

Searching for a lost child: Your role

Trained searchers know children of different ages have different tendencies

A search party is attempting to locate a lost youngster and you have been asked to join. As a result of your survival training, you know exactly what the child is experiencing — fear, pain, hunger, anxiety, thirst and loneliness, to name but a few.

Being a compassionate individual, without hesitation you volunteer to assist in this mission and you embark on one of the most altruistic journeys of your entire life.

The search team is finally in place. As a member, you are now walking silently in the woods, searching for this lost child (Her name is Maria, she's 12 years old. Her parents reside in Barrie. She was last seen at 10 a.m. yesterday by the family's cottage on the southern tip of Sparrow Lake. She's wearing blue shorts, Nike runners and a yellow T-shirt. Her pet dog's name is Scotty, she loves pizza and Mars bars. Her favourite singer is Shania Twain. She has no medical problems of any kind. She's carrying her prized doll, nothing else).

Wilderness Survival



GINO FERRI

Suddenly, in the distance, you hear what sounds like a faint cry for help. You signal the group to stop — the sound of dead leaves being crushed underfoot drowns out the faint cry.

You are completely motionless, even to the point of not breathing. At this precise moment, deep in the wilderness, you and the search party have become a listening presence. That special empathy between the astute searcher and the frightened victim allows you to hear\feel\sense what those foreign to the wilderness will never experience . . . a strong, overpowering and almost spiritual bond.

This bond unites all search members in the group; it also connects the members to the suffering survivor.

Your adrenaline is flowing and that intrinsic sense of primordial fear and respect for the forest enables you to

recognize and react to the faintest cry in the distance; you are empowered to distinguish it from the other sounds in the woods.

Within that unique relationship between you, the searcher, and Maria, the lost child, you know\feel\recognize her predicament. You, along with the search party, continue to search.

Based on past experiences, I propose that without this bonding relationship, the faint cry would (could?) never be heard! And that's a sobering thought.

As an avid outdoorsperson, you should be interested in knowing the typical reaction patterns of children who become lost in the wilderness. Some of these findings might surprise you.

Tots, one to three years old:

- Do not fully comprehend the concept of being lost. They know that something is wrong.

- They wander aimlessly to find comfort\family surroundings.

- The instinctively seek safe sleeping areas. These include hollow logs, under thick foliage, under fallen trees and on rocky outcrops.

- They will respond to their name when called and will not usually hide from rescuers.

The 4- to 6-year-old child

- Understands what it means to be lost and will attempt to find a way back "home."

- Is capable of wandering out of a search area.

- Actively seeks out safe sleeping areas (same as tots).

- Follows routes of least resistance (paths, small streams, game trails) especially under tangled underbrush.

- Most walk downhill.

- Are frightened of strangers and might not respond to hearing their name called.

- Most are found within a two-kilometre radius. However, a significant percentage are found two to four kilometres away.

The 7- to 12-year-old child

- Easily disoriented in new and unfamiliar surroundings or when facing stressful situations.

- Might use being lost as a tactic to avoid punishment or gain attention.

- Seldom responds to searchers during the day but tends to do so after dark.

- Is unpredictable — might react as an adult (anxiety, depression, extreme fear\panic) or a younger child.

- By far the hardest child group to locate in a wilderness setting.

Individuals who have participated in a search and rescue mission involving youngsters know, understand and appreciate the necessity of having trained people involved in such a mission.

I encourage readers to participate in an upcoming free workshop at Geor-

gian College, Owen Sound campus, called Project S.T.O.P. This seminar will help you to "bushproof" your child. Details will be outlined in a future article, or contact me directly at gferri@wightman.ca.

Readers are invited to participate in our upcoming wilderness survival workshops. Two hour-long seminars have been planned; both will be held at Georgian College, Owen Sound campus, Room 117. Workshops are open to all interested individuals, and are free of charge (except for a \$2.00 College parking fee). In order to effectively prepare, it's advisable to register if planning to attend. This can be done by simply contacting me at gferri@wightman.ca.

DATES \ TIME:

1. Tuesday, January 23, 7:00 pm.
Topic- Some Emergency Firestarting Techniques. I'll bring some of my students to demonstrate a few methods; do come and participate.

2. Tuesday, January 30, 7:00 pm.
Topic- Project S.T.O.P.: Bushproofing Your Child. This interactive presentation is ideally suited for the entire family . . . bring the kids.