

# What's In My 72 Hour Bag (and why)

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## ***What is a 72 Hour Bag?***

Good question, it means different things to different people. It is also known as a “go bag” (for what you grab when you just need to GO), a “jump bag” (presumably for what you grab when you jump out of a bad situation into a new one that is more promising) or a GOOD bag (get out of Dodge – when you’re abandoning your primary location for a new one). No matter what you call it, it’s your piece of mind that will provide you with tools and resources to take you from here to there. And ideally with a reasonable level of comfort.

I originally put my bag together in southern California where I worked 40 miles away from home. The original contents were intended to a) help me spend a couple of nights at work before... b) abandoning my car to make it home on foot. I’ve since fled that socialist state and I work closer to home so the contents have been adjusted. But the purpose is the same: useful gear and food for three days.

In this document I list the contents of my 72 hour bag which has evolved over the past three years. You may agree or disagree with my decisions but either way, put a kit together for yourself. Something is better than nothing and a lot of people I meet are in a perpetual state of planning. Which is just as useless as doing nothing. Be smart: act now and get something together even if you don’t believe its ideal.

Each photo is described by a bulleted list, starting from the top upper left and moving clockwise.

There are many important ideas I will unapologetically share with you in this document but the most important is: don’t ever borrow anything from your bag. **Ever.** It must be considered a sacred, self contained unit.

If you have a favorite headlamp in the bag but you want to use it for camping, then go buy a second one. Don't risk forgetting to return a borrowed item! Your bag should not be a haphazard resource for commonly used things but an engineered tool that you grab when things are going pear shaped.

The last thing you should be thinking about as you’re adjusting it upon your back and making distance from your workplace or car is “Oh, did I put the Leatherman back in?” Your mind needs to be sharply focused forward toward the unknown, not the uncertainty that you’ve created due to carelessness.

Repeat after me: Nothing is ever taken out of my bag unless I’ve flipped the switch and its Go Time.

OK I heard that and I’m holding you to it.

## ***The Bag***



This isn't a pack for going backpacking. It's 20 lb. of security that you can unobtrusively store and easily grab out of your car. The exact bag you choose is not important; I suggest looking for something in good shape at a flea market, garage sale or Craigslist. Get something and get started. You can always upgrade later.

The bag I chose is a Lowe Alpine Airzone 45 that I paid \$70 for new. It has 2700 cubic inches of storage and my gear takes up about 2000. Resist the urge to over pack. This bag also has an integral rain fly that deploys from the bottom. Fancy, but if its raining I am most likely just going to be hiking harder toward home.

## Outer Pocket



This bag has a pocket on the outside that is easy to access. It contains the things I might need in a jiffy.

- Good leather gloves – look at the dirty palm. It’s because I’ve used these so I know they are strong and comfortable. Break in a pair around the house and then put them in your bag.
- 25’ of paracord – it has a zillion uses
- A Sharpie marker – in case I need to write on walls of a collapsed structure (“Danger, do not enter”) or God forbid, triage numbers on victims’ foreheads.
- A small Leatherman tool – this isn’t to fix my Jeep or rewire a nuclear warhead, its just a useful extra knife blade (serrated at the bottom for cutting rope and cord) and a pair of pliers (I suggest spring loaded).

## Outside



I keep a couple of professional carabineers secured by the loops on the outside. They are real rock climbing types, rated for 5000 lb. What would I use these for? I’m not quite sure but they were on sale at a “deal of the day” website so I bought a few. It is very important that you should ONLY carry gear that you can trust. If it is iffy then throw it away (don’t even give it to someone). Junk is junk.

Any why two? Because two is one and one is none.

## Top Pocket



These are the contents of the zippered pocket that sits behind your head, the stuff you can get at without removing your pack just by reaching over your shoulder. The pocket should contain things that you might need often but not be over stuffed so you can easily add to it if you're hiking home.

- Energy bars – I like the New Millennium bars, each one is 400 cal. and good for 5 years
- A bottle of 5 Hour Energy – some supplier dropped this in an order for free so I included it. If it gives me a boost, great. But I can always trade it to some web developer I might encounter.
- An extra Bic lighter – you can't have too many good quality lighters. I've tried the Swedish fire steel while kneeling down in a damp area and trying to catch a spark on tinder. It was hard. I have a better idea: spend \$2 for a good quality lighter and enjoy your fire 45 minutes earlier.
- Headlamp – spend around \$30 on a good LED model that has low/med/high settings
- Spare batteries for the headlamp – buy some good alkaline ones and lash them together with masking tape so they don't get lost
- "Police grade" pepper spray – a less than lethal defensive weapon is just smart. It is also good for managing stray dogs.
- \$40 in small bills – maybe \$10 to a passing car will get you home 30x faster, so why not carry extra money?
- A good compass – don't break the bank on this but get a Brunton or some other name brand. (I've had poor luck with Cammenga.)
- A monocular – enhanced optics are always smart. Mine is a 10x25 but I recently saw small binoculars at the pawn shop for less money.
- A bandanna – really, you can't have too many of these. They're great for everything. I admire the heck out of Les Stroud, thus Survivorman.

## Main Pocket – Loose Loading



What do you need pronto if you have to take your pack off? This stuff:

- PPE – that's personal protective equipment. In a bag are a couple of pairs of latex gloves and two N92 respirators along with some safety glasses. These were to deal with concrete dust for an earthquake event in southern CA.
- A head net – because back in the mountains of CA there were mosquitoes everywhere. I don't need it out here in CO but it might look cool.
- Self igniting pocket warmers – because being cold is demoralizing and somewhat unnecessary
- Extra clothes – a technical running shirt, some heavy underwear (no Sponge Bob boxers) and both cotton and wool socks. When I was working in CA I had to dress in dark socks and a collared shirt each day so I also had some BDUs and running shoes too. Adapt your bag to your life.
- 2x quart Nalgene water bottles – each of mine has 48" tape wrapped around the bottom, black fabric (gaffer) tape and Gorilla tape. (Avoid that junky gray duct tape.) The bottles are stored empty and should be filled when you hit the road.
- Two stretch bandages – these are inexpensive and you can use them for other than wound management (like lashing)
- Super absorbent cloth – they are quick drying and could also double as a large bandage. Also consider a large hand towel which can be used as a pillow as well.
- A small medkit – I keep an EMT grade one in the car and this smaller one in the pack. This is a Medical Kit.5 from Adventure Medical. Amend with some moleskin in case the hike home takes a turn for the worse on your feet.

- A tubular space blanket – regular flat space blankets are useless in other than the most contrived situations. I know, I tried to stay warm with one on a hike to a 14,000' peak in CO. The same Adventure Medical makes one that is like a sleeping bag. Contained heat = better.
- 100' of paracord – be sure to buy the genuine stuff that is good for 550 lb. Pick a color that suits you.
- Knee pads – a Survivalblog reader recommend these so I picked up a pair at Home Depot. They weigh nothing and seem prudent.
- Emergency radio – your choice in this is *very important*. I recommend the Eton Microlink FR160 for about \$30. I spent \$200 testing various other radios and this is the one you should carry. It receives AM/FM/weather, has an LED light and is rechargeable both via solar and a hand crank. But most importantly it has a USB port on the back to recharge your smartphone (if you're cranking). Put a piece of tape over the power/volume knob so it doesn't accidentally turn on in your pack (why do I know this? see below) and also tape a spare USB-to-whatever cable you need for your smartphone to the back. Remember, you're going to grab this pack without a lot of forethought. Don't kid yourself and think that you're going to remember to grab that wacky iPhone charging cable from your glove box in an emergency.

Taping the power knob off reminds me that every three months or so, you should pull your bag out of your car and go through it end-to-end. Test everything. Better to find out now that some batteries are dead (like the emergency radio) or your food was punctured by accident than when you're counting on 100% of effectiveness in your resources. You cannot plan for everything but ignoring things invites the unwelcome surprise.

If there is something you absolutely cannot do without *then carry two*. Is it an expensive item? Give up a luxury (like Starbuck's) to recover the money from your budget. This isn't a game! You must hedge your bets *now* against future calamity. Disaster doesn't signal its arrival.

## Stuff Sacks



The rest of my gear is stowed in four stuff sacks inside the backpack, arranged according to usage.

There are five sacks in this photo because the green one contains a nice waterproof jacket from Sierra Designs.

## Sack #1: Toiletries



This isn't a death march, it's your mobile suitcase for a trip. Everything you stow should be chosen to keep you equipped and happy for four days. Yes, it's a 72 hour bag but always pack extra (remember the two is one saying?)

- Pre-moistened wipes – I don't know who invented these but they are a genius. Two wipes will get you clean: the first on your face, then armpits and then groin. The second on your feet, which are important to keep dry and clean if you are moving. They are also good for cleaning up small wounds and your eating utensils.
- If your area is partial to insects, a couple of OFF! repellent wipes could make your overnight much more enjoyable. Ditto for that head net I mentioned earlier.
- I have very little hair so I'm partial to the Bald Guyz head wipes. They're refreshing and I carry six, which allows me to pack the smaller 15 count pack of Wet Ones.
- Toothbrush, toothpaste and floss – fuzzy teeth suck down morale
- Toilet paper and Kleenex
- Carmex – this comes in small foil packets, not just sticks
- Multivitamins – if nothing else these will help with stress

## Sack #2: Cooking



decided they would be great in my bag.

- Eating utensils – I obviously carry a giant spoon/fork that I picked up online but a titanium combo set from Snow Peak or a nylon set from the local Army-Navy are fine. Don't use any plastic utensils from a fast food joint or supermarket as they won't hold up. Stick to camping gear.
- Extra fuel tabs – there are two types in this photo. To the right are the white ones that Esbit sells. They are immune to oxygen as you can tell because the foil is torn back and they have not deteriorated. To the left are military hexamine tablets. They are 2x as large and purple colored but degrade over time when exposed (time as in months). One white tab or one half of a hexamine tab is enough to boil my cup of water. The nice thing about these compared to a liquid fuel stove is that they always work even in extreme cold and the entire setup is both small and light. And if you were to need a campfire, these are great for starting them.

If you don't enjoy any hot liquids like tea, coffee or bullion then you can completely omit this. But I find that a hot cup of something – even steeped pine needles – is welcome when things are rough.

- Stove – I like the Esbit folding type. It takes a solid fuel tablet and you can store four of them in the stove itself to save space. One tablet usually equals one hot cup of water. No fuss or muss with liquid fuels.
- P 51 can opener – this is larger than the P 38 classic and attached with a lanyard so it won't get lost. None of my food requires a tool to open (or heat to eat) so this is just precautionary.
- Small cup – this is a titanium one that came with a kit I bought but anything will work as long as you can apply it directly to your stove flame
- Bic lighter – like I said, you cannot have too many of these. You can also trade one if necessary.
- Waterproof matches – these are the hurricane type with ridiculously long heads. I bought them years ago and

### Sack #3: Gear



This is extra gear that I don't need to get to often but I'd like to have.

- Altoids container – full of metal bits, see below
- Whistle and signaling mirror – this is for in case I *want* to be noticed (rescued). The newer mirrors have a sweet “holographic” dot that helps you reflect the sunlight at your target.
- Water purification – I was lucky enough to have bought a glass jar of Polar Pure before the empty brain Feds shut them down for some stupid-ass reason. You will need something if your trip home requires you to drink stream water. There are alternatives like Potable Aqua, etc. I've not used a SteriPen but it looks **fantastic** and if you have the cash, I say go for it. Note that I don't see the reason to carry an elaborate filtering setup for the short duration of this effort.
- Emergency poncho – being wet sucks so avoid it

Now for the mysterious tin-o-metal: I like to fashion things and that takes resources which usually include metal bits. So I use a small Altoids can (itself metal!) to sequester the following:

- Heavy aluminum foil, folded like a map to fit inside
- 24” of heavy steel wire
- 4 heavy nails
- Small and large safety pins – there are actually five of each size in the tin but I've omitted the extras for clarity
- Single edge razor blade – use your imagination
- Box cutter knife blades – two, and continue to use your imagination

A collection of various food items including StarKist Tuna Creations, Old El Paso Tortilla Stuffers, Beef Jerky, Clif Bars, Emergen-C, and various snacks. The items are arranged on a light-colored surface. The StarKist Tuna Creations are in blue bags, Old El Paso Tortilla Stuffers are in a yellow bag, and the Beef Jerky is in a red bag. The Clif Bars are in various colored wrappers, and the Emergen-C is in orange and red packets. There are also several bags of snacks, including a large bag of brown snacks, a bag of yellow snacks, and a bag of green snacks. A clear plastic bag containing a white spoon and a small packet is also visible.



My approach to food is this: it needs to be as palatable as possible considering that I'm carrying it and I may not have unlimited access to water. So I don't suggest any camping food that you add boiling water to reconstitute, or anything canned. That being said, here is what I keep and why.

- One MRE – these are not the best tasting or lightest but they are a) complete and b) well thought out. Make sure you pack one of the newer varieties with the included water-activated heating pouches for the main meal. A warm spoonful of stew goes a long way to improving morale in a stressful situation.
- Tuna – formerly these would be in cans but yet-another-genius has deciphered the means to store these in foil packages. I prefer the flavored versions since variety is the spice of life (and I don't need to fiddle with salt, pepper, Tabasco).
- Tortilla Stuffers – these are great even without the suggest tortilla. The vacuum packed crackers would be fine to use, though.
- Jerky – who in the civilized world doesn't go on a hike without dehydrated meat? It is both a) fun and b) yummy.
- Military crackers – I bought a case of these and you know what? They are dry crackers that go fine with stew, tuna or Tortilla Stuffers.
- Cliff fruit bars – fast sugar and loaded with citric acid for the bite. They're like 20 jelly beans in one.
- Misc. comfort food – Ritz crackers, peanuts and fig newtons. Each are full of useful nutrition but in their own comforting way. Peanuts are the best; think about why so many birds and small mammals eat nuts (protein and useful fat).
- EmergenC mix – when you are stressed you can get sick. 100x the daily dose of vitamin C sounds smart – and would make Linus Pauling proud. Plus it replaces the taste of chemically purified water.
- Gel packs – I have a bunch of these "instant carbs" lying around from when I ran half marathons. They helped me to the finish line, same for getting home to my front door.
- Coffee, tea or me – instant packs of coffee, tea and bullion that are the only things intended to be cooked by the Esbit stove. Don't underestimate what a hot cup of something will do for your outlook. Include single serving packets of sugar or cream if you prefer.
- Cheese-n-crackers – I've been eating these since 1976 and sure, the cheese is now plastic but it is still yummy to me. Count it as comfort food.
- Cliff bars – these are the ideal breakfast but they are heavy so don't go crazy on them.

## ***Conclusion***

Now you have some good direction and some facts to back up the assembly of your first 72 hour bag. And I say first because it should adapt as your living and working situation changes.

Regarding the inclusion of a firearm: there are far too many legal and moral issues involved for me to opine in this short space. So let's just leave it at this: you know if you need to carry one and if you don't know, you don't need to.

Other things that I do not (currently) have to deal with but you should also consider:

- Extra glasses or contact lenses (and their infrastructure)
- Medication that you require daily

I hope you never have to use your bag but if you do, don't just apologetically subsist. Overcome and survive to protect yourself and then help others.

Dan in Colorado