

MY OWN HUNTING-TREKKING KIT

THE PHYLOSOPHY BEHIND THE KIT

For those hunters that like the “solo” experience and more in general for those who like the challenge of hunting in remote location with the walk and stalk method it might be wise to consider the possibility of an unplanned overnight (or longer) outing.

When this happens and it will happen soon or later, a controversial view of mine is that albeit we have paid money this is by no mean a justification for becoming a “drag” on the accompanying professionals. This might be my own personal and by all means debatable point of view; however it is a fact of life that in particular circumstances, even the most seasoned professional or bush man might be objectively unable to ensure an evening return to base or depending on the circumstances, not attempting to return might be the wiser course of action.

In these circumstances in general have two options: a) Make our unplanned stop a miserable and to a certain extent, depending on the location, a slightly risky experience, or b) Thanks to a little advanced preparation make the unplanned stop another of the experiences of life worth remembering while keeping the whole affair within the boundaries of safety.

On these premises over the years I have developed and refined a personal kit that fits into a standard military butt-pack and can be carried out of the way on the belt. I have used this combination almost anywhere I went and it has served me well. The guiding principles behind the kit are that it should be: Compact, Flexible, Reliable and Easy to Use. Compact for obvious weight and space consideration; flexible as it should contain items which have the widest possible range of applications and reliable means it should be composed of items of the best quality available on the market; this last consideration means that albeit we keep the whole things down to the minimum, we should not penny pinch when reason dictate. Ease of use is self explanatory.

As the old saying goes “the more you know, the less you need”. As this last statement implies, we should have a minimum level of knowledge, however I believe that learning a bit, even at mature age, add a little spice to life. I’m not an advocating the “be prepared for the end of the world” approach, however it is worth pondering that the two biggest killers on the list of WHO (World Health Organization) are a mosquito and a parasite while the biggest killer of occasional trekkers stranded in remote locations is **exposure**.

A COUPLE OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

When it comes to venturing into remote locations the environment plays an important role in setting the “rules of engagement”, we always have three basic environmental conditions which alone or sometimes in combination make up for the situation we are dealing with when it comes to the **exposure** issue.

The following notes will provide clarification on the rationale behind the classification environments:

H (+) = (extreme+) hot environment

C (+) = (extreme+) cold environment

HRH = high relative humidity environment

H or H+: the general characteristics of these environments are: temperatures can reach 50°C plus during daytime, low or near zero humidity level and considerable temperature excursion between day and night. Except for regions at elevation, it is rare that night temperatures reach below 0°C however, temperature excursions of anywhere between 20° to 30°C are not uncommon. Wind might increases the risks of exposure induced mild to medium hypothermia during the night due to wind chill effects. The lower temperatures reached during the night are not per se a serious threat however, the considerable heat of the day, might lead to underestimating the requirement for proper protection to deal with the effects of temperature dropping at night.

The low relative humidity level (roughly below 35%) allows a certain amount of evaporative cooling of sweat provided we are and keep properly hydrated as this physiological process must work more and more (losing more water) in trying to keep the body temperature at 37°C. The issues associated with this environment, in addition to the risk of hypothermia (low), are: mild to severe dehydration, electrolytes imbalance induced symptoms, heat exhaustion and heat stroke (mild to severe hyperthermia).

C or C+: the environment so categorized span to any conditions where the risk of mild, moderate or severe hypothermia is present with the lower level temperatures reaching the proximity of minus 15-20°C. Below this temperature level we are entering into the sub arctic and arctic environment where survival techniques and tools go beyond the scope of the kit. This latter statement does not exclude the possibility of survival with the proper techniques and tools.

HRH: this environment encompasses in the majority of the cases jungle but can also be encountered in desert coastal areas and swamp/lake areas in summer. The critical factor is the high relative humidity (above 35%) which as it increases, proportionally hampers the evaporative cooling process and might conduce to the onset of mild to moderate hyperthermia and moderate to severe dehydration.

A COUPLE OF CONSIDERATIONS ON FIRST AID ITEMS

A first aid kit is something that could cover a very broad spectrum of weights and contents; however it is fact that aside from personal prescriptions, the cases we might be called to treat on a day or two unplanned outing are more concerned with preventing the onset of more serious issues than anything else.

What we are primarily concerned are the following occurrences:

- Prevention and first treatment of insects and snakes bites
- Prevention of issue deriving from mild to severe electrolytes imbalances induces by profuse perspiration (sweating),
- Treatment of minor wounds and scratches which, in certain environments, might deteriorate fairly quickly if left untreated,
- Treatment of broken bones (unlikely) or sprinkled joints together with pain/inflammation relieving medications
- Treatment or prevention of sun burns
- Treatment of blisters or mild cases of the so called “trench foot” (this should be a no issue, but just in case)
- Treatment of mild “traveler” diarrhea and mild fever due to acclimatization and change in diet issues or sun burns
- Prevention of malaria (upon doctor consultation)

WATER PROCUREMENT

Drinking water availability during the outings shouldn't be a major concern with the support of the hunting outfit; however the items to procure and effectively treat water from virtually any sources are so few and so contained in size that there is no reason for not being prepared for this eventuality. Walk and stalk and solo hunters should be a tad more proactive on this front. Circumstances might change during the trek or the hunt and with these the water availability and intake requirements. The average Joe is likely to have anything between 0.9 to 4.5 liters of water on you (1 quart canteen or largest hydration bladder or both) plus the water “in you” (start always fully hydrated); in hot or/and humid climate these quantities might go away in very short time.

The good news is that with a minimum of equipments you can procure water from virtually anywhere (rivers, water holes, etc.) and make it safe for human consumption.

THE KIT CONTENT

Before starting listing the content, there are two or three items that will not go into the butt-pack; two of them are the basis, the third is an additional item worth having, these are:

- A good knife with a sharpening tool being this a wet-stone, a diamond rod or anything else suitable,
- A metallic canteen (stainless steel or titanium) with cup in its belt carrying pouch. Best the 37-39 oz. (about 1.1 liter) with largest possible mouth,
- An hydration bladder 3.5 liters (USMC, Army or whatever surplus) with straps so it can be carried as a back pack

THE KNIFE

This is the single most important tool in our possession, point.

There two lines of thoughts for the selection of the blade. One that favor the large/longer blades (10-12”) made of tough steel and the other that favor the smaller/shorter blades (4-6”) made of more workable steel (easier to sharp in the field). Personally I prefer the second choice however it is a matter of personal preferences; just bear in mind that larger and longer blades are a tad more difficult to handle properly if you have no experience other than culinary one. In Africa and other places in the world, the machete is a widespread tool; they can do anything from chopping wood to sharpen pencils with it, but it requires skills or it can become potentially dangerous for the bearer.

What matters is that the construction should be “**full tang**”¹ (the blade goes all the way through the handle); the blade should be not less than 3.5-4 mm thick and the grind should be of the “**Scandi**” type (not to high, 30 to 40% of the blade

width) which is the easier to sharpen and not too fragile; “**drop point**” blade’s configuration works the best for a lot of tasks.

¹ Rattail types of tangs are also acceptable if the knife is manufactured by a reputable artisan of supplier. If not they tend to break at blade-handle joint point.

Before buying the knife, if you can, try how it fits in your hand; it should fit comfortably with a good grip commensurate to the size of your hand; these aspects ensure full control of the blade and safety while performing tasks. It helps if the back of the blade’s corners are not rounded but have a squared profile, it might come handy as scraper for the fire steel. This however can be a little modification performed after purchase. A good sheath is also a must; there are hundreds of leather and Kydex (a polymer which is heat formed) sheaths on the market **just make sure it holds the knife firmly in place.**

THE METALLIC CANTEEN

Surplus plastic military canteens have only one drawback, they can’t go on fire. A stainless steel canteen, albeit at a little weight penalization, will go on fire (remove the cap) and is fairly immune from corrosion due to chemicals used in the treatment of water (iodine or chlorine based). Titanium is the top, resist to almost anything and is feather light, it comes at about 130-140 dollars for a 37 oz (1.1 liters) canteen with its relevant cup. It is expensive but it will last a life time. A canteen and a cup is a wealth of possibilities for procuring, pre-filtering and treating water; the nesting cup is about 25 oz. (0.7 liters) capacity, you can cook a meal in it, prepare coffee or tea for at least 3 persons. In emergency you can use it (the cup) as implement for digging to scoop for underground water.



Large mouth stainless steel canteen with cup and a small stove for cooking all in a handy unit that fits into the pouch. Note the handy hanger made of stainless steel wire to place the canteen on the fire or to secure a line for water scooping. Titanium canteens are sold in the same configuration and set up.

FIRE, LIGHTING, SHELTER, SIGNALLING & OTHER ITEMS

- 1 fire steel with scraper (alternatively use the back, not the blade, of the knife)
- 1 plastic container (the one used for urine or feces analysis samples) with threaded cup filled with cotton balls (pure cotton only) impregnated by Vaseline (petroleum jelly)
- 2 pieces about 4” in length of used bicycle tire tubes
- 1 or 2 lighters (not the piezoelectric type) with transparent casing in a small sealed plastic bag
- 1 candle lamp with 2 spare candles (each candle last about 6-8 hours)
- 1 head lamp (lead light with multiple intensity including strobe) with one set of new spare batteries (these sealed in a plastic container)
- Sharpening implement for the knife
- 1 pair of heavy duty leather work gloves
- 1 medium roll of bank line (preferred) or 20 meters of paracord
- 1 military rain poncho with grommets on the border (rain protection and shelter)
- 2 Mylar blankets (space blankets) one heavy duty and one light duty
- 1 mosquito net (pre treated with insect repellent)
- 1 head mosquito net

- 1 piece of ¾" PVC plumbing pipe about 6" long with wrapped with good quality duct tape (~10 feet of more as you wish)
- 1 pair of spare socks
- 1 whistle
- 2 button compass
- 1 signal mirror with aiming device (4" x 3")

WATER ITEMS

These are in addition to pre-filtering and boiling:

- 1 water filter with 0.02 microns absolute porosity
- 20 water purification tablets (Chlorine-Dioxide type)
- 1 oz. glass bottle of saturated iodine solution (not suitable for pregnant women and for individuals with thyroid dysfunctions)
- 3-4 vitamin C effervescent pills lemon or orange taste (kills the taste of iodine AFTER THE TREATMENT, if added before the treatment Vitamin C renders the iodine ineffective)
- 2' - 3' of lattice tubing or transparent plastic laboratory grade tubing about 5-7 mm in diameter
- 1 piece of natural sponge about a fist size
- 1 cotton bandana (in addition to the one we might have on our head)

COMFORT ITEMS

- Tea bags
- About 10-15 tea spoons of instant coffee in plastic vial
- Small vial with sugar about 10-15 teaspoons worth
- A robust plastic vial with honey or jam (in Mauritania we use palm dates paste)
- A small bag of pipe tobacco and a small pipe

FIRST AID ITEMS

- 2 elastic bandages 4"-5" width
- 1 or 2 (depending on the size) insect repellent flacons (Permethrin, Picaridin or DEET 30% based)
- 1 tick remover or tweezers (for ticks and thorns)
- 10 saline solutions plastic vials
- Iodine or alcohol pads
- Band aids of various size including the large size 2" x 2"
- 3 days worth of personal medications, if required, in a waterproof plastic vial
- 1 water proof vial with analgesic, antipyretic (reduce fever), anti-diarrheal and anti-inflammatory pills
- 5 oral rehydration water soluble powder doses
- 1 magnifying lens
- Sun screen¹

¹I do not use sun protecting products because proper attire will prevent this problem; however sun screen could be part of the kit.

Take a little time of studying your whereabouts in advance before venturing out it will increase your capability to make a fair assessment of the situation; of particular use is the knowledge of what the locals do and don't do in dealing with the local environment and fauna.

With a little motivation and the items we have at our disposal, we can go on for quite some time in relative comfort. Just take it easy and set your priorities straight.....in doing this consider that food is last of your concerns.

PHOTOS OF THE ITEMS & NOTES ON UTILIZATION

FIRE, LIGHTING, SHELTER, SIGNALLING & OTHER ITEMS (not all items of the lists above are shown)

Fire steel



Fire steel comes in 100 of configurations, the larger and longer the better, shown here is also the scraper although the back of the knife's blade can be used. Having a handle is not mandatory.

Cotton balls impregnated by petroleum jelly & bicycle tire tubes



These two items are basically manmade tinder which ensures a reliable ignition even in dump conditions and burn for quite some time (up to 4-5 minutes). In absence of cotton balls but in presence of a wife or girl friend, you might steal a couple of internal tampons, once pulled from the cartoon tube and fluffed they make for good tinder; impregnated with petroleum jelly they work even better. The impregnated cotton balls will take the spark from the fire steel readily, just spread them a bit before igniting them. A stripe of the rubber tube (about 2/8" by 2"), once lighted with the lighter, will burn for quite some time even in dump conditions.

Candle lamp with spare candles



This particular model (shown open and closed) once closed reduces to a very compact size and has a handy batteries light at the bottom for additional flexibility. It has a hanging chain and hook and albeit it gets pretty hot with the candle lighted (good for warming up the hands), it is fairly safe from accidental spilling of the flame. The available candles last for about 8 hours each. It comes with an alternative candle sized plastic container and wick usable with oil or any other fuel. It makes a reasonable bright light good for reading and other stationary tasks while conserving the head lamp batteries for when we need to move.

Head lamp with one set of new spare batteries



Shown here is a headlamp with four light intensities capabilities, including strobe function; low consumption (utilizes led lamp), very light and handy; together is a batteries plastic container shock proof but not waterproof, wrap it in a small sealable plastic bag and you are good to go.

Sharpening implement for the knife



Shown here are a diamond rod, a natural wet stone and a diamond-ceramic stone. All will do with a bit of technique, for a Skandi grind knife flat sharpening implements work better and are easier to use.

Roll of bank line or Paracord



A roll of bank line cord on the left and paracord (old parachute cord) on the right; a bank line roll is cheaper and provides more cordage with comparable or less volume. Paracord (it comes with seven white strands in the middle) has a breaking load of 500 pounds, bank line of the #36 by 122 feet roll has a braking load of 320 pounds; the #18 by 250 feet roll has a braking load of 160 pounds. Both will do for anything required for an occasional camp. A roll of bank line comes at about 5 dollars US.

Mylar blankets



On the left two types of light duty Mylar blankets, the left one is a bit more resistant. If you need to fix the blanket with cordage a makeshift grommet made by a double duct tape layer will ensure that the blanket doesn't tear. On the right a heavy duty blanket aside from having the same usage of the light duty it can be used as a shelter on its own in lieu of the military rain poncho, note the grommets at the corners. The clear (silver) side is the reflective one. Any tear can be easily repaired with the duct tape applied on the non reflective side. Orange color is an additional asset for signaling and visibility.

The purpose of the blankets is to be able to create a microclimate in hot or cold environment. The reflective properties of the Mylar can really make the difference when sheltering under scorching sun or when trying to reflect the heat of a fire to maximize its effectiveness. Since heat gain and loss happen by radiation (direct exposure to sunlight), conduction (contact) and convection (air circulation), a properly made shelter which will allow evaporative cooling and at the same time minimize heat gain by sheltering radiation and contact with hot ground can create a more bearable microclimate.

The light duty Mylar blanket can be used to provide a reflective cap overhead to enhance the poncho or tarp shelter, while the heavy duty blanket can be used to enhance insulation from conduction heat from the ground during the day; in this case the reflective surface will be directed toward the sun and the ground. As body heat loss preventer during the night or as fire reflector to enhance the radiation of heat even from a moderate fire, both blankets might be used with the reflective surface toward us.

Mosquito net & head mosquito net



This is a must have, ensure that both are treated with insect repellent, alternatively invest in some spray insect repellent for cloth and gear (one brand shown) and proceed with the treatment. As additional insect repellent you can use dried elephant, rhino, buffalo dung (make sure is dry by kicking it before picking it up) tossed on the fire.

Button compass



Useful in the event we need to move a bit around and need to avoid losing the direction of the camp location in the thicket. Get the best on the market and keep two of them to check one's reading against the other in case you get caught by the doubt that they working correctly.

Whistle



Useful for attracting attention. Metal ones are not the best option in cold weather as they tend to stick to the lips.

Signal mirror with aiming device



Used for signaling to ground and air rescue parties. It has one drawback that it's effective only when the sun is in between you and the party you need to signal to and works best when the sun is a bit high in the sky. Note the aiming device at the center with the star shaped slit, it makes your life a lot easier as signaling to distant parties is easy said than done without an aiming device. The largest on the market are about 5" x 3".

WATER ITEMS

Water filter with 0.02 microns absolute porosity



Shown above is the Sawyer Point Zero Two filter (0.02 microns absolute porosity) (4" x 2" dia.) with the one liter bladder and the backwashing syringe (newer models comes in a bit different configuration). You can leave the syringe and the bladder at home. The white cap is of the pull to drink type and at the bottom is the inlet; you can screw the bladder at the bottom and just drink or you can screw a hydration pack adapter at the bottom (shown on the side) attach the tubing and drink directly from the source. No pre-treatment of the water is required other than basic filtration of largest particles if present, easily done with a bandana while collecting the water. Adapting the tubing might take a bit of ingenuity make sure you do that before outing.

Water purification tablets (Chlorine-Dioxide type)



Shown here are the military issued tablets if properly stored they have virtually no expiry date. 1 tablet treats 1 quart, instructions are on the back of the wrap; keep a magnifying lens handy if you have trouble reading the fine prints about holding time. Again a pre-filtering of the larger particle and suspension, if present, with a bandana is advisable. If treating the water in a transparent container, keep it away from direct sunlight during the treatment.

1 oz. glass bottle of saturated iodine solution



Iodine saturated solution with its neoprene-duct tape makeshift pouch (to keep it warm) and identification (note the iodine crystals at the bottom, about 4-8 grams). **NOT SUITABLE FOR PREGNANT WOMEN OR FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH THYROID DYSFUNCTIONS.**

Vitamin C effervescent pills lemon or orange taste



Any brand will do, ¼ to ½ of the pill thrown into a quart canteen of iodine treated water AFTER THE TREATMENT, will kill the iodine taste.

Lattice tubing or transparent plastic laboratory grade tubing about 5-7 mm in diameter, natural sponge



Fitting the tubing to the filter might require a bit of adaptation make sure you do all the trials BEFORE outing. The purpose of having the tubing and a piece of natural sponge is accessibility. Water might be too shallow to be able to scoop it with a cup, or might be found in pools inside rock recesses as left over from recent rains. The tubing or/and the sponge with a little creativity allow us to make maximum use of any amount of water available. The natural sponge is ideal for collecting efficiently morning dew from foliage. The lattice tubing can be used also as haemostatic lace as well. The natural sponge, as opposed to the synthetic one, once dry can be compressed to a very small size as compared when soaked in water.

PLASTIC VIALS FOR VARIOUS USES



Various plastic vials for storing pills, matches and other comfort items (including a fishing kit if needed in the larger type). The two on the left are waterproofed with an O-ring and they are about a match size in length; the one on the right is super tough, you can step on and it will not break. They are all well suited for the rigors of a butt-pack or back pack.

Tighten the cap enough and they will all be water proof. A little trick to avoid that medications pick up humidity is to put into the vial some grains of rice, rice tend to absorb humidity readily. They can be marked for the content with an indelible marker pen.

NOTE ON FIRE MAKING

Making fire is an art which in its basic form, can be easily mastered with a little knowledge and a bit of preparation. Know to make a fire and you will never run out of options.

Tinder is the first stage of fire making and it could be natural or manmade (cotton ball or tire tubes material). The purpose of the tinder is to ignite easily (in dry and damp conditions) and burn for a reasonable amount of time (minutes) in order to transfer the flame to the kindling and from these to **progressively larger** pieces of woods.

The rationale behind having tinder which readily ignite and maintain the flame for some time is that in the event of damp kindling, it will take a while for the wood to pick up the flame. Once a good flame is going even damp larger pieces of wood will eventually pick up the flames.

Remember that it is nearly impossible to ignite large diameter pieces of wood from the outset.

The fire lighting sequence involves a bit of advance preparation; you will need:

- Tinder > reliable ignition source in dry and wet conditions
- A bundle of kindling: wood sticks of the size of a pencil or less (the smaller the better and plenty of them)
- A bundle of wood sticks of the size of a finger

- Wood of about 1" to 2" in diameter

If you want to progress to a larger fire or to particular set ups:

- Wood 3" and larger in diameter

Wood up to stage three above can be procured without the use of any implement, thus making life easier for us. Just make sure of two things in the process:

- The kindling should be put on the burning tinder without "chocking" the flame as it need oxygen to burn
- Add the next level of fuel gradually and only when the flames are well ongoing

Have plenty of wood supply ready on hand as you might have to keep the fire running for some time and **watch where you put your hands before moving or turning larger logs in case some critters are taking a nap under** (if in doubt use a self made wood stick to probe and check). For signaling purpose, it is worth keeping some green foliage nearby the running fire, once a rescue party is spotted or thought to be spotted, adding green foliage to the fire produces a lot of smoke which is visible from quite long distances both from the ground and from the air (even if under a jungle canopy, the white smoke really sticks out once it reaches the trees top). A bit of smoke also helps keeping flying critters at bay, just make sure you stay upwind or parallel to wind direction while smoking the fire.

NOTE ON DUCT TAPE

Duct tape, of top quality, in remote locations is worth a million dollar. Here are some of the potential utilizations:

- Lacing for boots,
- Bandage or wound dressing waterproofing,
- Support for fracture immobilization,
- Reinforcement for tying down shelter material (makeshift grommets),
- Repair of tears in fabric,
- Cordage,
- Makeshift container building,
- Makeshift snow goggles building,
- Tourniquet building,
- Sling for fracture arms,
- Help in dressing blisters

NOTE ON BLISTERS PREVENTION & FEET'S HEALTH

Blisters should not be an issue at all. At my time in army we used to do some pretty crunching rucksack marches and I never had issues with blisters. There are few tricks which helps prevention, the first is to make sure that our boots are well broken in and that they fit like a glove without constricting the foot; in the old days of army all leather boots we used to take a shower with the boots on, once they are soaked wet, walk in them till they are dry, they will fit like a glove, if necessary repeat the process one more time. After the "fitting" a good treatment with grease or polish will protect the leather from drying and cracking.

I personally believe, but that's me, that modern boots made by leather and synthetic material are very comfy but so far I have not seen any practical improvement over the old style all leather boots if these are properly maintained and maybe fitted with a good quality anatomic sole. One of the problems with modern boots is that, no matter how technological they are, they soak in sweat and favor the production of bacteria (the proverbial "gag" smell they have after a while), I never had this problem with all leather boots.

Another useful trick is to wear under the socks a sock made with women's pantyhose material; this will help in keeping the foot from brushing against the coarser sock material; wool socks helps with thermo regulating the foot but they have a tad more coarse fabric than other material like cotton or synthetic.

More important is to stop regularly and aerate the feet; remove the boots and socks and let the feet rest (a good massage helps) once every two hours on the march or at the first occasion; the sun light will dry them and has antibacterial properties. If by any chance you have to walk into water, remove the boots and the wet socks and while the socks are drying, you can wear the boots without, it will be a lot better than keeping the fooks macerating in the wet socks.