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Survival and Rescue

Have you ever heard people say that they're "roughing it" while going camping? Certainly the challenges people face in the wild are different from those they encounter at home. But most campers enjoy places far from modern conveniences where they might experience nature as people who live off the land rather than as tourists.

In fact, some people choose to leave modern life behind for weeks or months to live more as members of earlier generations might have lived. Classes are available that provide basic instruction on how to survive in the wilderness. Adults can learn basic survival skills like how to build a fire, make a safe shelter, filter water, find foods, and signal for rescue. Tweens and teens can learn similar survival skills on extended camping trips with organized groups such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

In some situations, however, people do not choose to be in the wilderness. Instead, they find themselves trying to survive away from civilization by accident. For example, they might be victims of airplane crashes, or they might accidentally steer off course in a canoe or kayak. Cases such as these have resulted in both adults and children

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having to survive in the wilderness until they could be rescued.

A plane crash in 1971 forced seventeen-year-old Juliane Koepcke to make her way through Peru's rainforest in search of help. She was the sole survivor of the crash and had no survival training or tools. But when she found a stream, she followed it and walked along it for days. Finally, she found a canoe and a shelter. Soon after, she was rescued.

In the winter of 2006, James Glanton, Christina McIntee, her two children, and their two cousins headed out for a weekend of fun in northwestern Nevada. When they set out in their Jeep, they had no idea their vehicle would tumble down a hillside just hours later. Injured but still alive, the family had to find a way to keep warm. They started a fire and heated nearby rocks that they inserted into a spare tire next to their car. They decided to stay put instead of going to look for help because they were not far from the roadway. Concerned family members informed authorities that the weekenders were missing.

After forty-eight hours of searching, rescuers located the missing people and led them to safety.

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In 2014, nine-year-old cousins Tommy Alter and Zach Suri and their aunt, Alison Alter, drifted off course in their kayaks in Door County, Wisconsin, during severe weather. Alison tied their kayaks together, and they drifted several miles west.

A U.S. Coast Guard crew rescued the trio the following day. Their decision to stay in their kayaks may have saved their lives. They stayed warmer than they would have if they had climbed out of their kayaks and tried to pull them to dry land.

These three stories are just a few of the many positive ones about people surviving in the wilderness. However, not all stories have happy endings. To improve the odds that all will end well, rescuers and other people who know about wilderness survival usually point to several important ways that people can help themselves in emergency situations.

They advise victims to remain calm, use resources to stay warm, find or make clean water, find food, and signal for rescue. They credit each of these actions with the ability to save lives.