

Challenge: Don't Forget Your...



Content A look at the personal and group equipment teams carry for safety and rescue.

Activities

Scouts and Guides

- Choose the equipment you would take on a search in your local area and say why.
- Agree changes to your kit list for varied types of search and times of year.
- Demonstrate the best way to pack a rucksack.

Senior Section, Explorers and Network

- In small groups, from the list or pile of objects, choose the 10 things you would most want to take on a search and say why. Talk about the ideal features of each item.
- Agree changes to your kit list for varied seasons and environments, such as mountain, urban, cave or water.
- If you were lost what's the one thing you'd really like to have with you (other than a phone or GPS!). It doesn't have to be something from the list here.

Equipment

Background information (below), personal and team equipment or kit cards (see separate sheet), kit notes (below).

Setup

This activity can be done in groups of up to 12 but can be run simultaneously by patrols.

Each group creates a scenario for a lost person, focusing particularly on the environment and time of year.

One person from each group is the Search Manager who delivers the brief to another patrol. Set the scene: each patrol is a search team who have received a call out. They have arrived at the control point by car with all of their varied equipment in the boot. After hearing the search brief they must then decide what equipment will be suitable and why.

After an amount of time decided by the leader, each group explains why they've selected the equipment.

Each group should also explain the ideal features of 4-5 items. E.g. a waterproof jacket should have a hood, taped seams (to avoid water leaking in), be breathable (so your sweat can escape keeping you cool and dry) and be long enough at the back to cover you when you bend over to work... Some more examples are in 'Kit notes' at the end but use common sense and experience.

Background

Outdoor adventure and SAR kit has many similarities. Before rescuing someone it's vital to have suitable personal kit so searchers don't become casualties themselves.

However, there is a common saying: "A big rucksack is the sign of an untaught beginner". The more weight carried means more effort to carry it therefore less energy can be put into searching and rescuing.

Searchers usually maintain an array of kit ready to go at any moment but after each initial briefing they select the most appropriate kit for the situation. Consideration is given to location, weather, terrain, altitude and the potential condition of the casualty. Also, on a normal outdoor activity you plan how long you want to be out but with search this isn't an option so you need to be prepared.

Kit CARDS

On the separate Kit Cards sheet are pictures of personal and team equipment searchers might use (though they are in no particular order). You can bring in similar items of your own or print out and cut up the images. The advantage of using the cards is that you can create multiple sets to allow several smaller groups to play at once.

The pictures represent a general selection of equipment that can be adapted to varied search environments; feel free to add items as your knowledge allows or to ask young people what they think is missing.

Also included are a few 'red herrings' just for fun.

Notes on each piece of equipment are given after the pictures. However if this is a topic you are unsure about, consider gaining the support of someone with outdoor activity experience. Your District or County should be able to advise you.

General points to remember

- It's common to be operational overnight when increased cold can be an issue in any environment.
- Temperatures in upland and mountainous areas can vary within minutes and decrease with elevation (dropping 0.5 – 1°C for every 100m climbed).
- What falls as rain in lowland areas can be freezing rain or snow in higher areas.
- You work up a sweat as soon as you're active but quickly get cold as soon as you stop with a casualty.
- Water and cave environments bring all their own hazards such as low temperatures, hidden trips, slippery areas, oxygen issues (!), confinement etc.
- Safety equipment (buoyancy aid, helmet and a throw line plus a wet suit in colder conditions) must always be worn when working near to water.
- As a general rule, the total weight of your rucksack should not exceed 30% of your body weight.
- A rucksack should be large enough to fit all your kit inside; dangling equipment can be hazardous.
- Ideally try to use the lightest equipment possible. It may seem insignificant but using a plastic whistle instead of a metal one all adds up.

Kit notes

If decision making is proving difficult at first, it may aid decisions and understanding to encourage equipment to be split into categories such as below, but there are no set definitions of these:

- Clothing
- Personal 'tools'
- Group equipment
- Specialist equipment

Here are notes to aid discussion of the uses and ideal properties of equipment. Not every item is mentioned; further information can be found on websites and in outdoor instruction manuals. Group members may also have their own knowledge and experience.

Clothing

Clothing should be fast drying. Avoid cotton and denim as they hold water.

Choose many light layers rather than a few heavy ones as you can control your temperature better. Layers usually include a base, mid and outer. Each layer has a job. The base layer wicks sweat away from your skin to keep you dry and warm. The mid layer is for insulation and the outer layer allows moisture to escape while keeping wind and rain out. The outer layer should be large enough to allow layers to be worn comfortably underneath.

As soon as you stop remove wet layers and add a greater number of dry ones, before your sweat starts to cool. Hats and gloves are important.

Dry socks are one of the best things! Searching means you are on your feet most of the time so wet socks mean cold feet and the possibility of blisters.

Not everything on the list is necessary all the time. If it's a bone dry day in the lowlands with no forecast rain and it's 20 degrees, you may decide you don't need an outer layer. This is a sensible decision as carrying unnecessary weight in the heat means more sweating, lost energy and potential dehydration. However, you should carry at least one warmer layer, e.g. a light fleece in case the search lasts into the night and the temperature drops. You don't want to be caught out. Similarly if it's not snowing you probably don't need snow goggles!

Sunglasses help remove glare, particularly near water or in open fields allowing you to see better definition and possible hiding places.

Personal 'tools'

Duct tape is a very reliable fixer! In a desperate situation it can hold bandages in place, fix a rucksack, create a sling, seal evidence bags, waterproof items... its uses are nearly endless. A multi tool or penknife is duct tape's good companion.

For any electrical equipment always carry spare batteries (torches, radios).

Staying hydrated and 'fuelled' is vital. SAR is an active pursuit. Staying hydrated keeps you alert and helps your body efficiently get energy from the snacks you should be eating.

Every individual should carry a small first aid kit with plasters, a few dressings and a bandage for example. If a team member is injured, their own kit should be used. The group first aid kit is used for non-group members and usually caters for 3-4 casualties.

Radios are the primary method of communication with Control and other search teams however mobile phones are a useful backup. Numbers should be shared in case the team is separated.

Helmets are needed if working on cliffs, caves or in woodland – the latter also requires eye protection, especially at night.

Chalk is useful for building searches, allowing a door or wall to be marked to show it has been searched.

Every team member should wear high visibility outer clothing in order for teams to be easily identified and seen by members of the public, casualties, the emergency services, land owners and vehicle drivers. Camouflage clothing is not permitted.

Teams who are looking for missing people who may not be out in open ground, for example children or dementia sufferers, require a pole of some kind to enable them to move more easily through in over grown areas and to move hazards.

Group equipment

Basic group equipment could include: local maps, two-way radios, sun cream, GPS, insect repellent, casualty first aid equipment, a large and powerful torch/floodlight and flares.

In trying to keep the weight of rucksacks down it is useful to share equipment where possible.

Specialist equipment

As it says, there is some equipment that is only required in certain situations. For example:

Winter mountain rescue

Avalanche transceiver
Snowshoes and / or skis
Avalanche shovel
Crampons
Ice Axe
Survival shelter

Cliff/mountain/cave environments

Carabiners
Harnesses
Climbing ropes

Areas with large open spaces

Dogs

Water rescue

Buoyancy aids
Helmet suitable for water activities
Kayaks
Throw lines
Boats

Severe injury rescue

Neck braces
Splints
Stretchers – various types
Ropes

Areas with miles of identifiable paths or roads

Bikes