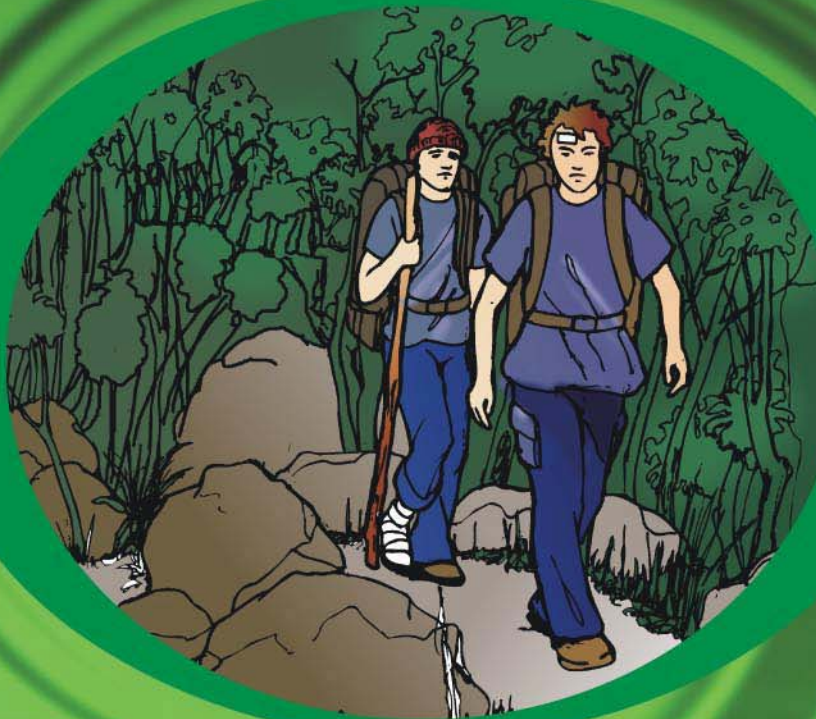


Extreme Action Series

TRAPPED



By Frances Croft

Trapped

Part One

"There's a helicopter down there," James said as he slipped off his pack and crouched at the edge of the cliff. "Can you see it, Shane?"

"Not with you in the way," came the reply. "Move over."

"There's not much room." As James moved a little to his right and leaned against a tree trunk, small rocks rolled down the treeless slope. Except for the cliff, the sides of the valley were covered in dense bush and forest.

"What have you stopped for?" Ben asked as he and Cameron followed them into the clearing. "We should go on. I want to get to the waterfall before we go back. It'll be lunchtime soon and we have to be out by seven. What are you doing, James?"

"Watching! There's a helicopter."

"What's it doing there?" Shane pulled the branch of a tree out of the way. "What a place to land." He knelt down by James and stared at the valley floor.

Slowly, James straightened up making sure he took all his weight on his left leg. A short time ago he'd put his foot in a hole when he'd tripped over a hidden root. His right leg had a long cut above his boot and his ankle was very sore. "Cameron, put my pack over by that tree, Catch!"

"Got it." Cameron grinned at his brother and dumped it down.

"Watch it, I've got my mobile and camera in there."

"Don't worry, they won't break," said Cameron. "I can't see anything from here."

"The helicopter's hard to see," James commented sitting down. "I'll have to take my boot off, Shane. The pain's killing me."

"You should keep your boot on," Ben called. He was too late.

"Your ankle's pretty swollen, James," Shane said as he reached for the first-aid kit. "I'll strap it for you. We'll need to change that dressing too. That cut's still bleeding. Here, lift your foot up. Ben, come and hold it for me, please."

"OK." Ben bent down and turned his head away. First aid wasn't really his thing.

"I don't think it's that deep," James said, "but there is quite a lot of blood, isn't there?" James stared at his foot. "I won't be able to get my boot back on. Thanks Shane, that feels much better."

"We'll stay here while Cameron and Ben go to the waterfall. They'll be away about an hour," Shane said firmly. "We still have to walk out. You shouldn't go any further on that ankle."

"You've no choice. It's too bad you had to see us. This was our last trip for the year. We've been in and out of this valley and we've never been spotted before. Why did you have to come this way?" Patrick moved further away but his finger on the trigger didn't waver.

"We wanted to see if the slope was deteriorating before we went up to the waterfall." James caught Shane's eye. If they could keep Patrick talking then Cameron and Ben would have a better chance of contacting the police. "What are you doing here, Mike?" He nodded to his cousin who had left school a few months ago.

"None of your business," came the nervous reply. "You do as Patrick says."

"Shane, help James up," ordered Patrick. The gun pointed straight at James. "Your ankle will slow us down. The track's rough and slippery." Patrick glanced about. "Mike, throw those packs over the cliff."

"My camera's in there," James called without thinking.

"You've taken a photo of the helicopter? Mike, get those packs over the cliff now!"

Without looking at James, Mike picked up the packs and threw. Rocks rolled down the cliff. James yelled as he stood up. Even with Shane on one side and the walking stick on the other he was in pain. His sudden yell startled Patrick but the gun didn't falter. "Shane, I'll take as long as possible," James whispered.

"Cut that out," Patrick yelled. "Get going. If I had my way I'd shoot the pair of you and roll your bodies over the cliff. You wouldn't be found but the boss wants to see you both first." He waved the gun at them. "Now move, and don't try anything funny. I'll go last and remember, I've got a gun."

"I can't hurry." James moved forward gritting his teeth.

"I'll come the other side of you, James. Patrick, we'll get down the hill faster if we help him." Mike slipped his cousin's arm over his shoulder. "Ready Shane? We'll try and swing James up and over the rocks."

James stopped. This was the Mike he knew, someone who was thoughtful and helpful.

"We haven't got all day," Patrick called impatiently, "though it won't matter what time of day it is for you two," he added under his breath. "Mike, make sure you watch what you say. You know what the boss said."

"As if I could forget," Mike muttered taking James's weight.

"How did you get involved, Mike?" James asked quietly as he hobbled onto the narrow goat track which ran down the east side of the slope.

"I'll tell you later," Mike whispered. "Patrick, there's not enough room for the three of us. Shane will have to walk in front of us."

"No he won't," Patrick yelled. "Shane, walk in front of me. I don't trust you. I don't want you running off to meet up with your friends. I'm sure there were four of you."

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Part Three

Days later James sat on the couch in the lounge and looked searchingly at Detective Phillips and then at Shane, Ben and his brother, Cameron. He and Shane had survived because they had rolled when the shots were fired. The white plaster on his foot was heavy. Shane had another nasty lump on his head and scratches on his face after rolling into the undergrowth.

"Well," James asked seriously, "what happened?"

"It was certainly touch and go. I hate to think what could have happened," Detective Phillips answered firmly.

"I guess it was instinct," James answered.

"We caught the whole gang." Detective Phillips gazed out the window at the house next door. It had been hard telling Patrick's family about how he had died and his involvement with Craig Wilson.

"Detective Phillips, what happened?" James asked again.

"Sorry, I was thinking how sad it is when lives are lost through drugs of any sort. We have been aware that this area has been the headquarters of the organisation for quite some time but we had to have proof. All the evidence pointed to someone who had a white collar job.

"Last week an anonymous phone call suggested that it could be Craig Wilson. The caller told us that there would only be one more operation this year. We traced the call to a phone box out of town and we have been watching Craig Wilson ever since.

"Three days ago we received another anonymous phone call. The muffled voice told us where and how the operation would take place. However, there was no mention of the day or the time. Your phone call was the key. We now know it was Mike who phoned. He also left a letter telling his family how he had tried to protect them and that he feared for his life."

"How did you catch Craig Wilson?" Shane asked.

"We planned an ambush. After that second phone call the facts were clear and we knew we could track Wilson's helicopter. As soon as the helicopter landed at the farm the marijuana would be transferred and taken out by truck. Patrick would drive the truck with Mike as co-driver. Mike also told us that Wilson would escort the truck to its destination.

"Mike was a good driver," Cameron commented.

"Fortunately there were only two roads that could be used. We came in the back road near to the farm where the helicopter would land and set everything up. We would have stayed in position for weeks if we'd had to." Detective Phillips paused.