CHAPTER 11 – MODERN WILDERNESS WARRIOR

THE COMPLETE STEP-BY-STEP SYSTEM TO GUARANTEE YOUR SURVIVAL
Chapter 11 – Modern Wilderness Warrior

If you bug out, you're basically going to be heading into the wilderness. Hopefully you have a survival retreat prepared somewhere that you'll be heading towards. Even so, you'll have some time in which you'll be traveling through the wilderness, in which you'll need to survive.

Many of the techniques we've discussed throughout this book, like fire starting and water purification, apply directly to surviving in the wild. But there are a few things we haven't discussed.

Surviving in the wilderness can be an all-encompassing task. Our pioneering great-great-great-grandparents didn't have an easy life or a lot of time for relaxing and recreation. Their lives were hard, filled from can see to can't see with tasks necessary for their survival. The price of laziness on the frontier was death, either by hypothermia, starvation, dehydration or roving Indian bands on the warpath.

This survival process consists of fulfilling the same priorities that we've talked about all the way through this book. You'll need to create shelter, find and purify water, find, prepare and cook food, build fires, protect yourself from dangers and in between time, prepare for those times when you won't be able to find the food, water and firewood that you need.

The life of our ancestors was one of constant prepping. Throughout the warmer months, they prepared, so that they would be ready to survive the winter months. In a way, we can call the celebration of Thanksgiving the feast of prepping. They celebrated, thanking God for their harvest, because they knew that they were prepared to survive the winter. Each year they had to do the same work and make the same preparations, because winter always came, ready to kill those who weren't prepared.

Shelter in the Wild

As I've already said, your biggest need for surviving in the wild is to maintain your body's temperature. That means having adequate shelter. Hopefully, you'll go into the wild, taking some sort of shelter along; but you have to be ready in case you can't. In that case, you'll either need to find or build some sort of shelter.

The most basic building blocks of shelter are the tarp and a piece of rope. When we were talking about building your bug out bag, I mentioned these items in the list. More specifically, I recommended having paracord in your pack. Paracord, sometimes known as 550 cord, is a thin, strong cord, originally developed for the use in making parachutes. It is known as 550 cord, because this 1/8" thick rope will actually support 550 pounds of weight.

With a tarp and paracord, you can set up a variety of different tents. I'm not going to go into detail here, but I've literally seen dozens of tent designs made out of these two items, together with what can be found in nature. But no matter what you do, nature is your starting point.

Finding Natural Shelter

If you keep your eyes open out in the wild, there is quite a bit of natural shelter available. The biggest problem is that most of it is hard to see. It's like the old saw about not being able to see the
forest for the trees. In this case, it's more like not being able to see the trees for the forest. Many times the shelter will be hidden by the rest of nature around it.

Shelter really only has to do a few things. It has to help keep you warm, keep you dry and keep you out of the wind. Anything that can do those three things, at least to some extent, can be considered to be shelter. So, as you're traveling through the wild, look for anything that can do that.

- **Caves** - A cave is the archetypical natural shelter. They provide shelter from the rain and wind, as well as providing excellent insulation. With a fire inside to warm you (make sure the smoke has a way to escape), a cave can be a very cozy place to sleep. In hot weather, caves are often cooler than outdoors, allowing you to be refreshed while you sleep. The one problem with caves in the wild is that they are seldom unoccupied, so check it out thoroughly before setting up housekeeping.

- **And Undercut Bank** - Many caves start out as an undercut bank. If you've ever seen Mesa Verde, the caves they built their cities in are wide, but shallow, as if they were carved out by a passing river. While not as good as a full cave, an undercut bank still offers excellent protection from the elements.

- **A Rock Outcropping** - Rocks can appear anywhere, often in jumbles and heaps, with one rock supporting another. This sometimes creates caves or partial caves. Large standing rocks may provide a place between them that is somewhat sheltered and could be improved upon by roofing the space over.

- **An Upturned Tree** - When large trees fall, the root mass makes an almost impenetrable wall. While not a complete shelter, it can form the wall of one. Sometimes, the tree will fall in such a way that between the root mass and the trunk, there's a pretty good space to use for shelter, perhaps with a few modifications.

- **A Pine Tree** - Large pine trees form natural shelters. Unlike other trees, the branches of pines grow out to the sides, not upwards. Their weight causes them to sag, to the point where the tips of the branches are lower than the point where they come out of the trunk. Therefore, a large pine tree will have a space under it, even if the lowest branches are brushing the ground. You may need to clear out some dead branches, but you'll have a nice, tidy shelter, with a dry pine needle mattress.

- **A Thicket of Trees** - When trees grow close together, they often form a natural shelter between them. Sometimes, you have to cut out a couple of saplings to make that space useful, but the trees themselves form the walls and roof of the shelter.

In many of these cases, you'll need to make at least some modification to what nature provides. The undercut bank, for example, provides good protection from the rain and from any wind that comes from the back. But it doesn't for any wind coming from the front. Adding a wind brake can make the shelter much more comfortable, keeping you warmer. Likewise, covering a gap between two large stones to keep the rain off your head turns those stones into a shelter.

Typically, you'll want to stop and make camp about two hours before sunset. That will give you some time to prepare a shelter, start a fire and cook a meal. If you don't give yourself enough time, there's a good chance that you're going to have problems getting your shelter together. Building a shelter in the dark or even by flashlight is infinitely harder than doing so in daylight.
Setting up Temporary Shelters

As I said, the easiest way to set up a shelter is with a tarp and a piece of rope; but what do you do if you don't have those materials with you? How do you make a shelter in the wild?

There are a number of different shelters that you can make out in the wild, using the materials that nature provides. One of the easiest of these is a debris hut. This is essentially a pile of leaves, with a space underneath it where you can shelter. It does an amazingly good job of keeping you warm and dry.

To make a debris hut, you've got to make a structure to keep the leaves off of you. This starts with the ridge pole. Find a fallen tree branch that's about eight to ten feet long. Lean one end of it in the notch of a tree, three to four feet off the ground and allow the other end to sit on the ground. If you have some rope, long grass or vines, you can tie it in place.

The next step is to find a bunch of sticks of various lengths, ranging up to about five feet long. These are going to be used to make the sides of the structure, much like the rafters of a roof. You'll need to lean the top end of these against the ridge pole, at about a 45 degree angle, with the bottom end sitting on the ground. It's going to take a lot of these, as you need the space between them to be smaller than the size of the leaves on the ground.

Once the structure is complete, all you need to do is rake up a mountain of leaves and pile it on the structure. The sticks will keep the leaves from falling through, leaving you an area you can crawl into. The leaves will shed the rain and make excellent insulation. A door can be fashioned by moving another pile of leaves in place to block the opening.

Another simple shelter requires finding a number of saplings which form a rough circle. The tops of these saplings are then drawn together and tied, forming a dome. This dome can be used as the basic structure, cutting tree boughs and leaning them against it, working from the bottom up to create the walls and roof.

Both of these sorts of shelter structures can be used with a tarp as well, making it much quicker to make a shelter. The ridge pole of the debris hut works perfect for the ridge pole of a tent. All you need to do is throw a tarp over it and stake the edges to the ground.

Building a Long-Term Shelter

Long-term shelters require much more work than a simple overnight shelter. You obviously don't want to live in a debris hut for six months, nor do you want to live in a tent for that long. That's why I was talking about bringing larger tools in the section called "Beyond the Bug Out Bag." Building a long-term shelter will require those tools.

How you build your shelter will depend a lot on what materials you have available to you. As we look at the primitive shelters of our ancestors, we see that they make their shelters from whatever nature provided. In areas where there were lots of trees, they built log cabins. In the Great Plains they didn't have many trees, so a lot of homes were made out of sod; cutting the sod and stacking it like bricks. These were called "soddies." In the southwest, adobe was used, as there was a lot of long grass and clay. Eskimos built the famous igloo out of their most common resource, ice.
As with building a temporary shelter, always start with any shelter that nature provides. I mentioned the Indians of Mesa Verde a bit ago. They made their homes by bricking up the entrance of the caves that they found. Larger caves were divided into homes by adding walls. But the basic structure was a cave.

Starting with a cave or cliff face reduces your work, by providing from one to three walls for you. That makes your construction job simpler, saving you time and energy. It also helps to camouflage your dwelling, making it blend into nature more. Strangers may not see you, in which case they may not bother you.

A couple of considerations for any type of long-term shelter you make:

- Building your roof at a steep angle helps it to shed rain and snow better. That protects you better, as well as protecting your shelter from damage.
- Any time you have an opening in a wall, for a window or door, you need to have a header. This is a log above the open space, spanning it, to support the weight of the wall and roof above it.
- Most natural materials don't fit together perfectly, leaving air gaps that wind can blow through. Fill those gaps with clay or moss to make your home more airtight and keep it warm.
- Don't forget about a chimney. You have to have some way for smoke to leave, even if it is just a hole in the roof. Many cultures used such a smoke hole, rather than an actual chimney.
- Water will work to damage your shelter. Structures built of adobe or sod can be damaged by a hard rain. Covering them with a layer of clay or stucco gives the rain something to expend its energy against, without damaging the structural integrity of the shelter.
- Heat rises, so a loft is the warmest place to sleep.
- You may need to defend your shelter at some point in time, so give yourself shooting positions where you have cover from enemy fire.
- Start small, with a one-room shelter; but plan for expansion. You can always add on rooms. Many homes on the frontier grew in this manner. They would start with a single room and then add on through the years.

Make sure that you pick a site for your long-term shelter which will provide you with the resources you will need to survive. Having a long trek for water is not conducive to happy living. You want to make your life easier, as much as possible, not harder.

**Finding Water in the Wild**

If you're ever forced to bug out, I hope it's in an area where there is abundant water. However, there are many parts of the country where water may not be all that obvious or may even be scarce. That won't diminish your need for water in any way though; all it will do is make you spend more of your time looking for that water.

Finding water in the wild can be difficult, if you don't know where to look. Hopefully you've got good topographical maps of the area with you, which show all of the naturally occurring and man-made
water sources there are. However, even the best of maps might miss something. So, it's a good idea to know what to look for, so that you can always find water in the wild.

**Follow the Terrain**

Last I checked, the laws of gravity still worked. That means that water still flows downhill. So, you’re going to stand a much better chance of finding water if you go downhill, than if you stay on the high ground. Look at the terrain where you are and try to figure out the path that the water will take to go down. Typically it will leave a hillside to go to a low fold in the ground, whether that’s a valley or canyon. It will follow that down until it finds another, larger one to join with.

Follow the path that you think the water will take. You will often find that there are little ponds and pools of water that get left behind. These may be because of an old beaver pond, or just because of some rocks that kept the ground from eroding away. Either way, they will hold back the water where you can access it without having to follow the water all the way downhill.

**Look for the Green**

Plants need water, so you'll find more plants growing where there is more water for them to drink. This is especially useful in arid territory, where the plant growth along a watercourse is going to stand out much more. Many times, this will identify the low spot in the ground for you, in otherwise flat territory.

Even if there is no water flowing in the watercourse at the moment, the fact that there are plants growing there will show you that water has flown there. That means that when it rains, water will flow there again. It will also indicate where to look for pools and ponds that may have formed when the water flowed past.

**Look for the Low Point**

If a watercourse is dry, check the streambed. There are two things you want to be looking for: mud and low spots. Either one is an indicator of water, albeit subterranean water. If you find a low point that looks like it could have been a pool before it dried up or especially if you find a muddy patch, dig a hole a couple of feet deep. Water in the ground will seep into this hole, providing you with water you can use.

Granted, that will be muddy water, but muddy water is better than no water. You can filter a lot of that mud out by just running it through a piece of thick cloth. Then, use your water purifier to get the clean water out of the mud.

**Follow Animal Trails**

Animal trails will almost always lead to water, as pretty much all animals need water. So, if you find an animal trail, as you are walking through the wilderness, it's a good idea to follow it. That may not be as easy as it seems, as animals can often fit through spaces where we humans get stuck. But if you can follow it downhill, chances are that it will lead you to water.
Look for Animals

Following the animals themselves is just as good as following their trail, although you can’t count on them being cooperative with your efforts. Many species of animals water at dawn and dusk, making it possible to use their movements as an indicator of where water is.

If you see cattle or antelope moving in a particular direction close to sunset, you can be pretty sure that they are moving towards water. This is an especially good sign, as many ranchers’ wells and wind powered pumps won’t show up on a topographical map. Yet the animals will know where to find them.

Always Make Sure the Water is Safe

Never count on water you find in the wild being safe. Even water taken from a cool, clear mountain stream may be contaminated. You don’t know who might be upstream of you, who thought that stream was their personal toilet. While that cool, clear mountain water may be tasty and refreshing, it can also be crawling with microscopic pathogens. Be sure to purify it before drinking and avoid any risk of getting dysentery.

If the water is clear and you’re going to be cooking with it, you don’t need to purify it beforehand; that is, if you're going to be boiling the water. Boiling water will kill any pathogens. So, if you’re making soup or even just some Ramen noodles, you can use the water just as you find it.

Finding Food in the Wild

Finding food in the wild isn’t as easy as many would think. That’s not to say it's impossible, but you need to be well prepared to do it; much better prepared than what I can give you in this book. About all I can do is to point you in the right direction.

Your potential food sources in the wild break down into four different categories:

- Plant life
- Fish
- Small game
- Big game

Plant Life

Plant life is usually the most abundant and can’t run away from you either. Therefore, you should always plan on harvesting plants from nature to eat. The thing is, understanding which plants are edible and which ones aren’t.

The easiest way to solve this problem is to buy yourself a book on edible plants in the area where you live and where you will be bugging out. You need a local one, as the same types of plants do not grow all across the country. Using a local one ensures that you have information that will be applicable to your situation and you won’t be wasting your time looking for plants that don’t grow in your region.
Don't just buy the book, use it. Take the time to walk in the woods, identifying edible plants. This isn't a skill you want to learn when you're starving. Better to take some time to learn it ahead of time. But still bring the book with you, packed safely in a waterproof bag, along in your bug out bag.

Fish

In most parts of the country, fish are the easiest form of animal protein to obtain. Pretty much anywhere that you have water, you're going to find fish as well. While some may be small, at least they will provide you with something to eat.

Fish can either be caught with a pole, a net or a trap. None of these are easy to carry with you in a bug out bag, but you could carry some essential gear, like hooks, line and bobbers, which you can use with a pole you cut out in the wild. While that won't meet the beauty and efficiency of a modern spin-casting rig, it will still work.

There are several styles of fish traps which can be made easily from materials you can find in the wild. They all have one thing in common. That is, they have a wide mouth, which narrows down like a funnel, leaving an opening which is just larger than the fish. When the fish swim into this, they find themselves caught. They can't find the opening, which is small, so they stay in the trap until you remove them.

In this diagram, the trap is made of a number of sticks, driven into the stream bed. There need to be enough sticks to make the spaces between them too small for the fish to swim through. If the sticks are not very strong, it can help to tie them together with tall grass or vines, so that they will not move apart. Fish swimming upstream enter the mouth of the trap and naturally follow it to the containment area, where they are trapped awaiting your arrival.

Small Game

Small game aren't usually hunted, as much as they are trapped in a snare. There are a number of different types of snares which can be made, some of which are fairly complicated. They also require finding the animals' paths, so that the snare can be set along their normal path.

If there are squirrels in the area, you can set up a very simple snare, which is almost guaranteed to work. All you need is a deadfall branch and some snare wire. I like to use the high strings off a guitar for my snare wire. Since my son is a classical guitarist, I have no shortage of used strings and they are
very easy to convert into snares. I cut the messed up end off the strings, where it had been wrapped around the tuning peg, before putting them into my survival kit.

The end of the guitar string has a small loop in it, usually formed around a metal donut. Putting the other end of the string through this donut makes a larger loop, which will slip easily, making the snare.

Lean a deadfall branch that’s about 3” to 4” in diameter up against a tree in the area where you see squirrel activity. Squirrels will always take the easiest way up, so they will naturally take this branch as a means to get into the tree, rather than climbing the trunk. Then take your snare loop and attach it to the branch, so that the open loop is on the top side of the branch. You need a loop that is about 2-1/2” across.

When a squirrel runs up the branch, they will get their head caught in the loop, jerking them off the branch and hanging them. The next squirrel that comes along will go farther up the branch, hopefully encountering another of your snares and have the same fate happen to it. When you come back to check your snares, you should have several dead squirrels awaiting you.

Big Game

Big game hunting is varied and extensive, depending upon the type of game that you are trying to kill. If you are used to hunting, you’ll already have a pretty good idea of how to stake out a trail and kill any passing game. I have to warn you though, this isn’t going to be the kind of hunting where you bait the deer in with corn and sit there in your blind waiting for them. You’re going to have to find a place to hide in the underbrush, alongside a game trail.

Hunting for big game requires understanding their habits. The easiest way to hunt effectively is to find where the animals frequent and stake out those areas, waiting for the game to come to you. A meadow where deer tend to eat or a stream where they water at dusk are ideal areas to stake out. If you are going to be in the area for a while, you should be able to learn their habits. If you are on the move, your best bet will be to try and find where they water.

You should always take a goodly quantity of salt with you, to be used for preserving meat. If you have a cabin in the woods or other survival retreat, always make sure you have a good stock of salt. With it, you can make jerky, which is the easiest way of preserving meat, without using electrical power.

The same could be said for killing some rancher’s cattle. If you have to resort to that to survive, then by all means do so. However, make good use of the meat that you get from the animal. Throwing half of it away because you let it spoil is wasteful. Turn the whole thing into jerky, so that you can eat off of it for a long period of time.
A Final Thought

You may be feeling a little overwhelmed by now, thinking that this is a bit more than you can do. That's okay, we all feel that way when we get started. Truly preparing to survive is an extensive exercise that takes time. Nobody can do it overnight and trying to will merely cause you to become overwhelmed.

Having said that, there is one thing you can do overnight, that's make the decision to get started. As they say, every journey starts with one step; so decide to take that first step. Each step you make along the path will make your family a little more prepared to face an emergency and a little more secure. Isn't that worth it?

So, where do you start? Let me recommend three things to you:

- First of all, start building your stockpile. That's going to take a long time; so you may as well get it going now. Get going on that first month's worth of food and water, so that you have something to work with.
- Secondly, start learning survival skills. I've mentioned a bunch of skills in this book, ranging from starting fires to building shelters with water purification somewhere in between. Start learning those skills, so that you can do them without having to use the book to help you.
- Thirdly, go back and read the book again. There's no way that you could have gotten everything the first time around. I've put too much information in this book for anyone to do that. Read it again, highlighting the parts that really spoke to you.

A year from now you're going to be much better off than you are today. Even better, if a disaster happens a year from now, you're going to be much better off than you would be if the disaster happened today. While I don't want to wish a disaster on anyone, I'd rather see you ready before it comes.

Whatever you do, don't give up. You're a winner. You can survive. Convince yourself of that and then get to work making it a reality. I know you can do it, now convince yourself you can too.