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One of the coldest chills you will ever feel is the one you'll get when you realize that you are lost in the woods.

People enter the wilderness all of the time without the aid of a compass, or even a good working knowledge of the area, relying only on a trail or road to follow. This kind of adventure as a general rule is safe, as most inexperienced people don't go into the deep wilderness, and usually keep



It is possible to know your direction by instinct.

on the trail or near their car while visiting a state park, or campground. In the smaller parks it's more of an inconvenience to get lost than a crisis, if you walk a short distance in any direction you will usually come out on a trail, a road, or somebody's backyard, unless you're unlucky enough to have walked in a circle all day. However, if the average person were to step off of the main trail while hiking deep into a national forest, that person might be facing one of the most terrifying experiences of his life, spending an unplanned night or longer in the real wilderness.

Finding your way in the woods can prove to be a challenge for the inexperienced woods person even with a compass. You could be walking in the right direction and be a few degrees off and come out in the next county, if you come out at all. Trails can disappear right in front of you and one tree can look like another.



Would you know which way to go?

I once took a city friend of mine hiking, and just for fun I gave him a compass and told him to head due north but only look at the compass every ten minutes. He had a tendency to stray to his left and pull us off course to the west repeatedly. I believe that without a compass or myself along he would have walked a full circle eventually.

Throughout history, experienced woodsmen and native people around the world have had the ability to travel considerable distances through the wilderness without a compass and not only avoided getting lost, but walked right up to the very place they set

out to visit. This is not a magic trick or a bunch of folklore for a campfire story, but a real ability that humans have and don't have a conscious realization of it. With the right kind of training most people can develop this instinctual navigation skill.

Animals have a perfectly tuned compass built into their brains, and they demonstrate what it can do for them all the time. A dog for example, can run for miles in thick woods and as soon as he's ready to come back, he does so without any trouble whatsoever. If you take a cat several miles from home, and let him go, in a few days, he will be back home. I used to think that animals followed their own scent trail back home, until I noticed that my dog never returned the same way that he left, but he always made it back, even if it were his first time in that area. Animals have a homing instinct that never fails them, they know how to tap in to this hidden ability and humans too can tap this skill.



Obstacles may get in the way. Just count your steps to clear it and return on the other side — again counting.

The first step in getting in touch with your built in compass is waking up the part of your brain that has the compass and start exercising it. Start thinking in terms of direction all the time, take a compass with you everywhere you go and practice guessing which direction is which and check yourself with the compass. Eventually you will start to sense what direction you're going. It does help in the early days of training to learn how to use the sun as a reference point for direction, and eventually you will just know where the sun is without looking. As you turn a street corner, think about your direction, this can be a big help in the city. A good example would be driving on the Interstate, and making a fuel stop in a strange town, and you get lost. You know that you've traveled east away from the freeway, and if you know which way is west, you can pull a 180 degree turn, and find your way back without a compass. This kind of training starts putting you in touch with your subconscious mind's two dimensional navigation ability, and it's your subconscious mind that is home to your instincts. If you want to be good at sensing direction, you must think about direction all the time. You must program yourself to be aware of direction, if it's important to your subconscious mind. Obviously this will take some people a very long time to master. For those people I say, get a good compass, and learn how to use it.

Now it's time for field training, and I do not mean a big grassy area where you play frisbee. Find a wilderness area that has established hiking trails, bring along a friend and a good lunch and make a day of it. Pick a trail that makes a big loop, or does not go too far, and take a compass reading at the head of the trail and start hiking. As you walk along enjoying the scenery, see if you know what direction you are walking without looking at the compass, of course you must periodically check with your compass to see if you're right. This gets harder to do if the trail has many curves in

it, however that makes the whole experience more challenging. Pay attention to each curve and try to keep track in your mind of any direction change, check your compass to verify. Eventually you won't need to check your compass as often, you will just know. This kind of exercise must be done many times before you will notice any progress. When you feel as if you are getting the hang of it, try to get disoriented and sense which direction to go, then check your compass to verify. Do not forget that there is a big difference between walking down a trail in a park and hiking cross country while navigating on instinct. And, do not be in too big of a hurry to hit the open woods and try this.

It may take the average person a very long time just to make it this far, though it helps if you have had a fair amount of wilderness exposure. After a few months of basic training, you are ready for some real instinct navigation training, cross country hiking without roads or trails. This can be dangerous so take someone with you and leave a hiking plan with the ranger station, or a friend.

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Before entering the woods make sure you have a basic survival kit with you. This should include a first aid and snake bite kit, an emergency transmitter (and make sure you know what channel you should be on), along with plenty of water, and a knife and some fire making tools, just in case. If you are an outdoor person, I highly recommend that you take a basic first aid course, and learn about outdoor emergencies; after all, nothing feels as bad as being injured, or seeing someone close to you injured, and you do not have a clue as to what you should do. A life may hang in the balance. The Red Cross offers an outstanding first aid class, and many other types of training.

So, now you are ready for the big leap. Find a very large wooded area that you're sure has a road a couple of miles straight ahead that runs from left to right so even if you don't walk a straight line, you will still come out on the road somewhere. Make sure that you wear hunter's orange to avoid any misunderstanding with a hunter, and don't trespass. Take a compass reading at the starting point and don't look again. Walk a straight line for ten minutes, then make a 180 degree turn, and walk for ten minutes back towards the starting point. After ten minutes, if you have not reached your starting point, you went off course, consult your compass and continue walking, you should come out of the woods down the road a ways from where you went in. The farther you come out from your starting point, the more bend you had in your attempted straight line hike. After several tries you should get a better understanding of what is going on and start walking in straighter lines. Pay attention to how it feels to walk in a straight line, and teach your subconscious mind to alert you when you start to stray off course. This may manifest itself as an uncomfortable feeling about the direction you're about to walk. Check your compass and make a mental note of the experience. If every thing goes according to plan you should be ready for the long hike now. Set out on a straight line cross country hiking and see if you can find the road that you know is out there ahead of you somewhere, when you find it, do a 180 degree turn, and return to your starting point. You can score yourself by determining how close to the actual point of entry you are when you come out.

Obstacles may get in the way now and then such as a lake or ravine. Simply make a right angle turn and count how many steps you take to clear the obstacle. Make another right angle, turn and walk until you have cleared the obstacle, then another right angle, turn and recount the steps you took to get around and continue on your

way. This is not fool proof, but it usually works well enough to get you pretty close to where you want to go, and the more you practice, the more accurate you'll become.

I have spent my whole life stomping around the woods, and as far back as I can remember, I could sense my direction. I have never met a true woodsman that did not have this skill. There are times when all bets are off and nobody can use this skill. If you are inclined to partake in smoking while visiting mother nature, or getting a good buzz, you will walk in circles. I have watched people try, and I have never seen it fail, even when using a compass, you are likely to still get lost, or show up a long way off, and a long time later.



After testing yourself for short distances, head for the deep woods and try testing your instincts where it really counts.

Using your instinct to find direction is not an exact science, and in most cases, you will not be able to plot a course and walk right up to the "X" you put on your map. Instinct should be used to get you approximately where you want to be, and you should never bet your life on it, if avoidable. The older you get, the better you will become at finding places in the woods or getting out of the woods without looking at your compass. It may take a lifetime of regular practice to become an expert. Once you develop the instinct navigation skill, you should practice regularly. It will be with you the rest of your life, as mine is with me. Another added benefit of this training is that it helps put you in touch with many of your other instincts. Your subconscious mind sees and hears things that your conscious mind misses or doesn't pay attention to. Without this phenomenon there would be no hypnosis. Listening to your instinct is like hypnosis, you are learning to extract information from your subconscious mind. This might help you navigate though this world with fewer unpleasant run-ins.



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