

Survival can be *In The Kit*

Survival kits range in price and size, but gear quality should be top priority.

By Dan Finkelstein

I started to get worried when I watched the sky turn black at high noon over my Southern California home. Several Orange County fires were burning within just a few miles, and evacuation seemed likely.

The fires were contained, but I started thinking about survival and what kind of gear would be needed. Here are some prime examples of pre-made survival kits, and some ideas for creating your own.

ARMY RANGER RICK

"Army Ranger Rick" Tscherne's kits are lightweight and contain only "essential" items needed for survival such as compass, magnesium and flint for fire starter, signal mirror, LED flashlight, whistle, and knife. There is also an expansion kit that includes a braided length of 550 parachute cord as well as a water purification set and fishing line and lures. This kit is uniquely strung on a wire saw encased in plastic, which could be worn around the neck.

Some of the items have a cheap plastic feel to them. The compass feels like a toy and I was a bit let down by the signal mirror, which is shiny plastic.

The fire-starting magnesium and flint worked quite well. The water purification was a little different: a non-lubricated condom and Aquatab tablets are stuffed into a small plastic container about the size of a quarter. There are detailed instructions on Army Ranger Rick's website, and it is a simple and space efficient way to treat water. You can find the kits at www.survivaloutdoorskills.com for \$14.99 to \$24.99, and there are several kits depending on what your survival needs may be.

SAS SURVIVAL TIN

Similar to the Army Ranger Rick kit, the SAS tin contains only the essentials. Included in the tin are: compass, whistle, candle, brass snare wire, fishing set, instructions, waterproof matches, pencil, sewing kit, wire saw, water purification tablets, safety pins, lighter, mini-folding knife with scissors, and sparker.

I like that SAS Tin adds a candle as well as matches. Sparkers can be a very useful tool in trained hands, but if you're not practiced in this art, the matches are a fine alternative. The candle will aid in this process. What I did not care for was the cheap folding knife because I prefer locking blades. The brass wire and fishing line are nice additions but the kit seems to be lacking for cordage (550 or otherwise). SAS Survival Tin can be found at www.uscav.com/ameriforce for \$33.

POCKET SURVIVAL PAK

The Pocket Survival Pak was designed by famous survival guru Doug Ritter whose work can be found at www.equipped.org. The whole kit comes in a sealed waterproof pouch a little bigger than a deck of cards. The Pocket Survival Pak includes signal mirror, lens magnifier to start fires, fire sparker and tinder, whistle, compass, fishing kit, nylon thread and needle, scalpel blade, aluminum foil, nylon cord, wire, safety pins, and a tiny pencil and paper. Additionally the Pak includes a small instruction booklet with detailed information ranging on how to construct a shelter to gutting and preparing a fish.

Although this kit contains many of the same items found in the Army Ranger Rick, they all feel higher in quality. The small button-sized compass works great and the small duct tape roll is essential. The thread and needle are a welcome addition and are great for mending a tear out in the field. Lastly, the tinfoil can purify water by creating a bowl from the foil and boiling.

The white nylon cord isn't bad, but the 150-pound strength falls far short of the power of 550 cord. The included scalpel blade has many functional uses, although the lack of handle can make for accidental cuts and other problems. You can find the Pocket Survival Pak at www.adventuremedicalkits.com (\$33).



SAS Survival Tin

S.O.L. 3

The "Survive Outdoors Longer" 3 kit has a multitude of gear for almost any survival situation. It's significantly larger than the previous kits, and is about the size of a hardback book. Survival tools are housed in a bright orange nylon carrying case divided into two sections; one side for first aid the other includes survival items. Additional is a small wrist-sized pouch that could be used to take just what is needed on a smaller trip.

The medical portion of this kit contains all the tools to handle most injuries in the field such as cuts, scrapes, burns, bug bites, headaches, etc. You'll find latex gloves, gauze, tweezers, tape, alcohol and iodine solutions. Adventure Medical Kits even included a small pair of EMT shears. The survival section of the kit contains many of the standard items (compass, whistle, signal mirror, duct tape, fire starter and tinder, etc.) as well as a small head lamp, zip ties, tin foil, and a large space blanket with all sorts of survival information printed on it.

The cordage that is used in the S.O.L. 3 is the same light string that is found in the Pocket Pak, except there are several small rolls in the larger kit. I would have also liked to see a knife or blade in this kit, as well as some type of wire saw. You can find the S.O.L. 3 at www.adventuremedicalkits.com for \$56.

If you are on an extremely tight budget, check out the Army Ranger Rick Kits. If your personality is more of the "pack light and go" I highly recommend the Pocket Survival Pak. At \$36 you won't break the bank, and the kit is small enough to literally throw in a pocket. Every time I go out for a hike the Pocket Survival Pak is in my ruck. SAS Combat Survival Tin has a lot for its size and so does the Pocket Pak for a few dollars more. Lastly, if you have the budget and the space you should purchase S.O.L. 3. This kit is great for keeping in the car, bail out bag, or when camping or hiking.



BUILD A KIT

Consider making your own survival kit, and remember the items you include should be centered on the survival basics: food and water, shelter, and fire.

Here are some prime items to include, which can be found at www.uscav.com/ameriforce under the Camping and Survival tab:

Magnesium Fire Starter: Most fire-starting device simply provide a spark. The magnesium stick will give sparks and you can shave a few flakes off with a knife for some fuel.

Emergency Survival Bag: Often referred to as a "space blanket," the survival bag retains up to 90% of body heat. These take up minimal space in your bag.

Duct Tape: 100MPH tape needs no introduction, and should unquestionably be part of your kit. Tip: grab an old credit card or pen and you can wrap the duct tape around that to make it more manageable.

SteriPEN: The SteriPEN kills all harmful bacteria in the water via UV rays almost instantly. Tip: It runs on batteries so be sure to carry and extra set in your kit.

The American Red Cross has more information on survival kit essentials at www.redcross.com.



SteriPEN water purifier