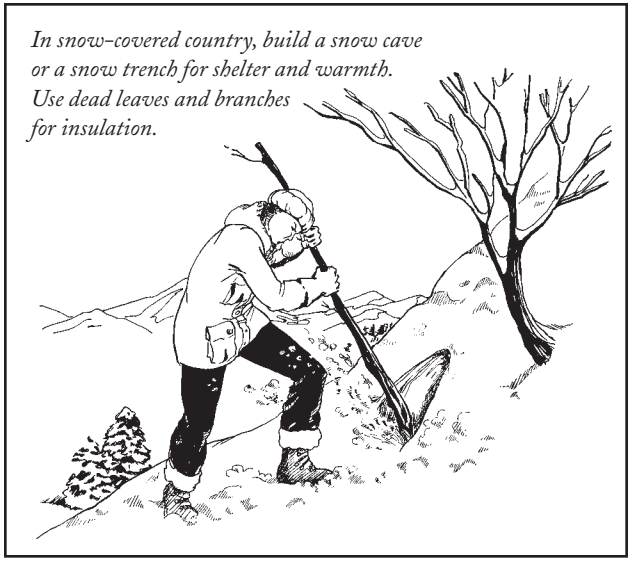
HOW TO SURVIVE WHEN LOST IN THE MOUNTAINS

The number one cause of death when lost in the mountains is hypothermia—humans are basically tropical animals. Staying calm in the face of darkness, loneliness, and the unknown will greatly increase your chances of survival. Eighty percent of mountain survival is your reaction to fear, 10 percent is your survival gear, and the other 10 percent is knowing how to use it. Always tell someone else where you are going and when you will return.

1 **Do not panic.**
If you told someone where you were going, search and rescue teams will be looking for you. (In general, teams will search only during daylight hours for adults, but will search around the clock for children who are alone.)

2 **Find shelter, and stay warm and dry.**
Exerting yourself unnecessarily—like dragging heavy logs to build a shelter—will make you sweat and make you cold. Use the shelter around you before trying to construct one. If you are in a snow-covered area, you may be able to dig a cave in deep snow for shelter and protection from the wind. A snow trench may be a better idea—it requires less exertion. Simply use



In snow-covered country, build a snow cave or a snow trench for shelter and warmth. Use dead leaves and branches for insulation.

something to dig a trench, get in it, and cover it with branches or leaves. You should attempt to make your shelter in the middle of the mountain if possible. Stay out of the valleys—cold air falls, and the valley floor can be the coldest spot on the mountain.

3 **Signal rescuers for help.**
The best time to signal rescuers is during the day, with a signaling device or three fires in a triangle. Signal for help from the highest point possible—it will be easier for rescuers to see you, and any sound you make will travel farther. Build three smoky fires and put your blanket—gold side facing out, if it is a space blanket—on the ground.

4 **Do not wander far.**
It will make finding you more difficult, as search teams will be trying to retrace your path and may miss you if you have gone off in a different direction. Searchers often wind up finding a vehicle with no one in it because the driver has wandered off.

5 **If you get frostbite, do not rewarm the affected area until you're out of danger.**
You can walk on frostbitten feet, but once you warm the area and can feel the pain, you will not want to walk anywhere. Try to protect the frostbitten area and keep it dry until you are rescued.

How to Prepare

You must dress properly before entering a wilderness area. Layer your clothing in the following manner:

First (inner) layer: long underwear, preferably polypropylene. This provides only slight insulation—its purpose is to draw moisture off your skin.

Second (middle) layer: something to trap and create warm "dead air" space, such as a down parka.

Third (outer) layer: a Gore-Tex or other brand of breathable jacket that allows moisture out but not in. Dry insulation is key to your survival. Once you are wet, it is very difficult to get dry.

Make sure you have the following items in your survival kit, and that you know how to use them (reading the instructions for the first time in the dark wilderness is not recommended):

A heat source. Bring several boxes of waterproof matches, as well as a lighter. Trioxane—a small, light, chemical heat source that the Army uses—is recommended. Trioxane packs can be picked up in outdoor and military surplus stores. Dryer lint is also highly flammable and very lightweight.

Shelter. Carry a small space blanket, which has a foil-like coating that insulates you. Get one that is silver on one side (for warmth) and orange-gold on the other, which can be used for signaling. The silver side is not a good color to signal with. It can be mistaken for ice or mineral rock. The orange-gold color does not occur in nature and will not be mistaken for anything else.

A signaling device. A small mirror works well, as do flares or a whistle, which carries much farther than a voice.

Food. Pack carbohydrates: bagels, trail mix, granola bars, and so on. Proteins need heat to break down and require more water for digestion.