

Building a shelter



The text below is from 'Hatchet' by Gary Paulsen. It is a story about a boy, Brian, who is stranded alone in the Canadian wilderness and has to survive until he is eventually rescued.

He turned back to his campsite and looked at the wreckage. He had a lot to do, rebuild his shelter, get a new fire going, find some food or get ready to find some food, make weapons – and he had to work slowly because his ribs hurt.

First things first. He tried to find some dry grass and twigs, then peeled bark from a nearby birch to shred into a fire nest. He worked slowly but even so, with his new skill he had a fire going in less than an hour. The flames cut the cool damp morning, crackled and did much to bring his spirits up, not to mention chasing away the incessant mosquitoes. With the fire going he searched for dry wood – the rain had driven water into virtually all the wood he could find – and at last located some in a thick evergreen where the top branches had covered the lower dead ones, keeping them dry.

He had great difficulty breaking them, not being able to pull much with his arm or chest muscles, but finally got enough to keep the fire going all day and into the night. With that he rested a bit, eased his chest, and then set about getting a shelter built.

Much of the wood from his original wall was still nearby and up at the back of the ridge he actually found a major section of weave still intact. The wind had torn it out, lifted it and thrown it to the top of the ridge and Brian felt lucky once more that he had not been killed or more seriously injured – which would have been the same, he thought. If he couldn't hunt he would die and if he were badly injured he would not be able to hunt.

He jerked and dragged wood around until the wall was once more in place – crudely, but he could improve it later. He had no trouble finding enough pine boughs to make a new bed. The storm had torn the forest to pieces – up behind the ridge it looked as if a giant had become angry and used some kind of a massive mincer on the trees. Huge pines were twisted and snapped off, blown sideways. The ground was so littered with limbs and tree-tops sticking every which way, that it was hard to get through. He pulled enough thick limbs in for a bed, green and spicy with the new broken sap smell, and by evening he was exhausted, hungry and hurting, but he had something close to a place to live in again, a place to be.

