

One of the dangers for people moving about in the wilderness is getting lost. While outdoors people like back-country campers may have the orienteering skills to get out and preparedness to stay, mushroomers often lack both.

Therefore the consequences of getting lost are far more serious for mushroomers, yet often forays treat getting lost as a joke, a part of the colorful lore of the club: *That was the foray when Bob got lost! What a character! We almost bust a gut laughing!*

Getting lost is about as funny as getting drunk—both carry within them the seeds for potential tragedy. Below are two real-life vignettes of situations that could both have had very different endings.

 A 72-year-old lady on her first foray got separated from her group, i.e. became lost. Apart from calling her name a few times, nobody made much of a concerted effort to try to locate her. Fortunately, the lady said, she knew from the sun which way led to the ocean and knew that the highway ran along the shore. Thus all she had to do was to bushwhack toward the ocean and then decide if the car is to the left or the right of where she reached the road. She made the correct guess and was at the car before her party came out!

 A 44-year-old man, drawn to exploring by dramatic landscape, went far afield during a foray, i.e. became lost. Several hours later he met some hikers with a map and compass, who gave him the direction to the trailhead. To save time, he left the circuitous trail and bushwhacked in a straight

line until he heard the whistles of his group doing a Hasty Search, while awaiting the arrival of a Search and Rescue Team. Clad in shorts and T-shirt, he displayed some dramatic bruises, scrapes, and scratches, but was otherwise in good spirits.

Quite clearly, the specter of serious injury and even fatality was never far off in both events. In order to prevent you from becoming the subject of such misfortune and to prevent your foray from living under such a cloud, the editors of *FUNGI* bring you a series of articles entitled “Get lost!,” outlining steps to reduce the possibility of getting lost or of losing a participant, as well as actions to take that will help secure a favorable outcome, should you get lost or lose a participant. Each article will have tables or charts summing up the main points, which you may copy for your foray, wallet, or emergency pack for handy reference. Here is the first of these articles: Straightforward advice about what to do when you discover you are separated from your group and don’t know your way back.

As with much of the information published in *FUNGI*, these articles will be available for download from our Web site (www.fungimag.com). Because electronic copies can be changed, we invite readers with experience in these matters to alert us to improvements. We also welcome articles or ideas for future articles on this topic or other topics related to reducing risk, so that we can make our forays as risk-free as possible for our participants. — *Andrus Voitk, Foray Newfoundland & Labrador Humber Village, Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada*

Lost? How to stay safe and assist searchers in finding you!

by Isabelle Schmelzer and Shawn Street

Bay of Islands Search and Rescue, Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada

*The best medicine is prevention:
do not get separated from
your group.*

Acknowledge/admit that you are lost!

People who are comfortable out-of-doors (e.g. cyclists, hikers, hunters, berry-pickers, mushroomers) often don’t like to admit that they are lost. However, because searchers move slowly when they are looking for you and any clues that you may have left behind, it will take much longer to find you (or you may not be found at all) if you continue to change your location as you attempt to find your own way back. Try to get back **ONLY** if you know the way back—but then you are not lost, are you?

Don’t panic!

This may sound trite, but if you panic the likelihood that you will act rashly, and thus forget all of the tips in this list, is high, and hence your chances of surviving and being found are correspondingly low. Try to collect your thoughts and mentally review (or perhaps pull this list out of your backpack, if you’ve packed it in your kit) the actions you should take. If your companion is with you, the likelihood that you will panic is far lower.

Stay together!

If you are with a friend or pet, do not separate. By staying together, you can help to keep each other warm, you are less likely to panic, and one can rest while the other blows the whistle, constructs a shelter or puts out something bright for searcher to see.

Clip and Save!

Stay where you are!

If you wander, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to find you. The more time that elapses between when you become lost and when you are found, the greater the chance that you will become ill (e.g. hypothermia, heat exhaustion, dehydration) not to mention hungry and bug-bitten. Also, you may injure yourself as you travel. If you live in a climate that is cool (or very warm), wet, windy and snowy, any exposure to these elements when you are unprepared for them can be fatal. Don't try to get back if you only think you know your way!

Blow your whistle!

A good whistle is your cheapest and simplest friend, when lost. Three short blasts on a whistle are recognized as a universal sign of distress. Blow your whistle, and listen carefully for a response. Continue to do this for several minutes at a time. If you are with a companion, your companion can then take a turn while you rest. If you are alone, take a rest and then begin again as soon as you can without feeling light-headed. A searcher who has heard you will acknowledge with a single whistle blast. Continue to blow your whistle even if you have heard an acknowledgment, as this information will be used to locate and approach you. If you hear your name called, acknowledge this with three blasts on your whistle. Alternatively, if you have a cell phone or radio with you, call your group leader. If you are unable to make a connection for whatever reason, blow your whistle!

Make yourself visible!

If possible, select a place to wait near a clearing or other visible site. Wear bright clothes and carry something the color of "hunter's orange" with you in your safety kit. Now put one item of bright clothing in the clearing. It can be tied to branches, laid on the ground, etc. You can also use the mirror from a compass and reflect light to signal a passing aircraft, or spell HELP on the ground with stones or sticks. The objective is to make your waiting place visible to searchers.

SUMMARY

1. Acknowledge/admit that you are lost!
2. Don't panic!
3. Stay together!
4. Stay where you are!
5. Blow your whistle!
6. Make yourself visible!
7. Don't be discouraged!
8. Prepare for the possibility that you may become lost!
9. Be reasonable!

Don't be discouraged.

Fifteen minutes can seem like three hours when you are lost. Have faith that you will be found. Searchers are probably approaching you at that very minute, but you may not be aware of it because you are not able to hear their whistles (nor they yours). It is important not to panic—do not start trying to find your own way back. Most lost persons are found within 12 hours.

Prepare for the possibility that you may become lost.

Consult a map of the area you are planning on visiting, or better yet, carry it with you. If you have a GPS, learn how to use it, and carry extra batteries. Carry a small emergency kit on your person any time you are out-of-doors. This should include a whistle, garbage bag (rainproof), something bright (e.g. an orange cap), knife, matches, radio/cell phone (if you have them) contact phone numbers, a to-do list for when you are lost, as well as extra clothing and provisions. If traveling on your own, always let somebody know where you are planning to go and when you expect to return.

Be reasonable!

Don't become obsessed with getting lost. Prepare your kit and put this list there for easy referral. Then forget about them unless needed. Enjoy mushrooming at your foray!

EMERGENCY KIT

1. Whistle
2. Radio/cell phone, if you have either
3. Contact phone numbers
4. To-do list for when you are lost
5. Map, if you have one
6. Compass/GPS with spare batteries, if you have either
7. Something bright (e.g. an orange cap)
8. Knife
9. Rainproofing (e.g. garbage bag)
10. Plastic sheet for lean-to or to sit on
11. Matches in dry container
12. Candle and/or fire starter
13. Extra clothing
14. Extra provisions
15. Thermos of hot drink
16. String, wire, rope, tape
17. Band-aids, bandages
18. Sun screen, fly dope

Note: Customize this list to your situation. Everything may not apply, be available, or be needed in your situation. This list is not exhaustive, and your situation may require other components. All items should be on your person, although not all items need be in the kit.