

## Equipment for Field Investigations

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Equipment as it relates to sasquatch research can become a very diversified and complicated issue. Almost everyone has an opinion as to what is necessary, what isn't, and what types and quality of equipment should be used. There are innumerable topics on bigfootforums.com that illustrate this point. This article will attempt to address what type of equipment you should consider as being necessary, what equipment you should have with you and when, and how to best go about obtaining the equipment.

The first thing that should be discussed is the difference between a field investigation and a field experiment. There is a significant difference between the two. In an investigation you will most likely find yourself covering large amounts of terrain in an attempt to locate physical evidence (if not a sasquatch itself). In effect you will be involved in a search. With a field experiment, you will be attempting to collect evidence such as audio or video recordings or photographs. In a field experiment you will most likely either set up your equipment and come back to retrieve it later, or you will be with your equipment in a fixed location for the duration of the experiment. This article will attempt to address the field investigation as opposed to a field experiment.

While it is desirable to have all the equipment you may decide is necessary, and while it is also advisable to have that equipment either loaded in your vehicle or stored in your camp, many people make the mistake of trying to carry everything they think they *might* need with them. This usually results in the investigator being overburdened. Unnecessary weight will cause you to fatigue sooner and having everything jammed into your pack makes it harder to get at what you want.

One of the primary things that should be considered before you head out into the field is just exactly what type of investigation you are about to undertake. Is it:

- A preliminary investigation in which you are hoping you may find sasquatch sign based solely upon habitat and environment?
- A reconnaissance investigation where there has been historical data of sasquatch sightings?
- A field investigation in which there has been a very recent sasquatch sighting?
- An evidence gathering investigation in which there is already some form of physical evidence you have been made aware of such as footprints or hair samples?

Regardless of what type of investigation you are about to undertake, there are two very important items that you should **never** go into the field without. A first-aid kit and a survival kit. If you carry nothing else with you, these two items should always be considered essential when you are in the woods...no excuses! A rudimentary first-aid kit can be purchased at most department stores for just a dollar. And while these kits contain only a minimum of what you may need, they are far and away better than nothing at all. Survival kits are sold commercially, but it is usually much cheaper and more advantageous to simply make your own. The contents of a survival kit can be as simple as a knife, a compass, some cord and a book of matches. Ideally for day trips, you should have a survival kit that is small enough to fit into a shirt pocket. There are a few links at the end of this article that will help explain in greater detail what you would likely want to have in your survival kit since the topic of these kits can become quite detailed and diverse.

Now that personal safety has been addressed, let's take a look at what you should consider as you begin to build your investigative equipment inventory.

All too often it seems that some people have a preconceived notion that in order for them to document evidence they must have everything that science and technology currently has to offer. Night vision, parabolic microphones, digital audio recorders with a sixty hour recording capacity, the hottest new digital camera, the list goes on and on. What seems to get missed is the bottom line...documenting evidence. While it is true that there are a few items you should never be without, there are many more items that you simply will not need for certain types of investigations. For example, if you are doing a preliminary investigation into an area that you think might contain sasquatches, is there really a need to carry all of your audio and visual recording equipment with you? What about plaster for casting tracks? These are the questions you, as an investigator, should be asking yourself.

Here is a basic list of equipment that you should **always** have on hand when you are in the field:

- Measuring tape
  - o Measuring prints, track ways, etc.
- Note pad
  - o Taking notes, drawing maps, etc.
- Pen or pencil
  - o Self explanatory (can be used as a photographic scale reference in a pinch)

- Ziploc bags
  - o Evidence storage as well as protecting equipment
- Paper bags or envelopes
  - o Evidence storage
- Garbage bags
  - o Protecting tracks until they can be cast – expedient raingear or shelter
- Tweezers (sterile)
  - o Evidence collection
- Plastic gloves
  - o Preventing evidence contamination – keeping hands clean while casting, etc.
- Camera (35mm or digital)
  - o Photographing physical evidence and habitat

This simple list will allow you to properly document and/or collect most physical evidence you are likely to encounter. Of these items, the most expensive one is obviously the camera. However, even a cheap, disposable camera will suffice if used properly. When broken down into components, this equipment list can be had for less than ten dollars. In fact, most of the items listed are probably lying around your home already.

Now that the bare minimums have been discussed we can take a look at expanding on your inventory. These items can be considered secondary because while it is not necessary that you have them, they can and will come in handy.

- Flashlight – This item is something that you really shouldn't go into the woods without anyway. It is all too easy to run out of daylight while in the woods and if you are not extremely familiar with the particular piece of land you are on (and in some cases even if you are), it can become very easy to get turned around and lose your sense of direction in the dark. But from an investigation standpoint a strong flashlight can prove to be very useful when photographing prints. Shining the light low across the print will shadow portions of it, which will make the print "stand out" better in a photograph.
- Compass – While you should already have a compass in your personal survival kit, it will usually end up being one of those small "button" type compasses that doesn't take up much room. That type of compass *can* work for field investigations, but it is advisable to have a larger compass as well. They are easier to use in conjunction with a map and the bearing will have a better chance of being visible in any photographs you may take.
- Surveyor's tape or trail markers – A roll of surveyor's tape is a great item to have in the event you want to mark a specific location or mark your way in and out of the woods. The downside to using surveyor's tape is that your trail is visible to anyone else who may happen to decide to follow it. The other option is trail markers such as Bright Eyes. These are small thumbtacks with a highly reflective backing. The downside of these is that they are sometimes practically invisible during daylight hours.
- Binoculars – Having a good set of binoculars in the field is always nice even if you're just out for a stroll in the woods. They allow you to observe wildlife from a distance as well as allowing you to recognize things you probably wouldn't be able to see with the naked eye alone. Remember, with optics you get what you pay for. Unfortunately, a good set of binoculars can be cost prohibitive for some people, but a functional set can be purchased at most local department stores for around forty dollars.
- Audio tape or digital recorder – While there is simply no replacement for a trusty note pad, an audio recorder can be immensely useful for taking field notes. A small digital recorder is ideal for field notes. A decent digital recorder usually runs around thirty to forty dollars.
- Multi-tool – These can prove to be very handy to have in the field. Multi-tools, for those who are not familiar with the term, are those nifty little fold-up wrenches that have items such as knife blades, screwdrivers, can openers, scissors, etc. built into the handles. There is practically no end to the uses these tools can be put to in the field. A good multi-tool will usually run around thirty bucks, but they can also be purchased for far less. Just remember, as with all tools and cutlery, you get what you pay for.
- Photography scale – This is one item that could also be included in the "basic" list above. While a tape measure is what you will use to measure and document tracks, a photographic scale will show up so much better in pictures than a tape measure typically will. In case you are unfamiliar with this item, a photography scale looks like a ruler with black and white markings alternating its length. They are used extensively by law enforcement officials for photographing crime scene evidence. While they can be purchased commercially, one can easily be fashioned from a stiff piece of plastic and a permanent marker.

With all of the above equipment in hand you will be adequately equipped to conduct field investigations. In the event that you are asking yourself why this list doesn't contain items such as night vision or parabolic microphones just remember, the topic here is field *investigations* as opposed to field *experiments*. Of course, if you *do* own that type of equipment you should definitely have it secured in your vehicle or base camp in the event that your field investigation suddenly *becomes* a field experiment.

Now, although the lists above are adequate, there are certainly more items that you should consider adding to your inventory.

- Two way radios – When you are in the field it is always desirable to have someone else with you. Family band, or FRS radios are excellent tools that allow you and your research partner to cover more ground while still maintaining contact with each other.
- GPSr – While there is no substitute for a compass and a map, a GPSr (Global Positioning Satellite receiver) can prove to be an extremely useful tool in the field. And while GPS units do have their limitations such as the tendency to lose signal in dense cover and also their reliance on batteries, they have features that can help you tremendously once you are back in the “office” as well as while you are still in the field. The uses to which they can be applied are many and a proper discussion of those uses is another article in itself.
- Batteries – With all the electronic equipment available nowadays it is important to remember to have extra batteries on hand when you are in the field. There is nothing more irritating than to have a piece of electronic equipment suddenly become a useless hunk of metal and plastic because the batteries have died. In general, rechargeable batteries are worth every single penny that is paid for them. Especially when one considers how quickly something like a digital camera can drain them. If possible, it is also wise to try and make sure all your equipment uses the same size batteries.
- Video recorder – A video recorder can prove to be useful during a field investigation although it is probably better suited for field experiments. Most digital cameras on the market today have the ability to film short segments of motion footage although most have no audio. However, recorders now are very lightweight and versatile so having one along may not be a bad idea. Just remember to have extra tapes and batteries on hand.
- Tripod – While this is another item that you should think hard about before carrying with you in the field, tripods are very nice things to have. They can help out tremendously when you are attempting to photograph tracks or other physical evidence (or anything else you may want to get a good photo of). Also, if you happen to be using a spotting scope instead of binoculars, there is really no substitute for a good tripod. A decent aluminum tripod can be purchased for around thirty dollars at most department stores.
- Additional evidence collection materials – In the “basic” list above, items such as Ziploc and paper bags are advisable to have on hand in the event you do find any physical evidence. They are also listed as “basic” because their weight and bulk are miniscule. However, there are additional items you may consider carrying if you feel the particular investigation warrants it. These items include: sterile small glass jars or vials, sterile gauze and swabs, sterile saline, a fingerprint collection kit, and evidence collection cards. Again, the amount of space and weight these items require should be a consideration prior to adding them to your pack.

At this point the majority of the items that can be considered essential have been covered. Now, what about casting materials? Consider this; it takes approximately twenty pounds of plaster to properly cast most prints of “sasquatchian” proportions. Add to that the weight of the water required for mixing and it simply becomes impractical to carry these items on the chance that you might come upon some tracks. You should have casting materials and tools in your inventory, but again, these items are best left in your vehicle or camp until they are needed. If you find a print or prints that are worth casting, it will be worth the trek to your vehicle and back to retrieve those items. If necessary, you can use the garbage bags you have on hand to cover the prints and protect them until you are able to get back with your casting kit. As far as the items included in a casting kit, the list is fairly simple. You need your casting medium (Hydrocal seems to be the medium of choice), a container to mix it in (a bucket or a gallon size Ziploc bag), and water. For large prints it may be necessary to use reinforcing rods. Aluminum is the best metal for this purpose as it will not rust, which can cause the cast to fracture. For a very detailed and excellent article on tracks and casting, please see [Mr. Rick Noll's article](#) here on our website.

Keep in mind that while this article contains many items that can be considered essential to field investigations, it is by no means the final word on what you should include in your inventory. It is merely presented as a template in the hopes that you will be better equipped as an investigator. Remember, the most important piece of equipment is something you already have...your brain.

Survival Kit Links

[Hood's Woods Website](#)

[Ranger Digest Survival Vest](#)

[Ranger Digest CW Survival Kit](#)

[Ranger Digest Mini Survival Kit](#)

Special thanks to Kathy Moskowitz Strain for her inspiration.

