

Campfire Stories For Kids!

Contents

How to use this book	3
The Hairy Hands	4
The Witch's Prison	11
The Giant's Cave	17
The UFO Crash Site	22
The Ape in the Woods	29
The Secret Military Base	35
About the Author	45

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How to use this book

This book is not just a collection of stories. It's a little toolkit for telling *campfire* stories to kids.

Any good campfire story has an element of 'scariness'. At the start of each story we give some indication of how scary the story may be.

You know your own kids. Read the story yourself and see if it is appropriate. If not, adjust the story to suit your kids.

In fact, for the best story telling experience, you should slightly adapt each story to your local surroundings, include a local landmark, or even include people and places your family know.

You should also adjust the tone of your voice, with quiet and loud spells. On some stories there are a few hints on when to shout or scream.

Since a good campfire story is told as an experience you had or know about, reading it from a book isn't very genuine.... however, committing an entire story to memory can be difficult. So, at the end of each story you'll find a story outline.

If you have committed the theme of the story to memory, use the story outline, and adjust the story to your campsite and family.

Alternatively, just read from the book ;-)

The Hairy Hands Story Outline:

- Strange things go missing from people's tents: clothes and items people would wear.
- An ex-policeman hears about it and goes to investigate.
- Nothing seen on first night, but things still get stolen.
- All campers keep watch on second night.
- A person hears their tent being unzipped; a family sees the hands; the ex-policeman's trousers are seen disappearing into the woods.
- A family of scarecrows are found in the woods wearing all the clothes that had been stolen.

The Hairy Hands

Scare Scale: The "hands" could creep some kids out, especially younger ones, but there are ways to make it less scary. Remember to adjust the story to the audience.

Inspiration for this story:

My daughter told me about these ghostly hairy hands when we went camping near Dartmoor.

As the story goes, a pair of disembodied hairy hands appear in cars on a stretch of road in Dartmoor. They then grab the steering wheel and force the car off the road.

The hairy hands in this story are a little different.

Story telling tips:

There's lots of details in the full story, but the outline is quite simple. You can make the hands as dramatic or innocent to suit the audience. For example, you could make a play on things like underwear going missing and people only left with their pyjamas to wear, which would make it less scary for a younger audience.

There's a really strange story about the campsites in this area. It's so strange, I don't believe it myself. BUT, I will be zipping up the tent nice and tight tonight.

It all started to happen a few years ago. No one knows why it started, but it did.

Lots of people started complaining about their things being stolen at campsites in this area.

At first, the campsite owners didn't take it seriously. They just thought people were being careless and losing things.

It would be a pair of socks from one tent, some pants from another. Someone even said their lipstick went missing.

Over that summer though, it just kept happening over and over again.

The editor of a camping magazine got to hear about it from lots of readers writing letters complaining how bad this area had become for camping.

If I'm remembering correctly the editor's name was Cliff, and it just so happens that Cliff used to be a policeman, so he was very keen to get to the bottom of this.

He packed his tent, and set off for one of the campsites. I think it may have even been this campsite we're at now.

People always noticed that things were missing when they woke up in the morning. It was as if someone had entered their tent in the night and stole the most ridiculous of items (such as a pair of really smelly socks!).

Cliff's plan was simple. Stay up all night, sitting in the awning of his tent on look out (he had one of those Outwell tents with the panoramic windows!).

That night, hours passed. And then some more hours passed. Nothing. Nothing happened at all.

He stayed up all night but had not seen a single person acting suspiciously (...though he had seen quite a few people heading to the toilet block in the night!)

Campers were starting to get up now, and the smell of breakfast cooking was filling the air.

However, despite Cliff's all night watch, things had been stolen. Right under his nose.

A man in one tent said his underpants were missing. A boy had lost his shoes. And a woman in another tent said here bra was missing!

Cliff just couldn't understand it.

He needed more eyes. So he got a number of campers together and they agreed that they would all stay up that night to try and catch this burglar.

When nighttime came around for the second time, people were awake in nearly every tent in the campsite. Just lying quietly pretending to be asleep, and waiting to catch the thief.

The first few hours passed and nothing happened. Some of the campers had fallen asleep (or they were doing very good snoring impressions - Cliff couldn't tell, but suspected they were asleep).

[Scream]

A scream came from a tent just two down from Cliff. He ran over, along with several other campers.

The woman in the tent had said that someone was trying to unzip the front of her tent.

[Scream]

A set of screams this time. One of the Dads, who had run out to the first scream, realised it was from his family, and darted back to his tent faster than Usain Bolt.

They had seen a pair of hands - hairy hands - crawl into the tent and try to take one of their girl's trousers that had been left on the floor. (Top Tip kids: don't just dump your clothes on the floor!!).

"Whose hands? What did the person look like?" everyone asked.

"No one! There was no person! Just a pair of Horrible, Hairy, HANDS!" replied the family.

No one knew what to say to this.

Cliff wondered if the burglar had been wearing black, all over except for his hands, which is why the family hadn't seen him in the dark.

[Shout] "LOOK!" cried one of the campers, pointing back to Cliff's tent.

Cliff looked on in disbelief.

His trousers were slowly moving out from the door of his tent.

Slowly being dragged across the ground.

Dragged by a pair of Hairy Hands! [Wave your hands. The hairier the better ;-)]

Cliff stared with his mouth wide open as his trousers disappeared into the woods that surround this campsite.

“Right!” he said. “Who’s got torches?”

Only a few campers were brave enough to follow Cliff into the dark woods that night.

Cliff was additionally motivated: he was in his PJs and those were the only trousers he had brought with him!

However, after a few minutes in the woods, they all came back. There was no trace of the hairy hands. Nor Cliff’s trousers.

After breakfast, a big hunt started. The woods were full of campers searching through the trees and bushes.

You’ll never guess what they found.

In a small clearing in the woods, someone (or something), had made what looked like scarecrows out of twigs and branches, and these scarecrows were dressed in all the clothes that had been taken from the campsites.

It was a family of scarecrows. There was a Dad, a Mum, and what must have been 3 children scarecrows.

The scarecrows were quite well made actually. All except....well, they didn’t have any hands. They were also a little bit creepy.

We can only guess that it was the Hairy Hands who made the scarecrows. No one knows why. Perhaps the Hands was trying to make

the rest of the body. After all, it can't be easy just being a pair of hands. And perhaps, there's a whole family of Hairy Hands that lives in these woods.

This year the campsite owners got together, went down to the local charity shop, bought lots of clothes for the scarecrow family, and took them to the clearing in the woods. And so far, nothing has been taken from people's tents.

But just in case, remember to put your clothes away before bed and zip up the tent.

The Hairy Hands Story Outline:

- Strange things go missing from people's tents: clothes and items people would wear.
- An ex-policeman hears about it and goes to investigate.
- Nothing seen on first night, but things still get stolen.
- All campers keep watch on second night.
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The Witch's Prison

Scare Scale: Not very scary. There are some themes in this story that younger children may not understand, but you can easily adapt it for a younger audience. Fairy tale stuff with witches and wizards.

Inspiration for this story:

This is inspired by Mitchell's Fold and the legend that goes with it.

Story telling tips:

If you can, drop in the names of the locations of where you are camping. There's a castle in the story, so if there's a castle nearby then use that.

Do you know those big stone circles? You know, the ones like Stone Henge, only a lot smaller?

Not a lot of people realise that you can find these small stone circles all over the country. They're usually always in remote spots where no body lives.

Archaeologists, despite all their digging and scientific equipment, still don't know why these circles were built. Especially in these remote places.

Well, just up the road from this campsite is a stone circle known as the Witch's Prison.

When I was searching for this campsite on the Internet, I saw Witch's Prison on the map in that old writing they use when there's something ancient. So I looked it up and found that there's an old legend....about the very place we're staying in!

Back in the 1400 (that's over 600 years ago) there was a small village near here.

The villagers used to work all day, farming in the fields.

They were quite poor as they had to give half of all their food to the castle that used to be just up the road. That didn't leave them much to live on.

One year, when it had been a particularly bad harvest, things only got worse for the villagers.

The lord in the castle expected to receive the same amount of food despite the bad harvest. If he didn't receive the food, he would

send his soldiers to take all the men and boys, and force them to work in his mines.

Giving away their food at the time of a bad harvest meant the villagers had even less food than before.

Then, just when the villagers thought things were at their worst, one of the few cows they had went missing in the night. Then a pig. Then two sheep.

The pig was intended for the lord's mid-Winter feast he held every year in the castle, which left the villagers in a very difficult situation.

When the lord found out about the missing pig, he sent his soldiers to the village, thinking that someone in the village had hidden it, wanting to eat it for themselves.

The soldiers went through each house, smashing things and making a right mess. But they never found the pig. Nor the sheep. Nor the cow.

A rumour started to spread that it was probably the 'old woman' in the woods.

The 'old woman' never came into the village. She lived alone in a small cottage about a mile into the woods. They said she had magical powers, was mean, and no one ever went near where she lived.

The lord dispatched two of his soldiers to go and get the 'old woman'.

They never returned.

He sent two more soldiers. And yes, you guessed it.....They never returned.

Now the lord was getting very, very, angry.

He knew just what to do, and sent a soldier off to the 'Land of Dragons' with six pieces of gold.

After a few weeks the soldier returned with another person who didn't look like the sort of person that normally visited the lord in the castle.

He was dressed in a large hooded cloak made out of old brown and grey rags, and even though this man was tall, his cloak dragged along the ground behind him, as if it had been made for someone much taller.

But it wasn't the clothes that made this person stand out. Nor his long grey beard that flowed down to his waste. No, what really made him stand out was the tall stick he held.

This was no branch from a tree. It was said that when you first looked at it you saw carvings of creatures, but then when you looked again, it just looked like a stick. A very tall stick with knobbly bits on.

Whatever it was, it was very weird.

The lord sent the this man to the village, who asked the villagers to dig out of the ground twelve of the largest rocks they could find. Each rock had to be bigger than a fully grown man.

This was Winter and the the villagers stomachs were grumbling from hunger, so digging large rocks out of the cold ground wasn't very pleasant, but they didn't have any choice in the matter.

Gradually, one by one, the villagers dug out 12 massive rocks.

The tall cloaked visitor asked the villagers to place the rocks in a circle.

Then he set off into the forest to find the witch.

That night there was a terrible storm. Thunder rumbled, lightening flashed, rain gushed, and the wind roared.

This was mid-Winter and it was the longest night of the year, known as the 'Winter Solstice'.

When the villagers awoke the next morning, there was a new thirteenth stone, much smaller than the others, standing right in the middle of the stone circle they had created.

And guess what? This new stone sort of looked a bit like an old woman. An old witch to be more precise.

The mysterious stranger from the Land of Dragons told the villagers to never remove the stone in the middle of the circle, and if they did that, the witch would never bother them again.

With that, he set off back to the land he came from.

So, now we know why the stone circle down the road is called the Witch's Prison.

The thing is, when I checked on Google Maps satellite photo, there was only twelve stones.

It looked like someone had removed the one in the middle...

[Feel free to cackle loudly at this point!]

The Witch's Prison Story Outline:

- Introduce stone circles and mention one called Witch's Prison
- Mention about the old village. Giving food to castle. Not much food.
- Mention the animals disappearing and the lord getting angry.
- Soldiers don't return. Lord sends for a Wizard.
- Wizard gets the villagers to build stone circle.
- Wizard goes after witch. Big storm at night. In morning a new stone in middle of circle.
- Stone circle there today....but not the middle stone!

The Giant's Cave

Scare Scale: This story is not that scary, and can easily be toned down. Based on a fairy tale.

Inspiration for this story:

There's a hidden cave in the Shropshire Hills called the Giant's Cave. There's also another, but smaller cave, on the side of Caer Caradoc.

And of course, the giant from Jack and the Beanstalk.

Story telling tips: This is a nice short story with a bit of a fairy tale twist. Adjust to make more or less scary as you see fit, and change the location to somewhere your family may know about.

Imagine walking up on the hills near here, but getting lost. With the sun setting and the rain pouring, you are fortunate enough to stumble across a cave.

Normally, finding a cave - or anywhere to shelter - would be good news in these conditions. But not one particular cave.

Not, the Giant's Cave.

Legend has it that a long time ago, back when there were knights, a giant used to live in this cave.

Now I don't believe he was a massive giant, like the one in the fairy tale 'Jack and the Bean Stalk'. That would be silly.however, it is believed that the giant in that story may have been based on the one in this cave, as this giant, ate people. Apparently, his favourite type of 'people' to eat, were children.

Don't worry though. That was a long time ago. The giant must be long dead by now, and the cave was searched only a few years ago when some walkers went missing.

That was a strange event.

A couple on a walking holiday went out for a stroll up the hills after having lunch in the pub. Unfortunately, that afternoon, a bad storm came in.

When the couple didn't return to where they were staying that evening, the police were called. The police called the local mountain rescue team.

It was nearly midnight when the rescue team received the emergency phone call to go out, and the rain was still lashing down.

They searched the hill for hours, walking up the paths, searching with torches, and calling the couple.

The team had a rescue dog. Rescue dogs are often much better at finding lost people than humans. Their dog would run ahead on the trail, sniffing for signs of the missing couple as it went. Normally, if the rescue dog found something, it would come running back, barking at the rescuers to come and follow him.

This time though, as they approached the area of the hill with the Giant's Cave, the dog came running back whimpering, and refused to go any further.

This was very strange, and if anything, made the rescuers more concerned that something was up.

They headed up the steep path to the giant's cave shining their torches. The cave was just a black hole in the side of the hill. Their torches could not light inside the cave from where they were standing on the path.

Finally, they reached the cave, calling the names of the couple. No reply.

However, it was clear the couple had been there as they had left a rucksack. The rescuers could tell it belonged to the couple as the bag contained their driving license, along with money and other items the couple would need.

That was a strange thing to leave behind. It was also strange that the couple would leave the shelter of the cave in such bad weather. They could have easily stayed there until the morning.

The mountain rescue team continued to search the hillside all night.

The couple were never found.

The next day the forensic unit from the police searched the cave for clues.

They found no trace of the couple....but they did find something.

Underneath the dirt at the back of the cave they found lots and lots of bones. A few were sheep bones but it was mainly bones of people. Mainly bones of children.

Don't worry, they didn't find the bones of the couple. These bones were old. Old enough to be from the time when knights rode the land. So perhaps, there was some truth to the old story.

The couple never returned to the B&B to collect their things, never collected their car, never returned to their home. They disappeared without a trace and have never been seen since.

The police asked the local sheep farmers for help, and do you know what the farmers told them? They never let their sheep go on that hill as the sheep keep disappearing, and what's more, the farmers never go onto that hill at night. Never. And never go into the cave. It's something their father told them, and his father before that. It's been passed down from generation to generation, right back from the time of knights, to never go near the Giant's Cave, and ALWAYS stay away from that hill at night.

Story outline for the Giant's Cave.

- A couple go for a walk on the hills. The weather turns bad. The couple don't return.
- Search and rescue are called out. Find couple's things in cave.
- Cave called the Giant's Cave. Legend that a giant once lived there and liked to eat children.
- Police search the cave and find lots of bones from a long time ago. Some are bones of children.
- Couple are never found.

The UFO Crash Site

Scare Scale: Some kids will find this a bit scary. For younger kids it maybe too much, so use your judgement. You can easily adapt the story to make it more or less scary.

Inspiration for this story:

Well....lots of UFO crash stories. Think of it as camping at Roswell with ET.

Story telling tips:

This story is a little longer. Have a read through then use the Story Outline to help remember when telling.

Tell this as if from memory. There's places to pause, whisper, and make lots of noises to make people jump.

As you probably know, I used to come camping here when I was a boy.

Not this campsite though, one on that other hill, over there.

You can't camp there now. Not since the [whisper] UFO crash.

[Pause]

One summer we came this way for our usual camping trip.

We camped here every year. Sometimes just a few days, sometimes a week.

It was a fantastic spot. It had a stream, a lake with a rope swing and canoe, forests to explore, and of course the hills.

It all ended one summer, and we started coming here instead. We've never been back to that campsite. You can't go there now.

That summer, we were driving through the valley to the campsite, when we spotted black smoke rising in the sky.

It was coming from where the campsite was and we were worried there was some sort of forest fire.

As we got close to the lane that went up to the campsite the police had blocked the road and told my Dad that the road was closed and we wouldn't be able to get to the campsite.

The policeman didn't know why, just that he had been given orders to keep people away as it was too dangerous.

We backtracked a little and took another lane which took us to this campsite, which we're in now.

You can't see now it's dark, but from this campsite you can see right across the valley to where the other campsite was.

That evening we could see flashing lights, lights searching for things, and the sound of engines. It went on all night.

That was the worst night's sleep I've had when camping in my entire life. Well, I say 'sleep', but we didn't sleep at all.

It wasn't just the sound of the engines and people shouting, but the other strange things.

Ourselves and the other campers weren't sitting around our campfires as usual, but had instead turned our chairs to watch the action on the other hill.

The first bizarre thing was the rumble of hoofs heading towards us.

The strange thing was, we just sat there looking at each other with puzzled expressions, wondering what the noise was.

Suddenly out of the bushes sprang hundreds of wild deer. They were running as fast as they could away from the other hill.

I'm surprised no one got hurt, as the deer were all around us. Some deer even jumped over small tents.

About 10 minutes after the deer had come charging through camp, we noticed a lot of smaller creatures. Rabbits and squirrels, all running the same direction as the deer - away from that other hill.

Nothing much happened after that for about an hour, and just as my brother and I were about to go to bed, all the lights went off on the other side of the hill. It went deadly quiet.

[Pause]

Then, it was just possible to make out a red glow coming through the trees. It gradually got brighter. You could see it reflecting off the lake where we used to play.

Then came the noises.

[Shriek if you wish]

That was sort of the sound. I can't do it exactly. It was sort of a high pitched squeal.

The noise was followed by gun shots and a lot of shouting, and the red glow stopped. All the lights and engines started up again on the other side of the hill.

We waited for another few hours. It was nearly dawn.

The lights and engine noises had continued on the other hill, and nothing much appeared to be happening.

Then we heard what sounded like someone walking through the woods next to our camp. The undeniable sound of twigs breaking.

Everyone looked at one another, wondering what animals would come through our camp this time. [Whisper] We all sat as quiet as we could, listening as hard as we could for any sound that might tell us what it was.

[Shriek]

As the noise rang out all of the campers, grown ups and kids, all stood up and started shouting and running for their tents.

It was the sort of sound that sent shivers down your spine and caused your legs to run without even thinking about it.

There we lay, listening quietly, until the sun came up.

[Pause]

The talk at the campsite the next morning was on nothing but the night before.

Of course, all the Dad's didn't mention how they screamed like little girls and ran into their tents!

We could no longer hear machines on the other hill, and it didn't look like anyone was up there either.

But what you could see was a big circle shaped hole in the forest, right next to the campsite. A little bit of smoke was still rising.

A group of us walked down to the road, and the police cars were still there.

This time though signs were up saying 'Bio Hazard' and 'Chemical Spill'.

The area has been closed off ever since.

We never found out what happened exactly. We packed up the next morning and went home. However, we did come back the next year. By then the story had been in the newspapers. Some papers were calling it a UFO crash.

The campsite owner warned us not to go up there. He had been told by some government officials in black suits that it was very very dangerous.

A few years later some kids went missing up there. Their mum found a note saying they were going to see where the UFO crashed, and were never seen again.

The search and rescue service wasn't even allowed to go there to look for them.

There's been a few other stories as well, and a couple summers ago someone saw a creature in the woods behind us. Apparently it gave out a shriek that sounds very similar to the sound I heard.

Since then, this hasn't been a popular spot with campers, but we keep coming back. There's always plenty of space to camp here. Just don't go wandering off in the woods...

Story Outline:

- Recall how you used to camp near here as a kid, but one year it was closed
- You went to a nearby campsite and could see activity going on at your usual campsite.
- Strange noises (remember to make some), animals running away from other campsite. A red glow.
- Noises got close to this campsite.
- All gone the next day.
- Rumours of a UFO crash.

The Ape in the Woods

Scare Scale: For older children you can make the ape as scary as you like. There's also plenty of spaces to make people jump. For younger children you will need to adapt the story quite a bit...depending on your kids of course.

Inspiration for this story:

Big Foot. Sasquatch.

Story telling tips:

Make the roars loud!

Did I ever tell you about the time I went camping in America and met the legendary 'Big Foot'?

This was a long time ago, not long after I finished college. I went on one of these organised tours of the US where you get to see the Grand Canyon, Monument Valley, and the giant redwoods of the Sierra mountains.

One of the highlights of the trip was a camping trip deep into the forests of the Sierra Mountains. You know me, I love camping, and this was going to be the best bit of the trip.

We visited a town called Mammoth Lakes, which is actually a ski resort in winter, but we were there in summer. We stopped off to get supplies for the trip, and this is where our tour company hired tents and all the camping equipment, then we set off down a dirt track.

It must have been about two hours down this track. Bump after bump after bump.

When we finally parked up, there was a 10 minute walk to the camping area. It wasn't a campsite like we're used to; just an area set aside for people to camp in. No toilets. Nothing.

As this was a remote place to camp we had to hang our food high up in a tree far away from where we were sleeping, just in case a bear came looking for the food. There were mountain lions in the area too.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, we never saw any bears, nor mountain lions. What we did see though, you won't find in any nature books.

It was starting to get dark and we were all huddled around the campfire, chatting away, when there was a loud crack and crash in the woods just behind us. It sounded like a tree had snapped and come crashing to the ground.

This can happen sometimes: branches regularly fall off some types of trees, which is why you don't camp under them. But this was a pine forest where that shouldn't happen. There was no wind at the time that could have blown the tree over.

Needless to say we were all spooked by the noise, but after a moment, we just shrugged it off as 'one of those things' and continued chatting.

Then a little stone landed next to us. That's odd we thought.

Then a larger stone was thrown, which came down with a thud very close to where I was sitting.

The group leader, who had a rifle, took a quick count of the group and realised everyone was around the campfire, stood up and shouted "Who's there? You can stop with the pranks now." And he pointed the rifle at the woods.

Thud! Another large stone was thrown out from the dark forest and landed in the earth just two feet from the leader.

This was a big stone. It would have to be someone very strong to throw such a big rock that so far.

Then there was silence.

ROAAARRR!

It was the loudest, meanest, scariest scream I had ever heard.

It somehow managed to be high pitched and deep at the same time. You could feel it shake in your bones, just like when you stand too close to a very loud speaker.

None of us moved. None of us made a sound.

“Look!” cried another member of the group, pointing into the dark forest.

We all peered into the gloom, and after a moment, our eyes adjusted to the darkness to see two glowing red eyes staring back at us. Then they’d disappear. Then reappear.

Whoever, or whatever, owned those eyes was playing peek-a-boo from behind a very large tree trunk.

At this point the group leader started to signal with his hands for us to move back.

Without taking his gaze off the glowing eyes he stammered “OK, guys. We’re going to walk very slowly back down the track. Don’t worry about your things.”

We all got up slowly, and started walking backwards, quietly in the direction of the track that we had walked up only a few hours before.

“They’ve disappeared! They eyes. They’ve gone”

We all looked at one another, not sure if it was a good thing or a bad thing.

Then we heard the crashing of breaking branches. Then boom, and another boom, quickly followed by another boom. It sounded like a giant had just started running.

ROOAAAARRRRRR!

The roar again, and then, from out of the forest was this humongous silhouette, that looked like it was an escaped mad-scientist experiment to cross a very large man with a very large gorilla. And it was very angry too.

We all screamed and ran down the trail as fast as we could.

When we reached our truck, we all piled in and headed back to town as fast as the truck would go.

The dirt road that had taken two hours to drive up before, only took us 10 minutes to get back to town; we were going that fast. And those 10 minutes felt like a very long time.

At breakfast in the diner the next morning, the old man working the grill had said “we had an encounter with a genuine big foot”.

The hire company who rented us the camping gear wasn't so convinced. They had to send someone up there to fetch all the gear, and our belongings, and said everything had been trashed, clearly thinking we had done it.

We all lost some deposit money because of that, but none of us cared. We were just glad to have gotten out of there alive.

Story outline for the Ape in the Woods

- You went with a group camping in the Sierra mountains in the USA.
- Remote campsite. Precautions with bears.
- Chatting around campfire. Sound of falling tree.
- Stones thrown.
- Roar.
- Glowing red eyes.
- Ape charges.
- You all escape back to town.

The Secret Military Base

Scare Scale: This one is definitely for older children.

Inspiration for this story:

If you've done much hill walking in remote places you will occasionally come across some old military establishment. Some remains from WW2, others are more recent.

This takes one of these remote abandoned bases and adds a bit of a horror-movie style plot.

Story telling tips:

This is a longer story but if you've watched many a scary movie, the theme is easy to remember.

Adjust places and characters to be more meaningful to your family.

If you think it too scary for your kids, try taking out the 'ghosts' and strange 'equipment'.

Back when I was a bit younger, I went hiking with a group of friends across Dartmoor.

Now Dartmoor can be an unforgiving place at times. You can be having a nice walk on a beautiful sunny day, admiring the miles and miles of moorland, when the weather can suddenly change, bringing strong cold winds and rain - and there's very little shelter.

We found ourselves in just that position.

It was a beautiful sunny day. We were going on a hike. We had a map. Knew the route. It was going to be great.

After a few hours though the sky started to darken. The clouds were so thick it was almost as dark as night.

We were prepared though. We had our waterproofs. So we put them on and continued with our walk.

Then, as expected, the heavens opened. Some of the largest raindrops I've ever seen started belting down on us.

After about half an hour of this, we weren't enjoying the walk anymore. Our waterproofs, as we found out, weren't that waterproof either.

"Look" shouted Ray, pointing to the other hill.

We could just make out the tops of some buildings.

"Let's go over there. There must be some place to get out of this rain."

We quickened our pace and head off for the distant buildings.

As we got closer though, it became apparent that these buildings weren't in the best of shape.

Windows were smashed or missing altogether. Doors hanging off their hinges. Bits of roof dangling down over the front of buildings.

Even in this gloomy light, the buildings looked gloomier still.

Surrounding the buildings was an old metal chain link fence with signs saying "Danger! Keep Out!"

We stopped. "Do we really want to go in there?" I asked the others.

"Come on!" said Ian, another member of our group. "It's abandoned. They'll be nothing dangerous in there anymore. Besides, I don't know about you lot, but I'm soaked and need to get out of this rain."

Ian set off towards a hole in the fence. We were all soaked; so we followed.

The first set of buildings had no roofs any more, and didn't look that dry. They looked like old garages, perhaps where vehicles were once kept.

We carried on following a line of buildings until we came across a concrete pill box. These are machine gun emplacements used to guard military buildings.

"Guys, this looks like an old military base" said Ray.

We carried on past the pill box and into a courtyard, and stopped.

There in front of us was a tall concrete tower, surrounded by a deep concrete ditch. The only way in was over an old rusty metal bridge. The tower door was open but it was dark inside as there were only a couple of windows on each floor.

The place didn't look very inviting. It did look dry though.

"Come on!" cried Ian again, and headed off over the bridge, with his footsteps clanking on the metal floor and echoing around the courtyard.

With all that noise, if anyone was here, they'd know we were here too.

Ian disappeared inside the tower. We followed.

Inside it was dark. We all had head torches so we fetched them out of our backpacks and put them on.

We stood in silence for a moment.

There was no sound inside the tower except for the occasional drip of water. Outside the rain was still belting it down.

"While were here, let's explore this place" said Ian. Both Ray and I looked at each other and weren't so sure.

The tower had a simple layout. In the middle was a metal spiral stair case.

Off the stair case there were corridors going north, east, south, and west. At the end of each corridor was a small window.

Off the corridors were doorways, into what must have been rooms. The doorways were just dark black openings, as the rooms didn't have any windows.

"What was this place?" Ray asked to himself.

We explored the rooms on the ground floor. All boring stuff really. A few desks, a few chairs, and a few empty filing cabinets.

"Let's go upstairs" said Ian. Why was he so keen to explore this place?

We walked up the spiral staircase to the next floor. Our steps echoed throughout the building.

On this floor there was broken glass everywhere. It also appeared to be a lot darker, and the beams from our head torches didn't light up anywhere near as much.

And it was colder too. We could see our breath in the torch light.

And it smelt. Damp, mouldy, and frankly, like something was rotting.

We took the north corridor and went into the first room.

In the middle of the room was an old metal bed. No mattress. But it did have handcuffs in each corner. Not nice we thought.

In the next room was a large metal cage. Nothing else.

And in the final room of the corridor is what looked like an operating theatre.

“Perhaps this was a hospital?” I said hopefully. The other two just gave me a wry smile.

BANG, BANG.

Two bangs echoed around the building. The same echoing bangs as our feet had made on the spiral staircase.

A cold chill ran down my spine. We all froze to the spot, listening intently, but there were no more steps. Just the two bangs.

As quietly as possible we walked back to the spiral stair case. We peered down slowly.

Phew - nothing there. Perhaps it was just a bit of debris falling.

We then peered upwards.

There were a few more floors above us and our torch light could not reach all the way up....but...could we see the underside of some boots on the stairs just a few floors above us?

“Whose there?” shouted Ian. Clearly the braver of us, as both Ray and I looked at him as if to say “what did you want do to that for?”

There was no reply of course.

CRASH. CRASH. CRASH.

This time not from the staircase. This sounded like something was shaking the bars on the cage in the room we had come from just moments before.

Ian, who perhaps wasn't that brave after all, was the first to start running back down the staircase. Then Ray. Then me. At the back. Great!

When we got to the front door we were pleased to find it was open, but the metal bridge had been pulled up like a drawbridge... from the other side. It looked like this tower's defences were made to stop people (or things) from getting out, and not to stop people getting in, as there was no way we could reach the drawbridge to lower it.

"What are we going to do now?" said Ian.

"The climbing ropes. Quick!" said Ray.

BANG. BANG.

Another two steps on the staircase.

Ray had just passed his climbing instructor exam, and had brought some climbing gear, just in case he got the chance to climb.

The bridge was about 12 feet away. The concrete moat had started filling with water. Not a lot. But it was about 12 feet down to the water.

The water couldn't have been more than a few inches deep, but there was no way of knowing for sure.

BANG. BANG.

The steps were definitely getting closer.

Ray fumbled in his bag but eventually got the climbing rope out. There was about 20 feet of line. Not much, but enough.

GROOOAAAAN.

A moaning sound echoed throughout the building. Looking back it sort of sounds like a cheesy horror movie, but at the time it sounded far too real.

Ray tied a slip not on the rope and we abseiled down. No time for harnesses. This was freestyle.

Fortunately the water was only a few inches deep, but it was starting to rise. And rising fast.

There were no footholds to climb out of the moat.

"What are we going to do now?" Ian asked, staring up from the bottom of the moat.

"I've got an idea" replied Ray as he eyed the walls of the moat.

Ray slipped the rope from the tower, pulled out a climbing harness from his bag, and tied it to the end of the rope. He then clipped on a bunch of karabiners to the harness.

"Stand back" demanded Ray, and he started to swing the harness up towards the bridge.

It fell back in the water. He tried again. Fell. Tried again - and the leg loop of the harness caught a pole on the metal railing.

"That should hold us. Let's get out of here" he said.

Climbing that rope wasn't easy. It was soaking wet.

With every heave it felt like the tower was staring at you menacingly, as if the building could be capable of hating.

Eventually we made it to the top of the moat.

We all stood in the courtyard facing the building. We never said a word. All you could hear was the rain thundering down around us.

Our eyes fixed on the doorway, trying to peer into that dark blackness.

I swear you could just make out a face staring back, with deep dark eyes as black as the darkness of the tower.

We felt safe though. Whatever was in that building, was on the other side of the moat, with no way to get across to us.

As one, we started to walk slowly backwards from the tower.

Creeeeeeeeaaaak CRASH!

The drawbridge came creaking down with an almighty crash. Now, whatever was in there, could easily get to us.

We darted back to the hole in the fence, and didn't stop running for over 10 miles, until we reached the outskirts of the village we were staying in. Only then did the rain stop, the clouds parted, and the sun started to shine again.

It was a relief and strange to be back in civilisation, seeing people going about their normal business.

That night in the pub we never said a word. I don't think any of us had really come to terms with it.

Ian got out the map. We all stared at our route.

There was no buildings, no military base, and no tower marked on the map. I've never been back to Dartmoor since.

The Secret Military Base story outline

- You were out hiking in Dartmoor (or adjust to any remote place)
- The it started to rain hard but spotted some distant buildings for shelter.
- Turned out to be an abandoned military base.
- There was a tower surrounded by a moat in the centre of the base.
- Inside it is dark. Strange medical / scientific things in rooms.
- Sound of footsteps. See feet coming down stairs.
- Crash in rooms.
- Escape but drawbridge up.
- Climb into moat, which is filling with water, and climb out other side.
- Drawbridge comes down with a crash.
- Run for your lives!

About the Author

Gav is a father of 3 who likes getting out and about on adventures with his family.

He founded the website www.GetOutWithTheKids.co.uk with his wife Shell. The website is dedicated to helping other parents enjoy the outdoors with their kids.



If your family enjoyed any of the campfire stories in this book, or if it has inspired you to create your own, please pass a copy onto any other parents who may also find it useful.

Cheers,

Gav