



ADAPT OR DIE

The Rucking Field Manual

A field manual covering pack selection, loading theory, clothing systems, hydration, nutrition, field hygiene, and functional fitness.

DISCIPLINE

KNOWLEDGE

ACCOUNTABILITY

EQUIPMENT

"The strength to endure, the wisdom to adapt, and the courage to lead."

— Adapt or Die

Where the Backcountry and Tactical Meet



Adapt or Die is a training community built around one conviction: **responsible people have a duty to their communities, their families, and themselves to be prepared.** Whether you are a seasoned backpacker pushing your limits, a new rucker building real fitness, or someone who takes personal preparedness seriously — this community is for you.

We bridge the gap between backcountry adventure and practical preparedness. The same skills required to carry a loaded pack through the mountains for five days are the skills that build a capable, resilient human being in any environment. We focus on *concepts* over gear lists — and community over lone-wolf thinking.

FOUNDER

Steven King — Leaders Forged Through Adversity

Steven's background spans the Boy Scouts (Eagle Scout), service as an Infantryman and Infantry Officer in the Ohio Army National Guard, a deployment to Iraq, a mission trip to Ecuador, and experience in Federal Law Enforcement. That combination of outdoor experience, overseas service, and high-stress leadership gives Adapt or Die its foundation: real skills, tested in real environments, taught by someone who has lived them.

OUR MISSION

"Train like your life depends on it." Everything in this guide flows from that foundation. The harder you prepare now, the less you suffer when it counts — on summit day, at mile 20, or when the unexpected arrives.

THE FOUNDATION

Rooted in Christ

All of it — the rucking, the leadership, the suffering, the preparation — is built on a single bedrock: **faith in Jesus Christ.** The soul is forged before the body. Without that foundation, discipline becomes ego, strength becomes pride, and community becomes competition. At AOD, we believe that true resilience is not self-made — it is Christ-shaped. We are here to forge leaders who serve, sacrifice, and lead with humility, because that is what He modeled. Visit adaptordie.us and explore the **Foundation** to go deeper.

Rucking as a Leadership Experience

At Adapt or Die, we don't just teach people to carry heavy packs. We use the ruck as a forge — a deliberate environment where character, discipline, and leadership are built through shared suffering. When the pack gets heavy and the miles don't end, you discover who you actually are.

"Leadership development through shared suffering. Nothing strips away the ego faster than a loaded pack on a long trail."

— Steven King, Adapt or Die

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The strongest ruckers are not always the ones who finish first — they are the ones who check on the person behind them, carry extra weight when needed, and hold the standard without being asked.

EMBRACING DISCOMFORT

Comfort is the enemy of growth. The ruck teaches you to welcome hard things, stop negotiating with your body, and stay on the path when your mind says otherwise. That capacity separates prepared people from unprepared ones.

TEAM ACCOUNTABILITY

In a ruck group, the team moves at the pace of the slowest person. No hiding, no shortcuts. Everyone sees what you are made of — and the standard is held by the group, not just the individual.

DECISION-MAKING UNDER LOAD

When you are exhausted, hungry, and uncomfortable, your decisions reveal your real priorities. Learning to think clearly and lead under physical stress transfers to every area of life.

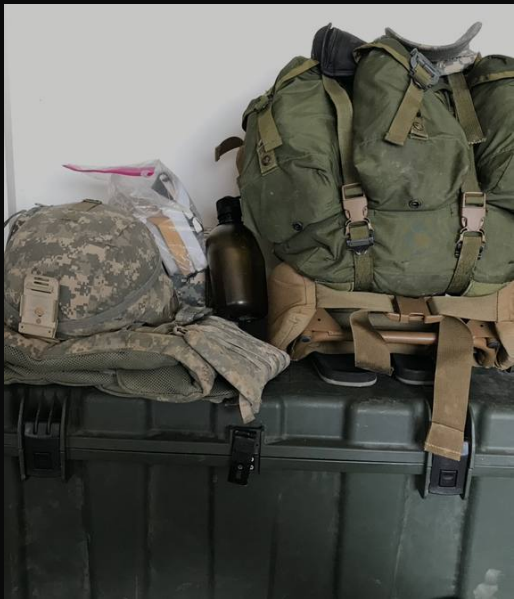
SURVIVAL MODE

There is a point in every hard ruck where the mind narrows and the only thing that exists is the next step forward. This is one of the most valuable places a person can be. Not because suffering is the goal — but because the response to suffering reveals character in a way nothing else can. You either quit, push through alone, or lean into your team and discover you are capable of far more together than apart.

"Iron reveals what comfort conceals."

— Adapt or Die

Pack Smart, Carry Smart



CONCEPTS, NOT CHECKLISTS

Your environment dictates what goes in the pack. What works in the Appalachians may be wrong for the desert or a jungle trail. Understand the *why* behind every item you carry.

Ounces equal pounds and pounds equal pain. Pack multi-use items wherever possible. A poncho can serve as rain gear, a shelter, a water collector, or an emergency stretcher.

PRE-TRIP GEAR CHECKS

Before every trip, lay all gear out and verify everything is present and functional. Do this with a partner when possible — a second set of eyes catches what you miss.

THE 10 CATEGORIES

Everything in the Pack Has a Purpose

01	PACK / RUCKSACK	Size depends on load and trip duration. Match frame type to terrain.
02	PROTECTION	Know your environment's threats. Plan gear accordingly.
03	COMMUNICATION	Phone, satellite communicator (Garmin inReach), whistle, signal mirror.
04	FOOD	Rations, cooking system, food tools. High protein, carbs, and salts.
05	WATER	Carry capacity, purification tablets, and a quality filter (Sawyer, MSR).
06	FIRE	Lighters, fire striker, waterproof matches, tinder. Always multiple sources.
07	SHELTER	Tent, tarp, or bivy. Full clothing system, sleeping bag, and pad.
08	FIRST AID	Boo-boo kit, blister care, personal medications, and basic wound care supplies.
09	NAVIGATION	Topo map, compass, protractor, GPS device, and mechanical pencils.
10	SIGNALING	Headlamp, signal mirror, whistle, chemlights, and emergency beacon.

Choosing the Right Pack

Choosing the right pack is one of the most important gear decisions you will make. The wrong pack punishes your shoulders, back, and motivation over long miles. Match these five characteristics to your intended use:

COMFORTABLE	A pack free of hot spots and pressure points is a major advantage on long days. Proper hip belt transfer, padded shoulder straps, and a frame matched to your torso length all matter significantly.
DURABLE	Heavier fabrics last longer but add base weight. Match durability to terrain — ultralight for established trails, bombproof for off-trail and technical environments.
HYDROPHOBIC	Wet fabric is dead weight. A water-resistant or waterproof pack — or a quality pack liner — keeps your load manageable in rain, stream crossings, and snow.
MODULAR	The ability to configure your kit based on the trip is critical. MOLLE attachment points, lash straps, and removable pockets give you flexibility across mission types.
LIGHTWEIGHT	Every ounce saved on the pack is redirected to food, water, and gear — or just a lighter, faster, more enjoyable day on the trail.

RECOMMENDED BRANDS

Field-Tested Packs — Backcountry to Tactical

STONE GLACIER	Purpose-built for backcountry hunting and extended wilderness trips. Exceptional frame systems and load transfer. A top choice for serious mountain use.
KIFARU	American-made, bombproof, and configurable. The frame-and-bag system adapts for any mission length. A cult following in hunting and tactical communities — earned through performance.
HILL PEOPLE GEAR	Durable, modular, and designed for those who carry a pack as a lifestyle. Premium price, worth every dollar.
TACTICAL TAILOR (MALICE)	A proven tactical workhorse. Heavier than modern options but exceptionally tough. Solid for those coming from a military background.
GI SURPLUS / ALICE	The grandfather of military rucking. Cheap at surplus stores, proven across decades. May need minor upgrades — excellent budget starting point.

Test the pack on your body with weight before committing — not every pack fits every person.

How to Pack — and What to Carry When

How you pack matters as much as what you pack. A poorly loaded pack punishes your body across miles — a well-loaded one almost disappears into your movement. Pack with intention: what do you need first, and how fast do you need it?

BOTTOM ZONE	Lightest and least-needed items: sleeping bag, extra clothes in a dry bag, camp shoes. These don't come out until you stop for the night.
MID ZONE	Medium-weight items: day food, mid layers, secondary gear — balanced left to right to prevent side-loading.
TOP / CORE ZONE	Heaviest items packed high and close to your back: water, cook kit, food bag. Keeps the center of gravity over your hips, not pulling you backward.
LID / EXTERIOR	Immediately accessible items: rain shell, headlamp, snacks, first aid, satellite communicator. Never dig into the main bag for these.

CARRY SYSTEM LAYERS

Three Levels — Always Know Which Layer You Need

Not everything rides in the pack. Your three carry layers determine your response speed when conditions change — and protect you if you get separated from your main load.

LEVEL 1 ON-BODY, ALWAYS	This kit never leaves you — in camp, on breaks, anywhere. Pocket knife, personal first aid kit, emergency fire source, phone or GPS beacon. If separated from your pack, these items keep you alive and able to signal.
LEVEL 2 DAY CARRY	Everything needed if you separate from the main pack for hours. Hydration, snacks, rain layer, headlamp, navigation, and a blister kit. Your "I can survive an unplanned night out" kit — under 15 lbs, always on your person.
LEVEL 3 BASE / FULL PACK	Full shelter, sleep system, multi-day food, complete clothing system, and all mission-specific gear. The load that sustains you across multiple days in the field.

Water and Nutrition on the Trail

Dehydration and caloric deficit are the two most common causes of preventable performance collapse on the trail. Carry more water than you think you need — you can dump weight, but you cannot manufacture water.

DAILY WATER FORMULA

Drink 50–75% of your body weight in ounces per day. Active individuals use 75%. Add 16 oz for dry or high-altitude environments and another 16 oz for strenuous exertion.

EXAMPLE — 190 lb active person

Base (75% × body weight)	142.5 oz
Add: dry / high-altitude	+ 16 oz
Add: strenuous exertion	+ 16 oz
Daily total	174.5 oz
Hourly target (÷ 16 hrs awake)	~11 oz / hr

NUTRITION — BEFORE, DURING, AFTER

BEFORE

Oatmeal with nuts and dried fruit, a peanut butter tortilla, or a bagel with cream cheese 1–2 hours before stepping off. Easy on the stomach, slow-burning, and packable the night before.

DURING

Trail mix, beef jerky, Clif Bars, Honey Stinger waffles, peanut butter packets, summer sausage, hard cheese, and tortillas. Electrolyte mixes (LMNT, Nuun) every 2–3 hours. Eat before you are hungry.

AFTER

Freeze-dried meals (Backpacker's Pantry, Peak Refuel) rehydrated at camp, instant mashed potatoes with olive oil and bacon bits, ramen with a protein source, or a high-calorie nut butter and honey wrap. Prioritize protein and carbs within the first hour of stopping.



Field Hygiene and Trail First Aid

Neglect your feet and they will fail you before the terrain does. Blisters, hot spots, athlete's foot, and trench foot are all preventable — but only if hygiene is treated as a discipline and not an afterthought.

FOOT CARE PROTOCOL

Clean feet with baby wipes at each camp. Apply antifungal powder to feet and insoles before sleeping. Change socks at every opportunity and air feet during breaks. Address hot spots with Leukotape or Body Glide *before* they become blisters.

TICKS & INSECTS

Conduct tick checks after any movement through brush. Use a tick key for removal and treat with antiseptic. Monitor bites daily. Use permethrin-treated clothing in high-risk areas.

HYGIENE KIT CHECKLIST

Toothbrush & toothpaste	Floss	Biodegradable soap
Razor & shaving cream	Athlete's foot cream	Vitamin C
Hand sanitizer	Nail clippers	Chapstick
Wet wipes	Foot powder	Permethrin spray

BASIC FIRST AID — BOO-BOO KIT

This is not a trauma kit. It handles the everyday injuries that derail trips — cuts, blisters, sprains, sunburn, and stomach issues. Keep it accessible, not buried.

Adhesive bandages (assorted)	Antiseptic wipes	Antibiotic ointment (Neosporin)
Leukotape	Body Glide (anti-chafe)	Gauze pads (2×2, 4×4)
Elastic bandage (ACE wrap)	Medical tape	Tweezers
Ibuprofen / Acetaminophen	Anti-diarrhea pills (Imodium)	Antacid tablets
Allergy meds (Benadryl)	Hydrocortisone cream	Blister treatment (2nd Skin)



Layering Theory for the Trail

Your clothing system is your primary interface with the environment. The goal while moving is to generate as little sweat as possible — reserve insulating layers for halts and camp. **Avoid sweating at all costs.** Wet clothing becomes a liability the moment you stop moving.

"Warm and cozy while moving means cold and wet when you stop."

— AOD Journal



BASE LAYER

Moisture management only. Merino wool: temperature-regulating, odor-resistant, comfortable wet or dry. Synthetics (Patagonia Capilene, Under Armour) work well in warm conditions. **Never cotton.**

MID LAYER

Insulation at rest. Fleece, wool, or low-loft down jacket. Take it *off* before moving, put it *on* the moment you stop. A vest protects the core while preventing overheating.

OUTER LAYER

Hard shell (Gore-Tex): waterproof, windproof, limited breathability — for sustained rain or snow. **Soft shell**: breathable, great to move in, won't stop heavy rain — for cold, dry, or windy conditions.

AVOID: COTTON

Cotton has zero insulating value when wet and dries slowly — a serious liability in cold or wet environments. Two exceptions: cotton-blend uniforms offer durability advantages in military settings, and in true desert heat, cotton can aid evaporative cooling by holding sweat against the skin. Outside of those specific conditions, synthetic or merino wool is always the better choice.

AVOID: OVERDRESSING

Sweating into your base layer at the start is a planning failure. Start cold — the pace warms you quickly.

AVOID: SINGLE LAYERS

A single heavy jacket limits your ability to regulate temperature. Stackable layers are always more adaptable to changing conditions.

Boots: A Serious Consideration

Your boots deserve serious consideration on any rucking or backpacking trip. They connect you to every mile, every rock, and every stream crossing. Footwear that does not fit, has not been broken in, or is wrong for the terrain will generate blisters, hot spots, and ankle issues that can shorten or end a trip.



LEATHER VS. SYNTHETIC

Leather is more durable and naturally water-resistant but heavier and slower to dry. Synthetic materials are lighter and dry faster but may wear sooner under heavy use.

WATERPROOF VS. BREATHABLE

Gore-Tex keeps water out but traps heat in warm weather. Non-waterproof boots breathe better and dry faster when wet. Match to your primary environment — wet and cold vs. warm and variable.

HIGH-TOP VS. LOW-TOP

High tops provide ankle support under heavy loads on uneven terrain. Low tops are lighter for established trails with lighter packs. Default to high-top for loads above 30 lb on technical terrain.

FIT & BREAK-IN

Press your heel firmly to the back of the boot — a thumb's width of room at the toe. Feet swell under load; account for this when sizing. Break in new boots progressively before committing them to a long trip.

INSOLES & LACING

Quality aftermarket insoles (Superfeet) significantly improve comfort and reduce fatigue. Two-zone lacing — tighter at the foot, looser at the ankle — reduces hot spots on long days.

AOD-recommended brands: Lowa, Salomon, Garmont, Danner, and Crispi. Test them on terrain before committing them to a serious trip.



PHYSICAL TRAINING

Functional Fitness for Rucking and the Backcountry

Physical training should be consistent and intentional. Proper hydration, good warmup, and correct technique are everything. The goal is not to be a gym athlete — it is to be capable, durable, and ready for whatever terrain demands are placed on your body. Train like your life depends on it.

WARM UP	Every time, without exception. Jumping jacks, air squats, push-ups, and hip openers before loading up. Stretch after — never on cold muscles.
STRENGTH	Kettlebells, goblet squats, Romanian deadlifts, and step-ups build the posterior chain needed to carry weight over distance.
GOAL SETTING	Track weekly mileage and total weight carried. Start where you are — not where you think you should be. What gets measured gets improved.

13-WEEK RUCK PLAN

Building to the Army 12-Mile Standard (3 hrs or less, 35 lb)

Weight is dry weight (without water and food). Carry a minimum of 3 liters of water.

WEEK	WEIGHT	DISTANCE	FREQ	FOCUS
WKS 1–3	20 lb	3 mi	2×/wk	Build base & technique
WKS 4–6	30 lb	6 mi	2×/wk	Add weight & distance
WKS 7–9	30 lb	8 mi	2×/wk	Endurance development
WKS 10–12	35 lb	12 mi	1×/wk	Near-standard load
WK 13	35 lb	12 mi	1×	TEST WEEK

The Path Ahead

This guide is a starting point. The knowledge matters — but it only becomes real when you put the pack on and step out the door. No amount of reading replaces miles under load.

FITNESS FIRST

All the gear in the world is worthless if your body cannot carry it. Eat well, train consistently, sleep, and recover. Build this foundation before you invest in anything else.

GET THE RIGHT GEAR

Buy the best you can afford and learn to use it before you need it. Gear is one piece of the puzzle — invest equally in knowledge, training, and community.

BUILD YOUR NETWORK

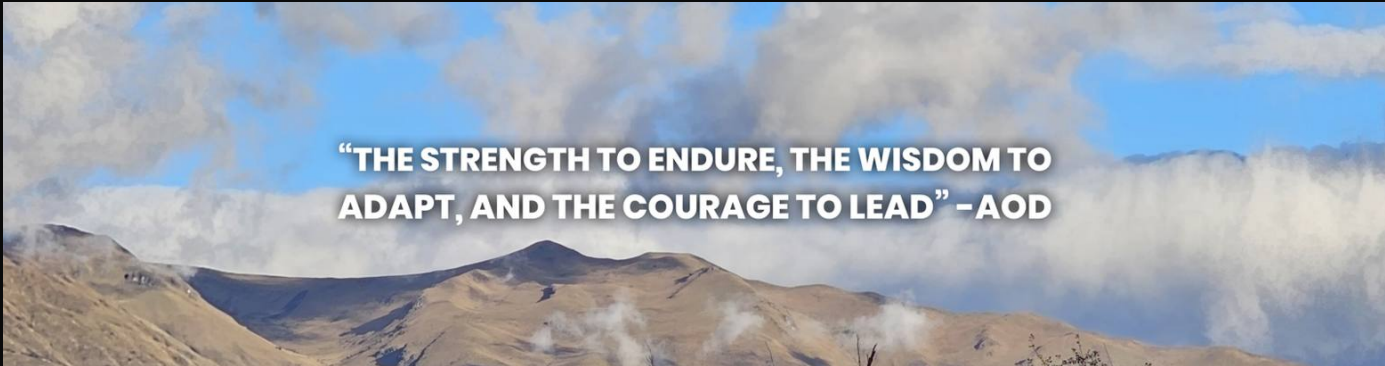
Real progress happens inside a team. Get your family involved. Connect with the AOD community. Train with people who push you to achieve and surpass the standard every day.

EMBRACE THE FORGE

The suffering of a hard ruck on a cold morning is exactly what builds the person who stays composed when things get hard. The discomfort is the point. Lean into it.

"Through discipline, knowledge, accountability, and the right equipment — there is nothing we cannot accomplish together. Welcome to the team."

— Steven King, *Adapt or Die*



**"THE STRENGTH TO ENDURE, THE WISDOM TO
ADAPT, AND THE COURAGE TO LEAD" - AOD**

FOLLOW & CONNECT

The community sharpens the individual. Follow us on **Instagram** @adaptordie.us, subscribe on **YouTube**, and connect on **Facebook**. Get on our email list at **adaptordie.us** — free training guides, events, and intel straight to you.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

This guide is the starting line — not the finish. Visit **adaptordie.us** and explore our **Training Modes** to find the course that will push you further than you thought possible. Sign up. Show up. Get forged.

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