



Smith & Wesson's Emergency Survival Kit By Jeff Randall

Every once in a while we have a reader that tells us the wilderness skills articles in *Against All Odds* don't fit in a "gun" magazine. To me, that's as bad as saying that "assault rifles" have no use in the hands of a lawful citizenry. And while I can agree that hardcore primitive skills may push the envelope a little for the gunpowder and nitroglycerin junkies, the bottom line is if you are a firearms aficionado then every once in a while you place yourself in a potentially dangerous environment. Maybe I'm wrong. In fact, it could be that today's LEOs never have to pursue a felon or search for a missing child in remote terrain, or maybe the "civilian" readership never enjoys a hike through

a national forest or cares about hunting, fishing or camping in some backwoods location void of other humans. Well, that's not where I come from, and unless your loyalty to the 2nd Amendment only exists for collector reasons then you'll recognize that survival skills and firearms are natural and close partners. Be warned though; while gun owners get a lot of "kook" labeling by the PC crowd and liberal press, once you add "survivalist" to that then you've reached the pinnacle of the tin foil wearing, black helicopter spotting, conspiracy crowd. And while I don't mind wearing "kook" pinned on me by the un-informed, it's something you should remember if you ever have to be judged by a jury for defending yourself.

Due to this popular belief that survivalists with guns are nothing short of domestic terrorists, most gun manufacturers (unlike knife manufacturers) have always been on the fence when it comes to the hardcore survival mindset – afraid of getting labeled but still wanting the almighty dollar of the large survival market. They devise unique ways of staying PC by adding tag lines such as "sporting" to their wares which enables them to talk out both sides of their mouth depending on the customer. A few years back I approached a manufacturer about marketing a .22 Magnum rifle with an integrated comprehensive survival kit. During private conversations the brass at the company loved the idea but told me in no uncertain terms, (paraphrasing) "we can't market it since anything survivalist gets bad press in today's world." Well, it looks like times are changing. It seems the manufacturers have finally realized how many dollars they're losing by not catering to the survival crowd, or maybe they're just recognizing the common sense partnership that exists between outdoor and survival. I'm seeing more and more big names publicly merging survival with firepower. Good for them, it's about time.

Most notable to this new marketing is Smith & Wesson's Emergency Survival Kits. Shortly after the 2007 Shot Show I requested one of their kits for review. The kit I received was the 629ES that included the following: Smith & Wesson model 629 (3" barrel .44 Magnum with black Hogue[®] recoil reducing grip), waterproof Storm[®] Case, Coghlan's[™] Magnesium firestarter and Wet Fire tinder, Saber Cut[™] saw with fabric sheath, Jet Scream[™] whistle, Star Flash[™] signal mirror, Polaris[®] compass, two MPI Mylar Space[®] emergency blankets, Smith & Wesson Extreme Ops liner lock folding knife

with sheath, and the book *Bear Attacks of the Century - True Stories of Courage and Survival*.

Of course the signature item in the \$1122.00 MSRP kit is the 629 stainless steel revolver. Except for running one cylinder of ammo through the piece I didn't do much testing. I've owned one so I already knew it had plenty of usability features and power to take down just about anything you squeeze a round at. There is no doubt in my mind



that it's a fine piece, especially for bear country, but we don't have much of a problem with bears in Alabama. Even though I didn't feel a need to carry the revolver on my outings while testing the kit, I decided to leave it in place since it does add considerable weight and I wanted to use the kit as it came from the factory. Now, I'm guessing that anyone going to bear country would most likely strap the revolver on their side while in the bush since retrieving it from the Storm Case would not be feasible during

an attack. I'm also assuming that the Storm Case is made to throw in a vehicle or to store the gear when you're not in the bush since backpacking this kit in its original case is bulky. And while I'm harping on the Storm Case I have suggestion to S&W: If this kit is designed to be stored in a vehicle or kept around camp then it needs to have an easy to see color such as Blaze Orange instead of Olive Drab. (Note: the 500ES Kit comes in a red case and the 460ES Kit is yellow). With that complain out of the way, the case is extremely rugged, waterproof, and easy to open. The foam cutouts also make it very organized and easy to re-pack.

Signaling and Self-Rescue



One of the first things I noticed and consider to be excellent is the emphasis on quality signaling and self-rescue tools. This is important since the most likely survival situation for the hunter/hiker/camper will come from being lost. The Star Flash signal mirror w/ aiming hole is definitely a cut above the small piece of reflective plastic that a lot of kits call a signal mirror. Even

with overcast skies you can still successfully aim a beam of light at potential rescuers. The liquid filled Silva Polaris baseplate compass with declination adjustment is another one of my preferred tools since it easily integrates with topo maps often carried by hikers and hunters. Finally, the Jet Scream™ whistle is a must-have when signaling rescuers on foot or trying to locate your lost hunting buddy in thick bush.



Firestarting

One thing that can't fall short in any hunter's survival kit is the ability to start a fire. Simply put, most hunting seasons are during the coldest time of the year and if you don't have

the ability to dry clothes or warm up after an incident you will most likely succumb to the elements. S&W chose to include a Coghlan's Magnesium / Ferrocium flint fire starter and Wet Fire tinder. This is about as basic as it gets but it works exceptionally well. The Wet Fire tinder does just what its name implies: it lights even when wet. Just fray the tinder and strike the flint with your knife and you'll get fire. The pieces I lit had been purposely submerged in a creek for about 15 minutes but they instantly took the sparks from the flint and burned for several minutes – plenty of time to get damp twigs and kindling started. One note on striking any Ferrocium flint: Most people want to hold the flint steady and strike the knife down the flint. What usually happens is your knife will hit your tinder, disturb it, or even blow it out from under the sparks, especially if you're using any type of fluffy lightweight tinder material. The best way to strike any artificial flint is to hold the knife steady over the tinder then rake the flint up the knife edge towards you, causing the sparks to shower into your tinder bundle without disturbing it.

Cutting Tools



I've used a variation of the Saber Cut saw for years in my tromping around in the woods. Designed like a chain saw chain with two handles you can easily slice through a 3 inch diameter hardwood tree in less than a minute. Overall it's an excellent tool for any survival kit since it has the ability to make shelter, clear obstructions or dismember anything made of wood or bone. It's also very compact and lightweight for the amount of hard work it will perform. The only downside I can see to this type of saw is if you were injured with only one good arm

then it's pretty much useless (but then again so are a lot of other tools). The Smith & Wesson Extreme Ops liner lock folding knife is heavy duty and built like a tank. During my fire starting work I used the serrated edge to strike the Ferrocium flint since sharper edges tend to produce better sparks, and the back edge of the serrations get very little use anyway so who cares if you dull them a bit. The only negative thing I have to say about the folder is, well, it's a folder. A lot of my survival work includes driving a knife through wood with a baton, whether to split kindling or to snap cut a sapling. Eventually a folder is going to get weak in the pivot and lock after enough baton work. So, if I were going to rely heavily on this kit I would replace the folder with a short stout fixed blade knife that would fit in the box.

The remaining items include two Mylar Space blankets. These come in handy for quick wrap-around warming or temporary lean-to shelters. They can also be used as improvised signaling devices due to their high reflectivity so you might say they have various survival uses while hardly tipping a postal scale in weight - great tools for any kit. The last item is the book on bear attacks. While I read enough of it to see that it is a very easy read packed with information, again, I don't live in bear country so I didn't finish it.

In conclusion, this kit is very well thought out, except for a few personal changes I would like to see. I would also kick this kit up a bit by adding a small tarp, 50 feet of paracord, a few large ziploc style bags for water, storage/collection, a small LED flashlight (like the ASP or similar), and a blister pack of water purification tablets such as the Katadyn

Micropur tablets. I also think this kit needs a laminated survival tip card enclosed with the kit that explains a few tricks of the survival trade. All of these additions would easily fit in the bottom of the box where the owner's manuals and lawyer mandated "don't shoot yourself" safety cards are. With that said, I've just been informed that S&W has also introduced a Disaster Ready Kit that includes much of what I stated above.