Survival gear field guide

Choose a subject below or print its page. The field sketches are AI-assisted illustrations. Compare the exact model and finish when selecting equipment.

Sawyer MINI 2

Sawyer Squeeze 3

GRAYL GeoPress 24 oz 4

Suunto MC-2 G USGS 5

MapTools pocket UTM slot tool 6

Black Diamond Cosmo 350-R 7

UCO Stormproof Match Kit 8

Rite in the Rain No. 973 9

Wilderness Survival Guide 10

Midland ER310 weather radio 11

Reliance Aqua-Tainer, 7 gallon 12

Taylor 3507 refrigerator/freezer thermometer 13

Klean Kanteen 40 oz stainless bottle 14

Olicamp Space Saver Mug 15

Storm Safety Whistle 16

Therm-a-Rest Z Seat 17

A water filter that fits in a coat pocket

The smallest part of a personal water kit is easy to pack. Leave room for a way to collect and carry the water, too.



Imagine stopping at a shallow creek with a filter in your hand and an empty narrow-necked bottle. The awkward part may be collecting water in the first place. Think through the MINI as a system with a collection pouch, a clean container and a place to put each one down. Keep the outlet and clean bottle opening away from untreated water.

Before you pack it

Lay out the kit at home and use clean tap water to rehearse filling your actual bottle. Check the direction marking and manufacturer care instructions. Pack the parts together so you have the right connector when you need it.

Choosing this model

This is a personal backcountry filter. Follow local advisories for tap water during an outage. Where fuel or toxic chemicals may be present, use bottled water or another safe source.

Back to contents

Choose a filter around the refill stop

The pouch, bottle opening and cleaning routine matter as much as the filter in the middle.



Think of the whole refill stop. One person holds a dirty-water pouch while another keeps a clean bottle upright. A squeeze system makes sense if your group is comfortable keeping dirty and clean parts distinct. A larger squeeze filter also takes a different amount of pocket space from a MINI, so try packing the pouch and bottle together before deciding.

Before you pack it

Run through one refill at the sink with clean tap water. Look for threads that cross, a pouch that slips and places where hands touch the clean outlet. Read the maker’s cleaning and storage directions while all the parts are still on the table.

Choosing this model

Check the pouches and maintenance tools included with this exact package. For municipal advisories follow the water provider’s directions. Use a separate safe supply if chemical contamination is suspected.

Back to contents

Carry the press and bottle together

An integrated water press changes how many loose pieces you handle and how much space the system occupies.



With a press bottle the collection vessel and inner container travel nested together. That is attractive when managing a separate filter, pouch and bottle feels fiddly. The trade is a fixed-size item in your pack. Pay attention to the space around it as well as its height, especially if you expect to use a narrow side pocket.

Before you pack it

Measure your pack pocket and try an object of similar dimensions. Read the cartridge instructions first, then rehearse with clean water so you know the surface and clearance you need to operate the press.

Choosing this model

Buy the 24 oz GeoPress cartridge that matches this bottle. Check its replacement criteria with GRAYL. For an official water advisory, use the prescribed water source or treatment. Treat suspected chemical contamination as a reason to obtain another safe source.

Back to contents

Learn the compass on a route you know

A sighting mirror and a paper map are more useful after you have practiced reading both in familiar terrain.



Pick a known open area and a landmark visible on the printed map. The MC-2’s mirror helps you sight ahead while seeing the compass dial. A useful first exercise is simply to relate the lines on the map to things you can already see. Getting-oriented practice close to home is easier to check than a first attempt on an unfamiliar trail.

Before you pack it

Work through Suunto’s instructions for declination and sighting. Repeat a reading away from vehicles and metal objects, then locate the same landmark on paper. Keep the regional map and its date with your compass.

Choosing this model

The school calls for a global MC-2. This is the USGS-scale variant. Check the scale markings against your map and read the local declination information before travel.

Back to contents

Keep the map scale honest

A pocket grid reader works only when the marks on the tool match the printed map in your hand.



Take a full-size topographic sheet and a copy printed with “fit to page.” The roads look the same, but their spacing on paper changes. That is enough to invalidate a fixed-scale plotting tool. A pocket UTM reader becomes useful when your map has the correct printed scale, a compatible grid and a legible margin with the identifying information.

Before you pack it

At a table, compare the printed scale bar against a ruler. Pick a mapped intersection and practice reading it with the tool. Record the zone and datum from the map alongside any coordinate you write down.

Choosing this model

This is a comparable slot tool. Match the tool’s printed scales to your actual paper map. A road map without a suitable UTM grid is a poor match for this purchase.

Back to contents

Keep both hands free after dark

A headlamp belongs where you can find it before the lights come back on.



Turning a doorknob, holding a notebook and aiming a flashlight takes one hand too many. A headlamp moves the beam with your line of sight. Think about the jobs you do close up, like reading a breaker label from a safe distance or finding a cable in a bag. Bright light pointed at a person across the table can also be uncomfortable.

Before you pack it

Fit the strap and locate the controls by feel. Try a lower setting while reading a page and turn the beam downward when speaking to someone. Store the lamp with its charging cable where everyone knows to look.

Choosing this model

The school lists the Cosmo 350. The 350-R is rechargeable. If you expect multiple nights without a recharge, decide where backup lighting or charging power will come from.

Back to contents

Keep an outdoor match kit together

A case only helps if the matches and the proper striker make it into the same pocket.



After a wet walk, loose small items seem to migrate to the bottom of the bag. This kit gives outdoor matches and their striking surface a dedicated place. During packing, check that the case closes properly and that any spare striker stays protected. A headlamp is the better item to leave by the bed for household outage lighting.

Before you pack it

Before a permitted camping trip, open the kit in daylight, identify the striker and read the manufacturer’s instructions. Store it away from children and check the local fire restrictions for the place you are visiting.

Choosing this model

Check the number of matches, included strikers and case size on the package. For a home outage kit, give battery lighting priority.

Back to contents

Keep one running outage log

A dated pencil entry can tell the next person what happened while their phone was off.



When a household is tired, small details get lost. One person hears an update on the radio, another checks the supplies and a third comes home later. A notebook left in a known place gives them a common record. Give each entry a time, a source and a next action. Mark an estimate as an estimate so nobody mistakes it for a confirmed update.

Before you pack it

Try one page with four short columns for time, source, update and next check. Write a sample entry with the pencil you plan to pack. Then ask somebody else to find the next action without your help.

Choosing this model

No. 973 is the green side-spiral variant. Choose a format you can hold while standing and check the writing instrument on the actual paper.

Back to contents

Give a paper field guide a job before you need it

A book earns its place in the pack when you can find the right page without scrolling or searching.



Jason Marsteiner’s Wilderness Survival Guide is a physical reference you can read without power. Its advantage depends on knowing your way around it. Before a trip, use the contents page to locate one subject you want to practice. A tab that you placed on purpose is easier to find when you are tired than a paragraph you vaguely remember.

Before you pack it

Choose one chapter at home, bookmark it and make a short list of questions to bring to a qualified instructor. Write local contact numbers and the location of your printed map on a separate card.

Choosing this model

The school sells a signed edition. This guide covers the standard paperback. Check the author, subtitle and format if you want a print copy for your kit.

Back to contents

Find your radio station before the outage

A station you can receive inside your own home is worth writing down.



In a storm, the clearest signal in one room may fade in another. A tabletop radio lets a household listen together and write down updates even when mobile data is unavailable. The smartest place to store it is somewhere that you have already tried listening, with its power supplies close by.

Before you pack it

On an ordinary day, tune the weather band and identify a local broadcast you can receive. Move the radio between two safe indoor spots and record which worked. Keep the station and your last battery check on a paper card.

Choosing this model

Check the ER310 manual for its battery options and charging instructions. Runtime varies with use. Plan a dependable energy source for long listening sessions.

Back to contents

Store water where you can pour it

Seven gallons of water weigh about 58 pounds before you add the container. Pick its spot before filling it.



A large jug makes sense as a stationary reserve. It is a poor surprise when the person who needs a drink also has to lift it onto a counter. A low, stable dispensing position and a smaller clean pitcher can make the stored supply easier for different members of a household to use.

Before you pack it

Try the jug with a small amount of safe water before filling it. Check the seal, the spigot clearance and whether a cup fits underneath. Find a storage arrangement that avoids a heavy lift when you are tired.

Choosing this model

The Aqua-Tainer stores water from a safe source. It does not treat water. Compare its filled weight, footprint and accessibility with several smaller containers.

Back to contents

Read the fridge without an app

An analog dial and a written time give you two useful observations when household power fails.



The best time to find a readable shelf position is when everything is working. Open the door briefly and see whether you can read the dial without moving cartons. A reading taken after power has returned only tells you the temperature at that moment. It cannot reconstruct how warm the food became while the refrigerator was off.

Before you pack it

Note the normal reading in your household log. During an outage keep the doors closed as much as possible, record when power went out and use the official food-by-food guidance when deciding what to keep.

Choosing this model

Look for a dial you can read quickly under your kitchen lighting. For food safety decisions consider elapsed time and official guidance as well as temperature.

Back to contents

Choose a bottle you can reach while walking

A cap you can open and a pocket that actually fits matter on every refill.



Try lifting your pack with the side pocket occupied. A large bottle is easy to see on the shop page but can be hard to retrieve from a tight or tall pocket. Decide whether you prefer one larger bottle or smaller containers spread between people. Balance and access can be more important than the capacity printed on the label.

Before you pack it

Measure your pack pocket, then fill a similarly sized bottle at home. Put the pack on and see whether you can reach, open and return the bottle without spilling the contents.

Choosing this model

The school links a 40 oz Klean Kanteen. Confirm the selected capacity, cap style and bottle diameter. This is storage for water from a safe source.

Back to contents

Make the cup fit the bottle

Nesting two curved surfaces sounds simple until a handle or shoulder catches.



A camp cup that nests around a bottle uses space that might otherwise be air. The critical measurement is the inside width of the cup against the widest part of your bottle. A handle that folds close to the body can also make the difference between a smooth draw and a cup that catches the lining of a bag.

Before you pack it

Put your usual bottle in a pack pocket and measure the remaining clearance. Check whether the cup will be easy to remove once the pack is full. Practice holding it with the handle open before adding it to your kit.

Choosing this model

The cup comes from the school’s packing list. Check its shape and dimensions against your own bottle. Two items sold as nesting gear can still be different sizes.

Back to contents

Carry a signal within reach

A whistle at the bottom of a zipped pack is difficult to find when you need somebody’s attention.



Think about an ordinary moment of separation on a trail. One person stops to adjust a shoe while the others walk around a bend. A small whistle is easy to keep on an accessible pack strap. Before setting out, agree on how the group will respond if someone signals or loses sight of the others.

Before you pack it

With the pack on, reach for the whistle one-handed. Check the clip, pocket or attachment point. Pick a meeting point in advance and carry the local emergency contact information as a separate backup.

Choosing this model

The school links this signaling whistle. Compare its attachment and size with your pack. Wind, terrain and hearing differences affect how far a sound carries.

Back to contents

Take a dry seat on a wet trail

A folding pad gives you a small place to sit while checking the route or reorganizing a pack.



Stopping on a damp log can soak clothing faster than you expect. A closed-cell folding seat makes a useful separation between the log and your clothes. A small pad is particularly handy when you need both hands for a map. If you have to unpack everything to get to it, however, it will probably stay in the bag.

Before you pack it

Find a place on the pack where you can get to the folded pad during a short stop. Try that arrangement with the pack full. Open the pad, sit down and repack without setting the rest of the kit on wet ground.

Choosing this model

The school’s folding seat link points to the Z Seat. Compare the folded dimensions and sitting area. It is sized for a seated break rather than overnight sleeping coverage.

Back to contents