Level: B2: Upper Intermediate

Skill: Reading

Living in a cave

A moment that changed me: I had a heart attack at 37 – so I went to live in a cave

I wanted to heal and thought the Colorado wilderness was the best place to do it. So I began six months of hunting and foraging, with a pile of leaves for a bed
Donny Dust

Two days before I had a heart attack in February 2017, I had just got back from Alaska, where I'd been leading an expedition. At home in Colorado, I thought the chest pains were to do with the change in altitude. I was 37 and active. I'd been in the Marine Corps until 2011, then I became a wilderness and survival skills guide. I was training for a 245km ultramarathon through the Peruvian jungle. Even when I got to hospital, I struggled to believe I was having a heart attack, but I was rushed into an operating room and a stent was fitted.

Three days later, I could barely walk and was put into cardiac rehab with a group of 85-year-olds. But I believed I needed something else to heal me. As an outdoors guy who could live off the land, I knew that was where I needed to be. And so, after several rehab sessions, I thought, "I'm out of here!" and went to live in a cave, near where I could hunt animals and drink from streams.

I spent around six months alternating between a conventional life and living in the Colorado wilderness. My wife and I were separating, but I didn't want to be away from our two sons for too long, so I would come back often. The longest stretch I was away was just under two months.

I had a series of caves and each had different amenities – some were next to springs, or near better fishing, hunting and foraging. The "main cave" had a bed in it – by which I mean a big pile of grass and leaves, which was comfortable. It had a bit of a skylight, so the smoke from my fire could rise through it and I could see the stars. I would jam a stick between the cave walls and dry clothes on it, and would keep an old soup tin to boil water in. That was the cave that had the most resources, but I would move from cave to cave. I'd cache animal hides in one, and if I wanted to treat myself to something special, I'd put a jar of dried mangoes in another – I'd have a two-day walk to go and get it.

I didn't take much. I always had a notebook with me with a photo of my sons, and something to write with. I'd take a steel bottle back out to the caves, which made it a bit easier to boil water.



Foraged food formed most of my diet – plants, berries, tubers, roots. I caught fish, squirrels and rabbits. You learn to really appreciate food: "Yes, I've got a fish and five berries! Today is awesome." I missed my sons, but I also knew that this was my time to really heal and reflect, and there was always something to do. I would make stone tools, build traps, baskets and clay pots, tan hides – they all gave me so much value. And you're always collecting firewood.

One night in my main cave, the fire had gone out when I started feeling a warm, wet sensation on my foot. When I woke up, I could see there was a juvenile black bear at my feet, licking my toes. I let out a scream, and the bear took off. I lit a big fire, and sat up the whole night waiting for him to return.

I was becoming part of the pattern of life that existed in the wild, understanding the sounds and the smells. You can choose to fight it, or to try to control it, but when you accept it, you reach a deeper understanding of who you are and what you're doing out there. The heart attack changed my life because it was a reawakening. Knowing that eventually one day you will expire, you need to live the life that you want, find the value.

Now I live between the worlds. I rent a place, drive a truck and have a TV. When I have my sons, we like to watch documentaries, but they also have their own interests. For all the time I still spend in the wilderness, social media has actually become a big part of my life. Before my heart attack, I was never on it, but, afterwards, people encouraged me to start a YouTube channel sharing my skills. Now I've written books, done reality shows and consulted for movies. I've embraced this element of modern life, and hope to fuel people's curiosity about the natural world.

Many of us accept life is just the way it is, but there are some outliers who want something different. I don't judge anybody for the choices they make, but I think some people get influenced to believe in things that don't matter. My passion is doing less with more, in the simplest way possible. Ancient humans focused on family, community and the natural world, and I think we can learn so much from that.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Level: B1 | B2: Upper Intermediate

Skill: Reading

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Find verbs from the text to form collocations from the article.

An approximate antonym has been provided for each verb.

1. (follow) .....an expedition

2. (taken slowly) .....into an operating room

3. (remove) .....a stent

4. (released)..... from cardiac rehab

5. (take for granted)..... food

6. (miss) .....a deeper understanding

7. (reject)..... elements of modern life

8. (deplete) .....people's curiosity



LIVEWORKSHEETS