

COUNT 10

by Thais K. Baer

When the Seattle Mountaineers first presented a climbing course back in the 1930's, they discovered that many miserable, even tragic complications resulted from climbers going out ill-equipped. Eager to carry the "real important stuff" like ropes and hardware, unschooled beginners often neglected the less prestigious items.

The climbing course instructors drew up a list of necessities and called it "The Ten Essentials". Toting these was an absolute rule for climbers in the Mountaineer's courses. Since then, the Ten Essentials have been adopted by most high-country wilderness travelers.

There's no mystery about the Ten Essentials. Most backpackers with a modicum of common sense already carry them, modified somewhat to suit the demands of their terrain. At any rate, here they are.

1. Map
2. Compass
3. Flashlight
4. Emergency food
5. Supplemental clothing

(wool hat, gloves and socks) and shelter (tube tent or space blanket)

6. Sunglasses and suncream
7. Knife
8. Matches
9. Firestarter
10. First aid kit (includes whistle, needles and thread and safety pins.)

Most of these items are self-explanatory, but a few comments are in order. A flashlight with dead batteries is as useful as fins on a fox. Fresh batteries, preferably alkaline cells, are the order of the day. So is a spare bulb, which can be secreted in a corner of the first aid kit. Emergency food means just that—food wrapped or sealed securely and left in the pack against an emergency. I'd be inclined to add a lightweight woolen undershirt and/or longjohns to my supplemental clothing for certain trips, and a container of dental floss makes admirable rigging line for a tube tent. Us lowcountry wanderers might opt for insect repellent in lieu of or in addition to sunscreen, and

my preference is for Coghlan's waterproof matches rather than conventional kitchen matches in a match safe. I carry both, though, because waterproof matches make my pipe tobacco taste foul. A sharp knife and the ability to whittle out a fuzz stick may obviate the need for firestarter, but there are times when you don't want to waste even the few minutes necessary to hack out a fuzz stick. We make no recommendations about the contents of a first aid kit, but if you require medication, you should carry extra in your kit against an unscheduled bivouac.

All of these items fit nicely into a jacket-sized stuff bag. My experience indicates that it's best to keep them together so that you don't wind up out in the boonies without matches or without needle and thread to sew up a split trouser seam on a raw, windy day.

Is all this really necessary? Well, read Thais Baer's account of a day that she had to count to ten and ask yourself where she would have been without the Ten Essentials. [HNR]

What pleasant relief it was to step from the car, stand up and stretch after a long, hot drive. *Just smell that evergreen air! Look at that mountain sky! A person couldn't ask for prettier weather.*

The day was new and held promises of trail and stream, sunlight and shadow, meadow and sky. My partner Jerry had gone to Maiden Lake earlier in the week to set up a base camp for his summer trail crew. He was expecting me to come in and visit over the weekend. Since we lived on opposite sides of the mountain range, I told him to expect me on a shortcut trail of which I knew. How good it would be to see Jerry again!

Should I bother with my day pack this time? It's such a clear day I'd look rather silly with a pack. But in my billfold was a little card certifying that I had just completed a course in Basic Mountaineering. One of the things I had heard over and over was, Carry the Ten Essentials on Every Trip Short or Long.

I shrugged, reached into the car and pulled out my blue backpack. Off at last!

There's something magnetic about a trailhead that makes me want to hurry, hurry, hurry. See what's around the next bend! How I loved it! The pathway, the quiet, the tromp of my heavy boots lulled me into distant thoughts. The trail led up steeply to a beautiful vista. I stopped to rest briefly, my heart and lungs and legs working their best again after weeks of boredom. My head felt clear and free, my eyes grew restful with the view.

There are many joys in a familiar trail and this was one of my favorites. A few more steep switchbacks and I climbed over the ridge. *Look at that late snow!* It covered much of the trail on the shady side of the mountain, but surely, I'd have no trouble crossing it.

The snow was old and soft and yielding as I made my way in the general direction of the trail. Not too many minutes had passed before I realized how hot and bright the sun really was out in the middle of all that snow. My eyes didn't feel too well in the glare so I changed to dark glasses. I hadn't used them since my last big climb. I peeled off my long-sleeved shirt, stuffed it into my pack and started on my way again.

The snow field was immense, bigger than I'd ever seen it before. It was getting steeper and to be safe I should drop down into the trees and get around the worst part. The jumble of trees and rocks at the bottom of the gully slowed me down. With nearly every step I plunged knee-deep into the soft snow.

Lunch time came and passed. I had hoped to be nearly at the lake. Surely I wasn't too far from it, so I decided not to waste any more time but try to make faster progress. Finally I was out of the soft snow and headed for bare ground again. By chance I looked behind me and over to the left. *That's strange!* I'd never noticed that lake there before! It had no trees around it, just big boulders and a waterfall. How could I have missed seeing such a gem of a lake on my earlier trips? Something tightened in my throat. Could I be lost? *No, I'm not lost! Just use your head. Be calm, sit down and think.* Resisting the urge to run back over the ridge again I sat on a rock to ponder my dilemma.

I thought it best to get out the map and take a really good look at it. The noonday sun didn't help me in getting oriented. All it did was burn. I could feel my face and arms beginning to glow from the exposure of the morning. I applied a good layer of sunscreen. It soothed more than my skin.

I had hoped to eat lunch at Jerry's camp. He had said not to worry about bringing food, but I was certainly hungry. How I wished I hadn't been so unobserving and blundered into such a mess. I was pretty sure there were some odds and ends of stuff somewhere in the bottom of my pack. I pawed around and found a small box of very hard raisins, a shapeless chocolate peanut bar and some stale-tasting nuts. I nibbled these and began to feel more cheerful.

While chewing my lunch I unfolded the topo map and began to figure. My compass was new and I'd never used it, but I was glad we learned to use one like it in mountaineering class. Thinking slowly and deliberately and following all the steps, the shape of the land finally began to fit what I was seeing on the map.

Obviously, I was confused when I first started over the snowfield and went seriously off course when I dropped down below the steep part. I

plotted my course and found my approximate position. *What is the best thing to do? It will take a half day to backtrack, find the trail and start for Jerry's camp. I'll end up traveling in the dark. Or I could go cross-country by the map and arrive at the lake pretty nearly on time.*

Confident in my new prowess with map and compass I chose to head down the new canyon and enter the lake basin at its far end. I had no trouble traveling through the timbered areas, except I snagged my pantleg on a deadfall and took a nosedive. Luckily, I suffered only a deep scratch on my upper right arm, but I couldn't get it to stop bleeding. My shirt was becoming a mess so I stopped, took out tape and gauze and covered it up.

Soon I came to a side canyon and a roaring little snowmelt stream with steep banks and a bed of treacherously loose boulders. Using a stout stick to help steady myself I tried to rock-hop across. But despite my caution both my boots filled with water and my pants became even more wet.

I had been so busy finding a route through the canyon that I hadn't watched the sky. Suddenly, everything went dim and the shadows disappeared. A big cloud bank was coming over the divide and I immediately felt the urge to speed ahead and try to beat the weather.

As long as I kept moving I was warm. I pushed on at a faster pace. I had some reason to feel uneasy, with the weather moving in and the afternoon nearly gone. Precious time was wasted crawling through boulder fields and deadfall jungles. I would just get through a patch of boulders when I would have to face another avalanche chute full of junk. I was so weary! *Ha! Jerry sure will be surprised when he sees me coming in like this! But I'd better get going.*

Perhaps there was only one more side canyon to work around before I'd drop down into the lake basin. Surely the going would be easier then. Mountains are deceiving; the distances so unbelievable! In the clear air ten miles looks like an hour's walk. That was my trouble. Seemingly, one mile turned out to be ten hours' walk!

The rocks and the woods and the sky glowered at me. I kept expecting to see the lake any time, but the basin below me was an awfully big place.

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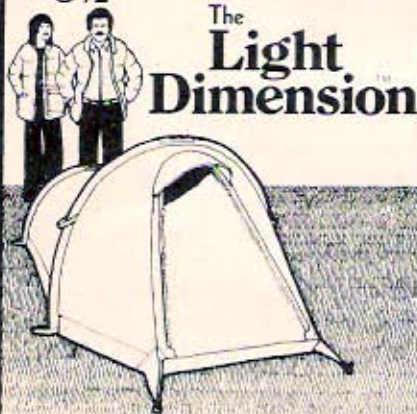
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Every time I stopped to look, the wind bit into me and I shivered. The lake was down there somewhere, Jerry's snug camp was down there, but I was just too worn out to find it. Between me and it lay the most discouragingly big boulder field I'd ever seen.

Another gust of wind made my pants feel like ice against my legs. My feet were so numb and—then it hit me like a shot! Hypothermia! I was a prime candidate. *I can be finished right here if I don't get hold of things and take care of myself.* Those cold, wet jeans helped me make a choice.

The landscape was pretty dark before I finally found enough bits of wood, knots and limbs to keep a fire all night. With a sudden twinge of panic I heard the rumbles of thunder in the distance. I set to work with a will to get my fire operating.

Quickly, I found my knife and my can of fire starter. I shaved some splinters from a pitchy twig and piled them over the can. I added a few pencil-sized sticks and before long had a promising fire laid. After some frantic groping I found my flashlight and by its beam was able to find my match box. Wow! Was I glad to see dry matches! Sheltering the wood with my body I struck a match, held it to the canned heat jelly and prayed for fire. It began sending out streams of black smoke, then a few cherry-red embers formed and finally some tiny, licking flames. I had a fire! Gradually it grew into a thing of warmth and I began to feel more relaxed.

Since rain was obviously on its way, I decided it would be smart to rig up some kind of shelter, no matter how primitive. I'd often wondered what good a plastic tube tent would be in a situation like that. How could it be used as a tent and still allow a person to keep warm by the fire? That was simple. I unfolded it and split it. Presto! It was a big plastic tarp. I needed some cord to tie it up. Carefully, I unthreaded the drawstring from the hem of my jacket and when cut into two pieces was long enough to tie up two corners of the plastic to branches. I anchored the bottom edges with rocks.

Then there was a dry place to sit, out of the rain and sheltered from the wind. My little fire was doing fine. I was ready to get settled for the night. I reached down into my pack a last time and came out with woolies!

Long, wooly underwear, top and bottom, wool gloves, stocking cap and socks. Those beautiful socks! I hugged them and sat under the tarp shelter to shed my wet clothes. Soggy boots, sopping socks and miserable stiff jeans were put aside. Nothing, just nothing ever felt so good as that wool! When I started to slip my sweatshirt over my head I suddenly realized I was still wearing my sunglasses. The night wasn't so very dark after all! A few stars were out already, dodging around between the clouds.

Sitting on my packsack under the tarp I finally settled down to a long night of stoking the fire. It definitely wasn't a comfortable night but I got along and even slept a little. Rain fell steadily during part of the night but not enough to dampen the fire. When the sky began to lighten and the horizon took shape again, I was very thankful.

My head felt leaden, my eyes were blurry and I thought constantly of food. During the night I had finished up the last of the food and was glumly considering the fact that a person can live more than two weeks without food if he has water and shelter. I mused so deeply on this that my mind didn't register for a few moments that I'd heard a whistle.

Somebody's whistling! Not a marmot, Not that loud! Must be Jerry, got to go find him! Frantically, I rummaged through my first-aid kit and came up with my little tin whistle. I gave it a few mighty blasts and waited. Soon I heard two answering whistles from just below the rocks, then a shout. I jumped up, and ran out to the rock pile in my sock feet and hollered my loudest. Then I could see in the dim light a yellow hat bouncing around over the boulders and before long he was with me.

"Just look at the way you look!" He tipped his head back and cackled until I half hoped he'd choke, but I was so glad to see him I didn't even threaten a fight. It was so good to hear Jerry again, even if he was laughing at me!

He helped me gather up the gear and I managed to struggle into my soggy clothes. He had seen my fire in the night and knew I wouldn't make it to camp until morning.

With great ceremony he held up my lumpy pack, handed it to me and said, "Are you a believer?"