

# Wilderness Survival Rifles

By Chuck Hawks



Illustration courtesy of Henry Repeating Arms Co.

This somewhat arcane subject is sometimes confused with "Rifles for Protection in the Field." But that article, intended as a guide to rifles carried for protection against large, dangerous predators has already been written and can be found at this URL:

[http://www.chuckhawks.com/rifles\\_protection\\_field.htm](http://www.chuckhawks.com/rifles_protection_field.htm)

This article is about lightweight, takedown rifles that you might use to survive in the wilderness if things go really wrong. After the crash of a bush plane far from civilization, for example, or on a wilderness canoe, kayak, or raft trip after your boat is damaged beyond repair and you must either walk a great distance to safety or survive for an extended period of time before help can be expected to arrive. These are the firearms that you might use for subsistence hunting to help fend off starvation during such an ordeal.

This article is not intended for the hunter far from civilization. He or she would be better off carrying a few extra boxes of ammunition for their primary hunting rifle for use in case of emergency, rather than another entire rifle.

This article is primarily for the explorer, fisherman, photographer, or anyone else who is *not* in the wilderness primarily to hunt. All of the recommended rifles will be .22 caliber rimfires, as the ammunition is so much lighter than any centerfire cartridge that a far greater number of cartridges can be carried in the same amount of space.

I suppose at this point it is reasonable to ask, "Why a rifle instead of a rimfire handgun, which would be smaller and lighter to carry?" My

answer is that if you are an experienced handgun hunter embarking on a non-hunting wilderness expedition, by all means pack a .22 trail gun, or "kit gun" as they used to be called. That is what I carry when I am out camping, fishing or photographing. But most people, including most big game hunters, are simply not sufficiently skilled with a handgun to be able to use a .22 pistol efficiently as a survival tool. If faced with potential starvation, a rifle will better serve them.

The .22 LR should be the cartridge selected for a survival rifle. The object here is to kill small animals and birds for food, not blow them apart with a powerful cartridge. The .22 LR High Velocity (not Hyper Velocity) cartridge loaded with 36-37 grain hollow point bullets is just about perfect for the purpose of harvesting such game. And .22 LR ammunition is so compact that a 50 round box takes up little more space than a single 12 gauge shotgun shell or three .410 shot shells or center fire rifle cartridges.

Clearly, for survival purposes, a takedown rifle with a barrel no longer than 21" will be advantageous. It is simply easier to pack. And space is likely to be at a premium on any wilderness expedition. The survival rifle may be scoped, but iron sights should be provided. There are at least four widely distributed (in the U.S.) .22 rifles that meet these requirements.

There is a pair of well known, classic takedown hunting rifles that meet our size requirement. These are the Grade I Browning Semi-Auto .22 (SA-22), and the takedown version of the single shot Stevens Favorite Model 30 falling block rifle.

And then there are a couple of purpose designed survival rifles, both autoloaders, that are widely available. These are the Marlin Model 70PSS Papoose and Henry U.S. Survival Rifle.

If you are purchasing a rifle solely for emergency survival use, one of the latter is the obvious way to go. If you also want to use your survival rifle as a plinker and small game rifle for recreational shooting, one of the more traditional models would probably be a better choice.



Illustration courtesy of Browning.

The Browning Semi-Auto .22 is the highest quality and best general purpose rifle in the group. It has been used for decades by knowledgeable small game hunters and plinkers who have no particular interest in a survival rifle. This attractive and compact .22 autoloader comes with a polished blue metal finish and a high gloss walnut stock and forend. Its tubular magazine holds 11 rounds. This rifle comes with a 19.25" barrel, weighs 5 pounds 3 ounces, and is 37" long when assembled or 19.25" long when taken down. The 2005 MSRP is \$535. If you are seeking a fine .22 hunting rifle that can also double as a survival rifle, and you can afford the best, the Browning SA-22 is the way to go.



Illustration courtesy of Savage Arms Co.

The Stevens Model 30 Favorite is a slim, under lever falling block design that weighs only 4.25 pounds. It is an external hammer single shot with a blued barreled action and a walnut finished hardwood stock and forend. Loosening a single thumbscrew allows the 21" barrel to be removed from the action. The rifle is 36.75" long when assembled. The 2005 MSRP is \$249. There is a review of the Stevens Favorite rifle in .17 HMR on the *Product Review Page*. For the more traditional hunter/survivalist on a budget, the Favorite deserves a serious look.



Illustration courtesy of Henry Repeating Arms Co.

Among the purpose built .22 survival rifles, the Henry is unique. It is the U.S.A.F's quintessential survival rifle, weighing 2.5 pounds and measuring only 16.5" long when disassembled. This is the basic AR-7 design now manufactured by Henry. Its barrel, action, and two magazines store in its waterproof ABS plastic butt stock (there is no forend), and it floats. The steel barrel and action are Teflon coated for rust resistance. The look and feel of its bulbous butt stock has never appealed to me, but the rifle is actually pretty accurate. This autoloader comes with a 16" barrel and an 8 round detachable box magazine. The 2005 MSRP is \$199.95 in black or silver; camo finish is an additional \$50. A soft plastic carrying case is included.



Illustration courtesy of Marlin FireArms Co.

The Marlin Papoose is based on their ubiquitous Model 60 autoloading action, modified for a removable 16.25" stainless steel barrel. Assembled, the Papoose is 35.25" long and weighs only 3.25 pounds. The detachable box magazine holds 7 rounds and the butt stock is injection molded black plastic (there is no forend). The Model 70PSS comes with a padded, floatable, Cordura carrying case. The 2005 MSRP is \$318. Once in use, this relatively conventional rifle is probably the more comfortable of the two dedicated survival rifles with which to hunt.

There may be other, lesser known, survival rifles out there that I have failed to include. Until recently, Springfield Arms offered their bizarre M6 swing-action, over/under .22/.410 combination gun. But that ugly duckling is no longer listed on their web site, although extra magazines and accessories are.

The four rifles described above are sold by major American arms companies with national distribution and can be purchased from

practically any sporting goods store or gun shop. That alone should make them the top contenders for the survival role, where a rifle absolutely, positively, has to work the first time and every time.