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Location: Tasmania
Climate: Temperate

Surviving the Wild in Tasmania

Our team of four researchers traveled to the island of Tasmania, off the coast of Australia, to investigate the threat of eventual extinction to the Tasmanian Devil population. The Tasmanian Devil is an integral part of controlling local populations as well as maintaining balance in the ecosystem. In addition to being at risk for Devil Facial Tumor Disease, these marsupials may be affected by human-induced climate change, increasing the risk of unmanageable fires and coastal erosion, which have a large ecological impact. Humans introducing new animals, like feral and red foxes, also threaten the state of the ecosystem. Already, there has been a 40% decrease in the Devil population since 1998. Because of this threat of extinction, our team decided to conduct a population survey of Tasmanian Devils in places untouched by humans, in Tasmania's Southwest National Park.

Expecting our expedition to last a few months, we packed and planned accordingly with supplies and tools in order to survive the wilderness. We set out for Hobart, Tasmania in December, during Tasmania's warmer summer season. From Hobart, we drove to Lake Gordon in our Jeep until the road ended and then set out on foot to the region south of the lake. While trekking through the forest, disaster struck! A bushfire caught in the distance forcing our team to quickly change course. While fleeing for our lives, we encountered a colony of Tasmanian Devils, which, though normally docile, attacked out of fear. While running away from them, we lost our waterproof bag containing our electronics, and Kelsey's ankle was bitten to the bone, becoming

incapacitated. Having escaped the fire, disoriented and with an injured ally, we decided to make camp near a river with mountains to our west and forest to the east.

Tasmania has a temperate climate with temperature variations that are largely manageable. In winter, it rarely gets colder than 37°F, while the summers rarely get warmer than about 75°F. The biggest problems we have to deal with are rain, possible floods, and wildfires. By using the four hatchets and small saw we managed to save from the fire, we planned out a log cabin to build at our camp. By building on the eastern side of a mountain with a lake on the other side, we would be located in a “rain shadow.” We set up our camp some distance away from the main woods in order to lessen the chance of our cabin catching fire. However, we needed to rely on an indoor fireplace so rain wouldn’t wash it out and to help keep mosquitoes at bay. Additionally, we covered the windows with the mosquito nets we had packed to further keep the bugs away. We also covered the windows with the plastic sleeping tarp we had originally packed in order to keep rain out. Our location put us close enough to an auxiliary river as well as a more permanent river source to use for fresh water and bathing. Wet Eucalyptus forests are nearby to the northeast, which prevent southwest nightly winds and hold animals can catch for food. Let us hope a traveler finds us on his or her journey...

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