

*The one thing you're all forgetting in that bugout bag- people coming to find you.*

There's very real crossover skill of conducting a personnel recovery, or at a minimum, how to link up with friendlies, which needs to be taught in lieu of the "look at muh bugout stuff!!!" that frequently goes on among the never-gonna-be crowd. Building a bag and sitting it in the corner, or better still, pontificating on which "one gun and knife combo am I gonna use???" really does absolutely nothing for us if a) I have nowhere realistic to go; b) I have few if any relevant daily practiced skills; and c) I have no people who also have those skills to help me. Gear is nice and makes us feel good when we buy that new piece of kit (*I'm an admitted knife nut, one day I'll find the perfect Bowie*) but equipment supports skill. Second, our gear is selected for mission; certain baselines may exist, but if I'm deer hunting I'm likely not dressed the same as if I'm coyote hunting, versus conducting a proper ambush (*but then again I might, it would depend on how deniable I wanted to be*). Third, I need to know, as do the others in my group, at a bare minimum, a healthy familiarity with the area I'm headed out to if I don't want to become a victim of the wilderness before any golden horde can get to my sorry hide.

We Gotta Get Out of this Place

So the bottom dropped out and it's time to git to gettin', because badness. While that bailout bag (*the actual term*) is nice, if you haven't realized it was time to go, *before it was time to go*, you're chances of success are now diminished at least ten fold. But further, your E&E plan has to include an end goal. Headin' out innawoods don't cut it. Where am I going and who is picking me up? You should have a spot previously agreed upon that's out of the way and *not in the middle of badness*, with the only things being carried are a few simple items to ensure you successfully get to where you need to go. All the fancy giant packs and bulky kit is stupid as hell- it makes you stand out like a sore thumb and immediately identifies you to both the golden horde and whatever authority structure is trying to contain it. And yes, there will be one. You're either going to look like one of the crowd or look like part of the problem.

I met Lara Logan once in Iraq, the former reporter for CBS. She's a tiny little lady and my team was tasked with outer security for her while they toured our AO (*she was part of a larger contingent of press and Brass who, for those that know, is akin to a traveling circus*) and while after 9 months a tiny cute brunette with a weird accent can be very distracting, and she was



quite friendly, one thing that stuck out in my mind was the absolute lack of any and all situational awareness. Unfortunately later down the road she was brutalized while covering the Tahrir Square uprising, because she didn't know it was time to go. While it was sad that this happened, it's an example of the need to move along when the weather gets rough, before the storm gets there. The only thing that saved her was having a security team *who did know their stuff*, despite the official story of a bunch of women gathering around her, reacting quick enough and getting her off the X to a designated RV site.

### Realistic Refuge and Getting There Alive

This leads me to the point most preppers get hung up on- the focus on going somewhere when things start to come unhinged, without much other thought than, "I've got a cousin out in the country". Ok, so you do. And let's say y'all got together and agreed that yes, badness will happen and yes, you can come out to the sticks and we'll live out our days like the Waltons. For the sake of coherency let's say the trip is feasible (*no Cold Mountain-style cross-state or multi-state treks; there's a reason it makes good stories, because the successful ones are few and far in between*). It should be relatively short and in an area you are intimately familiar. If you're living in the 'burbs and think you're gonna link up with cousin Jeff three counties over, with several small towns in between when things go *tango-uniform* you got another thing coming. But even if that is your plan, you'll be far better off carrying a lot of stuff to barter for safe passage versus thinking you'll muscle your way through it. But only having a realistic place to go doesn't do us much good if there's no one protecting it and we have no way of signaling our arrival without getting shot by the other folks cousin Jeff invited

over.

So we can say, relating the military escape and evasion doctrine to the prepper/survivalist world, that our three county area we plan to move across is our *Designated Area of Recovery*. That means if we don't show up in a reasonable amount of time after we've signaled we're moving, cousin Jeff and his band of bubbas at least have an idea where you might be. *A three county area is a HUGE space by the way, and him finding you in any area that big is a fantasy too, but I digress. Let's change it to two counties, neighboring each other.* You planned four routes with him, Primary, Alternate, Contingency, and Emergency. You planned all the interwoven routes you might take if primary goes to crap and then you take alternate, and so on and so forth. You've taken a road map out and drawn a box around the entirety of the area that encompasses the routes (*this is the Designated Area of Recovery or DAR*), and realistically came up with Rendezvous (*RV*) points that in case it all fails, you'll be hanging out for two hours, 12 hours, 24 hours, and 48 hours, each moving closer to cousin Jeff's property in the sticks. Under duress you'll become surprised just how far short distances can get.

While planning all of this, y'all talked about how to signal one another. Some people call this near and far recognition signals, or verification of Bona Fides. The first RV he checks in the DAR is the 2 hour. What if you're not there? He couldn't raise you on the radio channels you chose (*this is where that Commo SOI comes in*) so him and his bubbas get to the site. You left him a message telling him the direction you went and how many you have with you. One way we did this was by taking a piece of white cloth tape and drawing a circle for each team member still alive, with a slash in the circle signaling that person wounded and an X signaling KIA. Then there would be either sticks or rocks pointing in the direction we went, which would be the next RV. With any luck, you'll eventually meet up with cousin Jeff and get back to the ranch.

You've also planned near and far recognition signals, which might be electronic primarily but if that fails, would be a set number of flashes of light via a headlamp or signal mirror, an

American Flag held up over your head, or my personal preference, the blaze-orange VS-17 panel. You know what cousin Jeff drives and should have an idea of what his buddies look like, and they you, to prevent fratricide.

I'm going to reiterate three points here.

1. Cousin Jeff and his band o' bubbas are *people* coming to recover you on your 'bugout' to their location. You have to have them. Cousin Jeff also motivated them somehow to leave the safety of wherever and come get you. This states he's the Leader. Respect it. His bubbas are likely more competent than you too and stuck their necks out to get you, so respect them also.
2. The plan, and proper execution thereof, is critical. If you shoot off thinking "I'm gonna git to gittin'" without that plan (*and how to do it right*) you're going to suffer a miserable fate. Read the Logan story again. Read any story in the headlines of lost hikers. Most of those don't end well, and always with someone looking for them.
3. I didn't use a bunch of hypothetical "what if X or Y" nonsense. You don't train for scenarios to accomplish the basics. The basics remain when even the best plans fail. The best plans are the ones that don't stray far from the basics. Understand?

*But, but, what if XXXX happens, and YYYY goes down and etc, etc????*

*You're going to die, that's what. Miserably, watching your loved ones or group or whoever is with you doing the same. End of story. Plan and re-plan. Rehearse then re-rehearse. Do it again and again until it becomes memory.*

## Daily Skills

So we've figured out now that we've got somewhere realistic to go and the basics of how we'll get there with our hides alive. Good stuff. Hopefully we don't die in the process. But we

need those skills to back up our plan, and mostly, getting from A to B in a less than desirable circumstance doesn't involve much running and gunning or shooting fast at stationary targets. You're getting from A to B without getting shot in the process, so your best bet is keeping as low a profile as possible.



The first skill you need is knowing your cardinal directions without a compass, especially at night. Mic Chesbro wrote a pretty good book on doing just that a while back, among other topics.

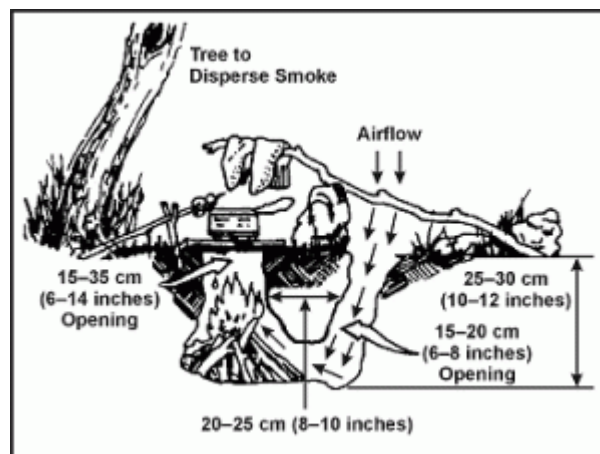
Daytime is pretty simple for anyone who's not a complete idiot, but night time can get very tricky especially if you're tired (*you will be tired*). The only way to get good at this is to do it regularly.

Next, while rehearsing your routes, know the general directions of the roads or routes themselves. If you know that when you're traveling down "Old Mill Trail" you're headed due east, you're a big step ahead. Of course this requires knowing the roads in your area and *NOT* relying on GPS. Always having a reliable compass (*I carry an old lensatic tritium compass most places, and on my body in the woods, in my left hip pocket of my pants with the lanyard girth-hitched to a belt loop. Tied down, I can't lose it, but if I did or it broke, I can still navigate*) is critical, but sometimes stuff gets lost or broken leaving us with our baseline skillset.

Next, notice in the scenario I said road map and not topo map. There's a couple of reasons for this. First, topo maps are tough to use under duress unless you use them all the time and have been trained by competent individuals. Their purpose is to show terrain features first and everything else second. Now if you know what you're doing, fine. But if you don't, and if you know you're not, or even more important you do but nobody in your group does, road maps are simpler, easier to relate to, and far more accessible if lost (*try to find a UTM map in a gas station*). I can still do intersection and modified resection on a small scale road map with a compass to find out where I am. Second, road maps don't look out of the ordinary

if/when I get caught by whatever authority props itself up. And they will, they always do. Topo maps instantly identify you as either someone official or someone with training. If you're keeping a low profile that's a bad thing.

Learn how to make fire when it's wet out with little light and smoke. There's a lot of ways to do this but I prefer the Dakota hole for both efficiency and safety. They're easy to put out and maintain a low signature. Make sure when you're building them to use dry tinder that gives off little smoke. Smoke carries a scent that instantly pinpoints you if there's too much; when you're cold tired and not thinking straight, people revert to building



large visible and smelly fires. If you're keeping a low profile on the move, you want the opposite. And its hard to do without consistent skills training.

Last, the big question I usually have for preppers planning a 'bugout' is how far do you expect to actually walk? You have to train for this stuff. As a former Infantryman, I'll tell you first hand that if you think you're gonna bounce from behind the computer and make a 20 mile movement with a pack, or even a 12 mile movement, you're woefully overestimating your skills. If you expect to be able to move later, you have to move today. There's no two ways about this. Your feet alone are going to dictate all of your actions and at this point, you're either going to be praising or cursing your boot selection. Then again, if you're not putting in a few miles on those *LPCs* at least once a week, you ain't walking nowhere when the time comes.

*No piece of gear will ever compensate for a lack of proficiency.*

People

The third and most critical point is people. Having a good network, or at least knowing the people along the routes I plan on taking, is a huge step in the right direction. Most likely these people are going to know cousin Jeff or know someone who knows him and his family, which makes life SOOOO much easier when things go sideways. Knowing them, and being on good terms with them, is paramount to evading hostiles or simply getting out of harm's way. If for nothing else, you may find their situation is better than Jeff's, and now you've got a couple of strong points to ride the storm out. Community matters.



Hikers, Refugees or Locusts? Its a matter of perspective.

If you're not on good terms with or know the people in the area you're moving along, it may do you well to attend a flea market or annual gathering or two just to meet people. A familiar face can get you out of trouble among a worked up crowd leery of outsiders, especially if you've got some things to barter. If you're neither familiar to them nor know anyone they may know, nothing's keeping them from robbing you blind and leaving you in a ditch anyway.



Next is the recognition that cousin Jeff has some people willing to die under his leadership; they're coming to get you when the world is sideways, after all, meaning that in one way or another there's an incentive cousin Jeff's got for his people to follow him. So no matter how much stuff you've got, or what you think you bring to the table in your opinion, they're going to look at you and yours as the low man on the totem pole

and the person they had to save, meaning they might welcome you with a bit of contempt until you prove yourself. *Yup, you gotta prove yourself, that's human nature.* If their risk turns out to be rescuing a bunch of complaining, skill-less anchors, no matter how much cousin Jeff loved you before, you're going to find yourselves ostracized and in ditch. So what it all boils down to is having community and being a worthy part of it.

Overall, you have to know that none of this can be done on your own. If your plan is *"I got this and this, and a bag, I'm hitting the woods!"* you don't actually have a plan for anything other than dying. Nature and your physical condition will painfully demonstrate your limitations to you. The community and what you bring to the table is by far more important than anything you can buy, and means the difference between life and death. So the most frequent attitude of "we got ours, screw the world" exhibited is a tremendously bad thing. In addition, personnel recovery is a difficult task even for those who do it all the time, but for those inexperienced or not even trying to do it right (*as there is a large showing among run n' gun dreamers*) will get a large number of otherwise well meaning people killed. And we don't want that. All of this underscores the need to get in a sustainable place now, quit making excuses, and start being useful. *Take charge of your fate or someone else will.*

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