

PRESSURE TEST YOURSELF



I will just jump right into this article and say that this is not going to be like the normal type of tertiary prepping skills I like to write about. This one is going to be focused solely on conveying the importance of pressure testing yourself. What I mean by this is, although as a prepper, survivalist, homesteader, or bush crafter you may have all the necessary equipment given a SHTF or TEOTWAWKI event, and you may even have some skillsets you have learned over the years, but have you ever pressure tested YOU?

In other words, have you ever created that SHTF or WROL scenario and put not just that bugout or get-home bag equipment to the test, but your skills, physical ability, and intestinal fortitude as well? At the end of the day, you can own all the latest gee-whiz-gizmo gadgets, read every prepper book, and watch every YouTube video on the planet, but if you have only mentally fantasized about what you will do when it all goes to Hades in a handbasket, you could get seriously injured or worse, killed, when that oh-so-lovely fantasy becomes a harsh reality.

Explore your limits

There very well could be a global, calamitous event someday where we are all going to be tested physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. I think deep down, we all know that day is going to happen in our lifetime. Because of this, we must all explore, understand, and learn what our limits are regardless of what our comfort zone is. We must put ourselves to the test to ensure we have a baseline of how we will or could react to whatever end-of-world event occurs. Knowing and accepting that you have limits does not make you less of a person, and it is a good thing to go looking for them now before the world gets even more squirrely.

SCENARIO:



You have been on business travel for a week and on your way home to South Carolina, you stop to refuel your rental in Waynesboro, PA. As you climb into the mini-SUV, you sigh outwardly, knowing you have a long 8 ½ hour drive back to SC and it is already 4 pm. Before you can even slide the key into the ignition, an emergency broadcast alert comes across your cell phone.

“PRESIDENTIAL ALERT: The President has enacted martial law nationwide effective immediately. A curfew is now in effect beginning today at 6 pm EST. All travelers must take shelter now. All highways will have mandatory military checkpoints and anyone traveling outside of curfew will be detained indefinitely. THIS IS NOT A TEST.”

You turn on the radio, and the same emergency is being broadcast on all stations. You grab your portable CB and jump to channel 19 to hear only static. You scan all the other channels and again, nothing but static. You reach into your travel bag and grab your portable ham radio only

to find that all ham radio stations are silent. Your blood runs cold and you think to yourself, "They are jamming every type of radio frequency so there is no communication." Before you even get a chance to fully comprehend the magnitude of the situation, your brain and gut both starts sounding the alarm, "MOVE! MOVE!"

Something is going down and you have no way of knowing what that is. Economic collapse? Another pandemic? A coup? An E.L.E? WWII? Whatever it is, you know it must be dire if the entire United States just went under martial law. Think. You try making a call. *"All circuits are busy at this time, please hang up and try your call again later."* The internet is down as well. You pull up your "Far Out" app (a huge blessing that this app works offline) and scan the Appalachian Trail. The GPS is still operational, which means the **Garmin 66i** in your get-home bag and your Garmin Instinct Solar watch should be operational as well.

You see that you are 3.4 miles from Pen Mar Park PA, and you can tie into the trail there. You know you have two choices staring you in the face: either wait this out and hope for the best or grab your bag and get moving to a red state within the next 24 hours, which is 44 miles away. You've section hiked in the past, so you know using the trail system is much safer than being on the grid at this very moment, and movement equals life.

You change your clothes and drive the 3+ miles to Pen Mar Park. You ditch the rental on the far side of the park, grab your get-home hiking bag, and you shove off trying to put as many miles as possible between you and anyone else with the same idea.

My Pressure Test



DISCLAIMER: I am not a licensed doctor nor practitioner and I am not a nutritionist. Before you take on any challenge like the one, I am about to describe, you should first consult with your primary health physician and/or seek professional medical advice.

I used the above scenario because this is one of my pressure tests for myself this year. My goal is to tackle the four-state challenge, which is a rite of passage for thru-hikers. The goal is to hike from southern PA at Pen Mar Park and finish outside of Harper's Ferry WV on the VA border. The goal is to hike the four-state challenge in 24 hours or less. The total distance is 43.5 miles. As a section hiker, I like to use the trails not only to hike and use my equipment but to pressure test myself and the skills I have learned over the years.

My active-duty days are too far off in the rearview mirror and at the age of 51, I try to make my own training gauntlet to ensure I am pushing myself to my farthest limits. For me, the Appalachian Trail is the perfect training ground for these types of annual pressure tests. The weather is sporadic and the temperature swings in the fall are just as wonky. This is as close as I have been able to find for my area that if the balloon does finally go up and I must walk home, it gives me a fantastic idea of what things could look like.

Where to start your pressure test

There are many ways you can pressure test yourself. It is driving to your bug-out location via secondary and tertiary highways or backroads. You are in the desert, and you use your cache map and live only off what you have buried for three or four days while you walk to your bugout location. Maybe it is just getting in your truck and doing dry runs to where you break down or there is a roadblock, and you must go at it on foot. Regardless of the scenario, you want to ensure you do not inadvertently injure yourself. Also, for all intents and purposes, you will more than likely walk at some point, whether you are trying to get back home and/or temporarily, or even permanently, bugging out. So, where, and how do you start with pressure testing yourself? Although this is not an exhaustive list, here are some phases to help you graduate through to pressure test yourself.

PHASE 1:

1. **Get a complete physical** and have all the necessary tests done prior to even attempting any type of pressure testing to ensure you are healthy enough to challenge your body.
2. Once you have been given the green seal of approval from your primary care physician, next you will want to **understand everything you can about hiking**. This part is crucial. Although many former military folks have humped a rucksack for miles on end (me included), it is the hiker community that you will glean the best practices before you even consider putting together a pressure test for yourself. Some channels to check out are:
 - **Jay Wander's Out** – A CDT and AT thru-hiker, Jay gives a great synopsis of what it is like day to day in thru-hiking.
 - **Homemade Wanderlust** (for the ladies) – Dixie discusses everything from gear reviews to feminine hygiene on the trail. She is also a triple crowner.
 - **GearSkeptic** – (This will help you better understand how to minimize your food weight along with the caloric weight of said food)
3. NOTE: **Think about ditching your MREs from your bugout** / get-home bags. You can get the same amount of nutrition and calories at a fraction of the weight by watching some of these videos. Remember, ounces = pounds and pounds = pain.
4. **Find a great pair of hiking shoes**, hiking boots, or trail runners. You need to consider multiple scenarios of having to walk to your desired destination and it all starts with proper footwear. This is not an area you want to skimp out on.
5. Purchase the right type of merino wool socks for your climate. Merino wool wicks moisture away from your feet and can help in reducing hot spots and blisters. A great pair of sock inserts will help as well.
6. If you are new to all of this, **start walking daily**. Even if it is up and down your street, breaking in your footwear will be one of the first things you will want to do.
7. Try to walk at least a mile a day if possible.

Phase 2:



- This one may be difficult for many but try to kick foods high in sugar. Eating a healthy diet and getting in shape are one of the most important aspects of prepping. Especially if you are going to be training to walk/run for a tremendous number of miles in a day.
- Start increasing your walking distance. This is going to be a slow graduation for most as you need to slowly strengthen your feet, ankles, calves, thighs and back.
- To avoid muscle aches and cramping which occurs when there is an increase of lactic acid released into your muscles, start incorporating cold showers into your routine. This helps by moving the byproducts of strenuous exercise out of your muscles into your body's lymph system for elimination and recovery. Also, eating foods high in potassium and taking salt tablets with electrolytes, such as SaltSticks, can also help your body if you are not used to pushing yourself.
- Take the bag you have ready to go and start off slowly by using five to ten pounds of gear and walk a mile or two with it. You need to break in not only your bag, but your upper body needs to slowly get used to the weight. Do this for at least three to four weeks or until your body does not notice the weight anymore. **NOTE:** There is a mathematical equation that your backpack should only be 10 percent of your total body weight. Although this could be a good rule of thumb for most, it is not always practical, especially during a WROL situation.

Phase 3:

1. Perform what is called a “shakedown” of your gear. This is when you dump all your gear on the ground and decide what you would truly need in a bugout / get-home situation. Do you really need an axe? A saw? A stethoscope? These are luxury items that you really cannot afford to walk long distances with. Try to keep it as simple as possible. In the military, there is a phrase, “two is one and one is none.” It is the exact opposite in the hiking community. For hikers it is, one is three or four. One lightweight item should have at least two if not more uses. (Ex: A tent stake can be used to dig a cat hole, used for cooking, used as a hanger to dry your clothes, used as an improvised weapon, etc.)
2. Purchase lightweight equipment if you can. Your “Big 3” are your sleeping bag, tent, and backpack. The more weight you can save on these items, the better off you will be.
3. Learn what “base weight” means when it comes to your backpack weight and set a hardline goal for yourself. Mine was 15 lbs. My total weight when I do a section hike is just under 25 lbs. These items are:
 - Backpack
 - Tent with **titanium tent stakes**
 - Quilt (sleeping bag)
 - Cold weather sleeping bag liner
 - 8 lbs. of food (Approx. over 12k calories for 3 days)
 - Sleeping pad
 - Footprint
 - Cooking system
 - Cool weather / sleeping clothes
 - First Aid / hygiene kit
 - Electronic cables and solar charger
 - Garmin InReach 66i
 - **Sawyer Squeeze water filter with CNOC bag** (also a sawyer mini water filter as my backup)
 - Frog Toggs Rain Poncho
 - Swiss Army Knife
 - Backpack rain cover
 - Waterproof trail Topo Map
 - (2) 20 oz. Smart Water bottles
 - A TK4 tourniquet for training purposes
4. Start adding additional weight slowly over the next few months along with increasing the distance you are walking.

Phase 4:

1. Now that you have been walking regularly, and hopefully with a lighter pack, now is the time to consider distance. Set a goal for yourself. For me, it was 12 miles in under 3 hours with a 30lb rucksack. It was extremely difficult at first, but after a few months, my body started to acclimate to the weight and distance. Once my body was used to doing 12 miles, I was then able to increase my distance to 15 miles, and then 20 miles which is a decent day hike. (This took about 9 months of regular training to achieve.) This is only an example. Your goal should be reachable over time. Do not set a goal that will only get you discouraged. This is meant to strengthen your body for the ultimate “event.”
2. Find your pain. (Slowly in the beginning anyway.) I know this might sound ridiculous and masochistic, but at the end of the day, we are all creatures of comfort. If you have never pushed yourself, the last thing you want to do is find out the hard way during a grid-down situation or WROL that your pain threshold is minimal. I have a personal three-rating system in this department. It is: 1) uncomfortable, 2) miserable, 3) unbearable. Whenever I section hike, I shoot to find my miserable threshold. This is normally a 20+ mile hiking day on the Appalachian Trail with numerous ascents and descents which push my knees, feet, and back to their daily limits. These section hikes are normally between 45 and 60 miles and can be done during a long weekend.
3. Start planning in your mind what your pressure test is going to be. Perhaps it is a hiking trail near your home. Or it is spending time walking from your current home to your bugout location. Whatever the scenario, try to incorporate mini “tests” for yourself to maximize your training. Although this is a non-exhaustive list, here are some examples I use when I am on the trail:
 - Can I read my trail Topo Map properly and find additional egresses from the trail if I needed them?
 - Can I find the North Star through the tree canopy and navigate if necessary if there was an emergency and I had to move?
 - How many nut trees and berry bushes can I identify, and can I find plenty of food to supplement my current food supplies I am carrying if a situation developed while I was on the trail?
 - Given the streams on the trail, can I easily dig multiple coyote wells if both of my water purification systems were to freeze, get lost or just break?
 - Can I properly apply a tourniquet alone if I were too seriously injured on the trail?
 - Can I properly identify animal tracks on the trail?
 - Can I set up an improvised shelter or find an immediate shelter if the weather turns on me drastically?
 - Can I send text messages to my loved ones via satellite with my Garmin InReach 66i given my current position?

CONCLUSION:

So, did I pass my pressure test? Nope. I failed. Murphy reared his ugly head as always. I ended up hiking from PA to the VA border during the remnants of Hurricane Ian. The total time was 46.5 hours. Although I did not hit my goal, I now know what it is like hiking during dangerous weather conditions. So, I will take what Murphy threw at me and use it as a positive. Use my experience as a learning lesson. Regardless of how you pressure test yourself, and no matter how much planning you put into your test, life is going to throw you some curve balls. This is great because during a TEOTWATKI event, more than likely, it is not going to go down the way anyone expects. Be fluid and you will do great!

Stay strong, keep working on pressure testing yourself, and do not stop searching for your limits!

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