



How to Camp Alone

YOU CAN'T KNOW WHAT'S ESSENTIAL UNTIL YOU'RE LEFT WITH NOTHING BUT



BY STEVEN LECKART



In my twenties, I embraced treks into the wilderness because, like any liberal-arts major hopped up on Kerouac, I craved adventure and Zen and nourishment for the soul, man. Now a thirty-something husband and dad with far less time (and marijuana) on hand, I've discovered that camping does, nevertheless, offer more than a reprieve from domesticity. Yes, I savor the break from broken garbage disposals and diaper changes. But it's not like digging your own toilet, building a fire, and climbing trails with thirty-one pounds of gear on your back is any less of a slog.

I choose to camp because it's Pack Sabbath: Time alone just to exist with what little you can carry. Stripping away all the material stuff you don't need (a hardback best seller, spare underwear) and prioritizing everything you do (water, complex carbohydrates, two-ply toilet paper) is a reminder of what's essential in this world. You don't have to journey far, or for long, to appreciate this. Recently, I spent a night on Angel Island, a small state park in San Francisco Bay with more deer than campers and magnificent views of the Golden Gate Bridge. It's not the backwoods of Alaska. But it worked.

I also got more than I'd expected: At dinner, my headlamp illuminated two glowing green eyes in the bushes. "Our raccoons," a park ranger had warned me that morning, "are particularly aggressive." If you find yourself in such a predicament, here is what will go down: You will pull out your pocketknife, and you will bellow to no one in particular, "I got this." And when that furry little bastard charges, you won't hesitate. Or maybe you'll just shuffle briskly into your tent, zip it shut, and keep swigging from a flask until you conk out at 8:17 P.M., only to awaken two hours later to something from outside slapping against your leg. And you'll kick whatever-the-fk-that-is until it scampers away, allowing you to pass back out into a not-too-deep sleep.

Either way, you'll awaken when the sun decides you should. The tent will feel more cramped than it did the night before. You'll reek of bad breath, bourbon, and nutsack. But stepping back outside to look around, you will feel refreshed. And you'll fire up

your little stove, and brew a cup of black coffee, and sip it leisurely, because there is nowhere you have to be, and nothing else to do. Not right now. **▀**



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