

BEAR ENCOUNTER

Bill Bryson and his friend Stephen Katz are camping in the woods of North America.

There was a sound of undergrowth being disturbed - a click of breaking branches, a weighty pushing through low foliage - and then a kind of large, vaguely irritable snuffling noise.

Bear!

I sat bolt upright. Instantly every neuron in my brain was awake and dashing around frantically, like ants when you disturb their nest. I reached instinctively for my knife, then realized I had left it in my pack, just outside the tent. Nocturnal defence had ceased to be a concern after many successive nights of tranquil woodland repose.

There was another noise, quite near.

‘Stephen, you awake?’ I whispered.

‘Yup,’ he replied in a weary but normal voice.

‘What was that?’

‘How the hell should I know?’

‘It sounded big.’

‘Everything sounds big in the woods.’

This was true. Once a skunk had come plodding through our camp and it had sounded like a stegosaurus. There was another heavy rustle and then the sound of lapping at the spring. It was having a drink, whatever it was.

I shuffled on my knees to the foot of the tent, cautiously unzipped the mesh and peered out, but it was pitch black. As quietly as I could, I brought in my backpack and, with the light of a small torch, searched through it for my knife. When I found it and opened the blade I was appalled at how wimpy it looked. It was a perfectly respectable appliance for, say, buttering pancakes, but patently inadequate for defending oneself against 400 pounds of ravenous fur.

Carefully, very carefully, I climbed from the tent and put on the torch, which cast a distressingly feeble beam. Something about 15 or 20 feet away looked up at me. I couldn’t see anything at all of its shape or size - only two shining eyes. It went silent, whatever it was, and stared back at me.

‘Stephen,’ I whispered at his tent, ‘did you pack a knife?’

‘No.’

‘Have you got anything sharp at all?’

He thought for a moment. ‘Nail clippers.’

I made a despairing face. ‘Anything a little more vicious than that? Because, you see, there is definitely something out here.’

‘It’s probably just a skunk.’

‘Then it’s one big skunk. Its eyes are three feet off the ground.’

‘A deer then.’

I nervously threw a stick at the animal, and it didn’t move, whatever it was. A deer would have bolted. This thing just blinked once and kept staring.

I reported this to Katz.

‘Probably a buck. They’re not so timid. Try shouting at it.’ I cautiously shouted at it: ‘Hey! You there! Scat!’ The creature blinked again, singularly unmoved. ‘You shout,’ I said.

‘Oh, you brute, go away, do!’ Katz shouted in merciless imitation. ‘Please withdraw at once, you horrid creature.’

‘Oh thank you,’ I said and lugged my tent right over to his. I didn’t know what this would achieve exactly, but it brought me a tiny measure of comfort to be nearer to him.

‘What are you doing?’

‘I’m moving my tent.’

‘Oh, good plan. That’ll really confuse it.’

I peered and peered, but I couldn’t see anything but those two wide-set eyes staring from the near distance like eyes in a cartoon. I couldn’t decide whether I wanted to be outside and dead or inside and waiting to be dead. I was barefoot and in my underwear and shivering. What I really wanted - really, really wanted - was for the animal to withdraw.

A CAMP IN THE DARK

This extract is taken from Robert Louis Stevenson's Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes (1879), in which he describes having to camp in a wood after being caught in bad weather, and not being able to find a room in the village nearby. (Modestine is the name he gave his donkey).

The rain had stopped, and the wind, which still kept rising, began to dry my coat and trousers. 'Very well,' thought I, 'water or no water, I must camp.'

My next business was to gain the shelter of a wood, for the wind was cold as well as boisterous. How, in this well-wooded district, I should have been so long in finding one, is another of the insoluble mysteries of this day's adventures; but I will take my oath that I put near an hour to the discovery.

At last black trees began to show upon my left, and, suddenly crossing the road, made a cave of unmitigated blackness right in front. I call it a cave without exaggeration; to pass below that arch of leaves was like entering a dungeon. I felt about until my hand encountered a stout branch, and to this I tied Modestine, a haggard, drenched, desponding donkey. Then I lowered my pack, laid it along the wall on the margin of the road, and unbuckled the straps. I knew well enough where the lantern was; but where were the candles? I groped and groped among the tumbled articles, and, while I was thus groping, suddenly I touched the spirit-lamp. Salvation! This would serve my turn as well. The wind roared unwearyingly among the trees; I could hear the boughs tossing and the leaves churning through half a mile of forest; yet the scene of my encampment was not only as black as the pit, but admirably sheltered. At the second match the wick caught flame. The light was both livid and shifting; but it cut me off from the universe, and doubled the darkness of the surrounding night.

I tied Modestine more conveniently for herself, and broke up half the black bread for her supper, reserving the other half against the morning. Then I gathered what I should want within reach, took off my wet boots and gaiters, which I wrapped in my waterproof, arranged my knapsack for a pillow under the flap of my sleeping-bag, insinuated my limbs into the interior, and buckled myself in like a bambino.

I questioned at first if I were sleepy, for I felt my heart beating faster than usual, as if with an agreeable excitement to which my mind remained a stranger. But as soon as my eyelids touched, that subtle glue leaped between them, and they would no more come separate. The wind among the trees was my lullaby. Sometimes it sounded for minutes together with a steady, even rush, not rising nor abating; and again it would swell and burst like a great crashing breaker, and the trees would patter me all over with big drops from the rain of the afternoon. I hearkened and hearkened; and meanwhile sleep took gradual possession of my body and subdued my thoughts and senses; but still my last waking effort was to listen and distinguish, and my last conscious state was one of wonder at the foreign clamour in my ears.

Twice in the course of the dark hours—once when a stone galled me underneath the sack, and again when the poor patient Modestine, growing angry, pawed and stamped upon the road—I was recalled for a brief while to consciousness, and saw a star or two overhead, and the lace-like edge of the foliage against the sky. When I awoke for the third time, the world was flooded with a blue light: the mother of the dawn.

Section A: Reading

Answer **all** questions in this section

You are advised to spend about 45 minutes on this section.

01 Read again **source A**; Bear Encounter.

Choose **four** statements below which are TRUE.

- Shade the boxes of the ones that you think are true
- Choose a maximum of four statements.

A Bryson's camping trip had been peaceful up until this encounter

B Bryson took a while to become fully awake after hearing the noise

C The creature sounded like a dinosaur

D Katz moves his tent to be closer to Bryson's.

E Katz finds Bryson's concern irritating and openly mocks him

F Bryson was certain that there was a bear in their campsite

G Bryson didn't feel prepared enough to confront a bear

H Bryson, when writing about this experience, uses humour to mock his own fear

[4 Marks]

02 You need to refer to **source A** and **source B** for this question:

Use details from **both** sources. Write a summary of the differences between Bryson and Stevenson's camping experiences.

[8 marks]

03 You now need to refer **only** to **source B**, the description of Stevenson camping in the woods.

How does Stevenson use language to try to dramatize his experience?

[12 marks]

04 For this question, you need to refer to the **whole of source A** together with **source B**.

Compare how the two writers convey their different attitudes to the great outdoors.

In your answer, you should:

- compare their different attitudes
- compare the methods they use to convey their attitudes
- support your ideas with quotations from both texts.

[16 marks]

Section B: Writing

You are advised to spend about 45 minutes on this section.

You are reminded of the need to plan your answer.

You should write in full sentences.

You should leave enough time to check your work at the end.

05 “So-called ‘staycations*’ are becoming ever more popular, as they are seen as cheaper alternatives to overseas travel. There are various hidden gems to explore without the need of a plane ticket.”

Write an article for a travel magazine in which you explain your point of view on this statement.

(24 marks for content and organisation
16 marks for technical accuracy)

[40 marks]

(*’staycation’ – a holiday spent in one’s own country)