



## SURVIVAL TIPS FROM THE MONTROSE COUNTY SHERIFF'S POSSE

# WHAT DO YOU DO IF YOU

**I** BY MARK RACKAY

It is surprisingly easy to get lost in the mountains. Maybe the batteries in your GPS died or a storm moved in and you lost sight of your landmarks. Perhaps you were so busy tracking an elk that you did not stop to take notice of those landmarks. Darkness may have set in, preventing you from being able to orient yourself.

Or perhaps your ATV broke down, leaving you miles from camp. Worse yet, maybe you slid down a slope, or stepped wrong, and hurt yourself. For the sake of this discussion, let's assume you are lost and uninjured.

The very first thing to do is STOP. There is no sense continuing unless you have a plan of action. There are many places in Western Colorado where you might walk for days and never find a road or trail. Just stop; sit down and think for a few minutes. A person who walks without using landmarks is destined to wander in a circle.

If you have done your homework, (and prepared for this trip as we have discussed earlier); you're carrying a pack with some supplies. Take a drink of water and munch down a snack. This will help you to relax and to think clearly. This is the type of situation that you should have mentally and physically prepared for, long before the hunt.

Remind yourself that this is only a temporary situation. You have a person, in town or at home who will summon help if you miss the prearranged call in time. This person should provide your description along with the location of your camp



# YOU ARE LOST?

Remind yourself that this is only a temporary situation. You have a person, in town or at home who will summon help if you miss the prearranged call in time. This person should provide your description along with the location of your camp or vehicle, which should be the starting point of searchers who will look for you. Hopefully, you left a note indicating your direction of travel and your hunt plan.

Try and orient yourself with a map and compass using terrain features. Perhaps a large peak, stream or river is visible. If you can find it on the map, you might be able to locate your position. In your mind, you might be able to think back to where you last knew where you were. Maybe you crossed a creek a little ways back or had a view of a large peak from the top of a ridge. This might allow you to backtrack to find your way back.

If all of this fails, take note of how late in the day it is. If nightfall is not closing in, or a storm does not limit your visibility, you might consider a move. If you move higher, you might get a better view of the surrounding landscape. From a

## POWERFUL. SOLID. STEALTHY.

Visit Montrose Implement, your work & play headquarters.



4690 N. Townsend  
Montrose, CO | 970.240.1720

[MontroseImplement.com](http://MontroseImplement.com)

©2016 Bombardier Recreational Products Inc. (BRP). All rights reserved. ®, ™ and the BRP logo are trademarks of BRP or its affiliates.



*We are here for all your  
health insurance options -  
no cost for assistance!*

**OFFERING** • Life • Health - Individual & Group • Annuities  
• Personal Lines - Auto/Home/Umbrella/Renters  
• Retirement • Medicare Supplement

### Watson Insurance & Financial Group

1802 S. Townsend Avenue • Montrose, CO 81401 • (970) 249-2298

SECURITIES OFFERED THROUGH CLIENT ONE SECURITIES, LLC MEMBER  
FINRA/SIPC. WATSON INSURANCE & FINANCIAL GROUP, INC. AND CLIENT  
ONE SECURITIES, LLC ARE NOT AFFILIATED.





higher point, you may get cell service on your phone, allowing you to contact help. Your phone call or text could possibly provide a GPS location of your position to rescuers.

You might also move in an attempt to locate some drinking water or shelter. Fortunately, Western Colorado Mountains are usually abundant with water sources. From snow that could be melted to small streams and ponds, there is usually drinking water. All you need is a life straw or similar filtration device and you are good to go.

If it is late in the day, think about staying put. Sheltering (to stay dry and warm) may be far better than wandering in the darkness. You may move to a clearing to be more visible to searchers, but if spending the night, look for a spot with shelter. Fortunately, the forests around us are full of spruce trees which make an excellent shelter.

Spruce trees that have long and low hanging branches make an excellent shelter. The depression in the snow around a tree trunk formed by the protective canopy of the hanging branches above it is called the tree well. Reinforce this natural enclosure by propping up additional branches around the lowest ones. Dig out the accumulated snow from around the trunk of the tree.

Fill the floor area of your tree well with additional evergreen boughs. Pile them up at least eight inches, as this will insulate you from the cold ground. It will also make a comfortable sleeping place. The temperature inside your finished tree well can be as much as forty degrees warmer than it is outside.

Building a fire is an important step but plan your shelter set up first. A fire may keep you warm but not if a rain or winds come into play. You never want to sleep in the open. A combination of both shelter and a fire is best. Gather as much dry wood as you

# Welcome Hunters!

- Full Service Archery Shop
- Archery Supplies
- Ammo Cans
- Muzzle Loading Supplies
- A Vortex Optics Dealer



Now Offering BowTech  
**Buy, Sell, Trade & Diamond Archery** **Gun Depot**

1210 North Townsend Avenue, Montrose, CO 81401  
(970) 249-6573 | [www.GunDepotUS.com](http://www.GunDepotUS.com) | [gunsncolorado@gmail.com](mailto:gunsncolorado@gmail.com)



first. A fire may keep you warm but not if a rain or winds come into play. You never want to sleep in the open. A combination of both shelter and a fire is best. Gather as much dry wood as you can find to keep your fire going all night long. Bring in twice as much as you think you will need, as it goes pretty quickly. Dry wood is often found still hanging in the trees, not lying on the ground. Once wood is on the ground, it absorbs moisture and is much harder to light.

Stay put in your shelter for the night. Staying warm and dry are the two most important things you can do for your survival. If you become wet or cold, hypothermia becomes a problem. Prevention is key. Try to conserve your body heat and energy reserves. Avoid exertion that leads to sweating, wet clothing and possible hypothermia.

One of the things you will want to consider is getting the attention of rescuers. That fire is a good start. At night, the light or glow can be seen while during the day you will want much smoke. Experiment with available foliage to see which creates the thickest smoke cloud. Remember, your rescuers may come by land or air.

In the United States, we have the rule of three. Three whistle blasts, three gunshots, or three fires burning are all signals that help is needed. Blow a whistle for three blasts, evenly spaced and wait a few minutes. Try to repeat this every few minutes. A signal mirror does not take up much space in a pack. Reflected sunlight can be a very effective "attractor" and seen for many miles.

Keep a positive mental attitude. Most lost persons are found within 24 to 36 hours. Occupy your time with signaling and making your shelter more comfortable. Remember, if you did your homework, search and rescue is likely on the way.

Mark Rackay is a freelance writer who serves as a Director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email [info@mcspi.org](mailto:info@mcspi.org). ■



**EXTREME  
IS OUR  
NATURE**

Internet and voice from Elevate Fiber

1 Gig (1,000 Mbps) fiber internet is waiting for you—that is 100 times faster than the national average. Get ready for an extreme connection. Learn more and preregister at [join.elevatefiber.com](http://join.elevatefiber.com).

**Guarantee your  
\$100 installation special—  
preregister today!**

Preregistration goals have not been set for all areas. \$100 installation fee is a limited time offer and is required upon installation. A 12-month contract with a minimum service level of \$49.95 per month is required. Elevate internet service is required for voice service.

877-687-3632

[join.elevatefiber.com](http://join.elevatefiber.com) / 

**ELEVATE**

FIBER ► POWERED BY DMEA

XLV204311