

## **ALL THE COMFORTS OF HOME ... A SURVIVAL TRAINING STORY**

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Besides conducting outdoor courses at Georgian, Loyalist, Seneca Colleges and Laurentian University, my company, *Survival in the Bush, Inc.*, conducts realistic wilderness survival training sessions tailored to meet the needs of military personnel and corporate clients. Working mainly with executives from large companies, we take their top echelon leaders and, following a set of extensive, immersion training classes, transport them to a wilderness site; here, under adverse situations, they're expected to use their leadership skills and survival training to cope with extremely challenging situations. My staff watch them carefully, and, upon completion of these experience, objectively comment on their performance.

Initially, I was rather intrigued as to why a progressive CEO would want to put his executives through our rigorous training programme. At the end of one particularly harsh outdoor session, I put this question to him; his answer was quite enlightening: "If my executives can make good decisions in a hostile, survival environment, think of what they can do in the Board room ...". From an organizational perspective, this makes good sense.

Recently, a similar point was again raised. Several months ago, during an interview with a Financial Post reporter, we compared the qualities of an effective executive to those of a survivor. From making sound decisions under trying circumstances to leading by example, the similarities were astounding (incidentally, these characteristics were outlined in one of my pieces entitled "*The Wilderness Survivor*"). The qualities in question were so similar that my interviewer commented that such executive leadership characteristics were undoubtedly taught at business schools.

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The following story you're about to read was written by Arthur R., an executive with ABC Corporation. It highlights his version of our wilderness survival training exercise; for the most part, these are his exact words:

As the second phase of a Learning for Life Course, some executives went on a weekend stay in the bush, somewhere in the vicinity of Bancroft, Ontario; it's mid-April.. The course was organized by Survival in the Bush, Inc..

Conspicuously absent were tents, sleeping bags, camping stoves, and, except for a small amount of jerky, food. Arriving at Loyalist College in Bancroft on the Friday evening, we are greeted by Jennifer Khan, Dan Flowers, and Kevin Good, our instructors. The evening was taken up with classes and presentations dealing with signalling devices and the treatment of hypothermia.

Our "kindly" instructors keep us awake and interested until the early hours, not really out of concern for our entertainment, but more to ensure we don't start out our survival stint too well rested. Our sleeping place is the College floor.

After breakfast at a local restaurant, we are driven along roads, which steadily deteriorated into rougher and rougher tracks. We finally run out of a navigable road, disembarked with our few supplies, and headed into the bush; we're on the shores of a small lake.

Our instructors retire but kept us under observation; later, we learn that the observation was much closer than we could have possibly imagined. We quickly elected Frank our leader, as he is, by far, the most experienced outdoorsman of our small group. The day is warm and after selecting a site, we set about building our shelter using whatever natural materials are available. As dehydration is a very real threat, Mark kindles a fire using flint and steel, and proceeds to boil lake water in our billy cans. As fast as the water boils, it is cooled and drunk.

Five hours later, we've completed our shelters; they're made from broken branches, spruce boughs and leaves raked from the forest floor. Mark painstakingly shreds balsam boughs to make a cushy floor. We've feeling pretty good about our shelter until we're summoned over to the instructors' newly built shelter, and we see how it can really be done.

Frank and I gather and boil some rock tripe and reindeer moss as a food supplement, with a little wintergreen to add taste. It's not exactly haute cuisine, but apparently, it's high in food value. Mark declines and I can see his point of

view; you need to be hungry to eat this stuff. We rest and enjoy the sun, refusing to believe that the temperature can possibly dip to almost freezing overnight. Big mistake.

Darkness falls and we sandwich ourselves into the shelter. Sleep is in short supply. By early morning, all I want is for the night to be over. There is a light snowfall around 3:00 a.m. Our luxuriating in the afternoon sunshine would have been far better used by adding a mountain of insulation. While our shelter looked pretty good, it could be a whole lot more draft free.

The last part of the course was to build an elevated distress signal fire, used to flag down passing planes or searching helicopters. Afterwards, we tear down our shelter and restore the terrain to its original condition.

We return to Bancroft and have lunch; strangely, no one is hungry, but we enjoy the meal anyway. Over lunch, we are debriefed collectively, and later, individually. Frank drives us back to the factory where we pick up our cars and head to our homes. Definitely the beds tonight will be more comfortable, but the experience will live on with us, and there is a bond forged between us which will last a long time.

The course was over.

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