

# Dirt Road Camping

By Wells Shoemaker MD



*Burr Desert and the Henry Mountains, Southern Utah*

## How to Bring What You Need

Anticipate Adversity

Stay Safe

Have Fun

Eat Well

Rescue Yourself

and Come Home Happy

## Dedications and Acknowledgment

Dedicated to the Words Simplicity, Humility, Adaptability, Delight, and Redundancy

Dedicated to the Virtues of Coffee, Bacon, Beans, Sunrises, Moonlight, and Sunscreen

Dedicated to the Friends who have shared this learning process over the last 50 years:

George Merilatt, Robin Stockwell, Evan “Grumps” Evans, Doug Campbell,  
Jim Gaughran, Geoff Drake, Salem Magarian, Scott and Barbra Berry,  
Joel Ramirez, Grant Johnson...and Murphy (of the Law)



*Robin's truck in the Alabama Hills before dawn. Mt. Whitney in upper right*

## Foreword

Many of us answered the call of the wilderness 20, maybe 50 years ago. Wild places gave us an awareness of the beauty of the Earth and what we have to lose if we're lazy or greedy. The wilderness counterbalanced the abrasive grind of work. Wilderness puts us closer to the edge of mortality on occasion, and that makes us treasure every day we live. I've undertaken roughly 150 backpack trips in the mountains, the deserts, and what's left of the wild Pacific coast over those years, spending roughly 2 years total roaming with an Osprey pack on my back. However, things change with time. Human physiology, injuries, and cancer have a way of altering one's capabilities as the years pass...but none of those dampen the appeal of wild places.

It's rare to get close to a real wilderness on pavement. Dirt roads used to get us to a trailhead in the middle of night in order to start hiking at the crack of dawn. Now, the dirt roads lead us to our destination, where we can stash the gear and hike unfettered.

Lurching over rutted roads to desolate dominions and creeping across scoured washes to remote trailheads may seem like peculiar pursuits to people who program the thermostats in their bedrooms. Dirt road campers know that what happens after the truck stops certainly transcends any pleasure to be found upon the TV couches of America. However, the journey to such destinations is fraught with both hazard and mischief, including deep sand, cloying mud, unexpected snow, tire damage, ponderous obstacles, and a variety of ominous metallic grinding noises.

This booklet shares some strategies that I believe will make those forays more efficient, safer, and more satisfying...if not, necessarily, less expensive.

"Dirt road camping" for this publication means some kind of hearty vehicle carries your heavy stuff to where you'll be going to sleep, probably somewhere on public land. I'm excluding RV's, sleeping trailers, and motorcycles because those approaches have their own literature...and limitations. Horse and mule packing is great fun but out of scope for the independence I'll be discussing. I'll be talking mostly about trucks...or vans and SUVs...with proper tires, capable suspension, and gearing torque to leave the highway.

I'm also excluding established campgrounds, where diesel fumes, slamming aluminum doors, coughing generators, bickering spouses, and screeching children largely eliminate any pretense of wilderness. I want quiet beauty, expansive views, bright stars, and clean water. I also insist on leaving the ground cleaner than I found it.

Let's see if we can get you there and back again.

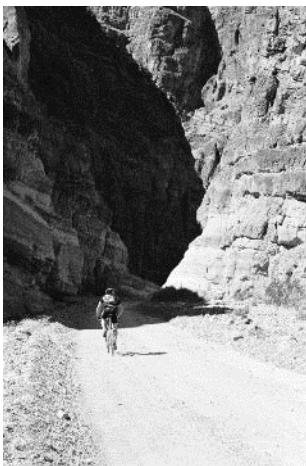
Wells Shoemaker MD  
Autumn, 2021





*“Congratulations, Wells, you bought a four wheel drive truck. Now you’ll be even further from the highway when you get stuck.”*

—Geoff Drake, Man of Wheel, Endurance Athlete, and Fastpacker



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*Photos by Wells Shoemaker except as credited*



*The author in Marble Canyon Wash, Death Valley*

*Photo by George Merilatt*

## Public Lands and Primitive Roads

The Federal Government of the United States owns a great deal of land. Some of it may have been protected from commercial development because of intrinsic natural beauty, environmental preservation, historical interest, biological notability, or recreation. Some of the new western states, Nevada and Utah especially, had no perceived use for vast tracts of “barren wasteland.” Some of that last category became military training facilities, nuclear testing sites, and toxic waste dumps...not great camping! Most public land, however, ranges from pretty to gorgeous.

It's gorgeous in different ways to different eyes, however. Natural resources above and below the ground have heightened the use of public lands as an economic and political friction point.

Tensions have grown harsh between extractive industries and preservationist interests. Timber “harvest” and pursuit of embedded coal, oil, lithium, uranium, and shiny minerals square off against protection of habitat and watershed, tribal rights and interests, biological diversity, and different takes on “outdoor recreation.” The pursuit of solitude and inspiration clash with terrain-shredding off-road vehicles, reckless gunplay, exploitative grazing, human error fires, and shameless littering.

What is common to public lands is that primitive dirt roads penetrate them. On a pragmatic, as opposed to political, front, these roads predictably have hazards—bumps and washboard at a minimum, and often enough...gaping ruts, impassable gullies, deep sand, muddy mire, obstructive rockfalls, and toppled trees.

Conditions can change in a hurry.

Dirt Road Camping uses these roads extensively...but of course it's more complicated.



*End of the road, Echo Canyon, Death Valley NP*

A confusing tangle of state and federal agencies has been charged with “managing” these lands and the dirt roads that thread through them.

- The **United States Forest Service** (USFS) had to decide if it were to be a timber harvest agency or a forest preservation agency or a wildfire combat agency. While it hasn’t made up its mind entirely, the roads are there...with numbers, maps, and access to the high country and beautiful places. We own them.
- The **Bureau of Land Management** (BLM) had to decide if it would be the leasing agency for oil and coal exploration on public lands, bargain rate grazing for wealthy ranchers, and soil for ATV plunder...or stewardship for responsible recreation for Americans looking for a connection to nature. That’s a hard donkey to straddle, but the roads are there, and they belong to all of us.
  - BLM field offices can be a tremendous resource if you’re planning to visit an area you don’t know well. Knowing current road conditions can save much more than time...and the staff likely know alternatives.
  - My favorite? The BLM visitors center in Cannonville, Utah, northern gateway to Kodachrome Basin, Grosvenor Arch, Cottonwood Canyon, and the Vermilion Cliffs.
- The **National Park Service** (NPS) was charged with creating access to Congressionally designated glorious destinations. That mission has become burdened with demand for hotel functions, traffic control, law enforcement for growing crowds, and climate change. Some expansive national parks have permitted dirt roads that lead to rare beauty and quiet. My favorites: Death Valley, Joshua Tree, and Capitol Reef.
  - Even a half inch of rain can take out the road in a narrow canyon overnight.
  - Death Valley’s formal website has detailed, regularly updated backroad reports.
- **National Monuments** and less restricted **National Conservation and Recreation** lands are protected from some forms of depredation and offer generally less crowded locales. Confused governance, political friction, and scrawny cows come with the package. They almost all have websites with a phone number you can use to garner advice and conditions. Most of the time, somebody will answer! My favorite: Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument (Escalante, UT), and Snow Mountain Wilderness NM (Stonyford, CA).
- **State Parks** are largely developed with designated campgrounds, but some have dirt roads with permitted “dispersed camping.” Inquire before you go!
- **Private property** in-holds, Trust lands, and tribal lands all have restrictions and access quirks which may take some research to understand.

What do we find at the end of these roads? The scenery will be different if you're climbing through the forest, negotiating dry washes in the desert, or approaching a windswept seashore. What they all share is the description "primitive," which means visitors must be self-contained and self-sufficient. No latrines and dumpsters there.

You won't drive by any stores, gas stations, or ranger kiosks once you leave the highway. Cell phone signals may be absent, which also means there won't be tow trucks on call nearby. There may not be any water. There may not be anybody to help you solve a problem for days and days...especially at the early and late fringes of seasonal access.

**ET Call Home. Tell somebody where you are going**, especially if you change plans. Put it in writing, too, as memories can be sketchy. Check in with that person when you get out to a cell phone tower. If you're not back at a designated time, and if you have been injured or stuck, your chances of making it back home will improve. We'll talk about contingency planning for self-sustainability and self-rescue later in this booklet.



*Doug's and Wells' trucks on the dirt road to Dedeckera Pass above the Eureka Dunes  
Dormant crater and Last Chance Range in the background*



## Maps and Directions

Driving into the back country without a map takes a special kind of personality, often merging with “victim.” Driving into the back country with a standard highway map isn’t much different.

Modern cell phone directions using GPS are not consistently reliable, and many will let you down when you lose a cell signal. They are rarely updated to show closures, washouts, landslides, and boulder blockades. Specialized ones such as **Gaia** do much better, even down to routes of hiking trail caliber, but users must engage a techy learning curve long before pulling off the highway.

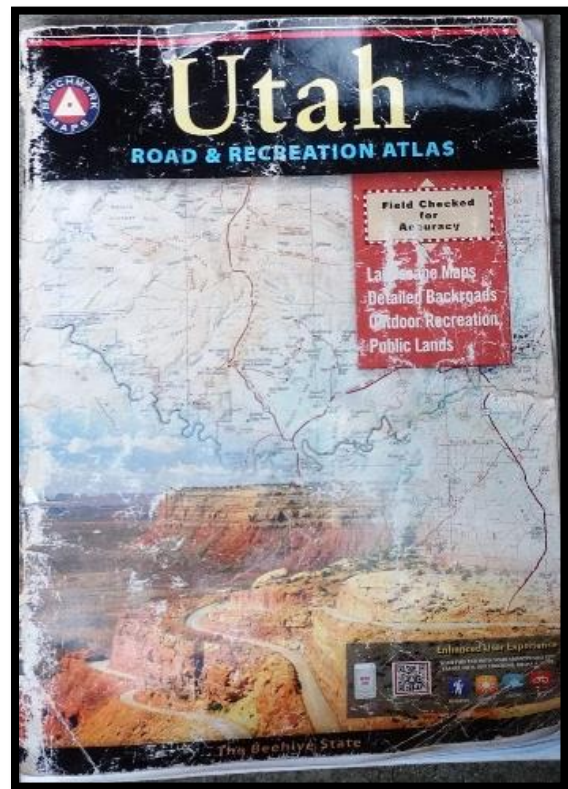
What we want is a map that doesn’t rely upon electricity or cell towers...and has a scale that will display dirt roads, including those puzzling, unmarked turns. The popularity of ORV travel has, admittedly, improved consumer choices here.

The **Benchmark Map** series is my personal favorite...with publications for Utah, Nevada, California, Arizona, Colorado ...and more. (About \$25)

Mine is a little worn and wrinkled...like its principal user.

Every legally driveable dirt road is here.

Some rural county chambers of commerce (e.g. Wayne County, Utah) have produced excellent, accurate backcountry road maps to encourage visitation.



Stay on the roads. The American wilderness does not need any new tire tracks...anywhere.



*Desert below Dedeckera Pass, above the Eureka Dunes, Death Valley National Park  
Off road driving explicitly prohibited.*

## Getting There: Your Vehicle



*Deer Creek, Utah*

### First issue—**two wheel or four wheel drive?**

Graded dirt roads in pleasant conditions generally will let a 2WD vehicle pass. When conditions change from pleasant to gnarly, you might not get back out. Less frequently used dirt roads are less traveled for reasons...and those include steep grades, rough surfaces, loose rocks, deep ruts, heavy obstacles, snow drifts, and water damage.

Personally, I want 4 WD. But “4WD” covers a spectrum, too, and if you or your vehicle are not ready for “serious” passage, it is perfectly OK to turn around. It’s better to back out than to be hauled out.

People do try, but please don’t drag a trailer into rough terrain. It’s an eyesore when you have to abandon it, and there are some places you just can’t back up or turn around with that thing dragging behind you.

**Open bed or a shell?** If your destination gets a lot of rain, you’ll be glad to have a shell over your pickup bed to keep your gear dry...and maybe keep your deer dry for sleeping. I always bring double tarps for my open pickup bed in case the proverbial “flood of biblical proportions” comes down.



**Clearance.** Most full size pickups qualify as high clearance. SUV's usually do. Street sedans and suburban personnel carriers likely will not. Vans rarely have adequate clearance unless they were designed specifically for that terrain. Why does it matter? Because when rock meets oil pan, muffler, or struts...rock prevails.

**Tires.** Sharp rocks and unexpected ruts will ruin "street" tires, which is what comes with most new trucks on the lot. I have pierced a standard truck sidewall with a puny sagebrush stick. Buy tough Class E tires—10 ply with reinforced sidewalls. Class E hybrids that work on highways and moderately rough terrain don't cost much more than ordinary tires, and the difference is worth every penny.

**Two Spares.** Tire disabling injuries are common enough that two will be a comfort. If you have replaced a damaged tire with one spare, you can continue your trip with the security of yet another. Otherwise, you're counting on good luck, an opportunity Murphy won't often miss. Also, if your spare rides tucked underneath the bed, but you're up to the axles in deep sand or mud...there is no way you'll ever get to it.

For less than \$60, you can buy a dashboard socket, vehicle battery-powered compressor and a flat repair kit. Learn how to use them! They'll work fine on nail punctures, but nothing works on a sidewall injury.



*Evan "Grumps" Evans, legendary dirt road camper on the Hanaupah Canyon alluvial fan, Death Valley*

**Cleats.** Most trucks are delivered to the dealer with 4 tie down attachment points low in the bed. Those get promptly buried if you put anything in the bed. Auxiliary, sturdy tie-down cleats don't cost much and generally can be installed by anybody with a drill. If you put 3-4 cleats high on the external panel of the bed on both sides and a couple on the tail gate, you'll add handsome versatility of tying down a flapping load at multiple anchor points, hanging your gear above the varmints in camp, or anchoring a shelter!



*Well designed tie-down cleats. Anchor holes are separated 4" and use sturdy 5/16" bolts. Note these are shielded from the side which helps to avoid rope slip-off and reduces accidental catches on clothing.*

Don't buy flimsy cleats. Those will rust, but more important, they're not strong enough to tie down anything heavy. Too-small bolts, too close together...and they pull out. Tie down rope won't slide smoothly through small loops to enable you to cinch it down.



Hardware store cleats, stronger ones on the right...still no contest compared to ones pictured above.

Don't try to install cleats on a truck with light gauge steel or plastic side panels, or you'll be spending time trying to collect your load in the roadside weeds.

A dealer can install tie-down rails which run the length of the bed on each side...sturdy, versatile, and elegant!



*One of many designs for a rail. I added hefty loops with carabiner-style snap clips for convenience*

**Equipment failures.** All parts of all vehicles will eventually fail. It's just a question of when, and Murphy's Law will be enforced with mirthful rigor.

- If your **battery** is 3 years old, get a new one before you go dirt road camping.
  - Common error: leaving your ignition key in place, perhaps to operate a power window. Dashboard lights, fan, and other power sapping activities will drain the battery while you go for a hike...or a nap.
  - Modern lithium jump-starters fit inside a shoe box and cost \$100-200 (get the bigger one). They're worth every penny if you ever need one...plus they can power lights and devices that use USB charger portals.
- **Water pumps and alternators** begin to fail at 60-75,000 miles. That's a replacement imperative...not a repair you can manage at the edge of the wilderness. It only takes one of those experiences to rationalize preemptively replacing these critical "organs" before you drive into the woods.
- Many modern vehicles have a single "**universal**" **belt** that drives the water pump, fan, and alternator. Belts get worn and stretched with normal use, but they'll wait to break until you're far away from the highway. Replace the belt every 50,000 miles, and keep the demoted one somewhere in your vehicle for an emergency backup.
- See the self-rescue "GUNK" section (Appendix 1) for more trip-saving hints & details.



*Hanaupah Canyon, rough road to the top of the alluvial fan at dawn. Telescope Peak above. 5 miles down to West Side dirt road, 15 miles to the highway in Death Valley*

## Sleeping Over the Dirt and Under the Stars

Dirt Road Camping means sleeping “out there,” likely not too far from the truck. I’ll share some viewpoints intended to keep you comfortable.



*Burr Point...the rim above the southbound Dirty Devil River after a rainy, cold night*

**Sleeping bag.** Down is my favorite—light, compact, toasty warm...but it won’t like getting wet. Synthetic fiber bags are too heavy for backpacking, but fine for dirt road camping. They tend to be a little more spacious than backpack bags, too. We can predict nighttime low temperatures, but it’s hard to guarantee them. Bring a bag rated 10 degrees colder than your guess, and you’ll not be disappointed.



No harm in sleeping in warm garments while you wait for the dawn

**Sleeping pads.** Some folks bring cots or sleep in the bed of a pickup, but most dirt road campers will sleep on the ground, and that requires a bit of preparation.

- First of all, spread a canvas tarp on the ground where you'll sleep. That helps with stickers, sharp pebbles, and other pokey things. The tarps keep ground moisture another layer away. They keep dust and soil from grossing out your sleeping bag, and they can do double duty as a shelter if necessary.
- Buy old fashioned, real canvas tarps. Slippery, noisy plastic is not tough enough to resist tears, and it's annoyingly flappy in a breeze. A canvas tarp will cost about \$20 for a 6'x8' ground cover for one person. I bring a 10'x12', fold it in half, and that has served me well. It will cost \$40-50, but it's everlasting and versatile!
- Some campers carry a comfortable tri-fold futon in the truck. They're comfy for certain, if a little clumsy to carry. Pin it down with rocks if you're going for a hike...they fly like hang gliders in the wind.
- Inflatable mattresses provide both padding and insulation, but of course, they're vulnerable to punctures. Slow leaks which leave your bones on the rocks in the middle of the night are no fun. Bring a repair kit and learn how to use it. Thermarest and other manufacturers now offer plush, larger sized inflatables which roll up and travel comfortably in a truck.
- Older fashioned closed cell foam pads (Insulite and successors) are fine for backpacking. They're lightweight, but honestly...not that comfortable. Let the truck carry something cushier...such as...



My new favorite of all sleeping pads—the Thermarest Mondo King. 25" x 77", 4" thick, cushy to a nearly embarrassing degree. (Cost >\$200)



On the subject of comfort...Don't forget a **pillow**...smart, not wimpy! A stiff neck doesn't improve either your mood or the scenery.





**The Big Black Bag** George and I each consolidate our personal “sleeping gear” in an oversized, tough canvas bag to ride in the bed of the truck. It holds the sleeping bag, pad, pillow, small tarp, tent, stakes...maybe even a 2'x4' rug remnant. A single trip delivers the BBB to that special spot you've chosen to sleep. A single container makes it easy to assure that all of your stuff returns to the truck, and it also keeps the contents from getting gritty, wet, or lost.

**Shelter...and the Tent.** I like sleeping under the stars, but wind in the desert, snow in the mountains, or rain at the coast will drive you to a shelter. So will bone chilling cold.

If you're going to sleep in the bed of your truck with a camper shell, you're definitely “set,” but the stars will be hard to see.

A **tent** needs only to be 2-person size, but it doesn't have to be an ascetic lightweight backpacking sausage casing. It should be big enough to throw your clothes, maybe your camera, and “stuff” inside and still have room to roll over and even sit up! Hang a light and read. Ventilation is a must. It must have a fly and a bug screen. It needs to be new enough to be assembled without an engineering degree or invoking profanity ...particularly when precipitation and wind are involved.

**Forgot the tent?** An improvised tarp shelter will fend off the rain, and it's not too hard to set up a single rope for the peak. Your truck will cheerfully carry a couple 6' 2x4's or 2x6's, perhaps with strategic notches or a drilled hole in one end to facilitate knots. You can also tie one end off to the lee of the truck and set up the shelter to thwart what Jerry Garcia called the “Dreadful Wind and Rain.” That 10'x12' canvas tarp will do the job. A lightweight backpacking tarp could do in a pinch, but you don't need to be in a pinch.

**Stakeout:** Ever try to pound a flimsy aluminum tent stake into a baked mud desert playa? I carry a little bag with ten 8” heavy spikes to use as lateral anchors.



*Serious 8” spikes and multipurpose tie-down/shelter support/makeshift bench boards*

**Novelties. Tepui pioneered pop-up rooftop shelters.** Tepui and competitors have attracted a loyal fan base, and you'll certainly see them if you're driving on secondary highways in the Southwest. They do not impede the handling of a vehicle the way a top-heavy RV or a swaying trailer will. They're cleverly engineered and spacious enough for two people. They have view portals and can be set up in either "airy mode" or buttoned down with inclement weather.

I have several reservations, however. They take a long time to set up and break down, especially with one person. The vehicle ideally should be parked on a flat spot, which is not always available. They're rated for wind tolerance, although it seems intuitively sketchy with quirky 60-70 mph winds on a desert promontory. (Not rare!)



Mostly, though, climbing down and back up a ladder in the middle of the night is not what gentlemen of a certain age crave when nature calls. I suppose there's always that wide mouth bottle.



*Thermonuclear dawn over the La Sal Mountains of Colorado  
...viewed from the sleeping bag at Cedar Point, Utah*

## Water

An adequate supply of water is essential for dirt road camping. Unlike backpacking, it's rather rare to be able to park a vehicle close enough to a stream or body of water to use environmental surface water. Some favorite destinations have no water at all.

It's feasible...if strenuous...for a fit backpacker to carry 3 gallons of water...enough for 3 days drinking water in the desert, as long as he or she never wastes a drop. That means drinking the rinse water after a meal, sucking the moisture out of your toothbrush...or your mustache if you have one. For **dirt road camping**, however, we tend to wash and rinse our dishes, make an extra cup of coffee, wash our hands, or conceivably take a parsimonious shower after a long day hike. (The sleeping bag will applaud your effort!)



**Jugs.** I carry two 5 or 6 gallon heavy duty plastic containers of water. The truck doesn't object.

Why two jugs, especially for a short 2-4 day trip? Because if you bring only one, Murphy will assure that any puncture will occur in the bottom of the container.

I've also enjoyed sharing water with other folks...especially bicyclists...who didn't plan so well.

*Coleman (5 gal) and Igloo (6) brands*

In addition to the large containers, I have now accumulated a dozen tough, unbreakable plastic or Nalgene, one-liter water bottles. I carry these in a plastic bin and use these easier-to-manage sizes for cooking, hiking, and nighttime hydration...refilling as needed from the reservoir jugs.

**Sunshowers?** What a great concept—put several gallons of water into a durable black plastic bag to warm in the sun while you hike. They come with a valve with a wee shower sprinkler. This appealing concept has been betrayed by poor manufacturing habits—flimsy valves and trauma-intolerant plastic, in particular. I've given up after three failed purchases. Just use a bucket and ladle warm water over your head...or have a trusted companion do it for you.

**Water filters?** If you're camping close to a lake or stream, sure!



*Eureka Dunes, Death Valley. Incredible beauty...but no accessible water here!*



## Fire

I love campfires. I'm also acutely wary of dry grass and globally toasted underbrush. We don't actually *need* a fire. Some sensible compromises must be made at times.



In plenty of ways, we are not that different from human beings from 100,000 years ago, for whom sleeping on the ground was also popular. Fire at night was a primeval necessity...but for 21<sup>st</sup> century campers, perhaps more of a social ritual. I do carry a fold up camp chair that makes it easier for my old bones to watch the firelight.

Fire leaves an unsightly mess if not overseen respectfully, and fire is a safety threat in lots of environments in our globally warming countryside.

Please follow a few commonsense rules if you make a campfire.

1. Use existing fire rings if there is one nearby. No need to add another scar. You'll find scattered charcoal and debris there, so please clean that up to the best of your ability as a "pay it forward" gesture to the next folks who stop there. If the ring is full of ashes, instead of compounding the problem and overflowing the site, dig a hole somewhere and bury them. You have a shovel in the truck (see below). A simple bucket will simplify that task. Just do it. Earn that beer!
2. If you are creating a fire ring "from scratch," when you leave, bury the ashes and scatter the stones so that your presence won't leave a scar. Leave the place cleaner that it was when you arrived.

3. Metal and glass do not burn, but some folks can't restrain themselves from tossing bottles, foil wrappers, and other non-flammable trash into the fire. Please pack that stuff out, including the junk that previous oblivious campers left behind.
4. If it's really windy, don't make the fire. The fickle smoke will be a pest for you, but flying sparks can spawn catastrophe. *Just Don't do it.*
5. Make a little fire...not a towering inferno. It's a selfish indulgence as well as a safety hazard to burn more fuel than you need.
6. If you are foraging for firewood...please take only fallen, dry wood. Don't deface trees by sawing off limbs, and for heaven's sake, don't cut down any living tree. It makes an ugly scar that will last for a whole generation. Don't cut down a dead one, either...let nature deal with those.
7. Sometimes a previous camper will have left firewood behind. *Use it up!*
8. I bring firewood with me in the truck if I'm going to be in the desert or a place with no wood. Increasingly, however, it seems that this behavior can bring fungal and insect scourges as "hitchhiker pathogens" to vulnerable environments. If you do bring your own, either burn it all or take home the rest. *Don't leave it.*
9. Chemically treated wood is now a common construction waste. When burned, it leaves toxic heavy metals in the ashes, and that runs into the environment when it rains. Don't bring that stuff, please.



*Teasdale Fire, Utah, 2012*

Please don't start one of these

## Dirt Road Cooking



*Tailgate paella, end of a dirt road in the Snow Mountain National Monument, California*

One of the supreme virtues of Dirt Road Camping is **Dirt Road Tailgate Cooking**. In contrast to the compromises inherent with backpacking, the truck can carry moist food and keep it cool. The truck will cheerfully transport a well-designed fold-up stove to make meals memorable from a culinary viewpoint as well as environmental novelty.

**Stove.** I like a 2-burner stove for versatility as well as efficiency. Like most of us, I started with a green Coleman **white gas** stove...still a classic, but a source of the unpleasant odors of spilled fuel...and moody to operate. It's hard to repair one of these when it gets "difficult." (Not everybody agrees with that.)

I graduated to a **propane** stove (Primus and Coleman both excellent), and I love the simplicity, speed, and range of adjustability from delicate simmer to urgent morning coffee boil. It fits cheerfully on my tailgate. I like the fold up wind shield, although if you're going to cook on the tailgate, it helps to orient your vehicle accordingly. Maybe bring a 2x3' plywood scrap or use the cooler for a windbreak.

Virtues of propane are many, but of course, there's the other side. The standard green 1 liter fuel bottles last for several meals but cost around \$5 apiece...equivalent to \$20 a gallon! Most of them wind up in trash containers. That's a hideous waste, both of metal and money, not to mention landfill space. Yes, I do have the gadget attachment to refill those, but I take a 20 pound, refillable propane tank with me instead, with a couple of the green canisters for contingency backup. A smaller 10 pound (2.5 gallon) tank might be smarter. Taking a nearly empty tank isn't too clever, though, so check that before your leave.

The tubing and fittings for these higher quality stoves are weak links. I've had to replace one hose that developed a leak in the middle of the night when the main tank valve had been left open. That's a convergence of equipment failure and human error, and Murphy did not miss his chance. I discovered the problem the next morning with no fuel to heat coffee water.



A **Dutch Oven** is a bad joke for a backpacker, but a marvelous blessing when the truck lugs it to your campsite. Once the cook gets it going, even that hero can relax for an hour and watch the shadows move over the canyon walls.

Like everything, there are real experts and fine publications, but it's basically simple. Start with a 10 quart cast iron pot. Ignite 22 briquets in a chimney, and as soon as they

light, put 10 briquets underneath and 12 on top to get roughly the equivalent of a 350 degree oven. More if you want more heat...2 extra briquets yield another 10 degrees. My successes include chicken parmigiana, chicken cacciatore, lasagna, beef stew, ranch beans, potatoes au gratin, and apple brown Betty. Buy a Dutch Oven cookery book and expand your range!

**Cooking over an open fire** is unparalleled for steak and sausages, and for that purpose, I carry a small, flat grill. However, cooking in pots over an open fire is stinky, dirty, uncomfortable, and slow...as well as rife with potential for irretrievable errors with spills and burns. However, it's always a backup option when you're out of gas.

**Beverages. Cans rule.** Not everybody likes beer, but I haven't met anyone who didn't want one when they arrived at the campsite after a bumpy ride. I carry **cans, not bottles**. Cans travel more compactly and don't rattle obnoxiously on rough roads. They crumple into space-conserving recycle materials for the ride back. Most important: they don't break. I don't know how many garbage cans full of glass shards George and I have hauled away from backcountry campsites...but it's a lot.



**Wine.** "Camping without wine is just sitting in the woods," according to one clever napkin. Wine with dinner...and around the fire...is just part of the experience.

Wine comes in glass containers, but it doesn't require refrigeration, and it comes in really efficient 12-bottle, rattle free, cardboard boxes.

Carry the empties back out in the same rattle-free case! No harm in box wine, or canned wine, but I package mine in bottles. ([www.SalamandreWine.com](http://www.SalamandreWine.com))



**Coolers.** Trucks carry coolers without complaining. They keep perishables from perishing and beer from the scourge of lukewarm. They're a source of emergency water when the ice melts. I do have a few suggestions.

1. If you're going to carry ice, get blocks instead of cubes if you can. Blocks last a day longer, but they eventually melt. The melt water inevitably gets into some packages if you're carrying food. Somehow, even with zip-lock bags, the water turns nasty in a couple days. After you pour out that cold meltwater, the remaining contents warm up progressively faster.
2. I freeze water in tough, one-liter plastic bottles and use those instead of bagged ice. (Fill only 90% full to accommodate expansion in the freezer!) The frozen bottles are basically block ice, and they last 3-4 days in a good cooler. Once melted, the cool water is a fine beverage after a hike.
3. I don't care for the cheap "freezer packets" which arrive with shipments of perishables. They don't last very long, and some of them leak who-knows-what kind of material into the water which is bathing your food.
4. I take 2 coolers...a big one with frozen goods and the ice on the bottom, then an **insulating layer (reflective bubble wrap or neoprene)**, and above that the perishables at refrigerator temperature. I go into that container quickly and close the lid compulsively. Keep it in the shade, as opposed to in a hot truck. Wrap it with a jacket or a fleece, and cover it with a reflective blanket if it's going to see sunshine. The ice bottles will still have some solid material on day 4.
5. The second cooler is a smaller one, and that's where I keep the beer and the snacks for the day.

**A folding table  
is civilized!**

*Dutch Oven lasagna*

*A nice reward after a  
12 mile hike to  
Happy Canyon*



*Doug, George, and Robin on the rim*



*The truck doesn't mind carrying fresh vegetables, a red Primus stove, and a real frying pan*



*Ingredients for Dirt Road Tailgate "Desert Roll Ups"*

**Canned vegetables** may not qualify as elegant gourmet, but they stay fresh forever and don't break in transit. It's up to you to make something memorable! Transport them in a partitioned wine box and they'll never rattle or scuff! The crumpled empties return in your truck to a proper recycler.

## Tools<sup>1</sup>

Backpackers used to carry Swiss Army knives, which were later replaced by Leatherman-inspired multitools. Lightweight backpackers now carry titanium miniatures. In a pickup bed, though, you can carry a full sized shovel, a hefty jack, a real saw, and a set of tools capable of doing something constructive under the hood or coping with nasty weather.

I consider these ones desirable, if not essential:

1. **A shovel.** It's no fun digging out a bogged down wheel with a trowel, and likewise no fun cleaning up an overflowing fire ring with a coffee cup. It's also no fun going out into the bushes and finding something smelly that somebody dropped. If you carry the shovel with you, nobody will stand in your way, and you can actually do what the rangers implore you to do...bury your waste! That shovel can also come in handy if a cow paused in a place you want to camp...or it can serve as an impromptu tent pole. I like my D handled flat end shovel for the ease of getting under the chassis, compared to a long handled spade.
2. **A saw.** If you're going to the desert, you probably won't have to cope with a fallen tree across the road, but elsewhere you will want a saw capable of cutting through an 8" log in your path. You may want to fashion a custom tent pole out of a stout stick you find. While sawing firewood isn't normally necessary, you can if you need to. Bow saws travel flat under a seat, but buy a good one and, more important, equip it with a new blade. A folding garden pruning saw will handle a lot of duties, but again...don't bring a cheap one to the wilderness. Handheld, "Humvee" toothed chains are inexpensive (<\$40), light, and pack into a pouch ...not efficient but better than gnawing a log.



<sup>1</sup> Appendix 1, the "GUNK" or Get Unstuck Now Kit, lists the tools and materials needed to re-mobilize after a jam. The GUNK expands the tool list, with some overlap, intended for folks going to raw places where few conventional rescue options are available.

- If you are going up into the mountains on a little used forest service road early in the season, you might find winter fallen trees in your path. I pack a real **chainsaw** for these situations. Boulders demand other ingenuity.
  - Modern **battery powered saws** avoid the smelly gasoline problem, but even the really good ones have limited bar capacity and relatively short operating duration under load. If you “go battery,” invest in a charger that can power from your dashboard jack...otherwise it’s soon dead weight.
3. **Jacks.** I carry three. Perhaps that will raise an eyebrow or two. I have raised my truck repeatedly. There’s the marginal crank-up jack that came with the truck...nearly useless if your tires have sunk into the mire. A 2-4 ton bottle jack can help you change a tire or move a log or dislodge a boulder, but it may not elevate your vehicle if it’s stuck up to its haunches in mud. I carry a hydraulic floor jack...not the industrial size you’ll find in a garage, but adequate (2-3 ton) capacity to lift one corner of your vehicle. You can dig out the sand, put in a board or two and the jack will slide underneath the axle. Up you go. Serious 4 wheel adventurers will carry a high lift jack.
  4. **Breaker bar.** If your tires were secured with an impact driver in a garage, you may not be able to loosen the lug nuts with the flimsy tool that came with the vehicle. I carry an 18” breaker bar with ½” driver and an impact-rated socket to fit your lug nuts. That way, if necessary, you can jump on it if necessary. You’ll spend \$40-50 for that package. Better than hiking 13 miles back to the highway.



5. **Complete socket wrench set and box end wrenches.** These all come in compact carrying cases. If you drive a Korean, Japanese, or European vehicle, bring metric tools, of course.
6. The **usual basic hand tools**—16 oz. hammer, stout pliers, needle nose pliers, sturdy wire cutter, slotted and Phillips screwdrivers in multiple sizes, and either heavy scissors or tin snips. My usual admonition: buy good tools. The small amount of money you save by buying cheap tools or plastic wrapped “kits” may cost you days of your life if you need them “out there”...but they bend or break.

- I also carry a can of screws of different sizes which correspond to the fasteners in my truck and a few longer wood screws. Toss in some assorted nails, too.

7. **Tire inflator.** These indispensable items cost less than \$50, draw power from the 12 volt socket on your dashboard, and work surprisingly well. They're slow...maybe 10 minutes to fully inflate a truck tire. However, unless the puncture is catastrophic, you can usually get another 10-15 miles out of a slow leaking tire before repeating. Like everything else, get a good one. It will last you for perhaps 5-8 years (they're not "industrial"). Verify that it works before you leave. While you're thinking about tires, get a puncture repair kit and learn how to use it. (I've had at least 5 occasions to date, and those are not likely the last.)



*Air for Flat Tires*



*Juice for Dead Batteries 2000 Amp rated*

8. **Lithium ion jump starter.** A 1000 amp size is fine for small trucks, but a full size V8 with a dead battery on a cold morning would commend a 2000 amp model (around \$200). Lights and USB ports included to charge devices. If 3 months have gone by, top up the charge before you leave home. Chances are fair you can use it to be a good Samaritan for somebody, too.
9. **Powerful light.** Headlamps are a no brainer, but sometimes you want a stationary light. Almost every battery powered tool now comes with an LED light with multiple intensities and flashers...including that jump starter. I have one that plugs into the dashboard, handy if you need to grovel under the vehicle, stare down the Yeti in the bushes, or signal the space station.
10. It's not a bad idea to keep a **low intensity, battery powered, LED light** to place on the roof of your vehicle if there's a chance your day hike will turn into a night hike. It's surprisingly easy to lose your truck in unfamiliar territory...and you'll miss that warm bag, cold beer, and juicy sausage waiting in the pickup bed.
- Solar rechargeable "Luci" lights can help you find your vehicle, then illuminate your supper, and read your maps in the tent for the next day.

11. **Lumber.** You can always improvise, but I carry the following:

- A 12-18" long piece of 2x12. It's a platform for your jack on soft footing.
- Two or three 6' long 2x4's or 2x6's. These are handy to keep your tarps from flapping in the bed, but they can also go under a tire you've lifted above soft sand, gravel, or mud. I put notches in the end to facilitate tie downs over the load as well as supporting makeshift shelters. Stretched over rocks or boxes...they make a serviceable bench. (*Photo p. 17*)

12. **Miscellaneous:**

- **Rope**...not flimsy! Truckers' rope (3/8" useful but 1/2" twice as strong) can serve a lot of purposes where wishful thinking fails. Tie down your load or secure gear in the wind. Double or quadruple it to tug a log out of your way. Bring reliable, new rope.
  - Some smaller caliber cord 3/16" or 1/4" for repairs and fastening.
  - See Appendix 3 for illustration of tying a truckers' knot. Make those tie-down cords "musically tight!"
- **Wire**—a small loop of 18-20 gauge (slender) and 10 or 12 gauge (stout) wire for field repairs
- **Tough tape.** Duct tape has served backpackers for 3 generations, but product quality varies. I prefer 2" Gorilla tape—a lot tougher!
- **A bucket.** A 5 gallon plastic bucket will serve you in countless ways—carry water, administer a shower, wash clothes, schlep cold ashes, sit on it by the fire, store loose parts, play the drums, transport trash.... Bring a relatively new one with a strong handle.
  - A galvanized steel bucket can do many of the same things, and you can heat water in it for that après hike shower. (Bring a new one.)
- A **whisk broom** for your vehicle & tarps
- A **fuel funnel** in case you need to innovate with gasoline or oil.



***Have you seen my...? A hint:*** Black and brown objects are hard to find at night...and in the rain. A short length of brightly colored cord will help...and facilitate attachments, too. Go one step further and put a piece of reflective tape on something you want to find in the dark.

## Contingency and Redundancy

When you're far from stores, help, and even a cell signal...and when you depend heavily on just one item...remember that Murphy has an uncanny knack of recognizing your vulnerability. When the failure of a single item can stop you in your tracks, it pays to carry duplicates...something the process engineers call "strategic redundancy."

Here's my list. Some of these items were described in greater detail elsewhere in the booklet (see Appendix 1—Get Unstuck Now Kit). That's redundancy, after all.

- 2 spare tires
- Backup headlamp or lightweight flashlight...with fresh batteries. Flashlights corrode and batteries leak insidiously when not used...check before you leave.
- A second ignition key stashed external to the cab in case the gremlins lock your keys inside. Show your companions where it is!
- Extra gas, oil, & fluids (see the self-rescue information "GUNK" in Appendix 1)
- Extra 5 gal water beyond anticipated needs
- Food for extra 3 days (I'm partial to canned chili for simplicity)
- Extra AAA and AA batteries and a Solar charger with cables for devices and lights
- Clothing & shoes...especially your sun hat (wind happens), socks, and shoelaces
- Back up sunglasses and reading glasses
- Second sleeping bag...an old beater will do. The wind on the canyon rim can be "uplifting," and unexpected rain can disable your chosen bag. If nothing else, use the backup sleeping bag to insulate your cooler and prolong the chill.
- An extra sleeping pad, especially if you are using inflatables. Lots of sticky things out there can bring you back to Earth's crust with all of its imperfections. The wind also has a way with unsecured pads! Old fashioned closed cell pads take up little space, can protect things from rattling in the bed, and provide shade and insulation, too. Most of us have one or two kicking around from last century backpacking.
- Camera battery and a spare memory chip, if that's one of your chosen activities.
- Flame source—No such thing as too many Bic lighters
- Toilet paper, toothbrush, dental floss, dish soap, shampoo...backup helps.

- You have a daypack, right? Not a bad idea to toss in an empty beater backpack, too, in case you have to walk a long way and carry water, food, and clothing.
- Cash reserve you don't plan to spend. Keep \$200 in 20's, and put it somewhere other than your wallet. Worst case, cash will buy you 40-50 gallons of gasoline if the marmots steal your wallet. It may help to reward somebody who stopped to haul you out of an awkward situation.



*Overlooking Seger's Hole, Mussentuchit, Utah*



## Unspeakables: Litter and Hygiene

It is a matter of honor to leave a campsite cleaner than you found it, and that applies to the road you use to get there.

I don't care that Edward Abbey rationalized tossing beer cans out the car window in *Desert Solitaire*. Littering is sloppy behavior, and while we can't effectively regulate that ethos, we can pause, collect some of those glinting cans, and return them to a recycle site where they belong. Karma will catch up with both you and the littering schmucks. You'll fare better in that reckoning.

1. Jerry Garcia thought it was inspirational to "Walk me out in the morning dew." Many of us agree! Toilet paper flapping in the morning meadow, however, doesn't have the same appeal as morning primroses fluttering in a gentle breeze above the red sand of an Escalante rincon.

You have two good choices:

- a. Put the tissue in a little bag and incorporate it into your campfire that evening, or put it in your trash bag and carry it to a proper disposal.
  - b. Ignite it with your handy Bic lighter and guard the process with the same shovel you used to make that little hole for the solid material. Then bury the dead ashes. In the wind...or in dry grass...go back to option (a)!
2. All litter needs to go home with you, including the glass shards, beer cans, bottle caps, pop tops, aluminum foil packets, dental floss, candy wrappers, and battery packaging you generated...or you conscientiously removed from the campsite and the fire ring. Nobody else is going to do that for you. Is it your obligation? Yes, it is a solemn duty of anyone who respects the beauty of the land...and hopes to return.
  3. Not a bad idea to dedicate a garbage bag or a box for this duty.



*Sunglow on the Panamint Range in Death Valley NP*

## Laws, Decency, and Common Sense

**No “new” roads.** Beyond Murphy’s Law, one actual law to remember is: Stay on the road, primitive as it might be. A law is a command, not a guideline. Find an established turnout to turn around or park. You should not drive into the verge or forge out onto virgin soil and crush vegetation, collapse habitat, and leave gouges that will last for years. That illegal and obnoxious behavior will gradually escalate the risk that these roads might get closed for everybody ...not just to yahoos. The fact that feckless idiots get away with it does not mean you have license to do the same.

**35 means 35.** Another law worth remembering is the speed limit in small towns, especially in rural Nevada and Utah. *They mean it!* These towns have all suffered economically during the pandemic and probably long before. You get a persuasive affirmation that township budgets depend upon speeding citations when you see local vehicles slowing to precisely the speed limit. Set your cruise control to the correct number and remove your right foot from the vicinity of the accelerator pedal. Spend money in town instead for things that bring you pleasure and enlightenment.

**One Clean Shirt.** Reserve one clean shirt in your vehicle so you can wear it into a restaurant, rock shop, grocery store, visitor’s center, or museum on your way home. It’s just polite. The staff will appreciate the courtesy at Stan’s Burger Shack or the Rockin Riddle Rock Shop in Hanksville...or the Chuckwagon in Torrey...or Royal’s in Loa...or the Hell’s Backbone Grill or the Anasazi State Park in Boulder (UT)...and so many more.

**Sticker Shock.** Most independent thinkers have adopted some political opinions over the years. Sometimes those notions can be a little edgy. I was never quite sure what people gained by plastering their vehicle with stickers to proclaim those affiliations. More to the point: It’s naïve to think that all the police officers and other people who encounter your vehicle will share your view.

*Think...is the officer going to give me a ticket, or maybe let me go with a warning this one time?*

*Will that guy in the pickup with big tires stop to help me or just keep driving after he looks at my bumper sticker?*

*“Deputy Doolittle,” Loa, Southern Utah*



## Appendix 1: Self-Rescue and the GUNK—Get Unstuck Now Kit

*(Some of this content overlaps with other sections in the booklet.  
It's all in one place here to review or use as a checklist!)*

**Dirt Road Camping means self-sufficient camping**...glorious when it works, not so great if you need extra hands, extra horsepower, or tools you don't have. All of these situations, sooner or later, will befall anybody who goes "out there." Unprepared people can be subjected to frustrations, bona fide misery, injuries, and worse.

I've learned from experience, and better yet from the wisdom of grizzled veterans (*RIP, Grumps*), how to prepare for these contingencies. Here is my list for a GUNK (Get Unstuck Now Kit) which can easily be carried under the seats or in the bed of any truck. With luck, you'll never need it. Hoping you'll be lucky, however, is not a great strategy.

Naturally, it would be ideal to use these implements in the role of Good Samaritan.... helping some hapless victim in the wilderness...rather than rescuing yourself after an episode of questionable judgment or straight-up bad luck.

Here's my list:

1. **Tow chain** with shackles for attachment to objects of various forms, and a high quality tow strap with hooks.



2. **Floor jack** (2 – 3 ton) and a second hydraulic piston jack (recommend 4 ton size)
3. A **12-18" length of 2x12** to support a jack on soft ground and several 12" 2x4 or 2x6 short boards to raise the jack if you need them.
4. **"Come-Along,"** 2 – 3 ton rated with at least 20' of cable. *Spend the bucks for a hardy one...you might be using this to move a 400 lb boulder out of your path.*

5. **Two 50' rolls of 18" chicken wire** for traction when your tires are bogged down in a low friction hole...loose sand in particular. Plastic folding traction devices might be adequate for a smaller vehicle.
6. **D-handle shovel** in good repair.
7. **Precious Fluids**
  - a. 1 gal fresh gasoline (buy premium...lasts longer)
  - b. 1 gal antifreeze
  - c. 1 quart motor oil
  - d. 5-10 gal potable water
  - e. 1 bottle young red wine, if all else fails



8. **Siphon Tube** ( $\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter, at least 6' long) for gasoline. It's nearly impossible to get into that tank otherwise.

Rides flat underneath a seat

9. **Empty container** (1 liter) to move liquids around (empty a food can or a wine bottle if necessary)
10. **Long (18") breaker bar** handle w  $\frac{1}{2}$ " drive...and an impact rated socket. *Buy good steel and verify socket fit for your lug nuts before you leave. Photo p. 28.*
11. **Toolbox** with standard gear (you know the list...also described above)
12. **Lithium ion jump starter** (2000 Amp rated for a full size V-8) for jump starting a dead vehicle. Most come with lights & 12 V USB jacks to charge your "devices." This will cost \$200, but it should last your lifetime. *Photo p 29.*
13. **Heavy duty jumper cables** (for the other guy...)

14. **Compressor** that runs off dashboard socket and **tire repair kit**.

*Practice using it—it's surprisingly easy, but hard to learn in a sandstorm. It will help with punctures, but not likely with sidewall injuries.*



George's Subie

15. **Second spare tire** (*I think it's essential...see earlier notes*)
16. **2 tarps**—a small one to lie down upon in yucky conditions while working under your truck, a bigger one to shade the sun in blistering weather or keep stuff dry in nasty weather. You already have these tarps for other, more cheerful purposes.
17. **Rope**—1/4" tough braided nylon for rigging shelters and keeping things together in the wind. And 1/2" trucker's rope for more demanding applications. This can be doubled or tripled to move stubborn obstacles.
18. (2 or 3) 6' long **2x4's or 2x6's**, with notched ends for convenience—to tie down loads in the bed, rig sunshades and wind shelters, slide under a tire for traction, make a ramp, apply neo-Egyptian leverage, or fuel your fire in a pinch
19. **Bow saw** capable of cutting 6"-8" deep (transect an 8-12" log, potentially)
20. **Powerful Light** that plugs into dash socket
21. **Headlamp** to help you underneath your truck
22. **Tire chains** if you're likely to run into snow. Make sure they fit before you leave home and practice installing and removing them when it's pleasant outside.
23. **Bonus for Versatility: Bubbles:** No, not champagne, but the reflective, heavy duty, construction grade, insulating "bubble wrap" available in most hardware stores and lumber yards. It comes in 3' and 4' wide rolls. A 6'-8' length can sub as a ground cover, a wrap-around reflective insulator for a cooler, or a sunscreen for truck windows. Fold it in half longwise, and it can be an emergency "sleeping taco," or a warm cloak if your parka got soaked. I suspect it could become anything in the hands of a Burner...maybe the glistening cuirass for the Venusian Warrior Queen or a makeshift re-entry shield for extraterrestrial visitors in Rachel, NV.



24. **Knife**—not a dinky pocketknife, but a sturdy, sharp 4 – 6" shaft with a serrated portion of the blade

25. **Hatchet**—A short handled one will do, and it doubles as a stake pounder. Smart to purchase a sheath for it. The compact Fiskars hatchet won't take down a tree, but it will handle campsite chores handily!



Remember chains. *Snow, Thou cometh when I expected Thee least!*



Life is short. Carry extra water.

*Mouth of Telephone Canyon, DV*

## Appendix 2: First Aid and Starter Treatments “in the Field”

When the native people roamed these lands thousands of years ago...and the Eastern pioneers crossed these deserts 160 years ago...not all of them made it to the other side. What killed them was occasionally hostile action, but far more likely it was infected hangnails, suppurating wounds, dysentery and cholera from bad water, urinary infections, pneumonia, and other conditions we consider easily treated or preventable in this modern century. Some of those backcountry hazards persist, and you may benefit from a couple days head start on treatment before you get back to a real clinic.

A first aid kit is standard, but I would add a few things that would fit into a small, brightly colored accessory bag:

1. **Extra band-aids**...with the tough cloth backing. Buy 1” and a couple larger ones for bigger injuries. Keep them in a Ziploc baggie.
2. **Hibiclens** (chlorhexidine) is probably the most effective antibacterial cleansing material. Available without prescription.
  - a. A 2-3 ounce bottle will last you forever. Keep that in a Ziploc bag, too. (Leaks are messy.) One serious warning: don’t get it in your eyes.
  - b. Betadine is a time tested choice, too...but messy. Double bag it.
  - c. Alcohol...naah...stings like crazy and doesn’t work all that well.
3. Effective **antibiotic ointment** for a fresh injury.
  - a. Neosporin and Polysporin are combination antibiotic ointments. Many generic brands available, with a 50 year safety record.
  - b. Bacitracin (single ingredient) is available without prescription, excellent for most cuts & scrapes. My go-to for decades. Brand names of “antiseptics” are goofy, and the pharmacist may need to help you find it.
  - c. Mupirocin (Bactroban) is better still, but it requires a prescription. It will cost \$10-15, but a small 10-15 gram tube will last years.
4. **Extra 3” roller gauze** (3-4 of these) and 4x4” sterile gauze pads to dress wounds after cleansing. Scrapes and burns use up a lot of dressings. Clean paper towels will serve in a pinch. You can always boil an old T shirt for a while if you need sterile rags for dressings and cleansing.
5. A “**SAM**” **splint**. It’s a 4x24” piece of malleable aluminum bonded to orange foam padding, available in most outdoor stores. It’s a favorite for wilderness medicine classes. You can make a splint for a sprained ankle, broken forearm, or even a neck brace. You can cut it with scissors to make a finger splint. It has twice saved me a lot of grief in the backcountry.
6. **Tape**: 1” clear plastic tape to hold dressing in place, and 2” old fashioned cloth adhesive tape to secure splints and tape ankles. Duct tape or Gorilla tape will do in a pinch, as every backpacker knows.
7. A **4” Ace bandage** helps to hold dressings in place for body parts that move.

## Medications<sup>2</sup> to get you out of the wilderness to definitive care

**Prescription Antibiotics:** I would ask your doctor to give you a **3 day supply of antibiotics** used for **wound infections**, which are usually caused by staph or strep germs. My preferred is **Cephalexin** (generic) 500 mg capsules, take 3 per day. For people allergic to that one, your doctor will have a number of alternatives.

For **bladder infections, ear infections, and pneumonia**, Cephalexin is also quite effective for a first choice for relatively healthy adults. People with a past history of these problems should **get individualized advice from their primary care doctor** because of the higher possibility of resistant germs. **Plan ahead for those appointments.** (Children's medications are beyond the scope of this article.)

**The idea is to get you started...until you get back to professional care.** Three days is not a complete course of treatment, and even if you feel better, a real doctor is going to add a great deal of important, individualized attention.

**Pain relievers**—acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil), or naproxen (Aleve) are all available without prescription, effective and adequate. I categorically do NOT recommend (or ever prescribe) narcotics for these DIY situations.

Carry medications in a watertight, screw-top container inside a Ziploc bag. I don't trust standard pharmacy containers to be waterproof or varmint proof in the outback.

**Your personal prescription medicines:** Bring 'em in a Ziploc bag inside a drawstring, brightly colored bag, and keep them from baking in the sun or a hot cab.

**“Cold Medicines” and other over-the-counter drugs, especially combination drugs, for minor nuisance symptoms:** I don't use them and regard them harshly.

- They don't work much better than hot tea, if that, and bizarre side effects can destroy your time out in the wild. It's a major problem for children!
- Only exception to that stern advice might be a non-sedating antihistamine in the spring pollen season or camping in the sea of sage.
  - a. Avoid Diphenhydramine (Benadryl). It's too commonly available in OTC combination concoctions...just too many quirky side effects.



Hint: Keep these bandages in a Ziploc bag and they'll stay dry and clean.

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<sup>2</sup> I've practiced (and taught) medicine for over 50 years. These bits of advice are sensible, but they do not replace the personalized information you will receive from your own physician.



### Appendix 3: Tie a Trucker's Knot

This knot creates a pulley function that allows the user to snug the load much tighter than a simple tie. (The pulley function doubles the mechanical advantage!). When it's loosened, the knot simply pulls out with a tug.

I learned this from a grape farmer who shook his head as he watched me cinch up my first load of grapes. 43 years later, after approximately 600 fully loaded trips...not a lost grape!



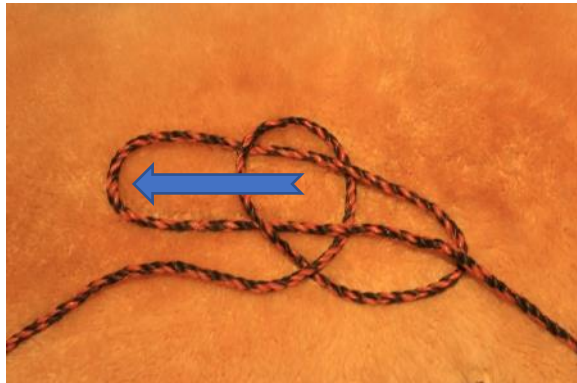
1. Your start



2. Make a loop



3. Make another loop close



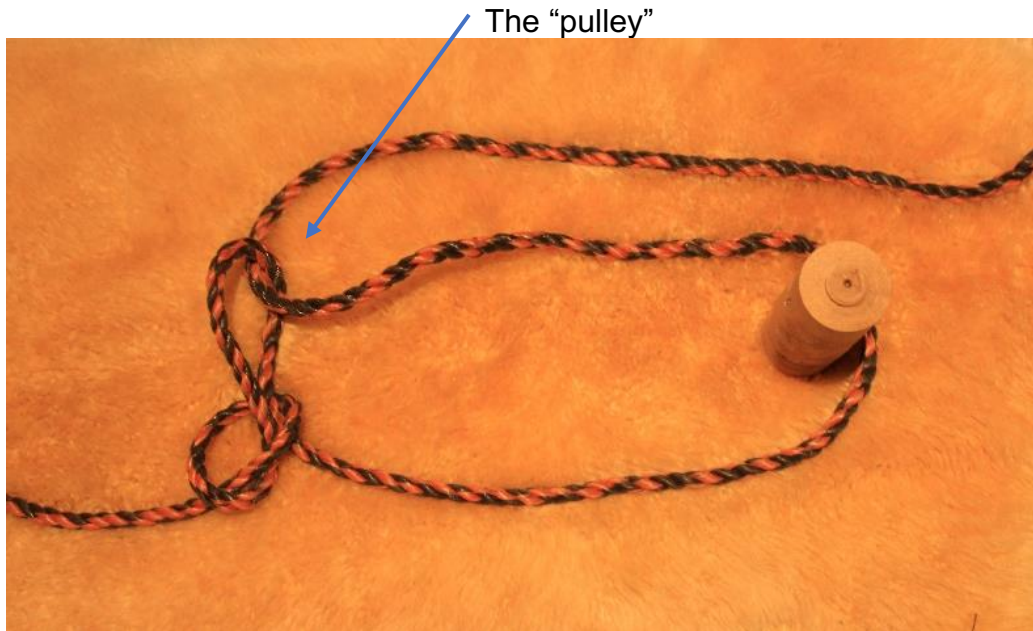
4. Slip the second loop through the first



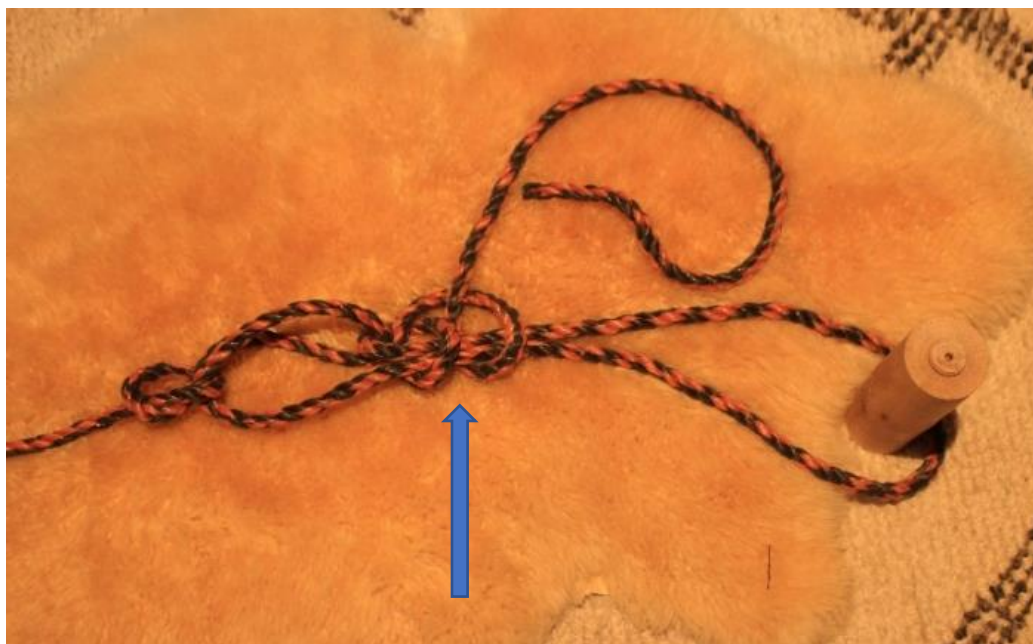
5. Snug the first loop around the second



6. Snug that knot finger tight



7. Loop the free end around your attachment (cleat, post, etc.) and bring the end back to your loop. Slide the free end through the loop and take up slack. Pull tight! The knot will hold with friction, and new truckers' rope will slide nicely through the pulley as you cinch until it thrums like an E-string.



8. Tie the loose end to the 2 lines attached to the cleat with a double half hitch. Done! It's easy to tighten it up if the load loosens in transit. No need to unfasten the whole assembly. Undo the double half hitch, cinch the "pulley" line tighter, and re-tie.

With practice, you can do these in 15 seconds.



*End of a dirt road on the rim high above the Dirty Devil River*



*Dirt Road in the Mojave Preserve. Don't sleep next to a cholla in the wind!*



*Dirt Road Camp on BLM land in the Panamint Valley...West of Death Valley NP  
Mountain Vista! Panoramic sky! Peaceful in nice weather, rough duty in a big wind*





*Primitive camp on Road 2731 Southeastern Utah*



*Barbra and Scott, Dead Horse Canyon, Death Valley  
Note mud smears well overhead from a flash flood previous year*

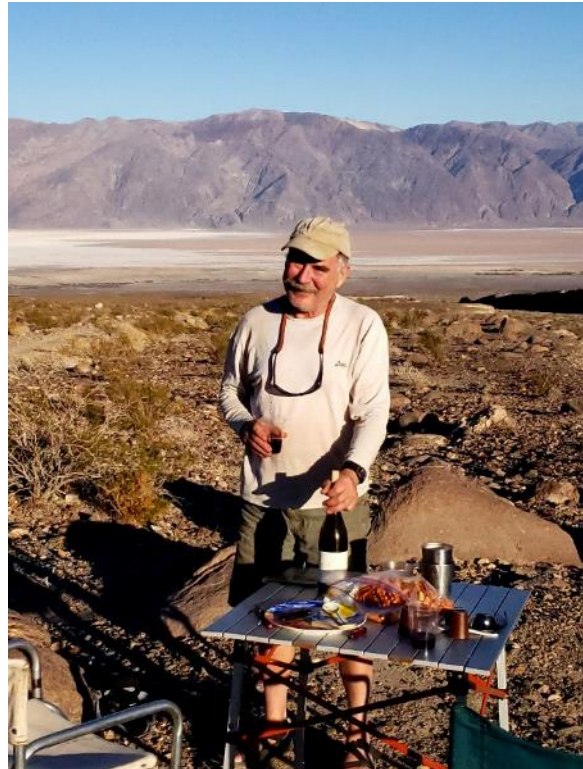
After hiking 35 miles in 3 days, it's nice to come back to the truck for a shower and some Dutch Oven lasagna.



Stress Mitigation in Dirt Road Camping



*George, Doug, and Joel above*



*Salem and Wells (Dirt Road Sommelier) below*



*It's **not** really silly to bring a sunshade to the desert. Jim and Robin*



*It can be really cold in the morning in the desert mountains, too!  
Nice to have a windbreak and hot chocolate!*





Salamandre Wine Fresh Air Tasting Panel

Photo by Doug Campbell

Afterword



Be willing to change your plans.