



**TOPS ATM and SOG PowerAssist are two tools perfectly suited for hard-use survival and bug-out bags.**

# HARD-USE TOOLS FOR BUG-OUT BAGS

» **BY JEFF RANDALL**

**Nowadays it seems the new “in” thing for outdoorsmen is to see how light they can travel.**

In many cases, I’ve seen critical tools get thrown to the wayside just to make everything faster and lighter.

While I agree with carrying as little weight as possible, getting rid of essential tools will some day cost the life of one of these ultra-light guys. The trend has even migrated over into survival go bags, or Bug-Out Bags (BOBs) as the survival practitioners call them. In my opinion this is akin to playing Russian Roulette, since the very nature of the bag is to sustain life under any circumstances. A little added weight or “unnecessary” tool in a BOB is just not an issue to me, since my bag stays in my vehicle at all times. If I ever have to go native, the 18-pound (loaded weight) of the Maxpedition Pygmy Falcon pack is easily handled in just about any terrain, or I can shed unneeded pounds from the bag as I move.

My bag is set up to handle all the essentials of short-term survival, including

everything from food, water and shelter to navigation, signaling and minor surgery. I’ve even got a SPOT satellite tracking device tucked away just in case I need to send out a 911 call, relay my position to my family or simply track where I’ve been after things calm down.

It’s pretty obvious I haven’t skimped on putting together a compact survival package, nor have I shorted myself on the tools I would bet my life on. No matter what you choose for your bag, the two tools that are an absolute requirement are a *good* multi-tool and a heavy-duty cutting edge.

## **SOG POWERASSIST**

It’s no secret that I’m partial to SOG Multi-Tools. I’ve had one of their EOD tools for years and it’s touched dirt on just about every continent, crimped a lot of caps in the hands of EOD techs, and fixed a lot of fence and machinery while working around my farm. Don’t get me

wrong: there are a lot of good multi-tools out there, but SOG just seems to do it better when it comes to what I use a tool for. I recently acquired the new PowerAssist, and this model now lives in my BOB, replacing an older SOG Multi-Tool.

As with other SOG tools, the PowerAssist features the patented gear-driven Compound Leverage system that I have grown to like so well. Not only does it hide the pliers when not in use, thus making for a smaller overall package, but it also gives the user a lot of leverage when using the tool for crucial fix-it applications in less than desirable environments.

SOG tools have saved our butts on more than one occasion along the Amazon River. We watched a Peruvian Special Forces Operator almost completely disassemble a small Evinrude boat motor with my SOG PowerLock—and then put it back together after fixing the problem. I also repaired a National Police vehicle

while poking around some narcotics operations in the Peruvian Andes, getting it out of harm's way before dark fell on the wrong side of the mountain. You might say that my experiences have taught me not to travel without a multi-tool.

The PowerAssist is also the first tool to feature two assisted-opening blades in one handle. Once you start to open either of the main blades (which are available to use with the main tool closed), SOG's Assisted Technology (S.A.T.) takes over and completes the task for you. Assisted opening is not a big deal to me. However, the fact that SOG put a fully serrated blade and a plain edge blade in easy reach without jumbling them up amidst the lesser-used tools, or making the user open the tool to use the blade, shows some forward thinking that the user will appreciate.

The other tools are pretty much standard fare for multi-tools: saw blade, screwdrivers, can opener, cap and electrical crimpers and wire cutters.

One tool that does stand out as being different from the rest is the V-Cut strap and cordage cutter. Since strap cutters have become a huge market due to military interest, it was just a matter of time before they started showing up on multi-tools. Having used a sharp edge to help rescue a victim from a car crash, the V-Cut is a welcome addition to me. Besides, most of the first responders I know already carry a multi-tool and separate strap cutter on them, so adding it into the multi-tool just makes sense.

Over the course of my lengthy evaluation phase, the PowerAssist proved itself to be a definite upgrade from the older EOD tool. And as previously mentioned, it has now taken the top spot as the tool of choice for my BOB, while the older SOG has once again taken its place on my side.

Specs on the PowerAssist tool (Model #S66) include: 7.125" open length, 4.675" closed length, 2.75" blade lengths and 9.3 ounce weight. It is available in satin or black oxide finish. MSRP ranges from \$115 to \$122. The PowerAssist EOD version (Model #S67) includes a C4 punch and glass breaker.

### TOPS ATM

I personally don't care for any knife over 3/16-inch thick, but when I ran across the ATM at the TOPS Knives booth



**V-Cut strap and cordage cutter is great addition to tool lineup on SOG PowerAssist, and one that first responders will appreciate.**

**Splitting hard pine stumps and kindling was easy work for TOPS ATM during author's survival outing.**



at the SHOT Show, I knew this would be a great BOB tool. You might say the ATM is a cross between a small hatchet and a knife.

Designed by Jason Breedon, it has the perfect balance to do some pretty serious chopping while still maintaining its fine work capability. You can choke up on the blade and get some real detail out of it, or choke up even farther and use it like an ulu (a knife invented by native people in Northern Alaska centuries ago and used for every task imaginable).

Shortly after the SHOT Show, Mike Fuller sent me an ATM for evaluation. The test blade he sent was shaving sharp, as are all the TOPS Knives I have ever used.

I figured a good test would be to put the ATM in the woodpile. One thing I'm always doing when moving through the woods is scouting for old pine stumps that

have turned into fatwood (resinous wood that lights easily with a match). Once the stump is harvested, then it's just a matter of splitting it into kindling for starting fires in my wood heater.

Of course, the best thing to cut these hard stumps with is a chainsaw, but I always seem to run across the stumps when I don't have a saw, and have to use whatever cutting edge is in the truck or on my side. The ATM was a breeze to use chopping through the base of the stumps and then splitting it into useable pieces. There's no doubt the ATM should rank high on the list of survival fire-building tools.

Another must for any BOB blade is the ability to make shelter, and while I've used everything from a traditional pocket folder to a machete to do this, it's always better when you have a chopping



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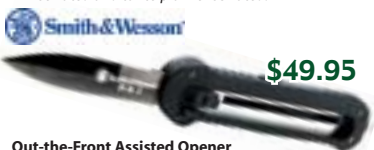
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tool. Sharpening hardwood sticks to build a raised bed was simple work for the ATM, as was cutting brush for windbreaks around my shelter.

After a day's work with the ATM, the knife still had a very good edge on it, but had lost its shaving ability. A few strokes on a ceramic rod and it was back to new condition. When all is said and done, the ATM is probably one of the best BOB blades you can have, because it's small enough to fit just about anywhere and big enough to do serious heavy-duty work.

Specs on the ATM include: 4.0" blade length, 9.0" overall length, .250" thickness, 1095 steel heat-treated to 58 RC, black Linen Micarta handles, Kydex sheath and 100% made in the U.S.A. construction. MSRP is \$179.

Whatever you choose to put in your go-bag, always make sure it fits the purpose of a bug-out bag. For me, a BOB is more likely to be something I use if I become stranded in my vehicle. My home area is not susceptible to serious crime or street violence, thus it is unlikely I would be evacuating to a safer area. Your situation may be different.

If you live in the city, government collapses and there's anarchy in the streets, you may need to set up your BOB more for E&E, so you can escape and evade the idiots until you make it to my house. The SOG PowerAssist and the TOPS ATM will work well for your purposes and for mine. ●

**SOURCES:**

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