



What Have You Done to Save a Life Today?

4905, 5th Ave. Fort Rucker, AL 36362-5363
Comm. (334) 255-2919 – Fax (334) 255-2609
<https://safety.army.mil>

Happy trails to you

Art Powell
Strategic Communication Directorate
U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center
Fort Rucker, Ala.

There are hikes, and there are HIKES.

Those that follow a popular, sometimes crowded, nature trail or go a short distance to a popular destination are hikes, those that take you into the wild back country are HIKES.

Each requires preparation in order to ensure a safe trip, but the back country trips take preparation to another level.

“Wear good footwear, take an extra layer of warm clothing, pack some rain gear if precipitation is possible, and carry the nine essentials,” advises Al Nash, chief of public affairs, Yellowstone National Park.

The ‘essentials’ Nash talks about include: (Don’t hit the trail without them!)

- Map
- Compass
- Sunglasses and sunscreen
- Extra clothing
- Headlamp/flashlight
- First-aid supplies
- Fire starter
- Knife
- Extra food and water

If you're a 'techie,' you may see a map as an electronic, battery powered global positioning system, and a compass is a cell phone application. While your great Army training showed you how to appreciate technology, you know technology can fail, usually when you really need it, like when you're in the wild back country.

Before departing, Nash advises checking in with a park ranger to get updates on current trail and weather conditions.

Even 'short' trips require more supplies than you may imagine.

"Too often we see visitors go out on a hike in shorts, a T-shirt, athletic shoes or sandals, and carrying only one quart bottle of water," Nash reports. "Because they can cover up to 3 miles an hour walking, they expect a 6 or 10 mile hike in the mountains to take two or three hours. At best, they are in for a long, miserable day."

The prospect of getting lost increases in the back country.

"If you realize you are lost, the best advice is to stay put," said Todd Stoeberl, chief of interpretation at the nation's largest national park, Wrangell- St. Elias National Park and Preserve in Alaska. "Staying in one place and making oneself visible from the air is the most important steps to take in order to be found. This is, of course, if someone knows you are lost."

Part of planning for back country travels involves notifying someone of your plans.

"If a person hasn't notified someone of their plan, then a search may never occur due to the fact we don't know that the person is lost," he added. "This leads into what preparations one should make. Telling someone where you plan to hike and the estimated time when you should return is critical. Also, making sure you have a good map and proper clothing is a must. Weather changes constantly. Food and water are also essential. These are the basics for any hike."

No matter how many high-tech devices you take along on a hike, or how much planning you put into your journey, don't forget to include a large dose of a critical ingredient: common sense.

