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**To stay or to go: what is the right decision?**

In my previous articles, I have addressed Personal Locator Beacons, what to carry in your day pack or fanny pack, survival kits, survival knives, and outdoor clothing. However, each of those articles has been leading up to this one which addresses what can literally be the single most important decision you will ever make in any survival situation; the decision of whether to stay where you are, move to what you feel is a better place, or try to find your way out on your own. Now, obviously, if you have a working Personal Locator Beacon and you are not in danger in your present position, then staying where you are is obviously the best choice since you will know with certainty that by activating your PLB, help will be on the way and will be there shortly. However, regardless of how much I stress the importance of having one of these simple, electronic, insurance policies, some of you will choose to ignore my advice and not purchase one or, perhaps forget to include it in your day pack or fanny pack. Therefore, if you do suddenly find yourself in an emergency situation, and do not have a PLB, then you must determine whether you are better off staying where you are or moving to another place.

In fact, I as I mentioned in one of my previous articles, I have only been truly lost in the woods on two occasions in my life and in one case, I determined that I was better off staying where I was and in the other case, I determined that I was better off trying to find my way back to camp. However, the deciding factor in each situation was the difficulty involved in finding my way out. In the second situation, I was bow hunting for feral hogs on a barrier island located off of the coast of Georgia where the terrain was flat and thus offered very few distinguishing landmarks and, to make matters worse, I found myself in the middle of a Palmetto thicket after dark that was so dense I literally could not look down and see my boots! However, in that particular situation, I knew that if I simply headed due east, I would eventually exit the Palmetto thicket and encounter the east coast of the island. Then, all I had to do was turn south and follow the coast line until I ran into our camp site. Therefore, in that case, I made the decision to try and find my way out by using my compass to guide me in the right direction which turned out to be the right decision since I did eventually find my way out of the thicket and back to camp.

However, in the second situation, I was bow hunting for deer in an unfamiliar wilderness area in the western North Carolina Blue Ridge Mountains and it that particular situation, I eventually determined that I was better off staying where I was. You see, in that case, I had decided to stay in the area I was hunting until after dark since I had mistakenly assumed that it would be a simple matter for me to find my way out again because I had followed an old logging road in. But, I had not taken into consideration the fact that the terrain looks VERY different after dark and, even with a flashlight in hand, the range of my visibility was limited to the range of my flashlight beam. However, I was tired after a long day hunting and I was really looking forward to getting back to camp where I could cook myself some supper and go to sleep in my nice, comfortable, sleeping bag. But, after attempting to find my way out, I was forced to come to the conclusion that I was truly lost. Then, in the process of attempting to retrace my earlier steps in unfamiliar territory after dark, I ran across a deep, dry, gully that was strewn with Volkswagen sized boulders. Thus, I reasoned that if I simply followed that gully down the side of the mountain, I would eventually run across the dirt road that I had used to enter the area in my vehicle. However, the terrain in that gully was extremely rough and the brush on either side of it was so dense that I was unable to travel through it. Therefore, I felt that following the gully was my best route out. Unfortunately, I was wrong and, after experiencing a couple of bad falls, I was finally forced to admit to myself that if I continued on my present path, I was likely to severely injure myself and thus, I finally made the wise decision to retrace my steps back up the gully to where I had entered it. Then, from there, I searched for and found a suitable camping spot for the night and used the items I was carrying in my survival kit along with my survival knife to create comfortable campsite there on the side of the mountain where I wisely spent the night instead of stumbling around in the dark. Then, the next morning after the sun came up and I could see exactly where I was, I was easily able to find my out and back to my original campsite at the base of the mountain.

Consequently, in each case, I was forced to ignore my emotions and make a rational decision based upon an honest assessment of my situation. Also, due to the fact that in both situations I had proper clothing, extra food, my survival kit, and my survival knife with me, I was able to make that decision rationally since I knew that I could survive the night regardless of whether I made the decision to stay or go. Also, since I did not need rescue, there was no need for me to activate my Personal Locator Beacon. Thus, if you ever find yourself in a similar situation, whether it be for only one night or for an extended period of time, your decision to stay where you are, look for a better place, or try to find your way back to civilization will depend upon whether or not the terrain offers you the basic necessities of life such as fresh water, food, shelter, and protection from predators. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that you make that decision rationally after a careful assessment of your situation, your physical condition, and your ability to navigate in the outdoors.

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