FIELD GUIDE · NO. 25

Whistle Signals

Three short blasts are the standard call for help. A whistle carries farther than your voice and takes less energy.



FROM THE BOOK

1. A whistle weighs almost nothing, needs no batteries, and can be heard much farther than shouting. It also takes far less energy; after a few minutes of yelling, most people are hoarse and tired.
2. Three short blasts are widely recognized as a signal that help is needed. That is the standard call for help recognized by searchers and strangers.
3. Repeat the signal periodically rather than blowing continuously. Pausing between groups of blasts gives rescuers a chance to locate the sound and lets you listen for a reply.
4. Three flashes of light are also a recognized distress signal. Morse SOS — three short, three long, three short — can be made with a whistle, flashlight, horn, or signal mirror. Repeat, pause, and continue until someone responds or help arrives.
5. The book notes that a later illustration includes additional signals for communicating within your own group. Those meanings apply only if everyone in the party has agreed on them in advance. Do not expect strangers or searchers to know unofficial codes.

PRACTICE IT

Carry a whistle where you can reach it quickly, and practice three distinct blasts, a pause, and three more, so the pattern is automatic.