

27 Years Alone in The Wild (Epic Survival Story)

Earth and sky, woods and fields, lakes and rivers, the mountain and the sea, are excellent schoolmasters, and teach some of us more than we can ever learn from books.

John Lubbock wrote these timeless words in the late 1800's. Their message of tranquility and serenity for those who choose to understand, still holds true today.

In Lubbock's time, the massive, urban cities of the West weren't even complete – yet urbanites already had fantasies of escaping them. Sublime landscapes and a conservationist desire drove even 19th-century city dwellers to ditch their daily grind and plunge deep into the wilderness only recently conquered by their forebears.

Before social media, smartphones, high definition television and what seems to have become an absolute absence of true personal connection, Lubbock still found value in nature that was surely available in even more abundance than it is today.

So, what fills modern day wilderness survivalist or even casual weekend campers with a longing to unplug, disconnect, and return to our beloved, basic nature? Across all cultures and at all times in recorded history there have been "hermits." We know them as misanthropes, monks, recluses, swamis, ascetics and anchorites.

Usually, there are only 3 common reasons people choose to abruptly abandon the world as we know it: Religion (to gain a closer relationship with a higher power); exhaustion with civilization as we know it (and the corrupt state of society); and artistic freedom (deeper self-understanding, or scientific insight).

Why then, would a 20 year old man named [Christopher Knight](#) – who fell outside any of these categories – completely disappear from society for more than a quarter of a century? Without giving notice to his friends, family, or employer, Knight fully turned his back on the world.

Knight neither practiced nor followed any formal religion; was not interested in protesting our modern society, and was not an artist or philosopher. He was simply tugged away from the rest of the world and lived one of the longest known and most fervent solitaries in history. Knight simply “wished to be unconditionally alone; an uncontacted tribe of one.”

Unfortunately, while requiring incredible commitment, Christopher Knight’s methods for survival were completely through trial and error and his plan for long term survival lacked all forethought.

He learned practical and workable solutions for rigging tarps into shelters, storing drinking water and trekking through the woods without leaving tracks, but his restraints were soon eroded after not eating for 10 days. It was then that his principles began falling away.

A few ears of corn snapped from one garden, some potatoes dug up from another – his thievery started off small and led to larger crimes, including breaking into unoccupied homes and cabins. After 27 years of total isolation, Knight was finally arrested while stealing food from a lakeside summer camp.

Had he planned ahead correctly, could Christopher Knight have survived successfully (and legally) for the long term? Sure. Knight’s method for survival included committing crimes, however, which is surely why his life in the wilderness came to an end.

So, what are some rules of thumb and practical ways for successfully surviving for extended periods in the wilderness?

First, a solid plan. A location, list of supplies, skill set, and knowledge are essential to fending for yourself.

Shelter

Exposure to the elements carries the risk of hypothermia, heat stroke and illness. Crafting a solid shelter requires materials and practice. Your shelter needs to be water tight, warm, and insect and animal proof. If you've planned ahead correctly, your survival pack includes a tarp or tent. If not, you'll need to learn how to craft a proper shelter using natural elements like wood and leaves.

Fire building materials

If you plan to eat after your packed survival food has run out, you'll need to have materials on hand to build a cooking fire every day. You'll also need to boil your water to purify it for drinking, bathing and washing your dishes and clothes. Matches are never the answer in a wilderness survival situation. Match heads absorb moisture from the air and perspiration from your skin. Purchase and pack at least one Ferrocerium rod and metal striker. Additionally, have petroleum jelly soaked cotton balls on hand. The petroleum is oil based and therefore waterproof – and helps start a good fire by burning well for at least 4 minutes.

Water

An individual is able to survive weeks without food. Without water, however, chances for survival are around 3 to 5 days. In extreme heat, chances for survival are reduced to mere hours. The easiest way to purify water in the wilderness is by boiling it.

Heat the water up to boiling and let the bubbles roll for 5 minutes. Then, allow the water to sit to avoid scalding or

burning your skin, lips or tongue. Hopefully, in your planning or while hiking, you have acquired a metal container with which to hold water.

Hunting and fishing

While it is possible to survive extended periods of time without food, in the wilderness, it is not recommended. The energy it takes to survive in rough, wilderness terrain requires you to stay nourished physically and psychologically.

The basic food gathering materials you need are a machete, knife or ax; an emergency survival fishing kit (including lines, lures, hooks, bobbers and artificial bait; and wire for bindings, crafting animal snares, or making hunting spears. A firearm and ammunition or a hunting crossbow or longbow are ideal if you have them.



First Aid / Personal Hygiene

Staying clean is essential to minimizing your risk of contracting infections, illnesses and diseases. You'll need to have an emergency first aid kit that includes materials to

treat insect bites, muscle cramps, cuts, sprains, scrapes and headaches.

When these supplies diminish over the long term, plantain leafs are the simplest do-it-yourself wilderness hack and can be found almost anywhere. Chew up one plantain leaf and use it to cover the wound, then cover that with an intact leaf. Wrap with string or cloth, and give the wound sufficient time to heal.

Always carry a good insect repellent to avoid bites from ticks, mosquitoes, and biting flies. When your insect repellent runs out in the long term, look for wild onions or leeks to rub on your skin and naturally provide a barrier against insects.

Additionally, be sure to keep your hands, armpit area and groin area clean daily. Antibacterial hand wipes are perfect to keep in on hand for this purpose. Once the antibacterial wipes run out, (which is going to happen in long term wilderness survival) you'll need to know which plants contain saponin.

Saponin is contained in a common wildflower called Soapwort, which is found near streams and in hedgerows.

Your mouth is one of the most delicate parts of your body. Do not underestimate the importance of oral care. Hopefully you've included a toothbrush in your survival equipment, but if not, chewing on the end of a willow stick to make a brush is better than completely ignoring your teeth.

The sap from willow bushes naturally and effectively rids your mouth of tartar and prevents buildup along your gum line.

Sunburns, cracked, or chapped lips are also very common in wilderness survival situations. Use a bandana to keep your face, neck, and head protected from harsh sun conditions.

Garbage disposal

In wilderness survival situations, it is imperative to be mindful of everything you discard. Choose a location that is a good distance from your campsite to dispose of trash. Be sure that everything you throw away leaves no trace and causes no harm to animals. Wild animals love to go “human food shopping” and waste left near your campsite is an invitation for them to do just that.

Human waste management

The rule of thumb is to remember to keep urine and fecal material at least 200 feet away from your campsite. The easiest and most common way to manage human waste material is by digging a cathole and burying the feces. Catholes are easy to dig and disguise; they have an element of privacy and they enhance decomposition by dispersing waste.

Your cathole sites must be at least 200 feet away (or around 70 adult steps) from campsites, water, and trail. Ideally, locate them by thick underbrush or decaying logs where you’re not likely to re-encounter them. The cathole is dug using a small trowel, which should be included in your wilderness survival gear.

Once the fecal matter is in the hole, fill the hole in and cover it over with ground material. Keep in mind that in shallow catholes, germs and fecal pathogens remain hazardous to your health for up to a year, so dig the hole at least six to eight full inches in depth.

Avoid catholes in places like desert, arctic, or alpine environments – where waste is unable to fully break down.

While surviving in the wilderness long term, you’re going to run out of suitable paper products. Smooth rocks from creek beds, rounded sticks, soft pinecones, or even handfuls of

grass make suitable alternatives.

Or, you can keep a separate piece of cloth specifically for this purpose, as long as you wash and fully sanitize the cloth after each use.