

Silverton Avalanche School 2013



Winter Backcountry Equipment and Self Rescue Considerations

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SELF RELIANCE: Every Backcountry Traveler's Responsibility

Anyone who spends enough time in the backcountry setting must expect to sooner or later be involved in a mishap, if not your own --- then someone else's. *It is imperative that a high degree of mutual responsibility be an integral part of your own group in preplanning and anticipating problems (hopefully preventing an accident), and if something does happen being able to deal with it.* Not to say organized rescue will not be required for a given scenario, but there could be an extended time you are with an injured patient while initiating a self rescue or waiting for rescue. Total dependence being on what knowledge and experience you have in initially dealing with a given problem and what equipment you have available to you --- what you have in your pack. Prolonged transport times, extreme mountain settings, and the need to rely on portable and often improvised equipment dictates a unique way of dealing with a wilderness evacuation problem. Your adaptability, improvisational skills, equipment and most importantly your ability to keep a cool head could very well dictate the outcome of a backcountry emergency.

For any wilderness mishap, to be able to effectively improvise takes a certain amount of background expertise and practice. This means having an understanding of what would be done in an ideal situation and then having the skills to safely deal with your current problem. For some problems, however (ie. spinal injuries, etc.) waiting or going for help will be the only answer. Most problems, however can be greatly alleviated by thoughtful improvisation with what is in your pack and in your head. The primary goal is to do your best and try to anticipate problems before they arise with the equipment available.

OBJECTIVES

- Provide the participant with some thoughtful ideas on what to pack for any winter backcountry skiing/boarding, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, or ice climbing outing.
- Provide the participant with a foundation from which further ideas can be generated.

GUIDELINES

- Always test your system with a non-injured member before utilizing it on the victim.
- Use appropriate splinting principles in dealing with orthopedic injuries.
- Be creative with available resources (packs, ski poles, ropes, ice tools, and etc.)
- Remember that most improvised litters are inappropriate for potentially spine injured patients. **Always consider professional rescue if the situation warrants.**
- Include improvisation construction materials in your pack.
- Practice improvisation techniques before you need to use them.

Winter Backcountry Equipment Recommendations:

Every backcountry traveler, in planning a trip, should consider what she/he takes in terms of an unplanned bivouac or extended stay emergency.

“Could I (or my partner) survive a night out or deal with an emergency with what we have in our packs?”

Most seasoned backcountry travelers all have variations of what makes up a versatile functional ski pack. Usually this is based on hindsight in what has been helpful (or what they wished they would have had) in the past. As we all realize, it is impractical to try and pack for every conceivable emergency, however there is one absolute in a winter survival/evacuation problem that will have to be addressed:

Any extended stay emergency will be compounded by exposure (possible hypothermia/frostbite) without adequate insulation and wind protection. Extra insulating layers, wind protection and shelter will be essential for an unplanned bivy and/or an immobile injured patient.

EQUIPMENT LIST CONSIDERATIONS:

The following list is only representative. Each person, through thoughtful consideration, should make their own list based on their specific needs.

◆ **Avalanche Rescue Gear:**

* Metal Shovel

* Avalanche Transceiver

* Collapsible Probes

- ◆ Map of area
- ◆ Compass
- ◆ Cell Phone
- ◆ Headlamp with extra batteries
- ◆ Small functional **First Aid Kit** (wound management / tape, etc.) – at least 2 kits in group
- ◆ Multi-purpose small Leatherman Tool or similar
- ◆ Lighter
- ◆ Small Candle
- ◆ (3) Large zip-ties
- ◆ Duct tape
- ◆ Small roll of flagging
- ◆ Extra calories
- ◆ Water bottle / Hydration system (fluid)
- ◆ **EXTRA Clothing:**
 - * Insulating layers (Down jacket or similar / extra synthetic long sleeve shirt)
 - * Warm Mittens
 - * Balaclava
 - * Wool Socks
- ◆ (1-2) Space Blankets
- ◆ Small Tarp or
- ◆ BIVY Sack (optional if not carrying a tarp)
- ◆ Small Lightweight Foam Pad (either from pack or separate)
- ◆ Small thermos of hot tea with honey - **Optional**

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS (may be designated group gear):

- ◆ Repair kit (pertinent to your mode of travel)
- ◆ 15-20m (45-60 ft) 7mm nylon accessory cord / 2 non-locking carabiners 1-locking carabiner
- ◆ Lightweight rescue sled system (commercial or improvised) - **Optional**
- ◆ (2) Talk-About Radios - **Optional**