

LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

Wilderness Survival

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Locate water,
find food, and make fire

Use survival hacks to
endure in any climate

Navigate out of the
wilderness

John Haslett

Drifted on the open sea aboard a
wooden raft for 125 days

Cameron M. Smith

First person to cross Iceland's
ice cap alone in winter



Wilderness Survival

2nd Edition

by John Haslett and
Cameron M. Smith

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand

Wilderness Survival For Dummies®, 2nd Edition

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Introduction

Welcome to the realm of the extraordinary. Survival situations can bring out greatness in some people — but they can also bring out foolishness, terror, radical changes in perspective, and sometimes, just enormous gratitude for being alive. We, your friendly authors, have crawled like fleas in the face of enormous winds and waves, and we, too, have experienced these extraordinary states of mind — and many more.

But more often than not, survival situations aren't so romantic: You're on a day hike, five miles from a major city — but hopelessly lost — and even though you can hear and see signs of civilization, you're still in danger of dying from hypothermia in the next hour. This situation can kill you just as readily as being lost on an expedition to the North Pole. Well, we wrote this book with sympathy for *both* — those involved in exotic adventures and those who just got a little turned around while taking pictures.

You may worry that wilderness survival requires you to bite off the heads of snakes or maybe leap from a cliff into a raging river. But really, most survival skills are much more mundane. For example, you can extend the life of batteries by taking them out of your flashlight and putting them inside your shirt, against your skin. Keeping batteries warm preserves their charge in cold conditions. There. That wasn't so bad, was it? You picked up a basic survival skill and you didn't have to shiver or go hungry. You're already rolling.

About This Book

This book is designed to thoroughly cover the basics of wilderness survival. To compile the information, we've selectively researched many tried-and-true sources, such as *The U.S. Army Survival Manual* (U.S. Govt. Printing Office FM21-76) and *Essentials of Sea Survival* (Human Kinetics Press), but we've called upon our own practical experiences and those of many field experts.

Throughout this book, we use the word *we* when we, Cameron and John, both want to say something personal to you, our reader. This book comes from the combined experiences of two people

who've been through a lot of misadventures over decades across the globe, and who are very close friends. We've been in enough trouble — and scared enough — that we think alike, basically, and therefore we speak with the same voice.

We define the *wilderness* as just about any place out-of-doors. We know from bitter experience that it's easy to freeze to death in places that a geographer wouldn't necessarily think of as "wilderness areas." With that in mind, you should know that this isn't a camping or 'bushcraft' book; it's a book for anyone at risk of perishing from exposure to the elements, whether camping or off on a "harmless" stroll.

We try to keep the language simple and direct; when we do offer new vocabulary, we *italicize* and define it.

We hope you enjoy reading every word that we've written, but if you just want the bare essentials of surviving in the wild, feel free to skip the sidebars that appear in the gray shaded boxes. This is additional information, purely for the curious. We hope you read them, but if you don't, you won't miss any vital information.

To make the content more accessible, we divided it into five parts:

- » Part 1, Stayin' Alive: Basic Wilderness Survival Principles
- » Part 2, Exploring Advanced Survival Techniques
- » Part 3, Surviving in Extreme Land Environments
- » Part 4, Surviving on the Seas, Oceans, and Great Lakes
- » Part 5, The Part of Tens

Foolish Assumptions

Although we know that you don't fit every description in this list of assumptions we make about you, we do assume that you have at least a few of the following characteristics:

- » You're someone who enjoys nature and being outdoors.
- » You want a basic survival book that gives clear, practical instructions for surviving in the wild, including how to find your way back to civilization or signal a search and rescue team.

- » You may be exploring solo or out with a group.
- » You're interested in safety while being outdoors for extended periods, such as backpacking trips, prolonged sailing trips, or camping trips.
- » You prefer your advice served warm and friendly, not cold and dry like other survival manuals you may have tried.
- » You want a survival manual that you can throw in your car or backpack (or carry-on luggage) or download to your phone for greater portability, just in case.
- » You've seen survival shows on television and they intrigue you.

Icons Used in This Book

Icons, little pictures in the margins, are placed next to some of the paragraphs that we feel need extra emphasis.



TIP

This symbol indicates additional information to make something easier to do or understand, and sometimes suggests alternatives.



REMEMBER

This symbol flags important information or actions that you should squirrel away in your brain for quick recall later.



WARNING

This symbol means danger. We use it to emphasize some aspect of a survival situation that can really get you into trouble.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the abundance of information and guidance related to wilderness survival that we provide in this book, you get access to even more help and information online at *Dummies.com*. Check out this book's online Cheat Sheet. Just go to *www.dummies.com* and search for "Wilderness Survival For Dummies Cheat Sheet."

Where to Go From Here

Feel free to start reading this book anywhere you like. The five parts are completely modular, so you don't have to read them in order. However, Chapter 1 is certainly a good place to start because it tells you exactly what to do first if you find yourself lost outdoors.

Part 1 is a great place to get a good foundation for all things wilderness survival. If you're planning on a trip to an extreme environment, you may want to start with Part 3. On the other hand, if you're looking for adventures on the sea, you can go straight to Part 4.

Of course, when you're in a survival situation, you can check out the index or table of contents and simply flip to the information you need. If you're bleeding, or if you've twisted your ankle, or if you've been bitten by a snake, check out Chapter 13. Or if your ship has gone under and you find yourself in a life raft, go to Chapter 19.

1

**Stayin' Alive:
Basic Wilderness
Survival
Principles**

IN THIS PART . . .

How to prioritize your actions in survival situations

Practice psychological preparedness

Improvise clothing to keep warm (or cool) during the day and overnight

How to build and sustain a fire

Places to take shelter

Where to find water and how to confirm it's drinkable

How to look for and harvest food from the wilderness

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Being prepared for common wilderness survival situations
- » Having the right attitude and being proactive
- » Taking care of basic needs and signaling for rescue
- » Navigating and avoiding mistakes

Chapter 1

Staying Safe in the Great Outdoors

Knowing the threats you face in the wilderness and the wisest courses of action to take to counter those threats can go a long way toward keeping you alive in a bad situation. If you find yourself lost or adrift, this prior knowledge allows you to start working on your survival priorities immediately, changing you from victim to survivor.

This chapter is a jumping-off point to wilderness survival. We give you a prioritized overview of the basics you need to know in practically any wilderness survival situation. We describe the main threats to survival and how to take care of them in the right order. Finally, we show you how so many people go wrong and how you can prevent your situation from getting worse — or perhaps how to stay out of trouble altogether!

Being Prepared and Proactive

Preparation gives you the knowledge to extend your life, and it may even give you what you need to avoid a crisis. Chapter 2 discusses what you can do and bring to be prepared in any wilderness.

Being *proactive* usually means stopping and getting control — such as slowing your swimming stroke or even floating to conserve your energy. If you suddenly feel lost, don't react and don't speed up; stop, sit, and think carefully about your situation. This is the beginning of taking control of the situation before it takes control of you.

Keeping the Right Attitude

Real survival situations feel enormously unfair — it's as though the world is conspiring against you or the odds are simply beyond your abilities. To survive this situation, you must accept the situation and keep a positive outlook; Chapter 3 covers survival psychology. To cultivate a positive attitude, begin by accepting the situation and taking it all in. Many people perish simply because they can't master disbelief.

The following suggestions can help you keep your spirits up:

- » **Be resourceful and creative.** Resources and options that you've never considered are available to you. Use rocks as hammers, nails as fishhooks, and belt buckles as reflectors for signaling. Then think of new options and work out more plans. Think of a way.
- » **Be patient.** Consider that being rescued or working your way out of the problem may take time, but never assume that no one will come looking for you.
- » **Never say die.** Misery and fear can fool you into thinking you're finished. Don't let your mind play tricks on you. You can keep going long after you feel like you can't. A *lot* longer. Don't give up. Keep a positive attitude, or grit your teeth in grim determination. If you slip into a negative attitude, you'll melt like a candle.

Applying Survival Basics

After accepting the situation, your next survival priority is to address your survival needs in the order they appear in this section.

You may also face a medical situation, which may take precedence over the ones we mention here, depending on its severity. For first aid procedures, see Chapter 13.

Regulating body temperature

Thermoregulation is the management of your body temperature. It's the highest priority because being too cold (*hypothermia*) or being too hot (*hyperthermia*) are the fastest killers in the wilderness. Here's how to manage your body temperature:

- » **Cold environments:** Stay dry — be careful near streams and rivers, shelter yourself from rain, and keep sweating to a minimum. If night is coming, realize that hypothermia is a dire threat and make a fire and a shelter.
- » **Hot environments:** If you are getting uncomfortably hot, take action by finding shelter and taking a rest. Waiting too long is the biggest contributor to heat exhaustion. It's especially important to stay hydrated in hot environments, so drink water if you have it, or start thinking about where you are going to get it.

The four components that govern thermoregulation are clothing, fire, shelter, and your own actions. Use these things to keep your body at a healthy temperature.

Your first line of defense: Clothing

In a survival situation outdoors you will probably have different daytime and nighttime temperatures, and your activity level will differ at these times as well. The best way to manage these temperature differences is dress in layers, improvised if needed. The key is to add or subtract clothing layers depending on temperature. For more on clothing, see Chapter 4.



REMEMBER

In many survival situations, people discard clothing that they don't think they need. Never discard any clothing, under any circumstances. If you take off a shirt or jacket, tie it around your waist or jam it in your belt; you'll want it again some time, guaranteed!

If you're in a cold environment and working hard, strip off layers of clothing to prevent sweat from soaking your clothes (wet clothes lose insulating capacity). If you're facing a cold night, add insulating layers by stuffing grass, leaves, or moss inside your clothing, creating a 'dead air' layer that helps to keep you warm.



REMEMBER

In all environments, cover your head. If you don't have a hat, improvise one that covers your head and neck thoroughly. In the cold, a head and neck covering deters hypothermia, especially if you've fallen into cold water, and in the sun, it deters heat stroke.

Warming up to the fire

A fire helps prevent hypothermia and boosts morale. Its light can be seen by night and its smoke by day. Carefully prepare your fire in a survival situation — don't rush things. Plan it out and have lots of backups to keep the flame going after it ignites. For info on how to make fire, see Chapter 5.

Taking shelter

Even the crudest shelter can also keep you warm and improve morale. We cover shelter basics in Chapter 6, and provide specific tips for different environments in Part 3.

Regulating your temperature in the water

If you're in a water environment, thermoregulation is especially important because you are much more susceptible to hypothermia when wet. Take the following measures to stay warm:

- » **Stay as still as you possibly can.** Don't tread water if you can help it; that just depletes energy, which will eventually make you colder.
- » **Cover your head.** Use anything you can to insulate your head, because the scalp dissipates a lot of body heat.
- » **Try to keep your armpits closed by holding your elbows at your sides, and keep your crotch closed by crossing your legs.** These areas also leak a lot of body heat.

Check out Chapter 18 for information about staying warm at sea.

Signaling for rescue

After you address body temperature management, think about how to make yourself 'findable' by rescuers. Don't ever believe that no one will come for you — someone usually does.

The main principle of signaling for rescue is to stand out from the natural environment. Visual signals should be large and bright and contrast with nature. Lay out tarps, sleeping bags, and other