

Avoid these backwoods mistakes if you want to enjoy the outdoors

Making camp or camping in various natural environments is usually done to enjoy time away from our hectic lives. This is the main reason people do it in this country, and we all enjoy our time in nature's backyard.

The second, less probable reason why some would choose to make camp in an "unhospitable environment" is out of necessity when a survival scenario forces them to bug out, and heading for the woods is their main option.

Regardless of your reasons or the scenario you have to face, camping in the backwoods follows specific procedures and techniques that do not change significantly when you spend time outdoors.

You may find yourself in survival or leisure mode, but you still need to follow the same rules, such as setting up camp in the best location, gathering firewood, repelling curious wildlife, being prepared for the changing weather, and so on.

Now, after years spent in the backwoods and finding every possible "excuse" to devote my time to the outdoors, I can tell you that there are some common and not-so-common mistakes we all make. You may be an experienced camper, or perhaps you're just a novice venturing out into the wilds; either way, you will be put to the test during your stay under the open sky.

For inexperienced outdoor enthusiasts, mistakes and lack of preparation can be attributed to their knowledge deficit, but a true survival situation can challenge even the veterans of outdoor living that may have all things figured out.

Both types of campers can overlook the safety practices and basics of living under the open sky, and this can lead to minor inconveniences, or in some cases, to serious injuries or illnesses, and possibly death.

I will outline in this article the mistakes I've made over the years and tell you about problems that might occur, but also how to avoid or manage them. Hopefully, after learning about these blunders, your camp will remain secure and ready to provide that safety you've been looking for while being away from home.

Flooded campsite

After a long day of exploring the great outdoors, you decide it's time to set up your tent. You pick the spot where you stop for your new campsite and begin assembling your tent or building your shelter. In some cases, this will prove to be a huge mistake.

When planning and picking your campsite location, it's important to survey the land around you. If you fail to do so, you may become susceptible to unforeseen and unexpected floods that not only will get you soaking wet but may also sweep away all your things.

In the backwoods, a heavy rainstorm can create a disproportionate amount of runoff that may sweep away your camp and you in a worst-case scenario. In a best-case scenario, you will wake up in a puddle and try to figure out what you did wrong.

And what you did wrong was not checking the higher ground around you so that you can set your tent in a place where flash floods won't become a problem.

For example, when I decide to make camp, I always make sure to look for signs of weather patterns, and I often pick a site

with less vegetation. The site with the least vegetation nearby can often mean there's less water in that area.

Stay warm and cozy around the fire

Building and maintaining a fire is a basic outdoor skill that is indispensable in both a survival situation and a leisure scenario. What most novice campers will learn after their first outdoor trials is that a fire will burn as long as it has enough fuel.

Most folks will underestimate how much fuel the fire they've built needs in order to keep them warm but also to keep curious animals at bay. In the wilderness, your campsite fire will keep you warm and cook your food, but it will also provide protection against insects and other "bigger pests."

You need to have an ample supply of firewood nearby, and you should build the largest supply you can. I often do so, and I apply my "15% more than needed", backup rule since there's never enough firewood readily available when living in the wilderness.

You will use that firewood for tasks you didn't initially plan, and even if you don't use it all, you'll make the next camper happy by leaving something useful behind.

Gear requirements

When it comes to gear, every survival pack, bug-out bag, and even the most basic camping bag should be personal. Assembling such packs should be done based on your level of knowledge and skills but also your ability to work with what you have at hand (resources obtained from the environment).

There are two major challenges when packing your gear. The first is that a lot of folks will pack improper gear or ignore key items because they didn't read about them, haven't tried

them, or simply forget about packing those items.

While during a camping scenario, forgetting key items such as a first aid kit or multi-tool can make your life miserable, and your tasks will be more time-consuming, the situation changes when you're bugging out. When your survival depends on certain items, there's simply no excuse for leaving those items at home. Make a list and make sure your survival bag contains everything you need to survive out there.

The second major challenge that people face is their inability to test their new gear and their inaptitude to fight the overpacking impulse. If you aren't familiar with the gear you bring along, you might end up discovering it is cheaply made, and it may fail you when you need it the most.

Also, if you test your gear and items, you will figure out how skilled you are with everything and how much time you would, in theory, need for certain tasks. These two realizations will help you better plan your action, especially when time and the light of day are working against you.

Overpacking is something that I've often seen amongst campers, and even some of my camping buddies do it. They tend to pack more than they need, just in case, since they believe they won't be able to function in the woods without everything they bring.

I often pack multi-use items, and I bring only what I need since I don't want to carry extra weight. I believe overpacking is an issue that's born out of insecurity and the inability of people to cope with the bare minimum, and it can be resolved only by gaining confidence while experimenting and improvising in the field.

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Food problems

Food is one of the essential items that we need to cover when being in the great outdoors. Food not only provides energy to your body but also boosts your morale and keeps your mind sharp.

However, food can cause a lot of problems for the camper, and the most common one is caused by the improper storage of food or its byproducts. Most campers don't know how to properly store food or dispose of food scraps and trash without attracting the attention of unwanted guests. Even if the animals venturing into your camp might not be dangerous, they can still cause a lot of problems if they damage your gear to get to the food.

All unused food must be stored in a sealed container, high above the ground, since this will keep most creatures at bay. Your trash must be sealed in trash bags and disposed of properly. This means that you need to dispose of it in designated containers, and if that's not possible, you need to carry it until you find those containers.

Sleeping on the ground

I've often slept on the ground during my wilderness expeditions, but I never forgot to bring ground insulation, no matter how light I was traveling. I've learned the hard way how cold ground can draw away heat from your body and leave you cold and miserable throughout the night.

You may be tempted to sleep on the tent floor or on a piece or two of clothing, but that won't do it. Rather than taking your chances with improvisations, raise yourself from the ground by improvising a bed frame from small saplings lashed together.

Also, there is a false assumption that when it's too cold, you will fall into a deep sleep and never wake up. I can tell you

from experience that's not the case, and you will wake up, and everything will hurt if you're too cold.

It goes without saying that you should learn about the signs of hypothermia and what you need to do if you spend time in the wilderness during the cold season. Another tip I can give is to bring a beanie and wear it during cold nights since it will greatly improve your sleep and overall comfort at night.

Bugs galore

After my first trips into the woods, I've learned that few things are worse than the bites of hundreds of insects. I will never again let insects feast on my skin, and I pack enough insect repellent to last until I get back to civilization.

The problem with insects is that not every bug spray will work for every insect you will encounter, and you need to make an informed decision when purchasing a bug replant.

For example, what works for mosquitoes may not work for biting flies. Consider having to deal with gnats, ticks, and sand fleas and bring something that can keep these insects at bay. Fail to do so, and you will be bitten from head to toe.

Water problems

Water, just like food, will become one of your primary concerns regardless if you spend a week in the great outdoors or if you plan to make your wilderness campsite a more permanent location.

Not having enough water to drink or to use for your cooking or hygiene needs not only can make you miserable for the day, but it can also make way for health issues that may put your life in danger.

Your supply of water will run out, and that's when problems

begin. Most folks will rely on natural water sources to quench their thirst, and that crisp and clean stream will make a fine choice.

However, that apparently clean water may be filled with pathogens that are not visible to the naked eye. These pathogens often don't change the color and smell of water, and you may be tempted to drink the water because it appears to be okay.

This is a mistake a lot of people are making, and they do so even if they bring a water filtration device along. I cannot understand why some folks like to take unnecessary risks and not boil the water or filter it using the stuff they brought.

It should be common sense that water needs to be filtered, especially if you find yourself in an environment where medical assistance is not available. Why risk dealing with vomiting, abdominal cramps, and diarrhea when water filtration devices are inexpensive, lightweight, and easy to carry?

Being reckless about the weather and your whereabouts

Always check the weather forecast before leaving home or while on the road to your destination. If you are prepared to face the harshest of weather, you will, at most, experience an unpleasant stay in the wilderness. But if you are traveling light and you don't have the knowledge and skills to build a shelter, bad weather will leave you wet and cold, and you might suffer from hypothermia if the weather doesn't improve.

You might not be able to check the weather when you're on the run or when bugging out, but even so, once you reach your destination, you can make everything sure you are prepared to face bad weather. For example, the behavior of birds, cloud movement, and wind pattern changes can indicate that bad

weather may soon be upon you. If you notice any signs predicting inclement weather, sheltering becomes your number one priority.

Another thing that people fail to do is let friends and family know about their whereabouts. Regardless if you plan to go camping or if you are forced to bug out, always tell your location and plans to those close to you so that they can come looking for you if you don't check in or return when expected. No matter how experienced or well-prepared you think you are, it's always recommended to let someone (perhaps the people you trust the most) in on your plans.

Concluding

I've put a lot of camping years behind me, and I'm always trying to spend as much time outdoors as possible, but even so, I don't consider myself an expert. I understand that no one is perfect and mistakes can always happen.

The key to living in the wilderness, regardless of the reasons behind it, is to always plan ahead, have a humble attitude towards Mother Nature, and never stop learning. I spend my time in the field teaching myself and others about the need to minimize mistakes and how to deal with unexpected situations. And that, in my opinion, is time well spent.



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