



The old, the new and the practical.....

Wilderness Safety is not an oxy moron

We have grown from a society that relied on natural instinct and adaptation in the bush for survival to a domestic creature reliant on modern tools and being able to return to the “comforts of home” with a 300 hp motor under you. It will get you way out there and hopefully get you back. A lot is made of what to bring into the bush. It’s always a weight and size decision – only so much room on your machine or on your back.

One of the many considerations is a first aid kit. Its contents and packaging should be able to handle the environment you exist in. Besides your activity, in NS, wetness and humidity is your reality. How many times have you opened up a kit and found bags of rust filled bandages? Waterproofed soft packs tend to be more stuff-able than a hard-shell container that will only crack in the cold.

A “wilderness” first aid kit for some can vary from your buddies’ bandana to a full blown trauma bag. I would suggest something in the middle; light, compact and as comprehensive as the person using it. We have grown beyond the pioneer days when folks had a lot of natural cures and wisdom to draw from their “pack of the mind”. But the bandana or modern day triangular bandage has endured and indeed is the “bread & butter” of the wilderness first aider. The Lone Ranger, the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides have it figured out. With a triangular bandage / bandana you can do just about everything, not necessarily the same one for all concerns please! Besides personal hygiene needs; you can stop the bleeding, wash the wound, wrap it up and strap the injury or injured down to minimize the damage. Then you can figure out how to get back to the roadside.

With a decent pair of scissors you will be able to make as many triangular bandages as your woods mate has spare clothes – because it is them having the problem! Looking after number one, you save your stuff for you. The cleaner the better, but sterile is not you luxury when in the bush. While the wound is actively bleeding, infection is not as big a concern because the wound is flushing away dirt and bacteria. Recognize, of course, the less loss the better as you can only lose about two liters before you are in real trouble. Consistent direct pressure will stop the majority of these dilemmas, and stop peeking to see how it is doing! In the first 10 - 15 min clotting will be your goal and the curious just interrupt the bodies attempt to look after itself. The difference in the wilderness is you will have a time consuming evacuation, so when the bleeding stops – and all bleeding eventually stops - irrigation is recommended. No need to add lake bugs to the potential bacteria count, use clean drinkable water. Also, anything that will force some pressured

water; an irrigation syringe or even a plastic bag with a poked hole to clean it out. Use of various topical antiseptics is yours to explore; keep in mind they are all fine for “minor” cuts and scrapes. TAKE NOTE: Hydrogen Peroxide is now highly deemphasized as a preferred option.

It has been said that the leading cause of evacuation from the backcountry in North America is infection. This speaks to illness matters in addition to our soft tissue discussion. Be sure to clean your wounds well, even the little ones. When you start to see swelling at the site, discharge, hot and foul scents; open and re-irrigate. A fever and red striated lines leading away from the wound is a solid indicator you need to get to a hospital fast, as systemic sepsis (blood poisoning) is taking root. That’s not good; anti-biotics are likely going to be your new friend for a while.

If you are not aware, using a tourniquet to stop the blood flow is old news. If attempted, it should be the last ditch effort because when doing so you often cause the entire area below where you tied to become unsalvageable. By squeezing on pressure points above the wound you can act as the “gas pedal” and slow blood flow to the limb, but DO NOT tie it unless you are prepared to possibly lose the area below in order to save the person.

Some other things to be aware of when loading a first aid kit for the woods is the quality of the metal in scissors and tweezers - stainless steel will take a lot longer to disintegrate. A lot of the new wound control options are excellent. Some are gel based and will be frozen if temperatures are sub zero. Moleskin can be a foot saver if you are doing any amount of hiking. This can make the difference between going home or staying when you get a friction blister born by your new boots rubbing new pressure points on your now tender tootsies. This could be an article all by itself! Feel free to add in a bit of your home medicine chest too. Over the counter drugs like anti-inflammatory and pain meds can take the bite off a swelling injury or deal with a simple headache. Be sure to keep meds in their tablet form and in their original containers. Nothing like playing musical tablets at two the morning around your emergency fire!

One thing hasn’t changed, if it happens to you in the back of beyonds you have a larger concern on your hands. The wilderness is called the great magnifier for this reason. A Wilderness and Remote First Aid program will give you a better sense for what can go wrong and what to do when Murphy’s Law rules the next jaunt to the fishing hole. Developing what’s between your eyeballs (your brain) will empower you to treat when injuries go well beyond the “Golden Hour”.

To get further info on suggest wilderness FA kit contents check out the contacts below.

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