

The Survival Camp

Live Free, USA has field- tested all levels of survival camping including the construction of a full base camp under simulated hostile conditions. The photos in this article are from those exercises.

In past issues we have looked at survival packs, home survival plans, evacuations, urban survival and a wide variety of survival emergency scenarios. Under most emergency situations it is best to remain in the shelter provided by your home and use the supplies and equipment there. Once you have elected to take to the road, you are placing yourself and your family at the mercy of the environment and a variety of hazards with the limited supplies you can carry. Unless you have a well-established route to a well-established and supplied retreat, you should regard taking a hike as the last resort. There are several scenarios that would justify or even necessitate evacuation and relocation under emergency conditions. Your home could be in immanent danger of destruction from floods, fires or looters. You may run out of supplies. Roving gangs or spreading epidemics could make the area unsafe. Some kind of “police state” action could make moving to the hills preferable to remaining in towns.

So let’s look at the various types of camps or bivouacs that one might establish. There are three, basic kinds of camps one may establish or be involved in establishing. There is the “hasty camp” that you put up nightly while on the move or when weather forces you to halt. There is the “Survival Camp” that an individual or family establishes where they intend to stay for a while to shelter, rest, gather food and perhaps meet others. And there is the full-blown “Base-Camp” where a group of families or an organization sets up a long-term base to provide all life sustaining supplies and services for an indefinites time. Each of these camps requires shelter, water, food, warmth, sanitation, and security. In many cases camouflage and concealment will be beneficial to survival.

The Hasty Camp

The hasty camp can take many forms, depending on the weather, location and outside hazards. Since such camps are inevitably established in close proximity to routs where others desperate people may be moving, concealment and security must take a high priority. The immediate availability of water is not necessary since you should have been gathering water on the march and you will be doing so the next day. So you should select an area well away from your trail or any other trails or roads. If there is any possibility of a hostile population you should have a dark cold camp with no fire and no candles or lanterns. Use small mini-lights or red-lens flashlights if you must, but try to have everything set up before dark. If you must have a fire to cook or boil water do so before dark and minimize smoke. You should locate a site well before dark and scout the surrounding area to be sure that you are truly in a safe spot. There could be a road, or occupied camp just over the hill. Of course you should select a thicket or natural concealed spot. Abandoned buildings or natural shelters can be used

only if they are well off main roads. Remember, if you think it's a good place to go, so will others.

Regardless of how well selected your camp is you must put security first. After-all if it was safe out here you would be home in bed. Unfortunately there is not much time to "fortify" a hasty camp. Be sure you establish your escape routes before dark. Use brittle twigs and branches to put up natural looking barriers that will make approaches difficult and noisy.



A hasty abates of deadfall and branches can slow down intruders and make approaches noisy

Have your weapon(s) immediately at hand. You should have all of your supplies not used for shelter, packed to go. If you have to run you will know where you are going next and have your weapon and most of your supplies with you. In fact you should never have any survival supplies you are not immediacy using out of your pack. Of course if you are not alone, take turns on watch through the night. Minimize your impact on the camp area and cover up or carry out and waste or trash. Signs of a well-supplied camp could make other want to follow your trail. In a hasty camp you have your water and food packed in. You may be lucky enough to find some edible plants, catch a fish or small game, but that's not the priority. The hasty camp is about shelter, warmth, security and preparing food that you have. While you still need to burry human waste sanitation is not a serious problem in a short stay.

Note: The above assumes that "hostile conditions" exist. Under such conditions any campfire and smoke can be seen for miles and will attract serious trouble. Of course if "rescue" is needed and/or concealment is not necessary a campfire

may be desirable. Extreme cold may justify the risk of a small fire if it is in a pit or well surrounded by logs. Remember that the fire will light up overhead trees and branches like a sign advertising your location.



With more time sharpened branches can prevent infiltration or rushing attacks on your camp

The Survival Camp

The Survival Camp is a much more complicated proposition than the Hasty Camp. While it starts out based on what you have brought with you, its success depends on a good location, available water, food sources, building supplies, and many other considerations. Unless there are prepositioned caches of food, tools and other supplies, it will require hunting, foraging, improvising and building skills. You need to spend more time on selection of a site. You may need to try several “hasty camps” before you are sure that a location is safe for this more permanent campsite. In this case you need to have access to water and be able to hunt, trap, fish and forage for food in the area. You may also need to “forage” in nearby towns and abandoned buildings, etc. for materials such as wire, plastic, cloth, rope, containers, metal and other materials. Depending on the situation you may or may not want to interact with other survivors or occupants in the area. Remember that these folks may be in desperate situations and may not welcome your foraging and hunting in the same area. Of course there may also be openly hostile and criminal groups roaming about that you want to avoid.

Your camp should be located well back from any trails, roads or occupied areas. In this case you probably will be needing to have fires, and some noise and odors will be unavoidable. But keep fires and smoke to a minimum and do not wear trails to and from your camp. Worn trails, trash, signs of foraging will all attract attention. These are particularly troublesome in fall and winter when there is less foliage and tracks in the snow are very hard to conceal. The gathering of firewood and building materials will soon clear the area of deadwood and branches, giving more evidence of your camp. After a few weeks your impact on the area will be hard to conceal. Two solutions to these hazards are:

- Move your camp every few weeks. Doing this gives you fresh foraging and hunting territory while reducing your risk of being raided by hostile groups. You should search out and designate your next campsite as soon as you settle in the current one. You may even want to cache some supplies there and make it your emergency evacuation assembly point.
- If constant moving of the camp is impractical you can minimize your foraging, hunting and other activities within a few miles of the camp and go out on foraging and hunting expeditions to remote areas well away from your camp

Another feature of the survival camp is that it justifies the time and effort to establish basic fortification. You should be able to setup and man a lookout post that will spot intruders well before they can detect the camp. You can use deadwood, branches, ditches and other material to slowdown any form of intrusion long enough to be identified, resisted or for you to evacuate. You should consider having trenches or other bullet resistant "cover" available for all camp members. Finally, you must have a plan for evacuation and a plan for camp defense established and practiced.



Larger camp attract more skills like field dentistry and medical support

Sanitation is another issue that becomes critical in a long-term camp. Human waste, cooking waste, the offal from cleaning fish and game will attract unwanted insects, animals and disease that will soon render the camp untenable. These wastes must be buried well away from the occupied camp and water supplies. Clear procedures must be in place as soon as camp is established. Since waste disposal and personal hygiene issues will probably be addressed outside of the camps main defensive perimeter it will be necessary to have an armed guard accompany anyone visiting these facilities. It is a standard procedure for a hostile intruder to take down a person who is outside the camp and then infiltrate in there clothing as if returning.



A base camp will require a dedicated security force and 24-hour guarding schedules

The Base Camp

This is a large multi-family camp like those used by refugees, survivors and resistance groups in recent wars. Some of these camps were occupied by several hundred people and included, shops, hospitals, farms and schools. These camps operated in the same forests for several years. While these worked well in Europe in World War Two, they may be impractical if (1) there is a hostile force in existence and (2) the current level of technology (e.g. infrared, spy drones, helicopters, etc.) is still functional. Such a camp would leave too big of a “foot print” and have too much impact to be secure for long. So to consider this kind of a “Base Camp” we have to assume that there is a reasonably friendly environment and/or a non-functional or over stretched technology. In other words a friendly or at-least neutral population and a friendly or non-functional state. Under these circumstances a base camp could offer significant long-term survival and recovery hope fare better than smaller camps. The capacity to provide specialized skills and group efforts in such areas as food procurement, medical aide, security, and equipment repair would attract more and more survivors from surrounding areas.



Trenches and shelters can link various parts of the camp and provide shelter and escape routes for emergencies

There are a number of challenges and hazards to the existence of a large base camp. A leadership structure, organization and rules must be established. Theft, and other transgressions must be dealt with. Who can come in and who cannot come in may be an issue. There is a real danger of would-be warlords and demigods taking control. The local population may become hostile to the camps occupation of land and use of resources. Obviously the goal of the camp is to preserve freedom, security and safety for its occupants, but joining the camp will inevitably require voluntary agreement to abide by some rules and to contribute work and skills as needed.



Established camp sites allow time to build more permanent shelters. Note the support for a radio antenna in the background

Urban Survival Camps

A “camp” could be an occupied structures in a suburban or urban area. Most of the same rules, techniques and cautions would apply. If you are located deep in an urban area you might have to hasty camp in town for several days until you reached more open country. In the end you might even have to set up a semi-permanent camp in a building or wooded area in town. One part of town may be untenable, but another area may be defensible and relatively safe. For example: industrial areas could offer shelter and lots of usable supplies and are usually unoccupied after a disaster.

Conclusion

The evolution from hasty camps, to survival camps to base camps depends on the length of time that “emergency” conditions exist and the extent of the “disaster zone”. The average “survival pack” will support survival on-foot for from three to six days. A few more if the weather is mild and some additional food can be had. So an emergency that last less than one week or where safety and supplies can be reached in less than one-hundred miles would consist of a series of hasty camps. When there is no sign of relief or rescue within a few days or a few dozen miles one must start planning for a more established survival camp. Base camps would develop in a number of ways. They might

evolve as more and more survivors get together and pool resources in an area. This certainly would start to happen within a few months if conditions did not improve. Base camps might be preplanned by organizations that established supply caches, plans and communications networks around a predestinated site. Base camps could also be established by surviving local, and county governments to help survivors while maintaining sanitation and safety for the area. Of course anything established to confine survivors and confiscate supplies is a "concentration camp" regardless of what they call it. While we can hope that Americans are never driven to become desperate refugees wandering the roads and trails to escape a destroyed or degenerating civilization, it has happened over-and-over again throughout the rest of the world and it is not as far fetched as it was just a few years ago. Once you have accepted the need to have a "survival pack" you must then accept the need to consider the possibility of using it in an evacuation and to camp until civilization is reached or recovers.