

## Text One

# SURVIVAL IN EXTREME CONDITIONS

Here are some tips on how to survive in the desert, taken from a survival manual.



Shelters, such as this Apache style *kiowa*, are important for a wide variety of desert survival conditions

### Climate and Terrain

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A feature of most deserts is the extreme fluctuation in temperature between day and night, sometimes in the order of 70° Fahrenheit. Some deserts are hotter than others, e.g. those of Mexico and Libya reach 136° degrees Fahrenheit. On the other hand, night-time temperatures are usually extremely low; in the northern Gobi and Siberian deserts they can fall as low as -50° Fahrenheit.

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### Medical Conditions

It takes about two weeks for the body to fully acclimatise itself to the heat of the desert. Even then the risks associated with such an environment will still be present. A survivor in the desert will still need an adequate supply of water and some shelter in order to stay alive. The desert can exhaust the reserves of both body and mind, so a strong, positive attitude will be needed.

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**A person in the desert will be affected by several environmental factors other than simply heat, and these need to be considered:**

### Sunburn

Burnt skin is inflamed and painful and will usually break out in blisters. The immediate priority in cases of sunburn is to get casualties out of the sun and protect them from further exposure. Cool the burnt area, if possible with cold water. Cover the burns with a dressing to prevent the possibility of infection, and do not move the casualties unless essential to do so. The chances are that they will also be severely dehydrated, so make sure that they drink plenty of fluids and get plenty of rest.

### Desert cold

Lack of the right clothing or shelter during the intense cold of the desert night will, again, threaten the body's ability to control its temperature, and may well result in hypothermia or frostbite. Remember that any wind will increase the chill factor and make any temperature loss even greater. During the evening, as the air chills, more layers of clothing should be added as necessary.

### Water in the desert



- **Shallow - rooted plants often store water in their fleshy leaves and stems**
- **Desert trees often store water in their roots**
- **Some cacti store large quantities of water in their bodies**
- **Some palms secrete large quantities of refreshing fluid**
- **Apart from safe species of cacti, avoid plants with milky sap**

### Fire in the desert



Women are as capable as men of mastering survival skills and meeting wilderness emergencies.

- **Keep fires small – natural fuel will probably be scarce**
- **Lighting signal fires will depend on vehicle fuel and tyres**
- **If travelling, try to carry an emergency supply of vehicle fuel**
- **Gather any natural kindling and fuel you encounter as you walk**

### Water

Survivors must find a source of water or they will die, no matter how abundant the rest of their survival resources. Dehydration occurs slowly when the body is losing fluid faster than it is replacing it. On average a normal adult will start to deteriorate after four days, with death occurring within the first week if no water is consumed. Small amounts of water may slow down the process, but to function well a survivor needs at least five litres daily.

### Fire

Survivors need a fire as urgently in the desert as in any other environment, for cooking, warmth at night, and signalling. In some desert regions any fire will need to be kept small due to the lack of combustible material; by contrast, other deserts are covered with dry vegetation. The kerosene plant of the Nevada desert is a good example, burning exceptionally well and producing a hot fire. Due to the dryness and thin structure of most desert vegetation, this fuel does not last very long. Signalling fires will normally only be possible if the survivor stays with the crashed vehicle or aircraft and uses any combustible material which it provides.

### Desert food

Food is not a priority in desert survival: indeed, if water is limited, then it is best not to eat at all. This particularly applies to high protein foods such as dried emergency rations and the flesh of wild animals, which require water for digestion. Your life expectancy is governed by the amount of water contained within your body and whatever extra water supplies you can obtain. Eating is only a long-term survival factor, and even then you are advised to eat moisture-retaining plants wherever possible.

### Desert travel

Despite what many survival books recommend, walking in the desert at night is no more hazardous than walking in daytime. The exertion will also help you keep warm, and conversely the cold will reduce the rate of body fluid loss. Visibility is normally good, with the moon and stars providing enough light to see clearly up to a hundred metres at ground level. If no compass is available, then knowing your star constellations will guide your path as easily as the sun by day.