

Life aims kept lost hiker alive

Melbourne
Age?
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HOBART — A hiker who was rescued on Tasmania's Cradle Mountain said yesterday he stayed alive by thinking of all the things he wanted to do.

"I was cold, wet, hungry and very tired," said Robert Bignall, who was found late on Wednesday night sheltering in a cave near the top of the peak.

"But I thought of all the things I still wanted to do in life, and I made up my mind I was not going to die," he said.

Mr Bignall, 36, said that the chance find of a packet of firefighters could have saved his life.

He used the fire lighters, which he picked up near Kitchen Hut, to start a small blaze that dried his clothes.

He said he left a trail for rescuers by placing arrows in the ground with his initials scratched into the earth.

And from the summit of the mountain to the cave where he took shelter, he left a trail of notes under the rocks.

Mr Bignall, a freelance photographer from Abermaine, NSW, was reported missing on Wednesday afternoon when he failed to return from a one-day walking trip.

He had left the Cradle Mountain national park ranger's office on Tuesday morning after telling the ranger the route he planned to follow.

Yesterday, as he tasted his first meal for many hours, Mr Bignall said he could not find the track leading down from the mountain.

He descended about 400 m in several vain bids to find a path down, but each time had to climb back to the summit, he said.

"I realised I was lost so I sat down and had a think on how I could survive the night."

Mr Bignall said he found a couple of dead tree branches and gathered them to make a fire.

And while gathering wood, he found the cave.

"It was about 150 m from the summit, with a small opening just big enough for me to stand up inside," he said.

"During the night I dried my clothes because I knew if I didn't I would die.

"I bedded down, but it was so cold that every half hour I had to get up and walk around to get my circulation going again."

The head ranger of the national park, Mr Oliver Vaughan, and a State Emergency Service officer, Mr Paul Darby, found Mr Bignall about 11.45 p.m. on Wednesday.

Mr Bignall said he thought he was lost because the track from the summit was not clearly marked.

Mr Vaughan said more snow poles would now be dropped on the summit.