

# Outdoor Smarts

BY KAREN BERGER

PHOTOGRAPHS BY OLIVIA OGREN-HREJSA

## Fix-It Guide for **On-the-Trail Repairs**

An ounce of **prevention** can make the difference when your **gear breaks** down.

**W**hen a boot sole comes unstitched, a tent pole snaps, or a camp stove sputters on a cold, rainy night, an otherwise promising outing may be in jeopardy, especially if a Scout troop or Venturing crew is miles from the nearest road.

This is when a carefully packed repair kit can come to the rescue—especially if you understand how your gear works and can be creative in fixing it.

### First aid for gear

Begin by checking out Adventure Medical Kits' offerings ([www.adventuremedicalkits.com](http://www.adventuremedicalkits.com)). They make several gear repair kits, from the multipurpose Cuts and Bolts Essentials (\$31.50; 8 ounces; contains both first aid and gear repair necessities) to the bare-bones Solo Gear Repair (\$10; 3.9 ounces; lightweight gear repair essentials).

You don't have to take every repair item with you. For example, Adventure Medical Kits' Backcountry Gear Aid contains several different adhesives, belt buckles, and cord locks, but you probably won't need all of them.

Modify your repair kit to suit your needs. Those extra buckles might come in handy if you are leading a large group far from the nearest town. But if your group is smaller, and the trail stays relatively close to roads and towns, a stripped-down kit will probably be sufficient.

For the ultra minimalist, the McNett Corporation ([www.mcnett.com](http://www.mcnett.com)) offers perhaps the tiniest repair kit. The miniaturized Field Repair Kit contains seam

sealer (a urethane compound that can be used as an adhesive on a variety of surfaces), an applicator brush, and nearly invisible patches that can be used on gear such as rainwear, tents, or air mattresses.

You can also make your own repair kit. Here's a list of items that regularly "make the cut" in experienced hikers' packs:



If your boot soles split, hold them in place with dental floss and duct tape. Run the floss through the sole's grooves several times and tie it tightly in place. Then cover with duct tape.

- small multipurpose tool
- spare batteries and flashlight or headlamp bulbs
- duct tape
- dental floss
- seam sealer
- needle and thread (two sizes of each: heavy duty, for backpacks; and medium weight, for clothing and sleeping bags)
- safety pins and blanket pins
- sleeping pad patches (can also be used on rain gear and tents)
- tent-pole splint.

For zippers that keep coming apart, crimp them with pliers by pushing on the back and front of the zipper, first on one side of the zipper, then on the other.

When your camp stove spurts and sputters, clean the jet with a jet-cleaning tool or the built-in cleaning needle. Replace any cracked O rings. Lubricate the leather pump cup with cooking oil or lip balm, then clean the fuel line. Always pack the instructions for operating your stove.

Use patches from your repair kit for ripped clothing. Be sure the area to be patched is clean and dry. Trim the patch in a circle, because corners of patches can catch on things and come off.

### Before your next trip

When you return home from a camp-out, clean and dry your tent thoroughly. Let it air out and empty any loose debris from inside before storing it. Keep sleeping mattresses out of their stuff sacks with air valves open.

Shake out any dirt or debris from your sleeping bag, and let it air out before storing it loose. Don't keep it in a compression sack. Wipe down your pack with a sponge and a gentle soap and let it dry.

Many cleaning and restorative products are available for keeping gear functioning. First check with the product's manufacturer for recommendations.

Examine any in-field repairs you have made to see if you can make a more permanent fix.

If in doubt, call the product manufacturer. Many offer gear repair and revival services for reasonable prices, and they can keep your gear in great shape for many more trips. ☺

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Nikwax has products that waterproof boots and fleece and breathable fabrics such as Gore-Tex. It also sells cleaners that restore loft to down sleeping bags and other outdoor clothing.



A sputtering stove won't cook dinner. A repair kit should include a gas jet cleaner, various O rings, and a specialized tool to take it apart and reassemble. It's also smart to carry directions for your stove's operation.



If your air mattress is punctured and the hole is small, a dab of seam sealer and a repair patch or duct tape may do the trick. Sometimes a faulty valve can keep a pad from holding air. Buy replacements from the original manufacturer.

Backcountry Gear Aid, from the manufacturers of Adventure Medical Kits, contains 32 items for in-the-field repair tasks. Pick and choose what you are most likely to need, but don't toss out the handy repair manual included with the kit.



Does your tent's rainfly leak in a downpour? Stay dry by sealing the fly's stitching with Seam Grip. It can also permanently patch holes and repair tears or rips in other gear.

Don't get caught in the dark. Always carry a spare pack of batteries and an extra bulb for your flashlight or headlamp.



Tears in breathable, waterproof garments, such as those manufactured with Gore-Tex, can be repaired with adhesive patches made of the same material.



For snapped tent poles, an aluminum sleeve acts as a tubular splint. Crimp it in place with your multitool (or gently smash it with a rock). If you don't have a pole sleeve, make a splint with a piece of green wood or a tent stake and then duct tape it in place.