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Opening extract from

Serious Survival: How to Poo in the Arctic & Other essential tips

Written by

Marshall Corwin

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Foreword

In our modern culture we no longer have a formal rite of passage for young people into adulthood. No way for them to prove themselves to their peers and elders. We have fewer physical challenges for them to complete. We make their lives easier in many ways. We sterilise their environment, wrap them in health and safety bandages and are paranoid about them ever being alone. To me this is a shame.

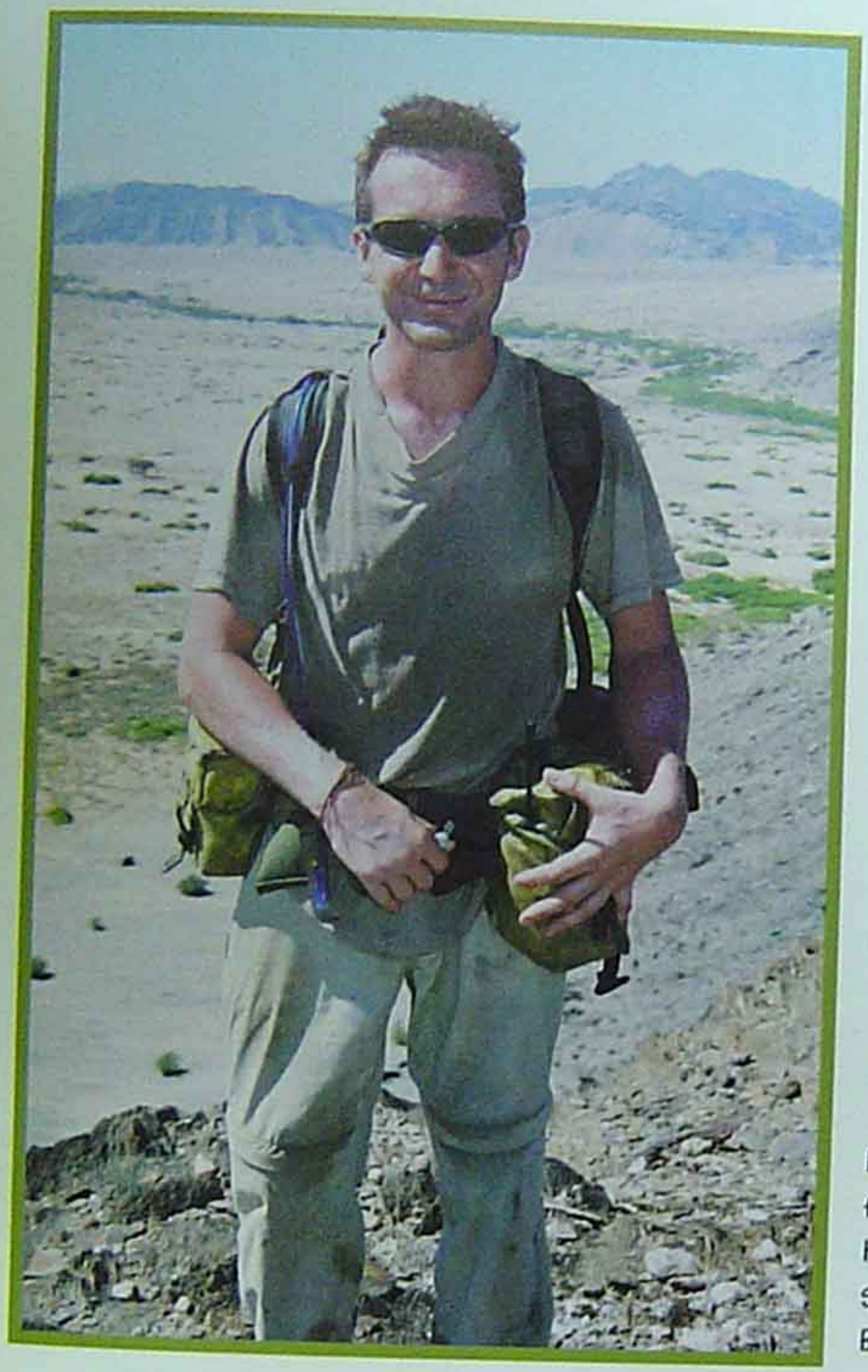
I have rarely been so impressed with a group of people as I have with the two teams of kids that I took away on the first two Serious expeditions. I also know that my great friend Ben Major, who has led every Serious trip since, feels similarly. In both of my expeditions I put the groups of young people into situations that would have made most adults balk. Yes, we had some tears – plenty at times – and we had numerous problems which often seemed insurmountable, but in every case the young teams overcame immense difficulties and came out the other side shining.

Expeditions aren't so much about learning new skills and processes, but more about learning about yourself and those around you in your team. A great way to do that is to be placed into a situation you've never dealt with before. On the Serious adventures, each expedition member pushed their physical and mental boundaries far beyond what they had ever considered possible. They all found some extra reserve of strength, stamina and fortitude that they never knew they had. And of course, the beauty is that they now know that extra something is there, residing within them, if they ever need it again. They've all been given a great gift.

When all their friends run for cover on the station platform because the storm comes in, they can stand it out if they so desire, because they know it's only rain and nothing could be as bad as the week of solid rain in the jungle when they had to look after themselves, try and light a fire, cook, trek through muddy paths and streams and more, just to go to work for the day. A better understanding of their personal comfort threshold in youth has awarded them a lifetime of self-confidence.

To my mind we are all capable of such achievement. It's known that even the least likely of characters, in a survival situation, can be capable of great feats of bravery, physical prowess and mental agility. This book reflects the philosophy of the series, namely that expeditions can be for everyone. Not just the realm of specialist climbers, macho explorers. I applaud all those great young people who took part in the Serious expeditions. They have inspired innumerable adults and children to get out there and push themselves in some way. I hope this book inspires you to do the same.

Bruce Parry
Ibiza 2007



Bruce in the Namib during filming of Serious Desert. He also led the very first Serious expedition to the Borneo jungle.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The environments described in this book are extremely hostile and dangerous. The information and suggestions given are of necessity basic pointers which are no substitute for experience, and no trips to extreme environments should be undertaken without appropriate training and advice from professional guides and survival experts. Accordingly, the author and publishers cannot accept responsibility for any prosecutions or proceedings brought or instituted against any person or body as a result of the use or misuse of any techniques described or any loss, injury or damage caused thereby. In practising and perfecting these survival techniques the rights of landowners and all relevant laws protecting certain species of animals and plants must be regarded as paramount.

EXPEDITION LOCATION





The three-week Serious Arctic expedition took place on Baffin Island in the far north of Canada. The team flew in to Iqaluit, the capital of the territory of Nunavut. Newly created in 1999 as a largely self-governed home for the indigenous Inuit people, Nunavut is one of the least populated areas on Earth. Just 30,000 people live in an area the size of Western Europe.

Food and Water

Carting bulky food and gallons of water on expedition is always a non-starter, and in the Arctic it's particularly pointless as everything would quickly be frozen solid. So apart from a few treats, freeze-dried expedition rations, pasta and porridge are probably the answer. You just need to add water. This raises the obvious question – where does the water come from? The answer of course is the endless supply of snow.

MELTING SNOW

This is one of the most essential – and tedious – jobs on an Arctic expedition, easily taking two or three hours every day.

First you need to fill a bin-liner with chunks of fairly solid, compressed snow (don't take powdery stuff from the surface). The old cliché 'don't eat yellow snow' applies, so camp discipline in having well-defined pee and poo spots really pays off.



Then it's simply a case of stuffing endless small amounts of the snow into a saucepan, prodding and stirring constantly. Put a little water in first, otherwise much of the snow will be lost as steam and the pan will burn.

Snow is full of air, and depending on how densely the original snow is packed together, you will get at best about one-third as much water (it might even be as little as one-tenth). The water produced will be all you have for drinking and cooking. After so much effort you probably won't want to 'waste' any for cleaning and washing – small chunks of snow will do fine for this.

THE ARCTIC DESERT

It's one of those strange facts about the Arctic that it's actually a desert. In the Arctic, rainfall and snowfall combined comes to less than 25cm (10in) of water. This qualifies it as a desert region, though scientists make the distinction between hot and cold deserts.

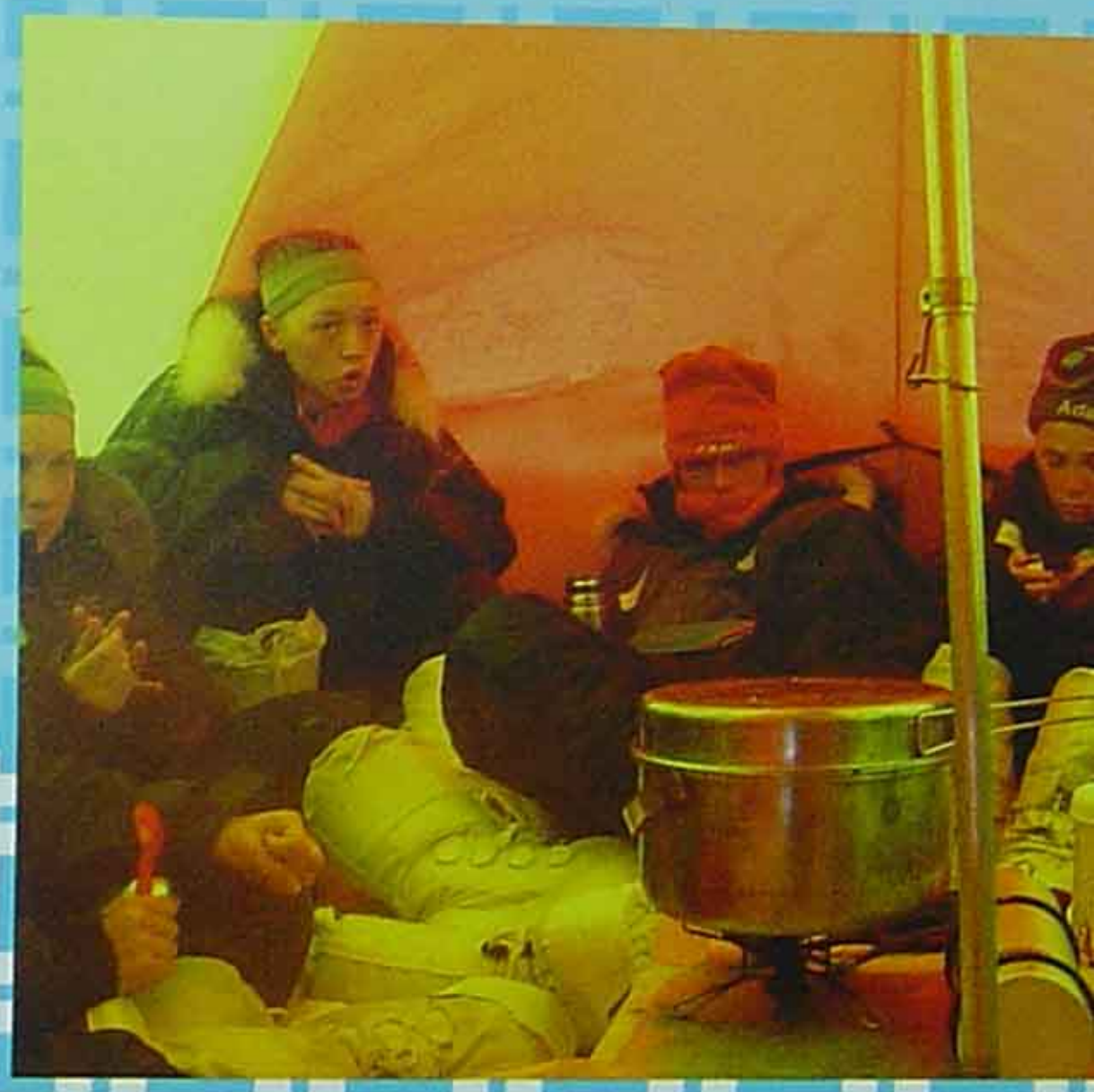
It also feels incredibly dry; cold air has hardly any moisture in it. This means that as you breathe you feel very parched.

In these conditions dehydration is a serious problem. It's hard to force yourself to keep drinking when it's so cold and can be such an effort to get liquid, but you'll need at least 5 litres (1 gallon) a day to cope with all the exertion of an expedition.

HOW DO YOU take something with you to drink? Won't it just freeze?

This is a rather crucial question that may not even cross your mind unless you've been to the Arctic. The fact is that in temperatures way below zero just about all liquids freeze (even mercury used in thermometers freezes at around -39°C/-38°F).

So this is where a rugged vacuum flask comes into its own. It will keep water cold all day without freezing, though on an Arctic expedition it's best to put a hot drink in it to help keep you warm.



DRINK YOUR HOT WATER BOTTLE!

One trick for avoiding dehydration is to drink the water in your hot water bottle. When you go to bed it's great to have a sturdy plastic bottle filled with hot water to keep your feet warm. By morning it'll be pretty cold, and instead of wasting the precious water force yourself to drink it all. You'll already be getting dehydrated after a night breathing dry, cold air, and it'll get the day off on the right foot (no pun intended).

THE ARCTIC DIET

Most polar explorers come back far lighter than they started, a result of the huge effort involved in most activities, plus the energy used in keeping warm. A male adventurer may use up more than five thousand calories a day in the Arctic, double what he needs on a typical day back in 'civilisation'. To stay the same weight he would have to eat the equivalent of about eighty slices of bread each day.

So you need to eat a lot, and in particular a lot of carbohydrates for energy – a great excuse to eat plenty of chocolate and sugar (though a frozen bar of chocolate will need to be warmed in an inside pocket before you can bite into it). While most expedition food will inevitably be stuff you add water to, take along a little 'real' food to thaw out for special occasions. It's amazing what a bit of bacon, sausage or salami can do for morale.