

# What's In Your Survival Pack?

By Jim Jones, CHCM/EMT

*Survival is 50% what you can do and 50% what you can do without  
Self-Reliance is 50% what you have and 50% what you know*

## **Why Have a Survival Pack**

The contents of what is known as “the survival pack”, “the evacuation pack” or the “bugout bag” is the subject of countless articles and lectures, but there continues to be a demand for guidance as new “survivalists” and “concerned citizens” seek to become more prepared. Having some emergency stuff scattered about the house is just an indication that you are worried, but having a complete survival pack is proof that you are ready for whatever happens. With the great variety of manmade and natural disaster potentials increasing every year, failure to have a “survival pack” is inexcusable and irresponsible. The “survival pack” provides the ability and means to live and operate independently of the social, economic system for extended periods of time. While this may never be necessary, the very existence of this pack confers a state of independence and liberation upon its owner. The owners of “survival packs” have certified their responsible citizenship by their actions. These are the people who will not need to panic or become criminals in order to survive a disaster or hard times. These are the folks who will have the best chance to survive and help their neighbors. The well stocked and organized “survival pack” is an insurance policy and a declaration of independence that is well worth the investment.

## **Pack Selection and Placement**

The reality is that most people will never actually carry their packs very far. In most cases they will open it up and use the contents while remaining in their homes or nearby shelters through an emergency. It may be carried only a few blocks to a safer location or thrown into the family vehicle for the drive to safety. But one should prepare it for the “worst case” situation, where it must be carried on the back for miles and provide at least the minimum needs of survival under all anticipated hazards to life. I have seen people with packs they could barely lift much-less carry. I have seen people who needed medical attention after trying to carry their packs a few miles on a test hike. If you are in the military or you are a frequent backpacker you can probably carry 50-plus pounds of gear, but the average citizen will need to keep the pack weight down to 20 to 30 pounds maximum if they are going to cover any distance without exhaustion or injury. Supplemental food, shelter and equipment can be kept in duffle bags next to the survival pack to be used in stay-home or vehicle transported situations, but the pack alone must provide all needs (water, food, shelter, medical, etc.) for 3 to 5 days. I do not recommend an oversized pack since one is tempted to fill it up. A pack that is about 20-inches high, 10-inches wide and 8-inches thick, with plenty of side pockets and padding should hold about 18 to 25 pounds of gear and supplies. The pack should include external tie-downs or straps to attach a blanket or light sleeping bag as needed. Zipper pockets and gear clips on the waist belt and shoulder straps are recommended for

keeping items you need to get to quickly. The color depends on the area you will be surviving in. A camouflage pack may be normal in some environments, but may attract attention in others. Black, brown or dark gray are recommended alternatives. Good quality packs of the kind described above cost from \$75.00 to \$150.00. If you cannot afford that much, checkout military surplus stores. The BTN rule applies to all survival equipment. The BTN rule is that if you cannot find or afford the ideal item, then get the best you can because anything is **Better Than Nothing** when it comes to survival. You can probably get an “adequate” pack for \$20.00 to \$40.00. I also recommend that you keep your survival pack inside a plastic tote bin when not in use. This protects it from all kinds of hazards including, dirt, water and curious hands. The tote bin can also contain supplemental belt and pocket items that will go with the pack such as knives, firearms, field clothing, canteens (kept full), energy bars, etc. Unless you live alone you will need to consider packs for each family member above the age of ten. These packs should have all the essentials (water, shelter, food, medical, sanitation, clothing) that your pack has, but does not need to duplicate things like stoves, water purifiers, tools, etc. So they can have extra food and shelter items.

Where you keep the pack may be important. If your garage burns down you still have the supplies in your house, but if your house burns down or cannot be accessed you will really need your pack. So maybe you want to keep the pack or a second pack in a shed, garage or other location separated from your house. That’s up to you.

### **Belt and Pocket Items**

These are items that would not normally be carried inside the pack, but you would need to have with you if you use the pack. These items should be stored right along side the pack in a bag, so you can quickly grab them as you put on the pack and then put them on your belt or in your pockets as soon as you can. These items may include a Multi-tool or Swiss Army knife, large belt knife, N95 respirator, canteen (filled) with belt hanger, handgun or pepper spray, ammunition magazines, small flashlight, sunglasses, cap, gloves, fire starter or waterproof matches, evacuation route maps, personal medications, spare eyeglasses, compass, small first aid kit, etc. I carry a Smith and Wesson brand KABAR style knife with a 6-inch blade or an Air Force survival knife with a 5-inch blade and a 14-function Multi-tool with its pliers, saws, files, screwdrivers and blades.

### **About This Pack**

The pack to be described below is a compromise based on what the *average* person can afford and carry. It is intended to provide all the basic needs for one person for 3 to 5 days and provide considerable support beyond that time. One would need to seek improved shelter and food sources as soon as possible. Foraging, fishing and hunting skills would be needed to extend independent survival. Carrying a tent and sleeping bag adds more weight than most evacuees could carry, so the shelter and warmth components are minimized to save weight. However, this limits the range of weather conditions one can expect to be comfortable in. The use of foraged natural and manmade materials would be required in severe weather. One should be comfortable in warm dry weather, adequate in cool and damp weather and survive in cold (below 40 degrees) weather, but in conditions of severe cold and wind the BTN rule applies. It may be advisable to

reconfigure the pack in late fall with more weight for warmth and less weight for other items. I have redundant systems for shelter, fire, food, and water purification because these are the most essential needs. There are expectable substitutes for every item depending on one's preferences and budget. Some items can be bought off-the-shelf or made at home. Some items that can be replaced with very high-end products are cheap BTN substitutes. One may want to put together a "starter pack" that covers each need with some items and then upgrade to better products as soon as possible. Remember that a fair survival pack you have ready is going to do you a lot more good than a great survival pack you are planning. Survival is 50% what you can do and 50% what you can do without. So think about each item you put into the pack and how you will use it. You want to breath clean, drink clean water, eat safe food, stay warm and dry, stay healthy and protect yourself. That's it! Everything else is secondary.

### **Air:**

In many survival situations you may need to improve the air you are breathing. The air may be filled with dust or smoke as you escape a disaster area. It may be very cold and breathing through a mask may help prewarm the air and reduce your heat loss. There may be biological organisms in a populated area that carry deadly diseases. For all of the above hazards I have several N95 and N99 soft respirators in the outer pack pockets. N95 masks are rated as 95% effective at filtering 3-micron particulates, but are proven effective at much smaller sizes. The chances of encountering a chemical agent (poison gas) situation are very small, so for most of us the bulk and weight of a military or civilian chemical mask is unnecessary. However if your are concerned about such a threat you may want to have one of the masks available for use in spraying pesticides and a pair of closed goggles that are available in most home improvement stores. But when properly fitted the N-95 and 99s are adequate, as well as cheap, light and small.

### **Water:**

The most common and essential survival need is water. I include a quart filled water bottle for immediate use, an Xtreme (tm) water purification filter system that will purify 1000 gallons of water and water purification tablets that will purify 25 quarts more. All are available at any sporting goods store.

### **Shelter & Warmth:**

Most tents are just too heavy and the weight and space would reduce food capacity. I carry a 1-mil thick 10 x 20 foot tarp (drop cloth) that is big enough to provide full shelter in most conditions. It may not last more than a few days under some conditions, but it is light. Then I have a good quality military rain poncho that can be worn in bad weather or used for a shelter or ground cloth. I have the military poncho liner to go with it as a blanket. You can get equivalent ponchos and light blankets or bags at sporting good and surplus stores. Finally I have included a high-quality space blanket with its quilted and reflective surface. I have slept out in a plastic shelter with an army blanket and a space blanket at below zero wind-chills. Yes it was cold. I slept on and off with all my cloths on, but I survived. This is survival, not a stay at the Ritz.

### **Food and Food Preparation:**

Most Americans are accustomed to eating whenever they are hungry and will often eat a lot more than the recommended 2000 calories per day. In theory you can live several weeks without any food at all, but one's endurance and judgment can begin deteriorate after a few days without nourishment. You can go a long way on survival rations of much less than 2000 calories per day. Carrying and consuming 2000-calorie meals for 3 to 5 days would take up unacceptable weight and space. My food choices are based on what would keep me going for long enough to establish other food sources. Obviously any additional food I could forage or hunt would extend my rations. I have also included a slingshot, snare wire and a fishing kit with hooks, line, sinkers and other items to help gather food. The miniature survival book illustrates ways to catch fish and game and how to identify some edible plants. I also have a slingshot for taking small game silently without using ammunition. Finally my firearm offers the opportunity to take small game. I always have 1 or 2 self-heating meals in my pack. They are a bit bulky, but they provide two hot meals of over 500 calories each without the need to build a fire. Military MRE meals with self-heaters are okay, but a bit heavier. Next I have 4 freeze-dried camp meals. These are very small and light, but take longer to cook. I also carry 18 Lifeboat Ration Bars that are 200 calories each. They are not all that tasty, but they will keep you going. Some coffee or tea bags and sugar add little weight and provide much comfort. Lastly, I throw some trail snacks and energy bars in with the pack to go in the pockets.

To prepare food I have a standard camping mess kit and a miniature Ezbit™ stove and 24 fuel tablets that burn 9-minutes each. This is just in case I cannot make a campfire. Of course I also have a knife, fork and spoon set.

You may want to save money by packing foods like, rice, pasta, beans, cornmeal and oatmeal along with dried fruits, nuts and packaged jerky. That's what they did in the old days. Even packages of instant oatmeal, macaroni and cheese and Rice-A-Roni™ can work. It takes more time and energy to fix these and is a bit heavier, but it is an alternative. These foods do need to be rotated and replaced at least annually, since they don't keep like the freeze-dried rations.

### **Heat & Light:**

This is another place where you want redundancy. You want to have one of those small LED flashlights. These are brighter, lighter and last a whole lot longer than the old bulb flashlights. Add a couple of chemical light sticks and a few of the small "tea candles" that burn for up to 4-hours and you have reliable light. For fire starting, I have several packs of waterproof matches, butane lighter and the last resort: a Gerber™ magnesium fire striker. I have also found that a cheap welding striker with extra flints is a very reliable fire starter.

### **Sanitation and Personal Hygiene**

A small bottle of liquid soap, a washcloth and a small towel will permit hand and face washing and even sponge baths as needed. A travel size toothbrush and toothpaste, razor and an unbreakable camp mirror complete the kit. A bottle of good insect repellent is highly recommended. There may be a few other items to suit your personal needs.

## **First Aid and Health**

I carry a 15-gram package of Celox™ blood stopper. This stuff will stop heavy arterial bleeding. My first aid kit includes several 3 x 3 inch gauze pads, an assortment of Band-Aids™, a 2-inch wide elastic bandage, a pair of latex gloves, a CPR mask, small tubes of Neosporin™ and Hydrocortisone, about 6 antiseptic wipes, packages of Tylenol, Advil, \* Aspirin, Antacid, and a small bottle of eye wash. You must also include any prescription or over-the-counter medications you require for your individual health conditions. Remember that the pharmacies will be closed or looted. Also include a dental kit to make temporary fillings or a denture repair kit if you have dentures. Finally, have a spare pair of eyeglasses in a well-padded location. You will need to do a lot of careful work and be reading the small print on your maps and survival instructions. That role of electrical tape (see next paragraph) can also be used for holding bandages, so I do not add a role of medical tape.

\*The combination of 3 Advil and 2 Tylenol can be taken safely and will provide ten times the pain relief of the same taken separately. This is for severe pain where prescription pain relievers are not available.

## **Miscellaneous Must Haves**

You should have a good map of the area within a few hundred miles of your home. Have a good quality compass. Neither one of these will be of much value unless you take the time to learn how to use them. I have a very small Tasco™ 8 x 12 monocular, but you may want to carry a small pair of binoculars instead. Anything that lets you see the route ahead will save you time and energy. Anything that lets you see who is coming or who is at the place you are going to before they see you could save your life. A whistle is a must for those cases where you do need to attract attention. I have a small AM/FM/Weather band radio. Even though you may need to be on your own, it is important to know the weather and what threats are developing and where. A role of electrical tape is great for making all sorts of repairs. I have a small sewing kit with needles, thread, safety pins and scissors for clothing repairs. The needles, pins and scissors are also handy for some first aid procedures. There is 50-feet of nylon parachute cord for shelter building, animal trapping and many other emergency needs. Even experienced "survivalist" don't remember everything they need to know, so I have included a copy of the GEMS™ miniature SAS Survival Guide that contains loads of information on first-aid, foraging, trapping, fishing and shelter building. I don't have room for a change of clothing, but I have included a wool cap because the body loses most of its heat through the top of the head. The pioneers used to say that if your feet are cold, put on your hat. They were right. But just in case I have two pairs of extra socks as well. I also managed to stuff in one Tyvek™ chemical suit. This does not weigh much and can be used for a nuclear, biological, chemical protection outer garment or an alternative garment to wear while drying or cleaning your main clothing. I have a very small folding shovel attached to the pack. This is required for sanitation, clearing ground for a camp and digging a shelter if necessary. You may want to save money and weight by just carrying a good garden trowel.

## **Weapons**

A subject of endless controversy. Some may want to go without a firearm. Okay, carry a good-sized can of pepper-spray and hope for the best, but this is survival and less responsible (using kind words here) citizens may be quite prepared to take what you have by force. Depending on your environment, you have two options for carrying a firearm under survival conditions.

If you are going to be evacuating through reasonably civilized areas you may want to go for a concealed carry (permit or no permit) with a small handgun inside the pack or in a pocket. A small .22 caliber hand-gun in the pack with a few hundred rounds will give you lots of small game hunting potential and some deterrent to would-be attackers. A .380 automatic in the pocket gives you a little more power, but is still easy to conceal. If law and order has broken down or you are moving directly into a rural or wilderness environment you may as well carry a full size 9mm or .40 caliber handgun on your belt and/or a rifle or shotgun in your hand. Selection of "survival" arms at this level is a subject for another time.

## **Surviving With Your Pack (a scenario)**

February 18<sup>th</sup> 20\_\_\_. It has been 12-days since the first signs of the epidemic were recognized. You wisely stocked up on a few items you did not already have before the panic started. You also filled up every container you could find with water and fueled up your vehicles. 8-days ago the hospitals started to get swamped and the stores were bought out of food, bottled water, medical supplies, flashlights, firearms and generators. All of the people in those stores only accelerated the spread of the unknown virus. The government is not sure whether the source is a terrorist attack or some new mutated flu virus. They have called out the National Guard and requested that all non-essential persons stay at home. You have been able to stay in your house because you had enough food supplies, but 3-days ago the electric power went off because the power company employees stayed home or were sick. Police, fire, and emergency medical services are no longer functioning and criminal attacks and looting is breaking out in your community. You can see smoke from uncontrolled fires a few blocks away and you hear shooting. You have been using some of the items from your survival pack already, but you have kept it packed and ready. Today the water stopped running and a fire is spreading down your street. You threw your pack and a few other items in your vehicle and tried to drive out to a safer area, but after a few miles disabled vehicles and gang activities blocked the roads. You had to abandon your vehicle and take your pack and a rifle down alleys until you reached an abandon railroad right of way that is on your map. The first night was spent in an abandoned building were you drank from your canteen and ate one of your heater-meals. You wrapped in your space blanket and got some sleep. Eating an energy bar you continued your evacuation. You wear your mask and clean your hands frequently to avoid contamination from others who may have been in the same locations. Once, several teenage gang members who wanted your pack confronted you. A few warning shots were enough to send them running this time. You use your binoculars to avoid hazards and find safe routes ahead. You walked far enough to get out of the suburban area, into a semi-rural area where there are some wooded areas. You selected a well concealed location and set up a camp. The plastic tarp seals your improvised shelter, you are able to use your stove or build a small fire to cook your food.

Water gathered from a nearby creek is filtered with your water purification system and you are survivable warm with your survival blanket and insulated liner. You listen to your small radio and find out that epidemic is slowly diminishing. Hundreds of thousands have died of the disease, rioting and starvation. Most of those who were able to stay isolated for 30-days or more were able to avoid contamination and the violence. You elect to stay in the woods for another 10-days using your pack equipment to hunt and fish.

Of course this is one of the “worst case” scenarios and does not involve the more complex issues of a family, but try running this or any other serious disaster scenario without that “survival pack”. You are out there hungry, freezing, thirsty, getting contaminated, fighting, getting injured, being desperate. Having a lot less options.

\* Keep your fires small and use the stove after dark. A fire and smoke can be seen for miles and will attract unwanted visitors.



Two “survival packs”. Left: military surplus “ALICE” pack is low cost, durable and has lots of compartments, but is not comfortable for most civilians. Right: commercially available hunter’s pack has a better profile, more padding and is easier to carry.



A typical “survival pack outside of its protective tote bin. Associated weapons alternatives are a .22 caliber pistol, .22 caliber survival rifle and a .12 gauge riot gun. The larger crank/solar radio and fire extinguisher are for home use, not from the pack.

### **The Mission of Live Free, USA**

*It is the mission of Live Free, USA is to promote and support self-reliance, self-sufficiency, self-protection for responsible people of all races, religions and nationalities.*



**Live Free, Box 3295, Munster, IN 46321, USA.  
E-mail [lfnow@aol.com](mailto:lfnow@aol.com)**

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