps.

2. Whistle Every child and adult should have their own whistle attached to a clip in their daypack or on a jacket zipper pull. In the winter, make sure it is plastic. Lips can freeze to a metal whistle.

3. Insulation What do you need to survive the worst conditions that could be realistically encountered on this trip? Are you hiking with kids? Remember that kids cool off faster than adults. A short daytrip out the back door and up the hill is no big deal until you twist an ankle or fall and cut yourself. After suffering an accident, the extra clothing you packed now becomes extremely important. In the winter, I throw in an extra pair of wool/synthetic blend socks, a thick balaclava and a mid-weight synthetic shirt. Additionally, I usually have a very lightweight polypropylene balaclava stuffed in a pocket somewhere. This can be used as intended to cover head, face and/or neck, but also can be modified to be worn as a bandanna across a forehead, or around a neck, or as a very lightweight hat for added insulation. I always have a windbreaker/rainshell with a hood.

4. Illumination Take a head lamp with fresh batteries and an extra set of batteries. If you really need your headlamp, you will be happy you have the extra batteries. In December, you only have about nine hours of daylight. Be prepared.

5. First Aid Bring a small pre-assembled first aid kit or put together something of your own. Someone in your party should have a decent kit. I add an ace bandage. Make sure to have something that can be used as a large compress. Have a couple of pencils and pens and some paper to write down your location to give to the person going for help. A pen can freeze; a pencil can always be sharpened (because you always pack a knife).

6. Fire Years ago I received a tiny flint tool and fire starter kit as a gift and I've been carrying it around ever since. It fits in a metal Altoids container. It works well. You should have matches in a Ziploc, or a childproof lighter.

7. Repair and tools Multi-tools such as a Leatherman are great, though relatively heavy. Folding Swiss Army type knives are also good because, besides the blade, they have a combination of screw driver tips. Try and get the model with the least amount of extraneous blades but still has a scissor. If you are going backcountry skiing, make sure you have the correct size Phillips head to tighten your ski bindings. I also bring cable ties for repairing ski poles or to double as zipper pulls and a small kit for repairing packs and clothing. Throw in a roll of dental floss. It's extremely strong and can be used instead of thread and also to tie broken items together. Wrap a couple rolls of duct tape around a water bottle or ski pole to store for future use. Also, take some Moleskin self-adhesive padding to be placed over "hot spots" on your heels or toes to prevent blisters. It can be cut with the folding Swiss army knife scissor. It can also be used to repair a hole in your outer clothing layer, as an emergency band aid and as padding for the nose rest on your glasses.

8. Nutrition Always carry some form of extra food. Energy bars, granola bars, a little GORP (Good Old Raisins and Peanuts – I skip the raisins and add different types of nuts, chocolate chips and M&Ms). If it's not freezing outside, or if you can keep it in an inside pocket, an apple or orange is a great treat. Hard candies are good for a little sugar infusion and also for keeping your mouth moist if you are running low on water or just breathing hard in the cold dry air. My favorite lunch to pack is peanut butter, strawberry jam, sliced banana and a drizzle of honey on whole wheat bread.

9. Hydration In the winter, at the very least, bring a liter sized wide mouth Nalgene or similar sized water bottle. Fill it with slightly warm water and bury it in some clothing in the center of your pack so it takes longer to freeze. If you trust the seal, place it upside down so the screw top doesn't freeze to the bottle. Using an insulated zippered case for your Nalgene bottle allows you to stow the bottle on the outside of your pack, creating more room in your pack for bulkier winter clothing. If you are expecting a long cold weather daytrip, drink a cup or two of warm water before you leave the house.

10. Emergency shelter This is in the same category as the headlamp; you may never need it, but when you do, you will be very happy you have it. I always have a couple of large black plastic garbage bags nicely folded in my daypack. It takes up no room and weighs nothing. In an emergency they are shelter and warmth. I can sit on my pack to insulate by bottom and slip my feet and legs into the bag for protection against the wind and cold. I can also punch holes in the bag for my head and arms and slip it over my head for added wind protection. The black color will help absorb energy from the sun. I also have an emergency space blanket with a built-in hood. Along with a whistle, every child should have one of these emergency space blankets in their day pack. Before you go out, take the time to show your child how to open the space blanket and how to use it.

And remember.....the most important "essential" is between your ears.



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