

I DIDN'T HAVE THIS BOOK WHEN I WAS A BOY



IN THIS AGE OF video games and cell phones, there must still be a place for knots, tree houses, and stories of incredible courage. The one thing that we always say about childhood is that we seemed to have more time back then. This book will help you recapture those Sunday afternoons and long summers—because they're still long if you know how to look at them.

Boyhood is all about curiosity, and men and boys can enjoy stories of Scott of the Antarctic and Joe Simpson in *Touching the Void* as much as they can raid a shed for the bits to make an electromagnet, or grow a crystal, build a go-cart, and learn how to find north in the dark. You'll find famous battles in these pages, insects and dinosaurs—as well as essential Shakespeare quotes, how to cut flint heads for a bow and arrow, and instructions on making the best paper airplane in the world.

How do latitude and longitude work? How do you make secret ink, or send the cipher that Julius Caesar used with his generals? You'll find the answers inside. It was written by two men who would have given away the cat to get this book when they were young. It wasn't a particularly nice cat. Why did we write it now? Because these things are important still and we wished we knew them better. There are few things as satisfying as tying a decent bowline knot when someone needs a loop, or simply knowing what happened at Gettysburg and the Alamo. The tales must be told and retold, or the memories slowly die.

The stories of courage can be read as simple adventures—or perhaps as inspiration, examples of extraordinary acts by ordinary people. Since we wrote them, it's been a great deal harder to hop about and curse when one of us stubs a toe. If you read Douglas Bader's chapter, you'll see why. They're not just cracking stories, they're part of a culture, a part we really don't want to see vanish.

Is it old-fashioned? Well, that depends. Men and boys today are the same as they always were, and interested in the same things. They may conquer different worlds when they grow up, but they'll still want these stories for themselves and for their sons. We hope in years to come that this will be a book to dig out of the attic and give to a couple of kids staring at a pile of wood and wondering what to do with it.

When you're a man, you realize that everything changes, but when you're a boy, you know different. The camp you make today will be there forever. You want to learn coin tricks and how to play poker because you never know when the skills will come in handy. You want to be self-sufficient and find your way by the stars. Perhaps for those who come after us, you want to reach them. Well, why not? Why *not*?

Conn Iggulden and Hal Iggulden