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The Poor Man's Guide To Survival Gear

Brandon Smith
December 15th, 2011

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Special Note: Obviously, an entire book could be written on this subject, which is a task beyond the scope of this article. The purpose of the following piece is to give those with financial difficulty a foothold on prepping without added pain. It is meant

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to be a starting point, not a compendium.

A friend of mine took note recently that a large portion of activists involved in the Liberty Movement had hit extremely hard times, or had been struggling financially even before the general economic collapse began to take hold. He asked me my theory on why it was that so many of us are always so broke. I could only relate that it is almost always the working class poor in any society that first sees the effects of a corrupt government and a faulty economic system. Those who legitimately hold to the principles of self sustainment, and fair play, are usually the first to be stabbed in the back by the establishment, and so, they are the first to become politically active against it. That is to say, sometimes we have to lose almost everything before we are able to see the bigger picture.

While I consider this fact a source of solace in these extraordinarily hard times, it still does little to put food on the table, or survival gear in the bug-out-bag.

The overall consensus within the prepper community is that survival planning is expensive, and yes, it certainly can be. Another consensus is that you "get what you pay for"; also true...to a point. My belief is that while no prepping model is free of expense or of quality concerns, perhaps there is a middle road that activists with thin wallets can take which will provide solid gear for less money, and that will serve most of the functions of high-end gear that is ten times as expensive. Let's examine a foundation list of those items that can help get you started now....

Backpack (Bug Out Bag)



You can literally spend hundreds of dollars on many top-of-the-line framed backpacks, and some may even be worth it, but it is not necessary to spend that kind of cash to purchase a decent bug-out-bag. In fact, surplus ALICE packs with frames can be had online for as little as \$30-\$60, sometimes even less if they are a bit worn. The ALICE system provides adequate back support for your needs, for a low price, and the quality of the design is military proven.

Camouflage Clothing

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Camouflage clothing and gear runs a wide spectrum in price, and it's hard sometimes to find the colors you want at a discount. One trick is to buy any camo you find on the cheap, and then lightly dye it to match the colors you want. For instance, one could gauge the dye levels with small samples, find the right strength, and then dye light camo like Digital ACU a darker green. Eventually, you may be able to make your own camo with any clothing you come across. It sounds like a pain, but it's actually quite easy, and could save you considerable amounts of money.

Extreme Weather Protection



Gortex is outrageously expensive, unless you get lucky and find it used or discounted. While it is difficult to beat the quality (or the warrantee) on most Gortex cold weather gear, there are cheaper alternatives that get the job done almost as well. A great extreme cold weather coat is the N-2B Flight Jacket designed to mil spec and resistant to most wet weather conditions. The jacket was meant specifically to deflect freezing temperatures and it can be had for around \$120 or less.

Purchasing several packages of polypropylene thermal underwear could also save your life in extreme weather situations. They are lightweight, can be easily layered, can be packed into a tiny corner of your B.O.B., and will retain much of your body heat. Even if you don't have a lot of winter gear with you, absolutely do not forget to bring the poly-wear! \$30-\$50 for a shirt and pants together is well worth it.

Finally, buy wool socks. Buy plenty. Look for deals, but do not

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cut them out of your budget. Any weather below 20 Degrees Fahrenheit and you'll want to double up. Cold feet, on a march, on patrol, on guard duty, sucks. They can be damaged permanently if you are not careful.

Combat Boots

Top quality combat boots traditionally run anywhere from \$100 to \$300 depending on the brand. One rule that you cannot break regardless of the circumstances; always treat your feet right. They hold up your entire body. Surplus boots are a good place to start when looking to cut costs, but usually you won't be saving much. To be honest, there are plenty of knockoff combat boots found in sporting goods stores, usually in the hiking section, that are just as durable as the expensive models but for much less. You can go far in a pair of \$60 boots. Be sure, though, to thoroughly check for poor sewing on the seams, crap laces, and light construction. If they feel heavy, they are probably made well enough.

Camp Heater



Unless you have your own oil well, or a line on a hidden vein of coal (some preppers I have met actually do), then your best bet for efficient heat during the winter weather in a tent, a makeshift shelter, or a house, is a wood burning stove. Timber fuel sources are everywhere. A couple cords of wood are enough to heat most homes and shelters through the colder months.

Gasoline and propane storage is possible, but the likelihood of shortage is high, and arranging a practical supply lasting a year or more is incredibly expensive. Solar power systems and battery banks are recommended, but again, this is another option that requires moderate to substantial investment when it comes to heating a house. A very affordable alternative for your heating needs would be the M-1941 Military Tent Stove. The cylindrical stove is portable, burns quite hot, and can be had usually for \$100 or less.

Survival Knife

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Some knives deserve the amount of attention and the high price tag they have garnered, but many are just....well....regular knives with a fancy name engraved in the blade. You are buying a knife for its functionality, not its sex appeal. Gerber, SOG, and Kershaw make plenty of knives which work just as well for \$80 or less than any \$400 cord wrapped Strider knife. Again, pay for the tool, not the name or the artificial commercial mystic.

Communications

Good HAM radios, base stations to handheld models, can be had for around \$200-\$300, but even this amount is sometimes too high for a limited prepper budget. Unless you plan to coordinate operations over longer distances using repeaters, or set up a HAM alert system with multiple members of your community, regular two-way radios costing around \$40 to \$60 like those produced by Midland should suffice for communications. Consumer models often advertize an effective range of 20 to 30 miles, but this is in totally flat terrain. If you can get five miles out of them in rough terrain, you are doing well. This range is adequate to handle most tasks required during a survival situation.

Electricity



Gas powered generators are unnecessary long term survival situations, primarily because the amount of fuel they use is impractical and the noise many of them produce could make having electricity a daily temptation of fate. Solar is really the best way to go. Unfortunately, many people assume solar power solutions to be too technical and overwhelming. In fact, setting up a solar power system is so straight forward it makes all the prepper uneasiness a bit laughable.

A simple and comparably affordable set-up would include one 180

Watt solar panel (which can quickly charge your battery bank during the day), one deep cycle battery, a charge controller, and an inverter. This kit can be had for \$600 to \$1000, is compact enough to fit a medium Rubbermaid storage bin, and will power almost every appliance and charge every electronic device that would make life easier during a collapse. Remember also that every Watt of power you produce by the sun reduces your on-grid electric bill, saving you even more money.

At the very least, a portable solar powered battery charger is a must have item. Doing without gear like radios and flashlights is simply not an option. Going caveman is the most ill conceived method for living through the worst of all possible situations.

Survival Tin

Pre-made mini survival kits are a rip off. Most of the items they contain (matches, fishing line, compass, small knife, firestarter, wire saw, water purification tablets, etc.) can be easily purchased separately for half the cost. Making your own mini-kit is also a good exercise in efficiency. Being able to prioritize gear and understand what is truly useful versus what is a waste of space is as important a skill as being able to shoot or navigate a map. It does not take a lot of money to build a solid base kit for emergencies....unless you buy one that somebody made for you.

Emergency Medical Kit

Again, all items within most pre-made medical kits can be bought individually for much less. Celox blood stopper, silk sutures, surgical tools, transfusion bags, and other goods should be added in with the staples, raising the cost slightly, but rounding out your kit and allowing for more critical injuries to be cared for. Bulk over the counter medications, especially for stomach ailments, would be highly valuable post collapse, and can be bought wholesale. Medicinal teas, at least the organic brands, work very well! These can be bought for reasonable prices and will boost your immune system, preventing illness before it ever occurs.

Food Production



If you have enough land to keep them, a half dozen chickens, a half dozen breeding rabbits, and a goat, will produce milk, meat, and eggs daily, providing valuable sustenance, reducing the amount of stored foods you need to use in a day, and reducing the amount of time you have to spend hunting for food in a dangerous collapse environment. Chickens and goats practically feed themselves with whatever is available on your land. Rabbit feed is easy to store, and can also be made at home. These animals are indeed worth their weight in gold.

Seeds are, of course, a currency in and of themselves. Non-GMO seed and strong gardening knowledge will save you and your family. Gardening is not as easy as it seems, however. Extensive practice, trial and error, and an understanding of regional climates will improve your crop yields dramatically.

If you are looking to survive on the cheap and avoid paying thousands of dollars for years worth of freeze dried goods, sustainable food production is the only way to go. Foraging and scavenging is NOT a reliable alternative.

Security Systems



Trip wires and tin cans are certainly cheaper than thermal security cameras, and a few well trained guard dogs can put your mind at ease, but sometimes more silent or less obvious methods are in order. I would recommend the MURS radio and infrared alert system for perimeter defense. As far as force multipliers go, MURS is relatively inexpensive. MURS motion detectors are wireless, weather proof, have a beam range of around 100 ft, and can be placed up to 4 miles away from your radio base station. Intruders crossing the infrared beam will set off an alert on your base station and all MURS handheld radios. Some MURS systems even have underground probes designed to detect the movement of vehicles. Up to four motion sensors can be linked to one base station and each can be designated for a sector, telling you exactly where on your property the intrusion is occurring. A full MURS system with multiple motion detectors can be had for \$300 or less. Other comparable outdoor security systems often cost \$500 or more.

Night Vision

The price range of night vision devices is truly staggering. Some can run as little as a few hundred dollars, others climb into the thousands. For the prepper with low cash flow who feels the need for night time security, a couple models offer good quality at a lower price.

For typical surveillance and overwatch, the Bushnell 2.5 by 42 night vision monocular creates a strong image with quality construction for around \$200.



For combat, the Yukon Nvmt Night Vision Scope offers many of the advantages of high end systems for only \$350 or less.



Night vision may seem like an unnecessary expense, even at these prices, but any edge one can get in survival is a good thing. Being at a disadvantage monetarily does not mean you have to be at a disadvantage tactically.

Self Defense

Yes. Guns. Big-scary-guns. Guns and survival go hand in hand, especially during an economic or social collapse. To bring up guns in a prepping article almost always draws criticism of militancy and extremism from suburban basted over-privileged adolescent hippies who have read "Into The Wild" way too many times and think survival is about "communing with nature". Sorry kids, but as much as I love nature, as soon as you turn your back on it, you end up a pre-digested meal spread like almond butter across 30 acres of grizzly valley. On the other side of the coin, firearms analysis always draws endless opinions and puffy chested "expertise" from armchair generals and "invincible special-ops superheroes".

Frankly, after years of survival writing, you stop caring what other people think. That said, for those of us with limited resources (of which I would include myself), firearms purchases are much less

about technical proficiency and more about affordability.

I won't be delving into sidearms here. Instead we'll focus on what you cannot conceivably live without. Purchasing a primary battle rifle should always be the prepper's first concern as far as firearms go, whether he is rich or poor. Semi-automatic, accurate, reliable, hard to damage, fires a common military caliber (.223, 7.62 by 39, .308). There's your list. Finding cheap rifles that meet that list is another matter, but here are a few that come pretty close:

SAIGA



The Saiga is a high capacity AK variant that comes in all common military calibers as well as a 12 gauge shotgun model (I'm amazed it's still legal). Works great, shoots straight, built tough, runs between \$450 to \$650. For the price, you can't go wrong.

CETME



A Spanish made .308 semi automatic rifle with a similar design to the HK G3. Many in circulation have been pieced together with surplus parts, and it is wise to get yours checked out by a trusted gunsmith. A little tuning may be required. Otherwise, a pretty solid 300 yard gun running at \$450 to \$600.

FN FAL

The FAL is a Belgium made semi auto .308 rifle. Accurate and well made. Effective range of around 700 yards. Can be found for \$600 to \$800.

AK 47



Will you look like a terrorist holding this gun? Yes. But beyond

that, the AK is synonymous with dependability, and affordability. Though gun prices the past few years have skyrocketed in ridiculous fashion, the AK 47, a 7.62 by 39 caliber rifle, can still be found for around \$300 to \$600 depending on the make, the age, and the honesty of your dealer. This is not a very accurate gun beyond 100 yards. Can you hit a man sized target beyond 100 yards with an AK? Yes. Can you do it accurately and consistently? No. You want pinpoint sniper accuracy from a Russian made weapon? Get a Dragunov. You want a close quarters weapon that you can clean with a dish rag and motor oil and still have it fire? Get an AK.

SKS

The SKS used to be a good deal. Four years ago you couldn't spit without hitting one priced at around \$200. Nowadays, many gunshops are fishing for \$400 to \$500. Do not pay this for any SKS. It is not a \$500 gun. It is a \$200 to \$300 gun. Period. Deals can still be found if you are patient. The 7.62 by 39 rifle is relatively accurate and solidly built. The bayonet is a bit of a pain, but removing it is apparently an ATF no no. Technically you are required to remove the bayonet mounting lug and the grenade launcher attachment along with the blade for the gun to be legal (I'm not going to go into the absurdity of ATF assault rifle guidelines). Honestly, if you don't like the bayonet, just take it off, and don't let any of your ATF buddies shoot it at the range.

RUGAR MINI-14



Another rifle that used to be a good deal, now ruined by overenthusiastic gun shop owners. Private sale at a gun show is the only way lately to find this rifle at its traditionally suitable price of \$350 to \$450. Gun shops today will ask \$600 to \$800. The .223 rifle, designed after the M1 Garand, is light, easy to wield, and pretty accurate out to 300 yards. Lighter ammo means more rounds can be carried at a time.

Long Range Sniper Systems

For long range at an affordable price, you just can't go wrong with Savage Arms. The company has maintained the great quality of its products, kept their prices low despite the Obama gun boom,

and most of their rifles compete equally with guns twice as expensive. One issue to keep in mind, though, is optics, which can sometimes cost as much as the gun itself if you are not careful. Long range shooting platforms are essential for a small force defending against a larger or better supplied enemy. The more you can increase your standoff distance when at a disadvantage, the better chance you have of survival. One or two long range experts can wreak havoc on a seemingly unstoppable foe, making the cost of operations so high the enemy begins to question the practicality of moving forward. In collapse environments, snipers, amateur to professional, always come out of the woodwork to dominate the landscape. Preppers have the ability to counter this threat, and with very inexpensive firearms.

SAVAGE MODEL 10

This is a .308 sniper system commonly found with a precision stock and a heavy barrel. Range of around 800 yards. Can be found for \$600 to \$700. Modified systems come more expensive, but the standard model is all you need.

SAVAGE 111

A highly accurate rifle utilizing the effective 300 Win Mag cartridge. Range exceeding 1000 yards. Can usually be found for around \$700.

SAVAGE 111 BA

The "long range hunter" model of the Savage 111 in .338 Lapua costing less than \$1000. The .338 is an incredible cartridge with an effective range of about 1 mile. The Savage has been found comparable to sniper systems three times as expensive. The only problem with the .338 is the price of the ammo, which usually runs around \$60 to \$70 for a box of 20 rounds, almost twice as expensive as 300 Win Mag. Man, does that sting! This rifle should be considered a poor man's substitute for the .50 Cal, a rifle that will always be undeniably expensive, considering one round usually sets you back \$4 to \$5. If you want the capability of a .50 Cal but not a quite so outrageous ammo price, the Savage is your best bet.

Procrastination Is Something We Cannot Afford

Preparation is not limited to the realm of the rich. Ultimately, survivalists with limited incomes must pursue their prepping MORE vigorously than those with expendable cash exactly because they are at a greater disadvantage. Being poor is no excuse for procrastination. Great gear can be had for little money, as long as purchases are approached intelligently. Budgeting for survival is not an enterprise for some future date in which we imagine ourselves to be better off than we are now. It should be a part of our daily life, even when times are tough.

Self discipline gets things done. Making a plan and then sticking to that plan despite our inner weaknesses and apprehensions gives greater returns in the long run. This method not only earns

the respect we hold for ourselves, but also the respect others hold for us. The flaky and indecisive cannot be relied upon. The gravity of the socio-political situation we face in the near term demands that we shake off our fears and our apathy, step out of our baby cradle comfort zone, and MAKE THINGS HAPPEN. Backing out is not an option. Otherwise, we simply defeat ourselves, and we let each other down.

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