

## Rendezvous at Jumbo Pass: a twisted tale of wilderness survival

The cabin appears in the distance, nestled beside a half-frozen pond. It's a scene from an old-fashioned Christmas card—except the cabin's chimney pipe shows no smoke.



“Looks like we’re the first ones here,” I say to Matt. I check my watch again.

My companion bends forward with the weight of his pack. He rests his hands on his knees, catching his breath. “Yeah—what time is it?”

“Twenty past three.”

“Well, we’re behind schedule from losing our trail. They could have had the same trouble on the other side.”

“Yeah; or maybe they got a late start.”

Matt turns his eyes from me toward the cabin. Sweat generated from our last steep climb up the scree slope drips from his limp, wet mustache.

I start to shiver. It’s the end of June, but at six thousand feet, a sweating body cools quickly. “Maybe they’re already in the cabin and there’s no wood; or they just got there and haven’t lit a fire yet.”

We trudge on through wet, foot-deep snow to the cabin. A couple of wooden steps at the entrance are falling apart; otherwise, the rustic structure appears stoutly built, with walls of rough planks supported by a stone foundation.

I push open the creaking door; wind whips into the single room. The cabin is well equipped, for all its remoteness. A neat pile of split firewood sits stacked beside a little stove. I notice plenty of blankets, sleeping bags, and spare shoes on a drying rack overhead, and four built-in bunks complete with foam mattresses. In the kitchen

cupboards we find matches, toilet paper, tea, cocoa, soup packets, and a bag of rice, along with a portable camp stove and fuel, cookware, and dishes.

Matt unlaces his wet boots and suggests we start a fire to dry our clothes and heat water for tea. Anxious for the arrival of the other party, I tell him to go ahead; I'll scout around to see if I can see or hear a sign of their approach. He tries to reassure me that they're probably just running late. I leave him to the stove and take off, with map in hand, for the



end of the ridge, calling out and peering down into the dim vastness of the Tumbler Creek drainage.

There is no response to my shouts in the empty wind. Far down the mountainside, the creek streams out from its source ice fields and winds away beyond my sight. Somewhere in the labyrinth of trees and ridges, a trail runs along the slope, veering up for a final ascent to the pass. My wife Faron and three-year-old daughter Suze are now over half an hour late for our long-planned rendezvous at Mirror Pass. There I

stand, hearing the echo of my shouts and gazing at the wilderness, its beauty so desolate and incomplete.