THE CLASSIC ‘TEN ESSENTIALS’ FOR HIKING ARE STILL RELEVANT TODAY

The Mountaineers Club, formed in 1906 to explore the wild areas and peaks surrounding the still-young city of Seattle, first established the classic “Ten Essentials” in the 1930s. This list was updated in “Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills, Seventh Edition” (The Mountaineers Books, 2003) to include “systems.”

Realizing that the classic 10 essentials were not adequate in an emergency, the group encouraged that “all members of an outing’s group must be individually prepared for the inevitable unexpected situations requiring standing in one place.” While they recognized that the group as a whole might have all of the equipment to survive an emergency, they felt that it was important that each person in the group be self-sufficient in case of the unexpected.

We will discuss the first five of the 10 essentials in this issue of the PA. Check next month’s issue for discussion of the rest of these important hiking tips.

When considering the purpose of the 10 essentials, remember that you may not use them every trip (or ever), but when you do need them, it could make a difference in the outcome of your survival.

The most important thing to take out on the trail is common sense! If you do not have common sense (or you left it at home that day), it does not matter what else you have on you, the outcome will not be the desired one. As you go through the list, keep that most important thing in mind.

1. Navigation

Map and compass are the basic equipment needed for navigation. You do not need a fancy compass with a mirror on it. Silva, Suunto and Brunton all make reliable compasses for $10 to $20. The small bubble compasses that come on some whistles or in some survival kits are hard to get a good reading on and are virtually useless.

Maps can provide more information than just elevation, stream crossings and trail intersections. Often you can gain valuable information on the back of the map, such as the emergency contact number for the area. There might also be information about the history of the area, places of special interest and geology. Topographic maps will provide the most detail and are the best maps to have with you.

Always look for the most up-to-date map, as trails, roads and structures can change. If your map is not waterproof, keep it in a waterproof container (a Ziplock bag is more than adequate). As with anything you carry, it is important to know how to use a map and compass.

A GPS is another option, but it should not be a replacement for a map and compass. A GPS can always fail due to weak batteries or poor reception, while a map and compass will always work.

2. Sun Protection

Sun protection consists of sunscreen and sunglasses. Look for sunglasses that protect you 100 percent from UVA and UVB. Not only can these dangerous rays burn your skin, they can also cause permanent eye damage and lead to cataracts. Good sunglasses are especially important at high altitudes, near open water, around snow and in prolonged exposure to direct sunlight.

Sunscreen can also be combined with sun-protection clothing. Choose one with an SPF of 15 or higher, and apply a liberal amount to all exposed skin, reapplying as necessary. It may be necessary to reapply it as often as every two hours, so make sure it makes it in your pack. Remember that once you burn your skin, it makes it more difficult to thermo-regulate, which is critical when dealing with rising or falling temperatures.

3. Insulation (Extra Clothing)

According to the authors of Mountaineering, “Extra clothing should be selected according to the season. Ask the questions: What is needed to survive the worst conditions that could be realistically encountered on this trip?”

This is a great question, and one you should ask yourself before any trip. Your extra clothing might be as simple as an extra t-shirt, or several extra layers. In cooler weather, a hat will help to retain body heat radiated through the head.

You also need to consider rain gear. If there is any chance of precipitation, make sure that you have rain gear with you. You can lose a significant amount of heat just by being wet. Your rain gear can range anywhere from a disposable poncho to a Gore-Tex rain suit. Once again, if you are not carrying it, it will do you no good.

4. Illumination

Even if you only plan a day hike, it is important to carry a light source. High-output headlamps make a good choice. They are typically lightweight, hands-free, compact and have a long battery life if used responsibly. If you end up on the trail after the sun has set and you do not have a light source, you significantly increase the chance of getting injured. Make sure to carry an extra bulb and batteries.

Another option for a light source is the 12-hour light stick—there are no batteries to fail or bulbs to break. They are inexpensive enough that if you have to leave a light source with someone, you do not need to take out a loan to purchase another one.

5. First-Aid Kit

No first-aid kit is perfect right off of the shelf. Personalize the kit with your own medications and supplies geared towards the outing that it will be used for. Go through the kit at least once a year to check expiration dates on medications, and supply levels of the other items.

Even though you can accomplish most first-aid tasks with nothing more than what you have on your back, it is always nice to have a place where everything
you need is right there and you don’t need to think about how to improvise it. Even by carrying just a couple of simple items, you can control bleeding or treat broken bones with a little thought.

Always make sure to have your first-aid kit in a waterproof bag. If you choose not to use a pre-made kit and just put everything into a bag, add a bandana to your kit so that you can dump the contents of your kit onto it without everything getting lost in the leaves.

**References**


This article was adapted from content produced by Emergency Response Training © 2011 www.onthetrailfirstaid.com, emailert@yahoo.com.

**Now Available: Map J. Tuscarora Trail from the Appalachian Trail, PA, to PA Rte. 641 (Edition 3, 2012)**

Map J covers Pennsylvania Sections 1 through 5 (51.7 miles) of the Tuscarora Trail as described in the Guide to the North Half of the Tuscarora Trail. Scale 1:100,000. Contour interval 20 meters. Grid: 10,000-meter UTM Zone 18; geographic latitude/longitude, 7.5-minute interval. Datum NAD83. Shaded relief. Edition 3 is a new base map compiled from the latest GIS data. Updates include a relocation of the Tuscarora Trail near the Florence Jones Reineman Wildlife Sanctuary; numerous trail changes within Tuscarora State Forest; and an updated elevation profile.


**HIKING WITH THE EXPERTS: PATC PRESENTS AT REI**

Registration required for each session. See registration information and store location at the end of each description below. All sessions are free. Presented by Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, www.patc.net.

Among its more than 6,600 members and volunteers, PATC has some of the foremost authorities on trails in our region, and it produces the best maps, trail guidebooks and other materials that will help you find, use and enjoy the best hiking routes for you. Hear from those experts to plan your next hike and learn about the many services PATC provides...

**Hikes in the Shenandoah National Park and surrounding area**

**Wednesday, Aug. 1, 7 p.m., Rockville**

Planning to hike in SNP and the surrounding area? Then join us from the learning edition of the 2012 Appalachian Trail Guide to the Shenandoah National Park with Side Trails and current PATC President John Hedrick about the best hikes in the park and adjacent area. John will talk about timing, hike safety and preparedness, maps and guidebooks for the area, cabin rentals in the park and nearby, and ways to get involved to ensure the area is preserved for future generations. PATC Maps Chair Brian Goudreau will demonstrate the club’s new iPhone/iPad app, PATC-Shenandoah. Learn how to use the app to navigate on the trail, to record places of interest along your hike, and to access PATC web-based services such as cabin rental availability, location and descriptions. Register at http://www.rei.com/rockville

**Best Hikes in the Washington Region**

**Wednesday, July 25, 7 p.m., Rockville**

You don’t need to go far to find great hiking. Within about an hour of the D.C. Beltway, many trails offer solitude, surprising wilderness and challenges that will suit you. Some are dotted with historical artifacts. Others offer fine vistas from atop rugged bluffs. Learn about the best and how to prepare for them from some of the volunteer experts who put together PATC’s series of pocket guides on Hikes in the Washington Region. The latest editions of this inexpensive three-book series describe 68 routes—mostly circuits—and many ways to shorten or extend those routes to fit your interests and level of preparation. See slides of photos from the series and get tips on where to go, what to expect and how to get ready from the team led by Larry Broadwell, revision editor/writer/photographer for the series.

**Fall Hikes in the Shenandoah National Park and surrounding area**

**Wednesday, Sept. 26, 7 p.m., Timonium**

Planning to hike in the SNP and surrounds? Then join Judy McGuire, a Shenandoah National Park 500-mile hiker, AT thru hiker and guidebook editor, to learn about the best hikes in the park and adjacent area. Judy will talk about timing, hike safety, women hiking solo, how to prepare, what maps and guidebooks to have, cabin rentals in the park and nearby, and ways to get involved to ensure the area is preserved for future generations.

**REI Locations**

**Fairfax Store**

11950 Grand Commons Ave.
Fairfax, VA 22030
571/522-6568

**Timonium Store**

63 W. Aylesbury Rd.
Timonium, MD 21093
410/252-5920

**Rockville Store**

1701 Rockville Pike
Rockville, MD 20852
301/230-7670

**WANTED: GRAPHIC DESIGNER**

Help wanted with monthly layout of Potomac Appalachian newsletter. Responsibilities will be shared with current layout editor of newsletter. Commitment to approximately 15 hours of design work every other month is to be expected.

Experience with publications preferred, but not required. Education in graphic design or art required. Please email all inquiries to susie.mulligan@yahoo.com

**Note: This is a volunteer position.**
6. Fire

Matches should be one of the things that you always carry with you. It is important to carry waterproof matches or make sure that the ones you do carry stay dry. Although a mechanical lighter can be easier to use, it can fail, so make sure to carry waterproof matches, also.

If you are stuck in an area where everything is soaked, it will be very challenging to get a fire started. Having something to give you an advantage will save you time and frustration. Fire starters can be very simple, such as a candle, a cotton ball slathered in petroleum jelly, or even dry tinder.

7. Repair Kit and Tools

Duct tape is an excellent repair tool and can fix almost anything (and a few diehards out there would say everything!). A simple trick to carrying duct tape without having to carry the entire roll is to wrap it around something that you always bring with you (like a water bottle or your trekking poles). It is good to create a little “lip” at the end to make it easier to get it off when you need it.

A knife and/or a multi tool will help in emergency situations, and have many general uses. Look for a tool with at least one fold-out blade, screwdrivers, and a can opener. As with any of the tools you carry, you get what you pay for; test the tools to make sure they can withstand general use.

8. Nutrition (Extra Food)

Depending on the hike you are doing and the time of year, you can go with a freeze-dried meal or something as simple as extra energy bars. This should be in addition to what you plan on eating on the hike. Nutrition plays a large role in our overall well-being, especially out on the trail. For someone that is suffering from low blood sugar or hypothermia, extra food can make a big difference in the outcome. Although that candy bar may seem like a good idea, it does little to replace the electrolytes that you have lost through sweating.

9. Hydration

Chances are that when you begin your hike, you are already dehydrated. Many people forget that you can be dehydrated any time of year. A collapsible water reservoir (i.e. Camelback) is a great way of keeping hydrated while hiking. People are more likely to take small sips of water while hiking than taking breaks to dig out their water bottle. It is also important to have a backup water source (e.g. a water bottle with water or a sports drink) in case your water reservoir fails or empties quicker than you realized. Even if you think that you will have enough water, it is a good idea of having some way to treat water (water purification tablets).

10. Emergency Shelter

If you are doing an overnight trip, chances are you are already carrying a tent or a tarp with you. If you are just planning a day hike and need to do an emergency overnight, having some way to protect yourself from the elements could mean the difference between life and death. The easiest and one of the most effective ways is to carry an emergency blanket. This item is lightweight and will reflect your own body heat back to you. Other options are a tent, tarp, emergency bivy, or trash bag.

11. Signaling/Communication

O.K., so I might have told a little white lie that there were only 10 essentials. This one was so important that it needed to be included, but I could not figure out a way to sneak it into one of the other essentials.

One of the most reliable signaling devices is a whistle. Look for a hard plastic whistle with no moving parts (no pea). Brands selling this type of whistle include Rescue Howler and Fox 40. The whistle should be attached to you or on the outside of your pack for easy access.

Communication devices can include: a cell phone, two-way radios, or a satellite phone. There are pros and cons with each one, but all of them have been documented in getting help in an emergency. As with any mechanical device, you should not rely on it completely; just know that it is another tool you have with you.

Summary

When packing your bag for the day, make sure that you include the 10/11 Essentials. If done correctly, this will not add a lot of weight to your pack, but will take a lot of stress off your shoulders if you actually need any of these items. If you plan ahead, you will have a fun, safe hike, but even with good planning things could take a turn for the worse and you want to be prepared.