

HOW TO LEAVE A TRAIL FOR RESCUERS IF YOU ARE LOST IN THE WILDERNESS

1 Walk through “track traps.”

Mud pools, wet sandy areas, snow, and other soft terrain can hold footprints for long periods (days or weeks, between storms). Step in these areas, write “HELP,” and draw arrows to signal your direction of travel to potential rescuers. If you reverse course, step in the tracks again on your way out. Your footprints will indicate that the search should not continue past the track trap.

2 Build campfires.

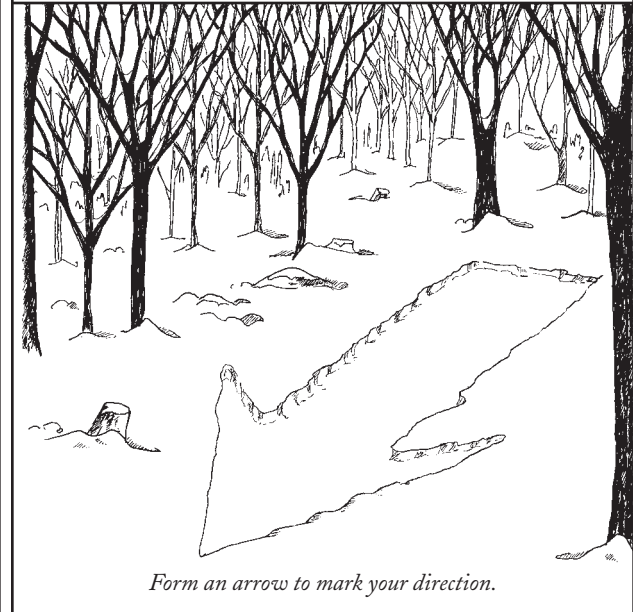
Smoke from campfires can be seen for miles, and fires show up well at night. Warm fire rings also indicate to rescuers that you were recently in a particular area. Do not leave fires burning, but make sure coals or dirt are still warm when you leave. (Warm coals can reignite, so leave warm fire rings only in wet areas or under conditions of low fire danger.)

3 Follow roads and rivers.

Rescuers will use natural boundaries to limit their search area. Do not cross roads or rivers. Rather, follow them to more populated areas. Do not climb steep slopes unless you must: Your searchers will follow, delaying your rescue.



Step in soft terrain to signal rescuers.



Form an arrow to mark your direction.

4 **Leave markers.**

If you abandon marked trails, signal your direction of travel by turning over fresh vegetation or leaving small piles of rocks.

5 **Listen carefully.**

In addition to shouting your name, searchers may use a “call word,” an unusual word yelled back and forth to distinguish members of the search party from the victim when not in the line of sight. Listen for odd words (“Hoboken,” “spaghetti,” “Internet”) that sound out of place in the wilderness.

6 **Yell loudly and make noises in groups of three.**

Three calls is the international distress signal. Use a whistle, if available, to signal your position.

7 **Sleep lightly.**

A rescue party may continue during the night, so use a flashlight or head lamp. Look for flashlights and listen for searchers between naps.

8 **Leave personal items behind.**

If you are lost in warm weather and have excess clothing or supplies, leave small items along your path as a signal to rescuers. Traveling light will also make hiking easier.

9 **Use a mirror to signal to air searchers.**

A mirror or other reflective device will help rescuers in planes or helicopters locate your position. Special “survival” mirrors with a hole in the center are especially effective in focusing sunlight.

