PRINCIPLE
SURVIVAL
TECHNIQUES

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Principle Survival Techniques
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Introduction

Whether you're backpacking out in the wilderness, rafting down a raging river, climbing a treacherous mountain, hunting in a national forest, or any other number of outdoor activities that may place you out of the immediate reach of outside help - it's highly important to know the key aspects of survival in order to bring you or your loved ones home. The last thing you want to do is get caught with your pants down, so to speak, when it comes to dealing with the challenges of Mother Nature. One key issue that people tend to have when they're out in the bush is underestimating Mother Earth. As the old motherly saying goes "I brought you into this world, I can take you out of it!" Though certainly it's inevitable that some day our time will come, using some of the aspects presented in this manual can mean the difference between getting home safely and an early grave.

Being aware of the inherent risks involved with nature is of utmost importance when it comes to embarking on your outdoor quests. From the smallest of adventures to the more grand undertakings you can never be too careful. Activities as simple as paddling down a river with your friends or as complicated as climbing Pikes Peak with minimal equipment can go from good to death quicker than you can snap a finger with but the smallest of changes in environmental factors. You could find your boat capsizing miles away from the nearest road or Ranger Station, forcing you to spend a night or two in the wild awaiting rescue. Or you could find yourself stranded atop a ridge line, having lost all sense of direction and ability to return to your personal vehicle. These kinds of situations happen all too often, and it's up to you to decide whether or not you're going to stand up and fight or lay down and let yourself become another statistic. Allow the following information to give you some insight into some techniques you can conduct in order to maximize your chances of survival in almost any situation!
Table of Contents

1. Introduction

2. Survivor Mentality

3. Why Survive? The Key of Knowledge

4. The Principles of Patrol- How They Apply

5. The Essentials

6. Useful Tools

7. Final Thoughts
Survivor Mentality

Have you ever gotten that funny feeling standing on the edge of a cliff? Like when you feel the hair raise on the back of your spine? A stirring tingles in your skin and you’re fully aware of the fact that one misstep could send you plummeting down to your early doom. Or when you get that uncanny notion that someone is watching you as you hike through the woods unarmed on an outdoor stroll. That’s your survival mentality kicking in.

Built into every human is an almost sixth sense. It's a fierce will to survive, and it's been cultivated within us for tens of thousands of years since before the dawn of organized civilizations. Since the time of the caveman in fact. Every animal is gifted with this sense of survival to some degree, but what sets humanity apart from animals is our ability to hone in on that sense and turn what we feel and observe into concrete laws. This kind of advantage has given humanity the edge we've needed to rise to the top of the food chain, and cheat the laws of life and death themselves!

When you get these kinds of feelings, it’s for a very good reason. There are numerous threats out there to take into consideration, and you do it subconsciously throughout your day to day activities. Seemingly anything can happen at any time. Life is a constant battle, and death looms with ever present consistency with every step you take. Not only do flora and fauna relentlessly battle to rise to the top of the food chain and ensure their own survival, but Mother Nature herself is also constantly cleansing the planet of over population in order to maintain the balance.
However, as random as it all may seem, there is a method to the madness.

Though life be a game of chance, there are many things one can do to help ensure their ability to do what we're meant to do on this planet. Sometimes things just boil down to bad luck, and there's nothing that can be done to halt the inevitable. The Earth could quite literally open up and swallow you at any moment, however, that's not what we're going to touch on in this, because those kinds of things are beyond our control. For the purpose of remaining effective we'll take that reality, log it down in our minds, and move forward with preventative measures that actually matter. Just keep that fact in mind and it will increase your situational awareness toward pretty much everything. Paranoia is what separates the statistics from the stand-ups. The ability to balance your level of paranoia with your level of comfort is a crucial key to staying alive. Knowing the risks inherent in different situations while also staying calm and calculated is the big objective. Cultivate the survivor mentality within you and you will prevail.

![SPC Ryan Kennedy sleeps in kit during a mortar attack on FOB Wilson, Afghanistan 2009. A prime example of “Embracing the suck”](image)

Before you even delve into the many rules of survival one rule stands out above the rest. Embrace the suck. This is a military mantra coined fairly recently, gaining popularity during Operation Iraqi Freedom. This term has become a time honored tradition among what has now become a multi-generational group of soldiers and sailors. Embracing the suck means accepting the hardships you're enduring and moving forward, keeping your mind focused on your needs rather than your simple wants. It has helped keep men and women focused on the mission at hand when everything seems to be working against them.

Knowing how to keep yourself alive through the harsh conditions that you may come across is absolutely crucial. It's eating food that you would never consider in normal conditions. It's getting into a naked group huddle to conserve warmth and throwing aside all notions of privacy. It's piling into the deepest hole you can find to keep the wind off your soaking wet body. Furthermore, it's doing this all while maintaining awareness of all the other bad things that can happen when you're most vulnerable, and it's doing it with a smile on your face.
Attitude is a major factor in survival, and having a good attitude will keep your mind honed in on the elements that will play the biggest role in keeping you and your loved ones safe.

Why Survive? The Key of Knowledge

Survival isn't all fun and games. To be truthful it can be an abrasive and bitter affair. It can be the most harrowing and painful journey of your life, or it can be as simple as spending a harmless but creepy night out by yourself in the wilderness. It all depends on what conditions nature has supplied you with.

Staying alive comes in many different forms, and none of them are pleasant when the comforts of a first-world life are taken away from us. The fact of the matter is it's in our nature to eke out a living no matter how low our standard of living has become. The more in tune we are with the austere, bare-bones aspects of life, the more we are able to eke out that living, at least long enough to get back to the relative safety and comforts that our communities provide us with.

The importance behind why you need to learn these skills is simple. The world is changing, that much cannot be denied. From the threat of global social upheaval to the stark reality of climate change itself, we are holding onto the last threads of a paradigm we've known for many generations. There is more at stake than simply having circumstantial survival skills on a personal level. Humanity has become more and more accustomed to the idea that someone will always be there to take care of us. That may not be the reality forever, and it's up to you and I to gather and retain our knowledge and pass it down to the next generations behind us in case they have to face the prospects of a reality where the comforts of our current lives are no longer available to us. This is how "less civilized" nations
have somehow made it through all of the massive changes of the past few centuries. They learned how to use the tools available to them and keep their eyes set on the big picture, and that is precisely why you're currently reading this manual.

The Principles of Patrol - How They Apply

The military doesn't train folks to be wilderness experts. You don't go into training and come back years later with the skills of a Lord of The Rings Elven Ranger, magically able to bend and mold the forest around you to your will and react perfectly to every situation. However, it does establish some fundamentals that are geared towards maximizing your productivity, whether it be on a unit scale or individual basis.

One of these skills are the Principles of Patrol. They can be applied to almost every single life task you commit to. Whether it be going out on an outdoor excursion or simply going downtown to bar hop with your buddies, the Principles of Patrol can unanimously apply to any situation. They are as follows.

Planning - Planning is crucial to any event. Before going out on a hunting or hiking trip make a conscious effort to prioritize; what exactly you're doing, who you're going with, when you're going, when you're returning, where you plan on going, and why you're doing it. This means briefing your loved ones on the locations you're going to visit and your projected time of return so that they have an idea of when you may need help. It means mapping out where you intend to go. It means having a mental checklist of who you're bringing with you and the assets they can provide to the "mission", if you will. For instance - do you want to be taking your children up the side of a steep mountain with you, or perhaps get them some child care for the day to mitigate the risk of losing one of them? Do you want to go on a multi-mile hike in the middle of nowhere with a person of low physical fitness, who may keel over from heat stroke or dehydration and put both your and their safety at risk? These examples are rhetorical questions of course, but they're the kinds of things you need to take into close consideration before embarking.

Have a primary, alternate, contingency, and emergency plan established.
That means having plans for every situation you can imagine coming across in your mission. What happens if someone gets hurt? How far will you have to go to get back to civilization? What methods of egress have you planned if everything goes to shit? Keep these things in mind and your journey will be a lot smoother.

Recon - Mapping out your route can save you a lot of trouble in the outdoors. Use the tools available to you to give you an idea of where you're going. If you're going on a rafting trip with friends, check online to see the water level of the river and the projected weather of your area and areas up river to see if flash flooding is a concern. Pack the proper flotation and signaling devices, and bring a small bag of goodies to aid in your survival needs. If you're going hunting in the mountains check out the area on Google Maps, and see what water sources lead to the nearest roads or Ranger Stations.

Keep yourself in the loop and half the survival situations you may come across can be eliminated right out of the box. If you do find yourself lost out in no man's land, having a compass and a small waterproof map can save your life. Find water sources on the map, and follow them in a consistent direction for long enough, and you will find other humans.

Security - All too often the security aspect of survival gets one of two treatments—either it's overlooked in a careless and ignorant manner, or it's over-emphasized to the point of detracting from the ability to accurately prioritize the proper kit for the job. You can't survive a cougar or bear attack with sticks and rocks, and you can't survive a snow storm with an assault rifle. Base your level of security on the mission, but never leave home without the proper means to defend yourself.

When going out into the wilderness at the very least bring a knife or a chopping tool with you.
Even if you're not a gun owner it's smart to give yourself enough tools to adequately respond to threats. If you bring just a small knife with you it can be converted into a spear by chopping a sturdy living stick three ways, sticking the knife in between the cuts, and then securing it down with cordage that you either gathered or brought with you. Humans have survived for thousands of years with simple tools, you can too!

Control- Control is an aspect that covers the entire spectrum of the Principles of Patrol. You are exercising control by ensuring you have all the right tools for the mission. Furthermore you exercise control by bringing the right folks with you outfitted with the correct skill sets. Then, as you engage in the mission itself you exercise control by regularly checking up on your team and yourself, paying attention to the changes of the terrain around you, and regularly assessing the situation from a tactical standpoint. You can always improve your position, and that idea applies to route selection, prioritizing the work you do, keeping yourself safe, and keeping yourself comfortable.

Common Sense- The simplest idea behind the principles of patrol. If you feel something is off, then follow your gut instinct. If suddenly all the birds and insects in an area have gone dead quiet and you feel like someone's watching you, there's a good chance a large predator is in the nearby and you may need to evacuate. If it's raining cats and dogs you're not going to want to be in a draw or depressed area, or attempting to cross a river. That's a good way to get caught in a flash flood with a quickness. If you're climbing a mountain and time and time again you find rocks tumbling past you as you climb, you're probably increasing your risks of being in a landslide, or climbing in a place that hasn't eroded enough to be safe to climb. Use common sense when you're assessing the environmental threats around you. If something looks craggy, spiky, discolored, or downright scary, it looks that way for a reason. Avoid bad signs and Mother Nature will reward you with more chances to exist.

One thing to note about the Principles of Patrol is that it's not simply a checklist of things you go over before the mission. It's an ever-evolving aspect of survival that must be taken into consideration at different intervals. That doesn't mean forget to stop and smell the flowers, and it doesn't mean to be constantly afraid and paranoid when you're trying to have a good time out there. It simply means to remind yourself regularly of what's at stake, and what you can do to mitigate any risks involved in
what you're doing. Remember, nature is there for us to enjoy, and be a part of. It can be a nurturing mother or a destructive monster, but it's all about responding to the signs given to you and you can and will have a great time!

Now, let's get into what exactly you need to have/do if in fact you are faced with a survival situation!

The Essentials

Survival experts, magazines, and TV shows always seem to give survival advice in a series of threes. You can survive three weeks without food, three days without water, three hours without proper warmth, and three minutes without air. While this is a good baseline to remind yourself of, the unfortunate truth is that there are TONS of factors that come into play with survival where these rules do not exactly apply. The climate and condition of the area you're in are really the biggest factors. If you're camping in a hot, dry desert and find yourself stranded- three days without water probably ain't gonna cut it if you're trying to tend to the rest of your survival needs and sweating it all away. You can die within an hour or less if you're immersed in water and then thrown into a blizzard. You can starve to the point of utter exhaustion in less than three weeks if you're treading through northern tundras and don't have an adequate store of body fat to survive on. You can pass out from lack of oxygen in less than a minute if your neck is constricted, or your lungs are filled with water.

What I'm saying isn't to terrify you, or make you feel like attempting to survive in these conditions is hopeless. It's to give you an idea of the sheer power of circumstance, and allow you the chance to base your survival plan off the location you're most likely going to find yourself surviving in.

Without a doubt, the most important aspects to survival are shelter, hydration, food, and heat. However, they are not necessarily in that order. You must base how you prioritize these aspects off the situation.

Shelter - Shelter can be anything from the hole a fallen tree leaves in the ground to a more advanced structure, such as a raised stick hut. The key idea behind shelter is to shield you from two things- the elements, and predators.
The elements can come in the form of blistering hot sun or bone chilling cold. The key to shelter is to mold it to the situation at hand. If you are stuck out in the middle of the desert or open plains, find two trees or stumps and raise yourself off the ground with sticks. Raising yourself off the ground will serve two purposes, it will allow a channel for air to flow through and keep your body cool as as helping you in avoiding the all too common insects, reptiles, and other pesky critters of the aforementioned areas. Make a small canopy out of tarps, clothing, leaves, or sticks. This will shield you from the heat of the sun when you're trying to lounge around and conserve energy. Conversely, if you are in a cold area digging in is the best option. Small predators aren't likely to be an issue, so you don't have to raise yourself off the ground. Instead, capitalize on the heat Mama Nature provides. Dig in, whether it be mud, clay, sand, or snow, and then find some materials to cover your position with, while interweaving the materials. This method will protect you from larger predators and help trap the heat that's generated from your body and from the Earth. If you have a friend handy, now is the time to shove aside your pride and start the cuddle-fest!

**Hydration** - I'm a huge advocate for the use of cheap water filtration tools. As outlined in my previous articles, filter straws like the Lifestraw can save so much time and effort. You just pop them out of your bag, stick them into any body of water, and suck it on up. If you can't afford the twenty dollars it costs to get one for yourself there are plenty of other methods to gather potable water. You can find a nearby water supply, whether it be a puddle, stream, river, etc, and if you don't have a cup or pale or something to gather the water in simply dig a hole near the water supply. If you dig deep enough water will begin to percolate out of the ground, and though it will be muddy and gross tasting it will be potable enough to stomach. You can also fashion a water vessel out of simple items found around the woods. Bamboo sticks cut in half, a slightly hollowed out stump of wood, and litter people commonly leave around like beer cans or water bottles work to boil water in if you're diligent.
In a snowy environment ensure snow you gather has at least melted before you ingest it, so as not to lower your core temperature and do more harm than good. In a desert, look for any areas that are low in elevation with greenery around, preferably on the northern low point of a hill or mountain, as the north side of major land features tends to get less sun. Search for discoloration in the sand, if it's darker in an area that means there's a small well of water underneath. Dig in and pray to the water gods! Animals are also a dead giveaway as to where water will be located. Read their tracks or look for congregations of birds.

Food - Many folks tend to misjudge how difficult it can be to find food out in the wild. Packing at least three days worth of non perishable food can literally save you a huge headache and maybe your life, but if you find yourself unprepared out in the wilderness there are some key steps you can take to subsist long enough to survive.

Ease of access is important. Sans the possession of weapon, you can easily find tons of juicy edibles in the wild if you search diligently enough without the need to make traps or battle anything. Food tends to gather around water sources, whether it be animal life or plant life. Edible plants tend to grow more around water sources than inedible plants. Something about having to survive with minimal water tends to increase the likelihood of a plant being poisonous or inedible. Familiarizing yourself with the local flora and fauna can make a huge difference. In some cases brightly colored berries or leaves can mean death, in other areas they can mean good chow. A good baseline to follow with plants is avoid mushrooms unless you're totally positive that they're edible, avoid plants that secrete a milky white substance, and don't eat things with hairs or spines on them. Of course this rule can vary by area. A good method to test toxicity is to rub the plant on your skin, wait thirty minutes to see if your skin becomes irritated. If no irritation happens rub more of the plant on the same spot and continue waiting. If after a few hours no irritation has happened, chew up a portion of the plant without swallowing. If it tastes delicious and doesn't
taste bitter, sting, or burn, spit it out and wait fifteen or thirty more minutes to see if your stomach hurts. If nothing happens, eat a small amount and wait again. Once again, if nothing happens, mow down!

The easiest way to get food, and bear with me here, is insects. Insects are some of the easiest to identify animals in regards to whether they're poisonous or not. If they're spiky, colorful, covered in crazy hairs or spines, or generally look ready to kill you, avoid them! Worms, grubs, ants, crickets, termites, bees, wasps, centipedes, and scorpions are pretty easy to find no matter where you are in the United States. Simply find a dead log and roll it over, or cut it open. You will find a host of yummy treats inside. If they have stingers remove them before ingestion. If they're too small to cook, eat them raw. My personal favorite is ants. They don't taste half bad and are easy to catch, and you don't have to remove any stingers!

A cricket can work as a tasty morsel in times of need, but a nice juicy squirrel will do you one better! Image credit- www.offthegrid-news.com

When it comes to catching larger animals, things can get tricky. This is why I personally prefer to bring a firearm with me in the outdoors. I don't have to bother with making complicated traps or chasing things down with hand tools. However, if you don't have a gun handy there are a variety of ways to catch animals you should become acquainted with. Sharpened sticks, rocks, and home made nets are the easiest methods. Believe it or not, a squirrel can be incapacitated with fairly small rocks. Fish can be caught easily with three pronged stick-spears. Frogs and reptiles can be caught easily by hand. Read up on different methods to catch the critters in your area, or just bring a damn firearm and avoid the hassle!

Heat - The final and possibly most crucial element of survival is heat. Fire has made the ultimate difference in human evolution. From keeping us warm and occupied to cooking food and warding off predators, fire is the real ace up our sleeve as a species. I'm thoroughly convinced that the moment cats learn how to light things on fire, the world is over! Think about it. They've already got us firmly under their control, all it takes is the first cat lighting a piece of paper on fire and next thing you know- kitty apocalypse. I digress.

Fire can be difficult to cultivate. Just the tiniest bit of dampness can render your fire starting attempts null and void. A good practice to go by when gathering fire
materials is to hold the material up to the skin on your face. Your skin will quickly judge the temperature and thickness of the wood and give you a good readout on its flammability. Avoid anything that feels cold and soft. You want dry and brittle. Start small and work your way up. Begin with things like dried up moss, dead milk weed or reeds, tiny sticks, or dry grasses. Leaves can work sometimes as well but tend to be more hassle than help, since they produce so much ash.

Some easy hacks you can use with some of the kit you’re likely to bring out with you are as follows- if you have a paperclip and a battery you can connect the metal clip to the positive and negative and then to itself again. The heat will build up until you have something akin to a miniature soldering iron, which will heat your fire starting materials up enough to burn. Other useful hacks include using things like gauze pads, tampons, corn chips, and cotton balls dipped in petroleum jelly for fire starting material. Remember to always carry at least two or three different methods to start a fire. That way you maximize your ability to get your heat element going in different environments.

One very important aspect of fire starting is having a good balance of fuel. Don't just pile a bunch of stuff together right from the get-go and think it's just gonna light right up. As mentioned early start small and work it on up. Blow into the fire softly and consistently to give it enough oxygen to thrive. Once you get your first flames going incrementally apply larger and larger sticks to get your fire going and viola!
Useful Tools

I'm going to go out on a limb and be a bit blatant- if you plan on going out into the wilderness without at least the bare minimum of tools you would need to achieve your four basic survival needs: shelter, water, food, and heat, then you're stark mad and nothing this manual tells you can make a damn bit of difference. All too often does it come up on the news of couples who froze to death because they drove up into the mountains during winter with no cold weather gear, only to have their vehicle break down on the side of the road, or folks who got lost in the middle of the woods hiking only to be found weeks later in a pile of bones and ripped up clothing, fallen prey to predators or the elements. If you can afford a lengthy trip out into the wild where a survival scenario is most likely to take place then surely you can afford the small number of tools you would need to stay alive if you got stranded.

The easiest way to organize and prioritize your survival gear is a top-down approach. Think of it as the character customization screen in a video game. You always start from the head and work down. A good hat and eye protection are a start. These will shield you from harmful ultra-violet rays, and the hat will keep you warmer in colder environments. You lose heat quickest from your main extremities, which are your head, feet, and hands.

Next you must clothe the rest of your body in accordance to the challenges you may face. Cotton-nylon mixed ripstop fabric is awesome. Cotton isn't the best for staying dry, but it's good for thermal regulation. You don't get too hot or too cold with cotton-nylon fabrics. If you're trying to stay dry Goretex is your friend. Though it's not cheap, Goretex is an almost foolproof method to avoid water penetration.
Nylon polyester mixtures are awesome too, invest in a poncho liner. It's super light weight, collapsible, and warm. Military folks call it a "woobie." Extra socks, tee shirts, and underwear can fit into almost any bag and can save your life! If you get soaked and only have a primary outfit you can strip down, change socks and undies, and wrap up in a poncho liner for warmth while hanging your clothes a safe height above a fire to dry them.

After covering the basic necessity of proper clothing, more in depth kit is required to fulfill the overall survival needs of an outdoorsman. Multiple fire starting tools are a must. I recommend the Survival Magnesium Flint by Efuture. For only two dollars it's one of the cheapest flint strikers on the market while retaining effectiveness. A lighter is important as well, but can get wet or destroyed in your bag, so always have another method.

Tarping and cordage are compact and easy ways to have a mobile shelter everywhere you go. A camping hammock can also mitigate the time and effort it takes to build a raised stick structure. These tools are cheap and easy ways to maximize your potential. Mylar blankets are also a great method to keep warm if you don't have room in your bag for heavier kit.

Carrying a few days worth of non-perishable foods can save you a ton of trouble. MRE's can get expensive, but there are plenty of other options on the market as well. From dehydrated fruit snacks to full on meat pouches, one can never be too careful when it comes to having the proper caloric intake. Water is also of utmost importance. So either take extra bottles of water with you, a hydration bladder, or a water filtration tools to tend to this necessity.

Next on the line are actual tools for self defense. There are plenty of cheap options available out there for the would-be survivor. From Gerber to Cold steel, Remington to Glock, there's something for everyone. You need a chopping tool in order to
to gather wood as it is, so spending a few extra bucks to get one that's capable of self defense as well can kill two birds with one stone. Keeping yourself and your loved ones safe from predators is a big force multiplier. Being caught by a big predator with a sharpened stick is a quick death waiting to happen. Outfitting yourself with the tools to get the job done can mean life or death.

Methods of signal and marking are also important. There are a myriad of tools available like flares, flashlights, and radios, but whistles and mirrors as well as a good smokey fire can also get rescuers attention from afar.

Final Thoughts

When it comes to survival there is no one-stop-shop for every situation. The most key aspect is the ability to adapt and improvise to a myriad of different situations. There are different tactics that are useful for all sorts of different scenarios, but the most important tactic of them all is simply observing and reacting to the climate around you effectively. Use the brain God gave you!

When offered the chance to upgrade your position, do so. That means everything, from the smallest step to the grandest leap. You can always do better, and keeping that in mind will instill within you a mentality of constant self improvement. Read up on different ways to survive situations, and then go out and get your hands dirty in the field! Testing yourself is a crucial point in training, because it will show you your strengths and weaknesses and give you an idea of what you need to work on.

There are different approaches to survival, some are more effective than others, but remember that nothing is ever written in stone. The climate can always change at a moment's notice, and reacting to these changes calmly carefully is a key element that will afford you the time you need to get the job done.

"Si Vis Pacem Para Bellum" - Tommy