

The Ten Essentials

By Scotten W. Jones

The ten essentials are gear you should carry with you anytime you are hiking. Even a hike planned for a few hours can turn into an overnight hike due to injury or weather. The ten essentials keeps you prepared for the unforeseen. There are some variations in the ten essentials but they are all typically pretty similar. Our ten essentials list is:

1. Navigation – a map and compass and know how to use them. A GPS is nice to have as a secondary navigation tool, but what do you do if the batteries die or you have trouble getting a good signal. Don't rely on a GPS as your sole means of navigation.
2. Shelter – a tarp and some rope to create a shelter. Integral Designs Guide Sil Tarp 2 is very light and well designed for shelter use although it is expensive. A 10' x 10' blue tarp with grommets in the corners is a less expensive although heavier option available at home improvement stores. Camping stores often sell coated nylon tarps that are intermediate in weight and cost between the Sil tarp and blue tarps. Parachute cord is light and strong and works well as the rope.
3. Food – high calorie – high energy food for a couple of extra meals. I like Cliff bars because they are made of high quality ingredients and avoid a lot of bad stuff like hydrogenated oils but they may not be suitable if anyone in your party has food allergies. Camping stores sell a wide variety of energy bars and goos.
4. Extra Clothes – a warm hat, gloves, spare socks, long underwear (wear under your clothes in the winter or under your shorts and T-shirt in the summer for extra warmth), they should all be wool or synthetic. A rain jacket and pants and an insulating jacket (Gore Tex or equivalent for the rain gear and a fleece or synthetic fill for the insulating jacket). A bandana and hat with a visor for sun protection. Do not rely on cotton for warmth, when it gets wet cotton loses its insulating properties. Down is a great insulator but also loses its warmth when wet. Down is OK especially in the winter as long as you are sure you can keep it dry with a rain jacket or the down garment has a water proof shell. Cotton shorts and T shirts are fine in the summer as long as you carry synthetic insulating options with you in case of changes in the weather. On a mountain ridge when clouds move in, seventy five degree weather can become fifty degree rain in an instant.
5. Light – two sources is best, a headlamp as a minimum with an added hand lamp is ideal. LED based lamps are really efficient. Your headlamp and hand lamp should use the same type of batteries and you should carry a spare set. I carry a head lamp and hand lamp that are both LED based and both run off of AAA batteries. Lithium batteries run longer, weight less and have longer storage life. Make sure your headlamp has a high enough output to hike in the dark if necessary.
6. Fire – two ways to make a fire. A water and wind proof lighter, water proof matches, a magnesium fire block, etc.
7. Water – at least 3 liters of water and a way to purify more water if needed. Water bladders in a back pack are great for carrying your main water supply but also bring a wide mouth bottle in case you need to capture and purify some additional water. Steri pens run on batteries and use

ultraviolet light to kill bacteria, viruses and protozoa, mechanical filters remove bacteria and protozoa but not viruses (how important virus removal is – is subject to some debate), or water purification tablets (adds unpleasant tastes to the water). None of these methods remove chemical contaminants so make sure your water source is not subject to industrial pollutants, fertilizer run-off from farming or run-off from roads. Wilderness mountain streams are generally OK but know the area you are in.

8. First Aid – the basics include band aid strips (for small cuts and abrasions), gauze pads and rolls (for larger wounds), adhesive tape (to secure gauze), triangle bandages (at least 2 for slings and to secure splints), elastic bandage (for strains and sprains), moleskin (for blisters), ibuprofen (pain relief and fever), Benadryl (allergy, sleep aid, anti-nausea, motion sickness) and antibiotic ointment (prevents infections in minor cuts or to lubricate minor burns and abrasions). A SAM splint is optional but recommended (splinting breaks and sprains). A SAM splint works best on arms and smaller injuries. For leg breaks a foam sleeping pads makes a great splint and is another optional item to carry. A foam pad is also good for providing insulation from the cold ground if you are sitting or lying down. Tweezers and a magnifying glass are useful additions. At least a one day supply of any essential prescription medications you take should also be included.
9. Signaling – a signal mirror (the better quality the mirror the easier they are to use and the farther away the signal can be seen) and an emergency whistle (it is a lot easier to blow on a whistle than to keep calling out). Do not rely on a cell phone, the batteries can die or you may not get a signal when you need it.
10. Knife – a multitool such as a Leatherman Wave works well and provides a lot of handy tools.

Before going out hiking make sure you leave your itinerary with someone you trust. They should know where you are going and when you expect to be back and what to do if you aren't back in time.

It is also recommended that you hike with a partner in case of an accident or illness you will have someone to take care of you or go for help.