

WORST-CASE SCENARIO®

HOW TO SURVIVE WHEN LOST IN THE DESERT

- 1** Do not panic, especially if people know where you are and when you are scheduled to return.
If you have a vehicle, stay with it—do not wander!
- 2** If you are on foot, try to backtrack by retracing your steps.
Always move downstream or down country. Travel along ridges instead of in washes or valleys, where it is harder for you to see and for rescuers to see you.
- 3** If you have completely lost your bearings, try to get to a high vista and look around.
If you are not absolutely sure you can follow your tracks or prints, stay put.
- 4** Build smoky fires during daylight hours (tires work well) but keep a bright fire burning at night.
If fuel is limited, keep a small kindling-fire burning and have fuel ready to burn if you spot a person or vehicle.
- 5** If a car or plane is passing, or if you see other people off in the distance, try to signal them with one of the following methods:

In a clearing, you can use newspaper or aluminum foil weighed down with rocks to make a large triangle; this is the international distress symbol.

- A large I indicates to rescuers that someone is injured.
- An X means you are unable to proceed.
- An F indicates you need food and water.
- Three shots from a gun is another recognized distress signal.

6 To avoid heat prostration, rest frequently.

Deserts in the United States can reach temperatures upwards of 120 degrees during the day, and shade can be scarce. In the summer, sit at least twelve inches above the ground on a stool or a branch (ground temperatures can be thirty degrees hotter than the surrounding air temperature).

When walking during daylight hours:

- Walk slowly to conserve energy and rest at least ten minutes every hour.
- Drink water; don't ration it.
- Avoid talking and smoking.
- Breathe through your nose, not your mouth.
- Avoid alcohol, which dehydrates.
- Avoid eating if there is not a sufficient amount of water readily available; digestion consumes water.
- Stay in the shade and wear clothing, including a shirt, hat, and sunglasses. Clothing helps ration sweat by slowing evaporation and prolonging cooling.

- Travel in the evening, at night, or early in the day.
- In cold weather, wear layers of clothing, and make sure you and your clothes are dry.
- Watch for signs of hypothermia, which include intense shivering, muscle tensing, fatigue, poor coordination, stumbling, and blueness of the lips and fingernails. If you see these signs, get dry clothing on immediately and light a fire if possible. If not, huddle close to companions for warmth.

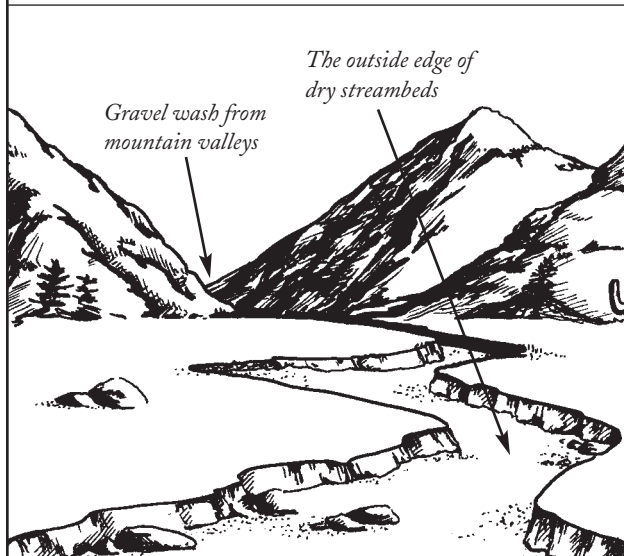
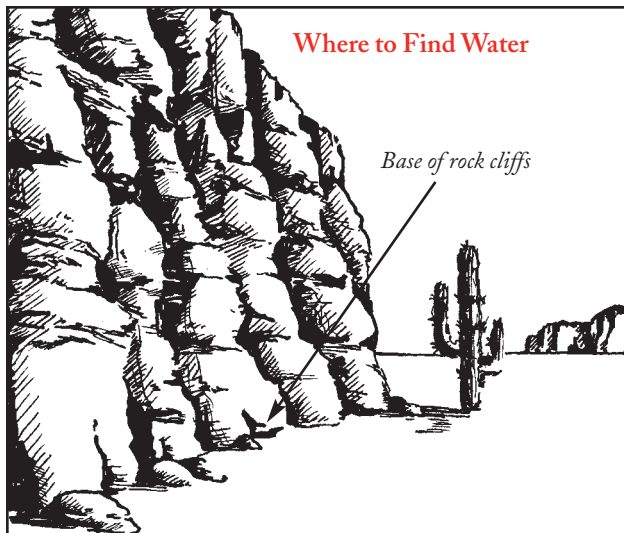
7 Try to find water. The best places to look are:

- The base of rock cliffs.
- In the gravel wash from mountain valleys, especially after a recent rain.
- The outside edge of a sharp bend in a dry streambed. Look for wet sand, then dig down three to six feet to find seeping water.
- Near green vegetation. Tree clusters and other shrubbery, such as cottonwood, sycamore, or willow trees, may indicate the presence of water.
- Animal paths and flocks of birds. Following them may lead you to water.

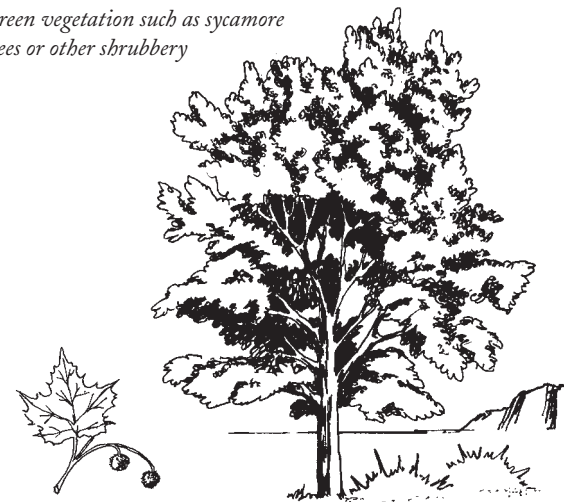
8 Find cactus fruit and flowers.

Split open the base of cactus stalks and chew on the pith, but don't swallow it. Carry chunks of pith to alleviate thirst while walking. Other desert plants are inedible and will make you sick.

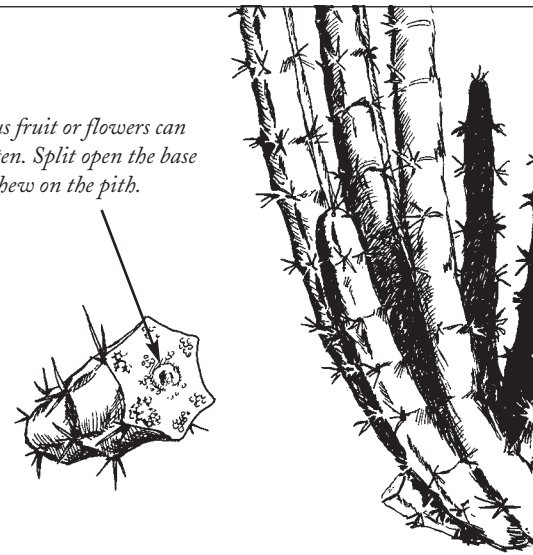
Where to Find Water



Green vegetation such as sycamore trees or other shrubbery



Cactus fruit or flowers can be eaten. Split open the base and chew on the pith.



HOW TO PREPARE

When planning a trip to a desert area that is sparsely populated, always inform someone of your destination, the duration of the trip, and its intended route. Leaving without alerting anyone and getting lost means no one will be looking for you.

If traveling by car, make sure your vehicle is in good condition, and make sure you have:

- A sound battery
- Good hoses (squeeze them: they should be firm, not soft and mushy)
- A spare tire with the proper inflation
- Spare fan belts
- Tools
- Reserve gasoline and oil
- Water (five gallons for a vehicle)

HOW TO DRIVE SAFELY

Keep an eye on the sky. Flash floods can occur in a wash any time thunderheads are in sight, even though it may not be raining where you are. If you get caught in a dust storm while driving, get off the road immediately. Turn off your driving lights and turn on your emergency flashers. Back into the wind to reduce windshield pitting by sand particles. Before driving through washes and sandy areas, test the footing. One minute on foot may save hours of hard work and prevent a punctured oil pan.

If your vehicle breaks down, stay near it; your emergency supplies are there. Raise the hood and trunk lid to denote “help needed.” A vehicle can be seen for miles, but a person is very difficult to find.

- Leave a disabled vehicle only if you are positive of the route to help.
- If stalled or lost, set signal fires. Set smoky fires in the daytime, bright ones for the night. Three fires in a triangle denotes “help needed.”
- If you find a road, stay on it.

WHAT TO BRING WHEN TRAVELING BY FOOT

- Water (one gallon per person per day is adequate; two or more gallons is smarter and safer)
- A map that shows the nearest populated areas
- Waterproof matches
- A cigarette lighter or flint and steel
- A survival guide
- Strong sunscreen, a hat, warm clothes, and blankets
- A pocket knife
- A metal signaling mirror
- Iodine tablets
- A small pencil and writing materials
- A whistle (three blasts denotes “help needed”)
- A canteen cup
- Aluminum foil
- A compass
- A first aid kit

How to Avoid Getting Lost

- When hiking, periodically look back in the direction from where you have come. Taking a mental picture of what it will look like when you return helps in case you become lost.
- Stay on established trails if possible and mark the trail route with blazes on trees and brush, or by making *ducques* (pronounced “ducks”), which are piles of three rocks stacked on top of one another.

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