

## We are stronger than we know

Some people choose to do incredible things because they want to break a record or test their own limits. For others, such unbelievable moments happen due to misfortune, the nature of their job, or coincidence.



Roy Cleveland Sullivan used to be a ranger in the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia. Between the ages of 30 and 65, he was struck by lightning seven times, and survived. Although it is very rare that a single person is struck by lightning even twice in their lives, Mr Sullivan worked at a place where thunderstorms are very common. He was not a happy man, however, because people avoided him, being afraid that they would get hit by a lightning if they were too close.



The longest tennis match that two people ever had to play happened at Wimbledon in 2010. American John Isner and Frenchman Nicolas Mahut needed 11 hours and 5 minutes, or seven matches and 183 games, to determine the winner. It was so long that even the scoreboard stopped working, and had to be fixed twice, because it couldn't show more than 50 points. The game ended with the score of 70–68 for Mr. Isner. The two men became close friends afterwards.



Juliane Koepcke, a German born in Peru, was 17 years old in 1971, when a lightning struck the airplane she was on. After the plane had fallen into the Amazon 3 kilometres below, she was the only one who survived. The trees and her seat softened the fall. Luckily, she was familiar with the jungle, because her parents had a research station there. Despite the broken collarbone and an injured arm, she walked down the river for ten days. Finally, she found a boat where she could rest. The owners discovered and rescued her.



Valeri Polyakov is a former Russian astronaut, who spent the most uninterrupted time in space: 438 consecutive days! Between 1994 and 1995, he lived on the Mir space station to learn how our bodies might react to the long time period it would take to get to Mars. Amazingly, after over a year in space, Mr. Polyakov managed to walk out of the craft on his own two feet. He was both physically and mentally sound after the voyage.



Poon Lim was a Chinese sailor who survived 122 days in the Atlantic Ocean. After the Germans had sunk his ship in 1942, Mr. Lim found a small wooden raft which had several tins of biscuits, some chocolate and sugar, forty litres of water, a couple of flares, smoke pots, and a flashlight. With only these things he kept himself alive until Brazilian fishermen saved him. He gathered more water with canvas from a life jacket and fished with the help of a hook he made from a nail. The most amazing thing is that Mr Lim could not swim: He had to tie himself so he would not drown.

### Research online and discuss:

- 1) What was life like for the people mentioned before the events in the text?
- 2) What did they do after their feats?
- 3) How did they spend their lives?
- 4) How many are still alive today?
- 5) Which of these things do you think you could manage?
- 6) What other incredible things have people managed to do, or survive?
- 7) Share a story of someone you know that has done a difficult thing.