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## **Desert Survival is Never Easy**



Many areas of the world are arid and seem to completely lacking water. I wrote the word “seem” on purpose. In fact, these areas do receive water, but not regularly. Some deserts can go for long periods, perhaps years, without water and then experience a heavy rain. For a survivor though, the desert

environment is a harsh and often victorious enemy. It is unforgiving of mistakes and often your first mistake will be your last.

Desert Survival is never easy. Just being in a desert is uncomfortable, and it becomes almost unbearable when you combine the physical and psychological factors of survival. But, with world being smaller now than it was even fifty years ago, there is always a chance you could end up in a desert environment. Or, perhaps you live in or near the American southwest. What makes desert survival so different than, say, mountain, general, or even arctic survival? There are a number of factors, but lets consider the lack of water and the extreme heat as the two big ones. As you read more, you will discover some of the dangers associated with survival in the desert.

If forced to survive in a desert environment, your first step is to seek shelter immediately. The heat of a desert, at times as high as 120 degrees F, can kill you in just a few hours. Look for an outcrop of rock, the shady side of a gully or streambed, or any shade that you can find. Initially you are looking for an emergency shelter for a few hours perhaps,

not a long term shelter. A better shelter can be constructed once the sun goes down. Just remember, you must get out of the sun and into the shade.

Keep your whole body covered if you can. Keep your sleeves rolled down and your hat on. Never remove boots, socks, or any piece of clothing in the direct sunlight. Additionally, you should cover the back of your neck to protect it from the sun. Experienced individuals often remove a t-shirt and use it as a scarf. Or, I have seen them push one end of the shirt up under and cap, and allow the other end to hang over the neck. Regardless of the technique you use, you should keep your neck covered at all times. It reduces water loss through sweating and it also prevents sunburn, often a painful situation for a desert survivor. Dress as much like an Arab as you can, they are the masters of the desert.

Once you become concerned about your location, or believe yourself to be lost, STOP. If you are not one hundred percent of your exact location, DO NOT continue walking. And, make sure even if you do know where you are headed it is a very short distance. The desert heat can kill you in very little time. Let's consider some basic water facts about travel in the desert. Most survival manuals will state in the 120F heat of a desert, if you rest and do nothing, you might live for two days. If you go meandering out into the desert, you most likely won't cover five miles. However, if you know where you are, wait until nighttime, you could cover up to 25 miles. So, STOP. Go no further and seek shade immediately!

Once you had a shade and you have decided to stop, what next? **THINK!** Did you file a trip plan (always recommended by this author) with a friend, wife, or your boss? Who knows where you are, how long you intend to be there, and the exact time and date you intend to return. Someone should always know these details prior to your trip. It will speed up your rescue a great deal. Be sure to phone in with any changes to your plans. Nothing is more frustrating to rescue teams than looking for someone who is not where they are supposed to be.

While you are in the shade thinking, you should also **inventory** the equipment you have on hand. I strongly recommend that you carry at least a minimum survival kit on you at all times in the field. If you have a *proper minimum survival kit*, you will have:

1. A quality penknife or jack knife.
2. Condoms for water storage, unlubricated.
3. Water proof matches
4. Flint and steel or a metal match
5. Water purification tablets
6. A long strip of aluminum foil folded up to cook with
7. Fishing kit, i.e., hooks, sinkers, and some line. Nothing fancy.
8. Commercial back packing first aid kit (with instructions). I carry a very small one.
9. One small pack of gum and one of hard candy (energy)

10. A small signal mirror
11. About 25 feet of cord
12. A space blanket

In the desert you should become nocturnal, once the sun goes down, your “day” will start. So, as you think, consider the type of shelter design you want to use, look the area over for possible sources of water, and find out how much water you have on hand. Do all of this from the shade of your temporary shelter.

In the desert, always think before you act. Do nothing that is not absolutely life threatening in the daytime. You want to keep your sweating down to the minimum.

Once the sun goes down, you should get busy. Your first priority is to construct a shelter. If you have a space blanket, a casualty blanket or a poncho, you can make a simple lean-to type of shelter, using the 25 feet of cord in your survival kit. I also carry a casualty blanket (a super quality “NASA” designed space blanket) and a poncho with me at all times in my survival gear. This extra equipment gives me two materials for shelter construction and one for sleeping (counting the space blanket in the minimum survival kit), if needed.

Simply secure one end of the material to the ground (called the secured end), using stakes or heavy stones, and angle the other end of the material up (called the angled end). Do not make the angle too steep, or you won’t get the needed sun protection you need. I suggest you make the angled end no higher than 4 feet off the ground. At the angled end tie it to bushes, stakes, or rocks. Then, place five or six pieces of brush on the material, and then cover the whole thing with material once more...it will be, shelter material, brush, and shelter material. I use a casualty blanket for the first layer of material and my space blanket as the top layer of material. I place the space blanket on the shelter with the florescent orange side up, to aid as an emergency signal.

Most survival professionals agree to the need for this type of “sandwich” shelter. It forms a dead air space between you and the sun. It insulates and keeps the shelter cooler than a single layered shelter. Remember to only construct this shelter in the cool of the evening, NOT during the day. Now that you have a way of keeping the water you have in your system, let’s look at how to procure additional water needed for your survival.

First, ration your water. If you drink more than you actually need, you will pass it out in the form of urine. And, when you urinate, check the color of your urine. Dark colored urine indicates you need to increase your water intake. Many survival professionals recommend that have a least one-quart of water for every two lost. But, remember, less fluid will NOT result in less sweat! In extreme heat, you may not even feel yourself sweat because the sweat evaporations very quickly. Always be on the look out for sources of additional water.

So, you need water, right? Not sure where to find it? Well, here a few suggestions. Not all of them work all the time. But, all are worth the attempt. First, keep in mind that water flows downhill. That means that water may be at low points in your area.

**One place to look for water**, using the above information, is on the outside bend, lowest point, of a dry streambed. **DO NOT** dig for water during the day; you will lose liquid from your body you might not be able to replace. Do not do anything that causes you to sweat that is not necessary. *Keep that water inside of you!*

Another possible water source can be added by make a **solar still** or using **condensation bags**. However, both methods require plastic sheets of material.

**To construct** a solar still, dig a hole approximately 3 feet across and about 2 feet deep. Make a smaller hole, or slump in the middle of the hole. In this slump you need to put a container, pan, can, or pot to collect the water. Once the hole has been dug, cover the hole with a plastic sheet. Be sure to secure the edges of the sheet with sand and rocks. Next, place a rock in the center of the sheet, so it sags down.

**How it works** is simple. The temperature in the hole, both the soil and air, rises due to the sun. This increase in heat causes vapors, which condensates on the inside of the plastic sheet and runs down. It then drops into the container in the sump hole.

**Condensation Bags are easy to construct.** Leaves and small branches may be cut and placed into clear plastic bags. **How it works:** The heat from the sun causes the liquids in the foliage to be extracted, much like the solar still, and collect in the bag. However, this method may produce bitter water and the taste test should be used to determine if it is safe to drink. If the water has a bitter taste, do not use it for drinking. **WARNING:** This method of water procurement may produce water with toxins and thus not safe to drink.

**Another method of procuring water** is by using a **transpiration bag**. In this method a large plastic bag is placed over a living limb of a tree or large bush. (I suggest it be high enough to be off of the ground). Insert the limb or bush just like you would a hand into a mitten. Then, tie the open end of the bag around the tree or bush. At the closed end of the bag, tie a rock so the bag is weighted and forms a collection point for the water. **How it Works:** Like the solar still and the condensation bag, it uses heat and evaporation.

**Cactus as a source of water** is often, in my opinion, over rated. We have all seen the cowboy movie where the hero, lost in the desert, kicks over a barrow cactus and is saved. It just doesn't happen that way.

In our American southwest there are many different kinds of cactus from the **barrow cactus** to the prickly pear. All can be used for gaining additional moisture, but it can take a great deal of work to open a full sized barrow cactus. Not to mention the fight you will have with the spiny thorns that protect it. If you decide to take on a cactus, do it in the cool of

the evening. (Chunks of freshly cut cactus can be added to the sloping sides of your solar still to increase the water level collected). Using caution, remove the top of the barrow cactus. Once the top is off, you will find a white a white substance that reminds me of “water melon meat” inside (this is a liquid filled inner tissue). Using your survival knife cut out hand-size chunks and squeeze the moisture from it.

The prickly pear is easier to collect and prepare. I use a large sharp stick and a good knife. I stab the round prickly pear with the stick the then cut it off with my knife. Then, returning to the fire, I simply burn the thorns off of the cactus. Make sure you sear the cactus well to remove even the smallest thorns.

Once the thorns are removed, I peel the green or purple colored outer substance off, and eat the inside. Prickly pear “meat” is so tasty, that in Arizona and New Mexico you can find jellies and candies made from it. It is the moisture filled inner tissue you want to chew, not the rough outer “bark.”

Use caution with all cacti. The thorns will usually cause infections if you are unlucky enough to be “grabbed” by one. I use sharp sticks, knives, and fires to handle cactus safely. Any injury from a cactus plant should be treated immediately to reduce the risk of infection.

Now, we had discussed the immediate requirements to survive, what about additional information? Well, you should also be aware of a few other things about the desert.

**Food is not usually much of a problem.** If you don’t have enough water, **don’t eat.** The USAF taught us if we did not have more than ½ a liter of water a day **NOT TO EAT.** When your body processes food into waste, fluids from your body are used. So, if you do not have enough water in you, you can speed up dehydration by eating. Besides, most healthy North Americans can go for a long time without eating. Water is your primary concern in the desert. If you urine color is not dark, food intake may be considered.

**Insects** can be a problem at times. If your water source is adequate, you can always fix up a nice meal of bugs. See the article on my site on preparing insects as food sources. In any case, avoid scorpions, spiders, and other “may hurt you” bugs. This includes centipedes, or brightly colored insects.

**Spiders are there with you as well.** While the large spider most often seen in movies (the tarantula) is scary and it can bite, the bite is usually just disabling and very rarely fatal. And, yes, the tarantula lives in the desert of the American southwest. Be sure to always shake out your removed clothing and your boots prior to putting them on. You may be surprised what will set up home in your gear. Avoid any spider you see in the desert.

**Snakes may be dangerous to you,** but they can also provide a filling meal. For the sake of simplicity, we will consider only the American rattlesnake. As a safety consideration, always keep your

clothing on and your boots (I would never even consider going into a desert with sneakers or shoes on). Additionally, use caution when you move around at night. Rattlesnakes do not always warn with a rattle prior to striking. Most snakebites occur to the legs, below the knees, or to a persons hands. The rattlesnake may be found in rocky areas, or in holes or shadows. Do not put your hands where you cannot see. If you see a snake, and know you can kill it, it does make an excellent source of food. Some states in the southwest have an annual rattlesnake roundup. These snakes are caught, killed, then cooked and eaten. I have had eaten rattlesnake and it tastes just like...snake, believe me, not chicken.

**Lizards are found in the desert as well.** The Gila Monster is seen at times in the American southwest. It is a fat, short, lizard with a rounded head and a bright yellowish colored body. It will run away from you if it can, so avoid cornering it. The bite is very poisonous and should be treated the same as a snakebite (I will soon have a new article out on the treatment of snake bites).

Surviving in a desert environment is never easy. Even for the best prepared and most knowledgeable there is no assurance of survival. The heat, dehydration, and hazards of desert survival often win in the end, even when against the most determined and prepared victim.

If you want to survive in the desert, you must maintain your body's fluids, do nothing that is not absolutely necessary, and find ways to procure water. The key to living is to maintain your water level. Nonetheless, with the information provided in this article and with a strong determined will to survive, you too, will have the tools that could make the difference between your being another victim of the desert, or a survivor.



# I Survived Three Days in the Arctic! And, So Can You!

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Those of us who enjoy big game hunting very rarely consider the real dangers associated with the sport. We frequently hunt in the extreme cold and snowy country of the far north. As a result, we often find ourselves miles from any one or any place as we search for game. While the day may start out nicely, it only takes

a short period of time for the weather to turn bad, and we will be forced to seek shelter quickly. But, do you really know how to construct a shelter in arctic like conditions? Could you survive until the weather clears, or help arrives? I do, thanks to the United States Air Force Arctic Survival Course.

“Alright, gentlemen and ladies. Listen up! The weather right now is minus twenty degrees, and it *will* go down with the sun.” The grizzled old sergeant said as he moved around our training site with his gloved hands on his hips.

I was physically and mentally overwhelmed, not to mention cold. Less than an hour ago I was snug and warm in a military survival classroom preparing for this venture. I had expected it to be cold, but not this cold. I actually felt the start of panic at the thought of three days in this weather with very little more than my mind. I was able to fight it to the back of mind by telling myself that I had just received days of intense arctic survival training. I was better prepared than most folks would be in a real survival situation, because I was actually in a semi-safety training site. At least the instructors had radio’s to call for help, need be.

The sergeant disrupted my daydreaming once more, “I want each of you to start constructing a shelter, get an insulated sleeping area made, and get a fire started. I want all of this done by the time I return. Remember the buddy system. Keep your eyes out for the safety and health of the one you have been paired up with. What this means is that each of you do your own work, but stay within sight of each other. If you are injured during this training to the point you cannot continue, you will be returned to camp for medical treatment and then, once the doc’s say yer healthy again, you will start the program all over again at day one. Any questions?”

No one had any questions, but as I looked into the eyes of my fellow students, I could sense fear, uncertainty, and confusion. Oh, we knew what to do, as well as how to do it. But, there is a certain psychological feeling of doom or dread as you face the reality of survival at minus twenty or lower. I knew I had to shake that feeling off, because it is a killer, so I started making my fire.

Since we were not so far north as to be out of the tree line, I walked to a nearby tree and started looking for “squaw wood” or the dead twigs under or on the tree. These are not very large, often about the diameter of a pencil. I soon had a couple of hands full and placed them on the ground near where I would make my fire.

What I wanted next was mother natures own fire starter, pine pitch. I walked to a group of large pines and found globs of the light orange sap that burned like gasoline when ignited. It is sticky, like gum, and is easy to remove, but at times leaves an oily feeling (residue) on the hand. (While not actually needed, it was there and would make the fire starting that much easier). I placed the pine pitch on the “squaw wood” and returned to the trees once more.

Gathering up armload after armload of dry wood (as dry as I could find), I stacked it near my fire pit. I quickly had enough for at least one night of continuous burning in a small fire. I did not want a large fire because I would not need it. I intended to spend a great deal of time in my shelter, out of the wind. While there was no wind now, there might be later that night. I knew from training that the shelter would be warm and I did not intend to lose any more body heat than I had too.

I placed four of the larger pieces of wood I had gathered in a line, sides touching sides. Essentially, I had just made a platform for my fire. I knew that as the fire burned the logs of my platform would burn as well. Thus, over time the fire would sink lower and lower into the snow, until it did me little good. At that point, I would have to start all over again and make a new fire pit. If I could, I would have covered the logs with sand, dirt or stones to keep the wood from burning. But, I was unsure how deep the snow was or how hard the ground would be. I did not want to work up a sweat, or use up energy, digging for ground level. Additionally, I would have used green logs, only I didn't have an ax to cut them with. I had to make do with what I had on hand.

As I said earlier, I intended to spend as much time as possible out of the cold and in my shelter, so the problem of the fire sinking like the Titanic was a small concern. I mainly wanted it to warm my hands as I constructed my shelter and made my sleeping platform.

After making my fire platform, I placed two pieces of pitch in the middle. I then made a very small teepee from the twigs I had gathered, taking care that I allowed room between the pieces of wood for airflow. This teepee was constructed right over the most of the pine pitch. Next, I need a fire source.

There are many different kinds of fire sources available and I usually carry at least three on me at all times (matches in a water proof container, lighter, as well as flint and steel) when I hunt. On this day, however, I had to start a fire with flint and steel. Not an easy task in the numbing cold of the arctic. I did have an advantage because the instructors allowed us to prepare individual survival kits, which they inspected closely for unauthorized food items, to bring along. This was to get us used to the idea of *always* having a survival kit of some sort, as well as learning what should go in it.

I had used an old survival trick of putting dried lint, from a clothes drier, in my survival kit wrapped in a plastic sandwich bag. I gently placed the lint up against and part way into my teepee of sticks and twigs. Once again taking airflow into consideration. Since the lint was dry and not compressed, it only took one tiny burning piece of flint from my trembling hands to start the fire.

As the flames slowly grew in size, I gently added more and more wood until I had a nice fire burning. Now my attention turned to constructing my shelter. Having been warned to avoid sweating in arctic weather, it leads to chilling and possibly hypothermia; I removed my parka and started to work.

My first step was to dig down into the snow and clear a trench about three feet wide, three feet deep and seven feet long. This was a little longer and wider than I am, to allow me to store my meager field gear in the shelter with me. I was looking for emergency protection from the environment, not a suite. The actual size used in construction is an individual preference, but I wanted a small and compact shelter with only my immediate needs in mind.

As soon as I had the trench made, I lined the floor of my shelter with pine boughs from the nearby pine trees. Other sources of insulation can be used if pine is not available where you are (If you survive an aircraft crash, the insulation from the walls or the material from the seats on an aircraft provide excellent protection from a cold sleeping surface). I place the boughs a little over a foot thick. I would have piled them higher, but I had to be able to crawl into the thing once I had a roof on it. I have discovered, in my opinion, that you can never have too much floor insulation in a survival shelter.

Next, I put my gear in the shelter up against the far wall, away from the entrance. I walked to the nearby trees and started gathering up logs and limbs to cover my trench. I had been cautioned to avoid rotted wood for the roof. As I gathered the logs, I stacked them near my trench until I had a large supply to work with. Once I started working on the roof, I didn't want to have to keep walking into the woods to find more material.

Starting at the end opposite my entrance, I laid the logs and limbs over the open trench until I had it all covered with the exception of a small opening. This opening would be my entrance. You will have to estimate

the size of your entrance based on your body size, but keep it as small as possible.

I walked around my shelter and made sure the logs overlapped the sides of my trench by about a foot on each side. I did this to give the roof strength and additional support. After the logs were in place, I returned to the pines and brought back enough pine boughs to cover the top of my shelter. These pine boughs would provide the insulation my shelter needed. This insulation would prevent body heat from escaping and help keep the shelter protected from the wind and elements.

Once the boughs were placed on top, I covered them with a small part of my parachute. While it is unlikely most people in a survival situation will have a parachute, a poncho, sheet of plastic, space blanket, or any material could serve the same purpose. If you do not have any material to cover the boughs with, then proceed without it. I anchored the edges of my “chute” material with wooden stakes and started covering it with snow.

As I worked covering my shelter, I began to sweat in the freezing cold and removed a layer of clothing. I wanted to avoid sweating because of the danger of the sweat freezing. Also, when I felt myself becoming too warm, I would stop for a few minutes. Also, as soon as I had the shelter about half covered with snow, I stopped and boiled me a cup of “pine needle” tea. Yep, it is exactly what it sounds like. Not my favorite drink, but it did the trick and refreshed me as I took a much-deserved breather.

The rest of my shelter was quickly covered with snow. All in all, it was not a difficult task, but one that required some planning and hard work. I had to ensure it was long enough and wide enough to hold me, and all of my equipment. Additionally, I wanted it high enough to be able to move around it, but not high enough to standup in. The smaller I kept it, the easier it would be for me to heat. But, I still had two more tasks to complete before it was ready for an occupant.

I crawled inside my shelter and poked a hole approximately three inches in diameter in the top. I did this to allow for ventilation. Since I planned to burn a candle in the shelter, plus I wanted some fresh air, I would constantly, over the next few days, be checking to make sure the hole stayed open. Without the ventilation, and with the candle burning, carbon monoxide poisoning was a real threat. Always keep your shelter well ventilated.

My very last step was to make a door for my shelter. I took a large piece of parachute material (you could use a poncho, tarp, space blanket, etc.) and spread it out on the snow near the entrance to my shelter. I piled snow on the material until I had enough snow, or so I thought, to block the hole I used for an entrance. I pulled the ends and sides of the parachute material together and tied them in place using some cord. I now had a door, roughly the shape of a circle. I could use the ends of the parachute

material as a crude door handle to pull the “door” closed once I was inside my shelter.

By the time the old sergeant had returned, I had completed my assignment. My fire was burning well, my sleeping area was lined with pine boughs, and my shelter was complete. I was actually proud of myself. The earlier fears of survival I had fought in my mind were now gone. (Remember, an active mind is less prone to the psychological dangers associated with wilderness survival). Actually, I had expected a small compliment when the sergeant returned, but he just took a long critical look, turned to me and said, “Not bad. Not good either. We will see tonight if it is good enough.”

Well, it was good enough and then some. I spent the next three days living in my snow trench shelter. While not exactly the most comfortable place to live in, it did serve its purpose, it kept me alive in sub-zero weather. I learned how cramped, lonely, and boring it can be when a howling blizzard is pounding on the outside and I was confined to my shelter. I actually felt how warm and comfortable a small candle can make such a dismal place feel.

Most of all, it honestly amazed me at the end of the three days of training, to open my shelter door and emerge as an arctic survival school graduate. Before, I never would have thought it possible, would you have?



# Can You Survive?

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In the mid 1960's three of my young cousins left home and walked to a nearby river do a little fishing. They didn't come home until three nights later. While they were fishing a storm moved in on them and they decided quickly to go home. As the wind blew, the clouds darkened, and the rain started to fall they made a serious mistake. They chose a shortcut one of the boys said he knew. They spent the next three days in the woods, lost. Now, you may think it happened to them because they were just kids. But, I know the oldest was fifteen and knew those woods like his back yard.

Yet, when the rain hit and day became as dark as night, they got turned around. They slept buried in leaves, ate insects, and drank creek water. Keep in mind, they were in the southern United States and the weather was agreeable, well, at least when compared to some weather in the north. Nonetheless, they had the *will to survive* and did so. Could you do the same where you are? I believe I could do it and be somewhat comfortable at the same time. How do I know? Because I have survived.

I know most of you have never seriously given the idea of being lost in the woods a second thought. But, those of us who hunt, fish, or hike in the North Country should always be prepared to survive. This is some of the prettiest and most dangerous country in the world. But, It can be unforgiving to the careless. Getting lost can happen to even the best and most experienced of us. Imagine being out and having bad weather hitting. Instead of stopping for a while, you continue on. Soon the weather turns worse and you become disoriented. I use the term disoriented because no true outdoors person is ever lost. With the weather, you being disoriented, what do you do next?

**Your first step is to stop.** Find temporary shelter if you can, sit on a log, or just stand there. Stop. Look around you. Do you honestly know where you are? Beyond any doubt? You must be totally honest with yourself at this point; believe it or not, your life could depend on it. If the weather is wet and cool, notice I did not say cold, you might even have the beginning symptoms of hypothermia and not be aware of it. (If you are not aware of what hypothermia is, you should not be in the woods. It is the lowering of the body's core temperature and can kill). If the weather is cold, your life may depend on your next step. Stop, take a look around and decide then what needs to be done. If you are honestly lost, relax. All is not hopeless nor may you even be in serious danger. But, plan as if your life depends on it, because it may. As long as you keep

your wits about you and have planned in advance you should be all right.

**Take a look around and find a place for a shelter.** An ideal shelter would be a cave, but those can be few and far between. If a cave is not available you may have to construct a shelter. Now, in a survival situation, a shelter is not hot and cold running water, a heat lamp, or a set of bunk beds. Many nights I have slept under a shelter made with a tarp or rain poncho. They are easy to construct, are somewhat water resistant, and keep you safe. The key in constructing your shelter is its location. Avoid making it under dead tree limbs, in dry streambeds, or too close to running water. High winds, rain, or other weather conditions could make them very dangerous. Two trees, eight feet of cord or line, a poncho and you are set for the night. Merely tie the cord to the trees, drape the poncho over the line, and secure the bottom of the poncho so it does not blow around. I usually tie the end of a piece of line to the poncho grommets and the other end to sharpened wooden stakes I hammer into the ground. A kind of poor mans tent. But, it does work.

**In cold snowy weather,** you should insulate your shelter. Place pine boughs on top of the tarp or poncho (as constructed above) and then add about six to twelve inches of snow on top. This snow will act as insulation and actually keep you warm. Have the opening to the shelter facing your fire. Do not have a fire inside the shelter. Keep the shelter well ventilated to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning. (I have used a shelter of this type in Alaska when the temperature was minus twenty degree Fahrenheit for three days.) Of primary concern is to conserve your energy and to keep out of the wind. Wind chill can be a real killer.

**Next step, usually for purely psychological reasons is a fire.** Keep it small and keep your firewood dry. Wet or green wood is difficult to keep burning. I usually keep a small bit of kindling in my shelter as well so it stays dry. That makes it easier to start a fire in the mornings. Also, keep your fire small. You will use less wood and a small fire is much easier to cook on, if you have food. A good fire will also assist rescuers in finding you, especially at night. A small fire in front of your shelter and you out of the wind will really make you feel much better.

Once you have a shelter and fire the battle is half won. Stop once more and relax a minute and **take inventory of the equipment you have on hand.** Look at what you have, how it is to be use, where it is to be used, and who is to use it. I mean, fishing equipment will not do you much good as fishing equipment if you are land locked. However, the line and the tackle are priceless. You can make snares with the line or use the pole to catch snakes for dinner, if need be. Look at abnormal uses for all of your gear as well. Let your imagination take over. I once saw an Alaskan Native start a fire by using his book laces and a piece of wood. I have even seen women's sanitary napkins used as dressings when a person sustained a serious cut. Keep the mind active. Your desire to survive and your mind are your best tools. Keep them both finely tuned.

Once inventory is completed, start on the most serious task you

have. **Procuring drinking water.** Not all water found in the woods is good for drinking. If you camp, hunt, fish, or hike, always have some fresh water on you. I carry a small baby bottle filled with water and it fits into my cargo pocket of my pants. But, for long term drinking, carry water purification tablets or boil your water. It is funny, when you think of survival most people think of the lack of food, not lack of water. Most of us, especially me, can do without food for a long time with few ill effects. No, I am not suggesting it is healthy, just that water is more of an immediate need. If you have adequate shelter, fire, and water, you can survive for a surprisingly long time. Food, for most of us anyway, is a habit. We eat too much. Besides, the odds are you will be found within forty-eight hours if others know where you went. So, get comfortable and relax.

When you are surviving you will get dirty. This cannot be completely prevented. Nonetheless, attempt to **stay as clean as you can.** Dirty clothing loses its insulating properties and will not keep you as warm as clean clothing. Besides, good sanitary conditions will assist your body in fighting infections from small cuts and scratches you will receive. Keep your clothing and yourself as clean as you can under the conditions. Keeping your clothing dry is important as well. Try to wear wool, gortex, thinsolite, or other commercial products that are known to keep you warm even when wet. There are lots on the market so get the best you can afford. Wool is one of my choices.

Once you have a shelter up, fire going, and dinner on the grill **stay there.** It is much easier for folks to find you than you to find them. I NEVER go out without someone knowing where I am, when I left, and when I expect to return. You can tell a family member, girlfriend or a buddy. It is safer to do this and will assist the authorities if they have to launch a search and rescue effort for you. Have you ever wandered all over a mall looking for someone? Difficult to find them, huh? But, if you take a seat on a bench they will walk by you sooner or later. Two trains of thought here, 1) let them come to you, 2) you use less energy. This energy thingy is very important when you don't know when your next meal is coming from. Conserve energy, let them find you. Besides, you have already established all the comforts of home, right? Why leave it then?

One aspect of all of this I have saved to the last is **being prepared.** Once you are forced to spend the night in the woods is not when you should discover you don't have matches. Or, that you don't know basic first aid or how to use some of your survival gear. Prepare. Be a scout and remember the scout motto, *always be prepared.* I never go out without my survival kit with me. No, it is not very big and it does not weigh much, but it could prove to be a life saver. I actually carry most of it in a small plastic box about three inches wide and about five inches long. I have it in my right pants cargo pocket at all times.

Also, I carry three other things on my person. I carry a good quality space blanket, dry socks, and about twenty feet of cotton cord. I

have found I can survive with the above items. And, all of this stuff weighs almost nothing. I carry it all in one cargo pocket and still have lots of room left. It is my insurance policy.

One other area I need to discuss is **how you dress** when you are in the woods. I usually wear military cargo pocket styled pants and shirts. These can be picked up in surplus stores at a good price. I also have good boots, warm socks, and always have a belt. I wear a wide brimmed hat to shade my eyes from the elements. Of course you know I also have a poncho but not much else is really needed. If you want to get a fanny pack and wear jeans, all of the equipment I have listed will easily fit into the container. Once you are in a survival situation is not the time to decide you need the gear. You have it with you, or do without.

With today's electronics and gadget's it is very difficult to really become lost. GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) systems, cellular phones, and other devices make it safer. But, many people, me included, prefer not to carry those things out of doors. I go out to avoid noise and technology, not to carry it. Keep in mind, all it takes is a touch of bad weather, a serious mishap, or a wrong turn, and you may find yourself in a survival situation.

In the far north, you are isolated and in some very remote country. Often, what you have with you will be all you have to use for survival. Remember, your mind is your best tool. Your determination to survive is your best motivation. With a survival kit, your mind, and determination, you too can survive until rescued.



**Simple Survival TIPS**

**Shelter**  
A tarp, blanket,  
or piece of  
canvas can  
be a tent!  
**Use your  
imagination**

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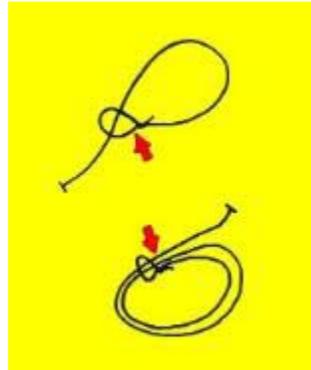
# Simple Survival Snares



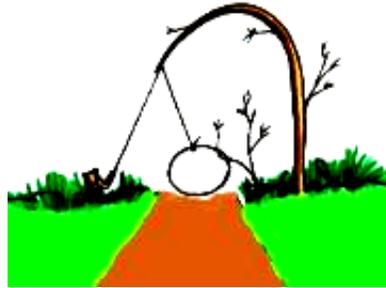
When it comes to procuring meat in the wild, you will have to work for your next meal. Usually, it takes a lot of work and then you will most likely have to lower your meat standards a bit. You may prefer beef, but in the field, you will be lucky if you dine on squirrel or rabbit. Animals are difficult for the inexperienced hunter to catch. They are very shy of man and often their senses are highly tuned toward survival. However, you can trap most small game, if you know what you are doing.

Now, there are all kinds of traps that can be made in the bush. Some use boulders, huge logs, deep pits, and so on. Those are more work than they are worth. Well, at least they are for the average person who needs meat quickly and is not hoping for a lion, bear or other large game. We will concentrate on small game. Mainly because they are easier to trap and they are more abundant. Not to mention, they are less dangerous to catch.

The most common method of catching small game is by using snares. Snares can be made using line, cord, wire, or even vines. I can tell you from experience, it will take a lot of traps to yield one animal. Unless you get lucky and discover a place that is full of small game! I recommend you set them out by the dozens and check them first thing each morning. Try to find small game trails, which are small trails through the grass and weeds. Often, rabbits and other small game use the same trails over and over to move to food and water sources. Like man, they are creatures of habit. You may also find trails that lead into briar patches, thorn bushes and other types of brush. Small game uses those types of places as protection, or places to hide. They are good places to put a snare as well.

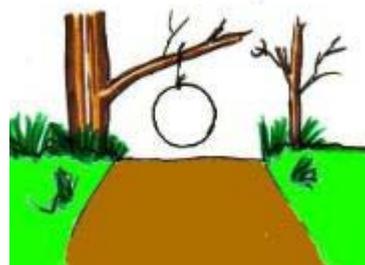


Snares can be purchased ready made, with a locking loop. Or, if you prefer, you can make your own from wire, string, cord or vines. I have found wire to work the best and as you may have guessed, vines work less effectively. But, in a survival situation, if you don't have an item with you, then you must use what Mother Nature provides, or do without. I carry about 50 feet of snare wire and about 25 feet of parachute 550 cord. The parachute cord is nylon and has strands of smaller "string-like" cords inside. I simply cut the cord and remove a single strand of the smaller cord and use it to make my snares with. It is small, light, and very strong.



When making a snare there are two very common designs. One type of design simply holds the animal at ground level and may or may not strangle the victim. The second design will flip the animal into the air and hold the carcass off of the ground. Of course as the animal is held off of the ground it is strangled to death. While they are both easy to make, each design has strengths and weaknesses.

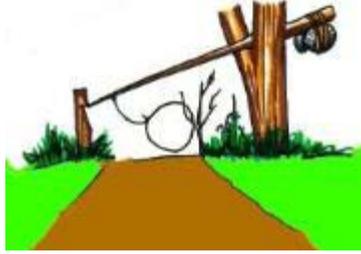
Both designs require the loop in the wire, cord, string, or vine, to tighten and hold the animal. The loop (see the illustration) should be free moving. This free movement allows the loop to tighten as the animal struggles or moves forward into the snare. With the flip up design, movement of the wire will trigger the device and fling the animal into the air, which using the animal's body weight tightens the loop. Make sure the loop has free movement.



In both types of snares you should set the loop diameter for the type of animal you hope to catch. I am using the most common small game here, due to the fact that they are most abundant. Additionally, keep in mind that different animals require the loop diameter to be different sizes and to be placed at different heights on the game trail.

- **Rabbits**, the loop should be about four inches in diameter and placed about two inches above the trail.
- **Squirrels**, the loop should be about three inches in diameter and two to three inches above the trail.
- **Beaver**, make the loop about five inches in diameter and place it about one to two inches off of the ground.

For the holding snare, let's say for a rabbit, you make a loop (about four inches in diameter) and place it about two inches above the center of the game trail. Make sure the end of the snare wire, opposite the loop, is



secured to a bush, stake, or other stationary object. Make sure what you use to secure the snare cannot be pulled away by the animal. Then, if needed, use brush, logs or other debris to make a funnel toward your snare. In other words, force the animal to the snare and do not allow them to go

around it. Since most animals will continue to use a trail they have used daily, this should not be a big issue. But, by using the tunneling affect the game will usually continue down the known trail. The animal's head will then enter the loop and as it continues to move forward the loop will slide and become smaller. Eventually the loop will be so small is size the animal cannot get out. Any struggling will only tighten the loop. Thus, you have dinner.

In the flip up snare (see the illustrations) the principle is the same as far as tunneling the animal. The difference is when the animal's head enters the snare it will eventually pulls the wire far enough to trigger the flip up part of the trap. At that point the animal will be flipped into the air and strangled. The diameter of the loop and the distances off the ground remain the same in this snare as in the other.

To make a trip snare, you need a flexible limb or bush, the snare wire, a trigger and a method to hold the trigger. The illustration shows a couple of examples. I do not recommend this type of snare in extreme cold because the flexible part of the trap often freezes in place and does not function as a spring any longer. If the weather is really cold use the standard holding snare.

I stated early in this article to check your traps each morning. This is important to remember. Some animals, if snared by the leg, will actually chew the limb off to get out of the trap. While I have no problems snaring my dinner, I do not want to cause pain or suffering to any animal. My goal is to kill the animal so I can survive, not to inflict pain.

When you approach the snare you will usually see right off if it has an animal. If an animal is there, use a club or spear (see my article on primitive weapons) to kill it instantly (Most animals caught in a snare will be dead already, but be prepared) Or, if you are an experienced hunter, you may have a different method. The choice is yours, but keep in mind to kill quickly. Many animals, even small game, will be capable of inflicting pain on the person checking the snare. They may bite, scratch or claw you.

For some of you, snaring an animal may not be a very pleasant task. It may prove to be even more difficult to kill an animal so you can eat. In today's society we are rarely involved in the processing of our meals and it can be a shocker for some folks. I can understand your views, but in an emergency, you will need the fats and protein the animal will provide. Something must die so you may live. Survival is not a game. In a real survival situation your life may very well depend on your ability to snare

game, eat insects, or even the eating of certain plants you may not like. It is necessary for your survival. Can you do what it takes to survive?



## From the Field to the Kitchen



The young boy raised the long rifle and I watched his arms tremble from the weight, as well as excitement, as he slowly squeezed the trigger. For some reason when the report of his shot echoed through the woods I was surprised at how loud it was.

Well, after about fifteen minutes I suspected that buck was as dead as he would ever get. Brandon and I slowly made our way out of the tree stand we were in and approached the deer. I had told him earlier, "If we knock a deer down, we will both walk up to him from the rear. That way if the animal hears us, he will move or try to stand up. Keep your gun ready

when we approach a downed animal and be ready to shoot. Even a wounded deer can hurt a hunter at times. ”

I spent some time and showed the young man how to field dress an large animal and stressed the importance of him always checking the inner organs for spots or lesions of any kind. I explained that the organs should be a nice uniform color, without any discoloration at all. I picked up the liver and explained this to him as I ran my right index finger around the organ to indicate the even dark red color of the tissue. For a boy not yet sixteen he paid close attention to the entire field dressing process.

Soon the buck was skinned, placed in a fresh game bag, and we were pulling up in the driveway at Brandon’s house. His mom was grossed out, as she is every deer season, but his father was as proud as any man could be. While Larry had wanted to go along on the hunt, he had fractured his left leg only the day before and was stuck at home.

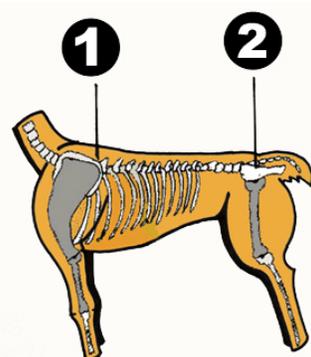
Now, my brother Larry loves to deer hunt. He hunts every year and he does it all, bow, black powder, and rifle. I have to admit, overall he is a much better hunter than me and he always has been. He seems to have more patience than I do and I suspect his hunting senses are better tuned than mine as well. With the deer in the back yard, Larry just took over and walked Brandon through the butchering process.

“The first step is to make a long cut completely down both sides of the deer’s spine, and use just the tip of the knife blade. This cut is the loin, or backstrap, and it is the best part of the deer. Brandon, keep your knife sharp or else go and get a couple more knives. A sharp knife is necessary when butchering any large game (I noticed the knives and other tools, like a hacksaw, had already been cleaned with soap and water by my sister-in-law). Now, you know how to fillet, so run your knife up from the area near the ribs toward the deer’s spine. As you cut, make the cuts smooth and keep the blade even. Do this cut on both sides of the spine and remove both pieces of backstrap.

Next, raise the front leg and make a nice even cut where it joins the chest. Remember, this leg bone lies flat against the chest and is not in a socket (see illustration step 1). It is held in place by muscle and tendons. As you cut, lift the leg until you have removed it. Ok, that was easy, now do the other side the same way.

The rear legs are held in place by the hipbone and you have to have a feel for where the joint is. If you place your hand near the hip and raise the leg (see illustration, step 2), you should feel the movement in the hipbone. Make a cut down to the joint and make it smoothly. Remember to cut and not carve or saw the meat, and that’s one good reason to always keep your knife sharp. You may have to lift the leg as you do this step, but it’s not a big deal if you do.

Now, my grandpa used to cut his deer in half when he butchered. That was before Chronic Waste Disease (CWD) and we won’t chance that now. But, if you wanted to, and you knew the deer



was disease free, cutting it right down the spine makes handling much easier for you. Also that way you can work on one half of the animal at a time. Oh, and I see you looking at the glaze forming on the meat. The glaze is ok and it actually helps protect the meat from hair, dirt or other debris. It will turn a light gray color by the time we are finished. Now, I want you to trim the flank, or the meat around and over the ribs from the deer now. Place it all in that large pot, so we can wrap it for use later in soups or stews. Ok, move down to the neck and remove as much meat as you can, placing it in the same pot as the flank.”

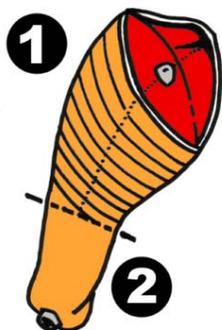
“Do you want to keep the ribs, Brandon?” I asked a few minutes later as he worked on the neck meat, not knowing the answer since it was his first deer.

“No, there doesn’t seem to be much meat left on them and not much between those wide bones either.”

“Good and wise decision, Brandon. Deer ribs are not like beef or pork ribs, in my opinion, just not enough meat on the ribs of most deer for me. Plus, I hate wrapping them because they are curled and harder to wrap. But, if you had wanted to keep the ribs we would have removed the bullet damaged areas (bruised meat, blood clots, or broken bone) and then cut them as square as we could for ease of wrapping. ”

“Do you see how the tissue of the meat grows in almost a line up the legs? The direction of that growth is called the grain of the meat. Ok, if you cut with the lines (or grain) on the tissue the meat will be harder to chew, thus it will be tougher to eat. So, we want to make our cuts across that grain or in the case of the rear leg you have there, we will not cut lengthwise, but across the leg. Take your knife and cut a complete circle at the part of the leg where it has tapered down a lot, the remainder of the leg below your cut is called a shank (see illustration number 2). We can use that as a roast or we can use it to make stews or soups with. It is tougher eating, but still good meat.

I suggest you make a long cut now, from the bone at the top of the meaty portion of the leg down to the circle you cut around the shank (see illustration number 1). Do that on both sides. Keep your cuts as straight and even as you can. Ok, you’re done? Next, lets start cutting the meat into steaks. Make them about an inch or so thick and as you cut down, go all the way to the bone. Do that until both of the two rear legs are



prepared. You may have to use your knife to cut the steaks from the thighbone, but if you wanted to, you could simply cut the bone with a hacksaw and make a nice looking steak as well. But today we are not keeping the bone in place, so just cut the steaks loose from the bone.

Now, the two front legs we will cut into three pieces (or two

circular cuts) and make pot roasts with them. I have found making roast to be an easy way to prepare the front legs without a band saw, or some other way of cutting steaks from them. Now, pick up the hacksaw and cut through the bone in both spots where you cut. Brandon, take that piece of cloth and wipe the bone dust and chips from the roasts. Keep the meat as clean and free of debris as you can at all times.

Ok, that went well. Now, pick up the loin and let's cut it into pieces that weigh about a pound to two pounds each. Keep in mind, this is the best part of the animal and it is the favorite cut of most venison eaters. Once again, remember, all of our cuts are against the grain, or width wise if you will. Put those in a different container over there, because when we wrap them they will be labeled differently (as loin) than the steaks or roasts. We don't want the meat cuts to get mixed up.

Our final step in cutting, Brandon, is to remove the fat from the flank and trimmings we collected from the neck and rib area. Since we are going to use this meat in soups and stews and it will be cooked until tender, we will not worry so much about whether or not the cut is with or against the grain. Cube the meat into small squares less than an inch thick.

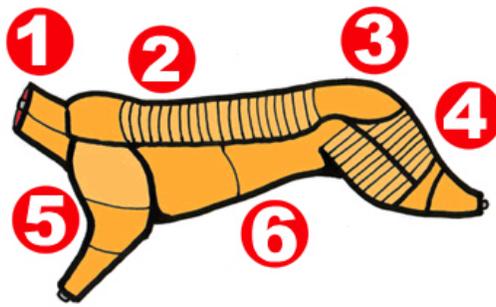
Ok, you did a fine job, son. Now, we have to wrap all of this meat up into packages we can store in the freezer. I always double wrap my meat and I have found it will last at least six months in the freezer and still taste as fresh as day one! So, pull out a large piece of butcher paper, place it shiny side up, and lay the meat on there. Now, pull the sides in and over lap them, then the top and bottom, and use tape to hold them in place. Wrap it once more with another sheet of paper making sure the tape from your first wrapping is down on the solid part of second sheet. This double wrap will also assist in keeping freezer burn to a minimal level.

Now, take that permanent marker and mark what cut of meat it is, type of meat and today's date (Loin, Venison, November 28, 2004). That way we know when we look at the paper we will know what type of meat it is, the cut of meat as well as the date frozen.

The remainder of the day was spent watching Brandon wrap the meat. That night over dinner, I said, "Brandon, what you did today would have cost you over a hundred dollars if a butcher had to do it. And, you know, I don't see why more hunters don't butcher. It's not all that hard is it son?"

He looked at me and gave me a big crooked smile as he said, "It was my deer from the field to kitchen, plus I did it all! Aren't you proud of me!"

"Yep, Brandon, I am proud of you." And I honestly was. For those of you who wish to use a butchering chart or guide, I have included this one (see illustration below).



1. Neck meat, great for stews or soups.
2. Loin or backstrap, the best part of the deer.
3. Rump makes a nifty pot roast, or use in stews or soups, or even as jerky.
4. The rear legs make great round steaks or they can be used to make roasts as well.
5. The forelegs should be cut into three pieces and they make good roasts.
6. Flank, or side meat, and trimmings can be removed and used in burger or sausage making.
7. (Not shown) Shank meat is the lower part of each leg, ground it or use as roasts.

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