

Bargain 10 Essentials **Hiking Safety Equipment for Any Budget**

The Ten Essentials can be traced back to climbing courses conducted in the 1930's by the Seattle Mountaineers Club. These key safety items should always be carried when in the wilderness and will help you survive an unplanned overnight or assist another hiker in trouble. Their composition may change somewhat, depending on the time of year or the remoteness of the trip.

In the Hiking Safety Seminars conducted by the Denver Group of the Colorado Mountain Club, a popular element of the class is when instructors empty their packs and share their ten essentials. Climbers and hikers for decades, they have fine-tuned their equipment as well as having acquired some high quality items. It is not uncommon for new or prospective members to approach instructors after class and share that they are just getting started and cannot afford the level of gear instructors might have gathered over many years. Their concerns may be heightened from reading Club trip itineraries which routinely require all participants to carry the 10 essentials. No one wants to stand out by being ill equipped.

This hurdle to Club participation is particularly problematic in light of CMC's recent affirmation to be welcoming and inclusive to all Coloradoans. We are glad for all who have joined us in our love of the mountains and the backcountry. We do not want the high cost of gear to be an undue burden that will keep new members from joining our ranks and getting outdoors. Accordingly, the Hiking Seminar instructors have created a ten essentials list that is lower cost and meets the requirements for supporting safety in the wilderness. We have tested this gear in the field and found it suitable for easy and moderate hikes.

SHELTER: A temporary emergency shelter will help you survive an unplanned, though maybe uncomfortable, night out. There are commercially produced bivouac bags or thermal tarps that work well. Low cost alternatives are large, black trash bags. The best are heavy duty contractor bags. Larger and stronger than regular trash bags, they work best if you place your legs and torso in one and your upper body in the second, cutting a slit hole for your head. Contractor bags are sold in large boxes which contain more than one person will ever need. Ask for a couple at a construction site. Contractors will often give you a few at no cost. These bags can also serve as rain covers for your pack, which will keep your gear dry. In the sun, they can be used to melt snow for drinking water.

SUN PROTECTION: It is likely you already have sunglasses. Take them year round. Sunscreen is also necessary. Special mountain sunscreen is not required if you have a generic brand with a high SPF level and it is relatively new. Sunscreen can lose its effectiveness after a couple of years.

NAVIGATION/COMMUNICATION: The sound of a whistle will carry much further than a human can shout for rescue. Three whistle blasts mean "HELP!" Two blasts, in response, means "I am coming to help." A quality whistle can be bought on the REI Outlet website for \$6.50.

A compass, a backup and the knowledge to use them is invaluable. Get one with a clear, flat base plate, which is a key to locating North and setting and finding field bearings. The Suunto A-10 fills this role and is available at the REI COOP for \$24.00. A simple backup compass will provide direction confirmation for those times when you are lost and you swear your compass must be wrong. The backup compass can be very basic, such as those attached to a key chain or thermometer. Also, many cell phones have a compass feature. This can serve as your backup, if you are in cell tower range. Check to make sure it is calibrated properly.

A cell phone can also serve as a secondary navigation device. The free GIA GPS app shows your location using the phones satellite access. Free maps can be printed from your home computer by getting to know the CALTOPO website.

NUTRITION/ HYDRATION (extra water, extra food): A typical trail lunch is a sandwich augmented with trail mix and salty snacks. Carry a couple of power bars in case you are stuck overnight. If not used, they will keep in you pack for your next trip.

Two or three liters of water are usually adequate for a day hike. Used 32 oz. Gatorade bottles are light weight, have a large mouth (good for cleaning), and will last all hiking season. They are free after your initial purchase

of the drink and popular with long distance hikers practicing ultralight techniques. Water purification tablets, such as Potable Aqua, are less costly than a filter and useful if you need to replenish your original water supply from a spring or stream. EmergenC packets are light weight and add electrolytes and antioxidants to refills you make in the field.

INSULATION: It is wise to have extra clothes in reserve. A wool or fleece “watch cap” should go with you on any mountain trip, all year long. Spare socks can serve as mittens in an emergency. Rain gear, top and bottom, is necessary and can be pricey. An exception is Frogg Toggs. This simple jacket and pants set is at a price level unlike any other rain gear. In 2024, new ultra light Frogg Toggs rainsuits were available at Amazon for \$19.90. This gear is thin and must be handled carefully, but they have gained a cult following amongst long distance hikers, who swear by them. They have survived many 2000 mile plus long distance hikes. It is also wise to carry a light weight down jacket. In recent years, the quality of these items has improved to where even low cost ones will serve well. In 2024, several name brand outfitters carried good quality down jackets for as low as \$60.00. Be sure to check the Eddie Bauer, Sierra Designs, Outdoor Research, and Columbia sites or help save our planet and buy quality recycled gear at REI Resupply.

ILLUMINATION: Most any kind of flashlight will be adequate to get you started. Headlamps are preferred, as they provide you with hands free use. REI Outlet carries last year’s models for as low as \$13.73. As a favor to other members of your team or chance hikers, learn headlamp etiquette when wearing one in the presence of others.

FIRST AID KIT: Only carry first aid items you know how to use. Beginning day hikers can get by with a simple kit such as the Adventure Medical Kit Ultralight, available for \$8.95 at REI. Add three days’ worth of any prescription medication you take. A small bottle of hand sanitizer can disinfect wounds, serve as a fire starter and even clean your hands.

FIRE STARTERS/LIGHTER: A BIC type butane cigarette lighter can be purchased cheaply at a convenience store. Back it up with self-striking wooden matches in a waterproof container, such as a used plastic medicine bottle. You can create fire starters, which are useful for igniting materials in moist conditions, by bundling a dozen wooden matches and dipping the head in melted candle wax. Cotton balls coated with Vaseline and stored in a Ziplock bag also work well. Carry a pocket comb? They light easily and provide a strong flame for emergency fire starting.

REPAIR KIT/KNIFE : Hefty Bowie type knives are not necessary for basic hiking. A small Swiss Army style knife as found on the Gossamer Gear website for \$19.99, will serve many purposes and contains a few repair features, such as a screw driver head and scissors. A small roll of duct tape will mend torn clothing and shelters, as well as help stabilize broken hiking poles and wrenched wrists. If you have a big roll at home, wind several feet around your Gatorade bottle or hiking pole.