

## **A Week in the Woods by Andrew Clement**

### **Chapter 18 Summary**

#### **“Bushwhacking”**

Mark had been hiking on the loop trail for about half an hour when he had to stop because the temperature decreased and he started feeling cold. He stopped to put on a stocking cap. He noticed from the start that this loop trail wasn't nearly as wide as the main trail had been. He had to keep a sharp lookout for the markers. The ones on this trail were blue, and there weren't as many of them. Sometimes they were almost hidden by tree branches. It was getting late, so it was dark under the pine and hemlock trees.

Mark was getting tired; he started feeling his backpack much heavier. He knew he was slowing his pace, but he thought that it was ok. After all, he was walking back to the camp and most of the trail was downhill. He decided to keep on walking, even though his body was asking him to rest for a while.

As Mark walked out of a thick grove, the trail made a sharp turn to his right, angling up across a stretch of mostly open hillside. Only a few trees could be seen. The climb wouldn't be steep, but that wasn't the problem. The problem was that the trail wasn't really a trail anymore. It looked more like the rocky bed of an uphill river. Where the trail used to be there was a crazy jumble of granite rocks, some of them as big as washing machines. To go up that way, Mark saw he'd have to pick up a path either above or below it. Then he thought he could find a different way. He took his map out and looked at it. He found where he was. According to the map, if he just went straight that way, then in about half a mile he'll come to the trail again, the part that heads down to the campground. It seemed simple to Mark, especially since he was already tired, hungry and in pain. Then he thought it was better if he used his compass. He did some quick thinking as he detailed the trail in the map. Then he decided that if he went west he would go directly across the downhill part of the trail, then he would just have to take a left and that was it. Simple.

He started walking and soon he found that the going was a lot harder than walking on a trail. He had to duck under low braches, step over fallen limbs and trees, and push his way through tangled brush. His framepack felt heavier and it kept getting caught on things. But he kept walking, checking his compass every thirty steps to check he was going west. He also counted his steps to try to estimate the distance he had walked. He did everything right. That's why he couldn't understand why, after thirty minutes, he hadn't find the trail yet. After forty-five minutes he began to wonder if his compass was working properly. And after almost an hour Mark thought maybe Mrs. Farr's map was wrong. So he stopped to look at it again. But it wasn't the map or his compass. It was the forest added to his inexperience. A more experienced hiker would now that a log laid across a trailhead means “trail closed”. I Mark had known that the trail had been closed for three years, he wouldn't

have taken it. Three years is a lot of time is a long time in the forest. Plants grow back again and branches can start covering the unused trail. And that's why, at the particular place where Mark had crossed the downhill leg of the loop trail, his eyes saw only more forest.

After looking at Mrs. Farr's map again and then looking at his watch, Mark realized that somehow, somewhere he must have missed the trail. So he decided to go back, heading east, to find the trail. Daylight was fading fast and it was getting colder. He started walking faster. He wanted to find the trail before it was completely dark. He checked his compass every 40 steps. From far away uphill, he heard something. "Maaark..." At first he thought he had imagined it. Someone shouting? Mark stood still, pulled off his stocking cap, and held his breath. He heard someone calling him again. He knew it was Mr. Maxwell. He recognized his voice. He felt angry. He didn't want to be tracked and caught by Mr. Maxwell. He would make him walk back to campground just to take him back home. Then he would have to face suspension and all the rest of it. He started running blindly through the forest, just running away from that voice that kept calling him. Mark's body was very tired, so when he jumped a four-foot drop, it didn't respond and he fell. He laid there. Then he heard the call again, only this time he only heard half of his name "Maa..." The voice was farther away now, above and behind. Then he had a moment of clarity. His anger and fear were gone. The whole scene snapped into focus, and Mark thought, *Why am I running away from him? I was already heading back to the campground, right? So I was going to have to face up to Mr. Maxwell anyway. It might as well be now. I'll just go and find him. Turn myself in. Might even make things easier to do it now instead of later.* He sat down and noticed a small cut on his left hand. His right hand hurt too. He turned around, facing the direction where he had heard Mr. Maxwell' voice and yelled, "I'm down here!" He didn't hear anything back. So he yelled "Mr. Maxwell? I'm down here!" Pulling a deep breath, Mark put all his strength into one more yell: "Mr. Maxwell!" No respond. Then he remembered Mr. Survival and he took out the whistle. He blew the whistle a couple of times, always waiting for a response, but nothing. He started thinking that maybe as he was running downhill, Mr. Maxwell could have been running uphill ad that's why he couldn't hear his voice now.

Mark decided that he had to go uphill again, looking for Mr. Maxwell. He ate an energy bar and drank some water. He knew he was tired, but he needed the fuel. Then he picked up his pack and set off uphill, to where he last Mr. Maxwell's voice. He was in such a hurry that for the first time all afternoon, Mark forgot to check his compass.