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### Do I Just Stand Here and Shake in My Boots?

#### *Safety in the Wilderness*

“Fortune truly helps those who are of good judgement.”

Euripides

“Will I be safe?” is an oft-asked question by women considering a backpacking trip. In Shirley MacLaine’s, *The Camino: A Journey of the Spirit*, she walks the famous pilgrimage trail across Northern Spain to Santiago de Compostela. People honk their horns, and call to her, “Ultreya!” “What does it mean?” she asks. Her companion Anna replies, “It means moving forward with courage.”

Just the act of going backpacking can be a physical challenge to most people. Carrying a full pack, covering long miles over rugged terrain, and going to high altitudes qualifies as demanding physical activity. We go because we want some degree of challenge, and also because we long for the exhilaration of being out in nature. However, most of us are not looking for the risks of “extreme” sports. We’d prefer to hike in relative safety — and return home. While we are hoping to have some degree of adventure on our trip

into the backcountry, we're wise women who want to be reasonably prepared for what we will encounter.

So, just as we try to fit in additional pre-conditioning hikes, and look for ways to reduce pack weight, we are interested in knowing how to reduce the chance of personal injury or disease.

Always remember that your backpack is your life support system in the wilderness. So whenever you leave your backpack behind in basecamp — when going for a dayhike, for example — you must still carry everything essential to your survival.

## Survival Skills

### ◆ Betty and her daughter, Susie

The following story contains numerous lessons. From the example of two experienced backpackers forgetting essential gear and making potentially life-threatening errors in navigation, we are reminded that errors can be easily made and quickly compounded in the wilderness. Checklists of essential gear are invaluable. As we read Betty's account of their activities after they realized they were in trouble, we can observe that their calmness and resourcefulness played a large part in helping them survive getting lost in the wilderness.

In August of 1992, Betty and Susie, set out from Carson Pass in Northern California to Lake Alpine, a 25-mile round trip.

The first night's stop was Camp Irene on the Mokelumne River. They quickly ran out of matches; each thought the other had some. The two rangers they encountered didn't have any either. But the two campers did manage to get a Wilderness Permit — which they hadn't obtained earlier because they had gotten to the area too late in the day to get

one. With these few details worked out — it was to be granola and cold tomato soup for dinner that night — they settled in for the evening.

Up the next morning at 5:30, they were soon underway; Betty knew it was a good eight and a half miles to Lake Alpine that day. They hiked along but after a while they found the “ducks” (trail-markers) were fewer and farther between. They were spending a lot of time “duck hunting,” — often removing their packs to scout around. They were encountering lots of brush and no obvious trail. Soon they were traveling cross-country.

“We came out at the base of a huge granite outcropping with steep, rough sides, shelves and crevices. We scrambled to the top and looked around. Below, we could see the stream that we knew we had to get to. In the absence of any ducks, we figured a way to get down and slid all the way. Susie’s ragged seat of her pants is evidence of the roughness of the ride.

“Then we saw a monstrous boulder that blocked our way jutting out into the water — completely impassable.” They struggled up the granite again.

They stopped to drink cold cocoa. Which way to go? They continued to clamber up and down, “duckless and hopeless.”

Hope was rekindled. Betty continued, “We came to a spot on the river where we stopped and had lunch, after spotting a duck on the cliff above. A search revealed a few more, and we finally arrived at what we thought was what the book described as the ‘drinking pool.’” But they could find no more ducks. In despair, they decided they’d just have to sit there and wait to be rescued. There was no possibility of retracing their steps.