

## Nice Harness! What's In It Besides Your Butt? or, Survival for the Adventurous Pilot

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When I discovered the challenge and joy of cross country flying, it opened up an entirely new part of my life. Cross country flying, and competition XC flying in particular, requires preparation, training, practice, and good decision making. When you land in "Tiger Country" your recovery – even your survival, will rely on these same prerequisites. There may be times when your adventure begins *after* the landing and it is useful to consider the following before you find yourself in this position.

Philosophically, I feel that none of us should ever plan to have others "find" or "save" us if we are not injured. Your 'survival with style' starts while still airborne – Use your bird's-eye-view. Are there any roads or structures near? Which direction will you take on your hike out? What obstacles lie between you & civilization? We may find ourselves miles from roads, at high elevation with sunset looming and only a vague idea of the best route to travel. Communicate your situation and location prior to landing if possible. After landing, a radio call, "Down OK" is very helpful to those who might worry. Then, you must set about to make decisions that will make your evening as safe and comfortable as possible.

Your first order of business is to assess your personal condition – Are you injured? If so, how badly? If you have sustained more than slight injury, communicate your position and condition ASAP via radio or cell phone (You do have the appropriate emergency number in your phone, don't you?). The signal that you are NOT OK, to fellow pilots, is to leave your wing as it fell when you landed. If no communication is possible, set about to 'hunker down' until help gets to you.

Next, what are the conditions of your world? What kind of terrain, brush, weather, and distance will you need to cover to get to civilization? How much daylight is left? Know the time of sunset. It is much harder and hazardous than you might imagine, to hike in the dark, so you must make a decisive choice to begin the hike out, or to make camp while you still have sufficient light. If you choose to make camp, your evening in the woods is not an emergency and it doesn't have to be uncomfortable, IF you have prepared for such an eventuality. One of the primary characteristics of a survivor (Yes – you now have entered the world of the 'survivor') is that a survivor thinks realistically – not optimistically. If your hike out will be substantially longer than the daylight remaining, it may be safer to find an appropriate camp site and settle in for the night. This prospect is much easier to consider if you have prepared for this eventuality by bringing some essential items to use with those you have already in your bag.

I come from a SAR / Technical Rescue background. This experience has shown that a situation can go from uncomfortable to life threatening in a few hours for even the most hardy of individuals if they are mentally unprepared and lack certain simple tools in a survival kit. I've carried various kits with me while flying comps and XCs. I've carried a tree kit, survival kit, first aid kit, etc. I've carried too little, and I've carried too much. I think I may have reached an acceptable compromise with the kit I now carry. Space and weight are always a consideration. Some of you will have ideas for more gear and I will consider all suggestions – the important thing is to ***go through the mental exercise and carry some form of survival kit*** any time you venture away from your home LZ.

Your first chore is to find a suitable container. I use a pair of amenity bags I got on airline flights. They are soft, flexible and spacious enough for my requirements. One I carry deep in my harness. It is seldom removed. The other is in my flight-deck storage. It has renewable items like food and batteries. You need to think of your kit as part of a system of survival. Everything you carry should have a purpose.

The tools of rescue/recovery are:

1. Communication
  - i. Transceiver with spare battery (AA version)
  - ii. Cell Phone with recharger unit (AA powered)
  - iii. Whistle
2. Visibility
  - i. Signal mirror
  - ii. Flashlight/headlamp (AA powered)
  - iii. Strobe Light (AA powered)

Each of these items is carried to aid in your communication and recovery. If you are injured, these will increase the chance of a quick rescue and extraction. Notice that all use similar batteries for redundancy. The rest of the items (below) are carried to buy time and increase your protection from the elements.

The basics tools of survival are:

1. Water
  - i. Bottles/Bladders (amount depends on wx/terrain- at least 3 liters)
  - ii. Water Purification tablets
  - iii. Emergen-C type of vitamin powder (for taste)
2. Food
  - i. Energy Bars (enough food to fuel me for 48 hours)
  - ii. Dried Fruit / Nuts
3. Shelter/Warmth
  - i. Use Paraglider for shelter
  - ii. 10'X10' Blue Plastic Tarp
  - iii. Space Blanket
  - iv. Fire Making tools / Matches
  - v. All clothing used for flying (Be sure to carry a waterproof shell)
4. Navigation
  - i. Compass
  - ii. GPS unit
  - iii. Topo maps of the area
5. Tools/Supplies
  - i. Knife
  - ii. Flint
  - iii. Spare Boot Laces or twine
  - iv. Streamer Tape
  - v. Spare Batteries
  - vi. Pain Meds
  - vii. Hat
  - viii. Plastic Bags
  - ix. Pen and paper to log progress and coordinates
  - x. Toilet paper



All these items fit into my two small kits (each about the size of a woman's clutch purse) and my harness storage pocket. Total weight for these items (minus clothing and water) is less than 2 kilos and costs less than \$50.



I fly with enough clothing to withstand the forecast evening temperatures. If the flight is in warm conditions, I still carry a waterproof shell and fleece in my harness. Your wing, tarp, and space blanket complete the basic shelter needs. Start a fire if cold weather is planned and remember to drink water and eat the food in your kit. Your goal is to remain warm and rested for your hike out in the morning. If you decide to leave behind equipment, note the position with your GPS and tag your path with the streamer tape you brought. Use your knapsack to carry as much of your gear as you can haul.

As I wrote earlier, survival requires preparation, training, practice, and good decision making. Your kit is a major portion of the preparation. Preparation includes the airborne orientation that you do when visualizing the area around your planned landing site – Are there any roads, streams, buildings? Which direction will your route take when daylight comes? Practice this exercise just as you do when looking at potential LZs.

To train your mind for this type of scenario, you might visit some survival sites on the web and read some of the great books on the subject. Practice using the equipment in your kit – Have you ever used a flint/magnesium tool to start a fire or consumed water that has been purified with your tablets? Familiarize yourself with, and use your gear so you will be confident in its ability to sustain you. The decisions you make will determine whether your stay in the wild will be an adventure or a hapless brush with danger. Plan ahead and use your head. A great book on the subject of survival is [“Deep Survival: Who Lives, Who Dies, and Why”](#) by Laurence Gonzales. The author explores not only the HOW of survival, but the WHY. He looks at the decision process and attitude adjustment that survivors need to accomplish, to go from victim to survivor.

So many people go through life ignoring the opportunities to experience true adventure – take your opportunities and temper the adventure with just the right amount of preparation and caution for an adventure you can tell your grand kids about!