

# Lost

► The two boys had to face facts – they were lost. The problem wasn't finding a path; the problem was finding the right path. The forest had cheated them time and time again, their hopes being dashed as wide tracks dwindled before reaching overgrown, thorny dead-ends. After each failure, the boys retraced their steps but they had become increasingly confused. Harry didn't say it, but his opinion was that they had been down the same paths more than once – they were wasting their time and energy. They needed to try something different.

Noah slumped down by a mossy log. "That's it," he said. "I can't go on." Harry agreed to take a break. There was no point wandering around just hoping for the best. He needed a chance to think. What would his dad do in this situation?

"I'm hungry," Noah complained. "Let's have some more chocolate." Harry's stomach was rumbling too, but he only broke off one square which he gave to his younger brother.

"Let's make it last," Harry said. Noah frowned. One square wasn't going to appease his appetite, but he knew deep down that Harry was right – it wasn't sensible to eat all their supplies.

The sun was getting low and Harry guessed it was about six o'clock. This meant they had been in the forest for about four hours. Not long enough to start panicking, but long enough to be hungry, tired and anxious. Even in full daylight, the forest floor was a shadowy place. Now, no light was breaking through and it felt gloomy and threatening. In whichever direction he looked, all Harry could see were walls of tall, dense trees forming an impenetrable natural maze. Harry had tried to remain optimistic but he was struggling to keep his spirits up. He tried to swallow his fears and said in a bright voice, "Let's try one more time. If we can't find the way home, then we can camp. It will be an adventure – we've slept out before, so we know what to do."

"That was with Dad," Noah wailed. "We had food and sleeping bags!"

"It'll be fine," Harry said, as cheerfully as he could manage. But Noah was right; it would be easy if Dad was here. He thought back to their family's trip last summer, where they'd spent a week camping wild. Noah was still too young then to be of

► CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

much help, but Harry had worked with his dad to set up camp. Could he now do it on his own? With no tent?

“Look,” he said, pointing to a thin path that weaved gently upwards away from the clearing. “Let’s follow this track. We’ll try and find some higher ground.” Harry hoped that if they could get above the treeline they might be able to spot a way out. If not, then perhaps there would be a cave where they could shelter. That appealed far more than a damp night on the forest floor. He might even be able to light a fire. His dad had given him a survival kit for his birthday, and he had practised with the striker until he had managed to create a spark every time. He always took the firelighter and the pocket knife with him when they went into the forest. Now he might actually need to use them!

Noah just looked up at him, dismayed. “Can’t we set up camp here?” he asked.

Harry pulled him up. “No, come on,” he said. “Let’s give it one more chance, then we’ll look for somewhere safe to sleep.”

Although the path seemed unpromising at first, to Harry’s surprise it stayed strong. As it steepened, it twisted and turned, working its way uphill. Unlike the others they had followed, it didn’t narrow and it remained clear of vegetation. Harry guessed that goats used the path daily to drop down into the forest to forage. If that was the case, then there was a chance it would lead to open ground above the trees. Harry barely dared to hope.

The two boys, encouraged, picked up their pace. The forest was definitely becoming sparser, and the track rockier. Harry’s spirits soared as, ahead, he saw the scree of a rocky slope. The boys scrambled up the loose rocks, almost racing now. When they reached the top, Harry stopped to catch his breath. As he looked around, he spotted the roofs of the village houses, just visible above the treetops. He let out a whoop. “I know where we are,” he yelled to his brother. “I know the way from here!”