2. Would You Survive in the Wild?

Picture this: you are hiking in a remote area when thick clouds arrive. Rain begins, your phone battery is almost empty and you suddenly realise that the path you followed has disappeared. You have a jacket, a small amount of food, some water and a torch. What should you do first?

Hollywood has taught us to associate wilderness survival with dramatic skills: starting a fire with two sticks, catching fish with your bare hands or escaping a hungry bear. Real survival is usually less glamorous. It is about managing a few basic risks before they become serious problems.

One of the first priorities is shelter. You do not necessarily need to build a perfect wooden hut. A good emergency shelter simply protects you from wind, rain and cold. This can be crucial because wet clothing increases heat loss. According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, hypothermia can occur even when temperatures are above 4°C if someone becomes chilled by rain, sweat or cold water. Early symptoms include shivering, exhaustion, confusion and poor coordination.

Water is equally important. The US Geological Survey estimates that up to 60% of an adult human body is water. The National Park Service calls water the most important survival need and recommends carrying extra supplies. Physical activity, especially in hot conditions, increases the risk of dehydration. However, finding a natural water source is not the end of the problem. Streams and lakes can contain organisms that cause illness, so wilderness water should be filtered, boiled or otherwise treated before drinking.

This is where the idea of conserve becomes important. In an emergency, every resource has a limit. You may need to conserve your phone battery, water, food and physical energy. For example, repeatedly walking in different directions may waste energy without bringing you closer to safety. Your first response should be to stop, breathe and assess the situation.

If you are genuinely lost, navigation becomes another challenge. If you have a map, compass or GPS and can safely retrace your steps, you may be able to return to your route. If you cannot identify your location, however, the National Park Service recommends staying put unless there is an immediate danger. This may feel strange because people often believe that moving is the best way to find help. In reality, moving can enlarge the search area and make rescue more difficult.

A signal can be surprisingly powerful. A whistle can travel farther than your voice. A torch can attract attention at night, while bright clothing or a large visible shape can help rescuers

spot you from the air. The key is to make yourself noticeable without wasting unnecessary energy.

Preparation is perhaps the most reliable survival strategy of all. The National Park Service recommends carrying the “Ten Essentials”, including navigation equipment, extra clothing, first-aid supplies, extra food and water, and emergency shelter. It also recommends telling someone your plans before entering the wilderness.

The biggest lesson is that survival is not a competition between humans and nature. It is a test of decision-making. Cold, heat, dehydration, injury and getting lost can become dangerous long before a wild animal appears. If you stay calm, protect yourself from the elements, conserve your resources and make a clear signal, your chances of being found can improve.

Now imagine the same situation again. Would you know what to do, or would you make the classic mistake of simply walking until you found something familiar? In the wilderness, knowing when to stop may be just as important as knowing where to go.

There is also a lesson about confidence. Knowing a few survival facts is useful, but confidence without preparation can be dangerous. A person who understands their limits is more likely to turn back early, carry the right equipment and ask for help before a problem becomes an emergency.

Finally, remember that survival decisions are connected. Keeping your clothes dry helps prevent heat loss; keeping your phone charged helps communication; conserving energy makes it easier to stay warm; and staying in one place can make a signal more effective. A simple plan can therefore protect several resources at once.