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Deep woods and jungle kit

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- Skills and guides - Bushcraft and Survival -



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Description :

What to take in the woods or in the jungle?

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Robert A. Heinlein wrote a marvellous science-fiction book called "Tunnel in the Sky". It was about the exploits of some high-school students of the future who were stranded on a distant planet when a final exam in their Survival Studies course ran into some unforeseen difficulties. It was supposed to be a short two to three day field exercise to determine their final grade, pass or fail, the way real-life survival would. The students could take any gear that they thought would be advantageous to them. The hero of the story took his survival vest loaded with food, water and other supplies, and chose two large knives, an eight-inch bowie pattern and a seven-inch dagger, for his weapons/tools. At one point he loses the bowie temporarily, and has occasion later to use the dagger, lashed to a stick, as a spear.

This story thrilled me when I first read it, and set in motion my desire to be prepared for any eventuality. Re-reading it in later years caused me to question what gear to carry for an extended period away from "civilization", i.e. knives and related items, and how to use them to cover the broadest range of potential problems. And I came to the same conclusion Heinlein's hero did: one knife just wouldn't do it. Loss or some other mishap could spell disaster. Through a lot of trial and error, the kind we all go through when in the field, hunting and camping or the like, I found the following combination to work quite well.

My main knife is an SOG bowie from SOG Specialty Knives. This is a fairly exacting copy of the knife carried by various spec-war types during the Vietnam conflict. It's heavy enough to cut fairly dense brush, yet light enough to carry with everything else on my survival belt. In the field of do-everything knives, bowies have long stood apart from the rest. They're stout, and overall a good design. Unfortunately, the SOG bowie had a top quillon, which didn't last long before succumbing to the hacksaw. I personally don't like that feature on a working bowie; it gets in the way of a finger-forward, "choking-up" type grip, handy when skinning game or whittling trap parts. I also reground the tip, to make it a little stronger. All clip point bowies suffer from this problem, which is addressed by the spear point bowie's design.

The sheath was originally for a six-inch Gerber LMF, which I bought from a catalog company, empty. Unfortunately, they no longer sell these fine sheaths separately. What makes these (and those of the LMF's larger brother, the BMF) sheaths so nice is that they are built from the start to have a pouch lashed onto them. Somebody should start making these sheaths as an aftermarket item for any number of blade lengths, they're that good. The pouch I chose was originally designed to hold four double-stack pistol magazines, which gave me plenty of room for my stuff; I merely sewed the bottom of it shut, and filled it up. Then I used the Bianchi clip on the back to attach it to the knife sheath. Again, another nice, modern design touch that should be more often emulated.

The only other knife that rivals the bowie in sheer outdoor usefulness the world over is the machete, and I decided to carry one of these as well. I chose a twelve inch bladed Tramontina, because that size is much handier to carry than the full eighteen inch U.S. issue machete. The sheath was purchased from Brigade Quartermasters and is nylon with a plastic liner. The liner should be a little thicker/stiffer, but it still beats the heck out of canvas. The flap portion of the sheath contains a hidden pocket, perfect for storing line or similar items. I carry a spool of twelve pound test fishing line (75 feet), some paracord (6 feet), and snare wire (12 feet) there.

Attached to the machete sheath are a Shrade skinning knife on the front, and a leaf-bladed throwing knife on the back. I carry a nine inch section of hacksaw blade in the throwing knife sheath. The machete sheath is slung under the main belt via a pair of hangers I made myself, sort of like a sword hanger. This allows it to be carried low and out of the way, yet remain easily accessible.

Each item I carry is there for a purpose, and I tried to choose items with more than one use, either as a tool or weapon. I also chose the method of carrying each item with similar care.

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Being left handed, I'll start at the left side of my belt order and work my way around, describing the contents of each pouch or sheath.

First is what used to be a spare parts pouch for a .45, designed to hang below the belt. I removed the brass hook and adapted it to use ALICE clips instead. Inside are: matches, a large ziplock freezer bag (both in 35mm film canisters), snare wire (insulated, multi-strand copper electrical wire, 6 feet), and paracord (20 feet).

Next along is an M-14 double pouch, with a compass pouch attached to it. In the compass pouch I keep: matches, a magnesium bar, nylon twine (125 pound test, 75 feet), and paracord (12 feet).

Inside the double pouch are: 3 large garbage bags, 6 sports bars (2 days e-rats), 2 12 hour Cyalume light sticks, matches, nylon twine (150 pound test, 100 feet), nylon twine (250 pound test, 75 feet).

Attached to my SOG bowie sheath is a pouch that holds: matches, fishing kit (hooks, sinkers, rubber worms, jigs, and a spoon), nylon twine (125 pound test, 35 feet; dental floss); fishing kit and line are carried in 35mm film canisters. I also carry a sharpening stone, ceramic rod, and gun oil to sharpen all my knives in this pouch.

After my bowie is a single M-14 pouch, which holds: tinder and a Mylar blanket; hanging from that is another spare parts pouch holding: a rudimentary first aid kit (Band-Aids, gauze, ibuprofen, aspirin, decongestant tabs, electrolyte replacement tabs, burn gel, nail clippers), matches, wire saw.

On the right side of my belt, starting at the front, is a pouch containing: matches (2 35mm cans), fishing kit (same as above), nylon twine (125 pound test, 75 feet).

One quart canteen and cover, with: canteen cup, water purification tabs (100), 28 bullion cubes (beef and chicken) stored under the canteen in a double ziplock baggie.

Last on that side is my machete, which I've already listed above.

The throwing knife can be used as it was intended, or lashed to a pole to make a spear. The hacksaw blade can be used to make the slot needed to attach the throwing knife to a pole, or for cutting notches for trap parts. I prefer this to saw-blades added to the backs of knives, because it cuts so much better.

The ziplock bags and garbage bags can be used any number of ways, and take up so little space/weight that they should be a part of everyone's kit.

With the magnesium fire starter, capable of starting literally hundreds of fires, I also have seven containers of strike-anywhere kitchen matches. I store them in 35mm film cans (cut matches to length), air-tight plastic vials that once held radiator leak-proofing, and a screw-top match safe with rubber gasket. All told I'm carrying in excess of 200 matches, plus tinder in the form of store-bought compressed sawdust mixed with paraffin.

The sports bars and bullion cubes should provide me with around a thousand calories a day for two days, by which time I should have either caught or killed something to eat. And in addition to making yourself a spear, you could use some of the nylon cordage as a bowstring, and the dental floss to lash fletching to your arrows.

With this kit, whether I am lost in the deep woods of North America or some equatorial jungle, I have the means to

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gather food, produce fire and shelter, carry clean water, and provide myself with weapons for both hunting and self-protection. All in a kit that weighs less than twelve pounds and I can wear about my waist, never worrying about leaving it sitting back in camp when I might really need it, such as might happen with a daypack.

Knives were our first tool, and for good reason. Using a good knife, or an assortment of them, we can make other tools and weapons, something that can't be done with a gun, no matter how good it is. A gun is a gun and nothing more. Run out of bullets and it won't even make a good club. Short of breakage or loss, a knife will go on doing its job forever.

And that's a comfort when in you're the back of beyond, and why you should always carry a couple of good, stout blades, no matter what manner of atomic death-ray cannon you may have in your arsenal. Remember the basics.

Post-scriptum :Original article at [OldJimbo's site](#).