



By Jeff Topping, for USA TODAY

Out of the woods: Cody Lundin teaches outdoor survival tactics at the Aboriginal Living Skills School near Prescott, Ariz. "The more you know, the less you need."

Cody Lundin wants to save you from yourself

# Danger Dude

By J. Taylor Buckley  
USA TODAY

PRESCOTT, Ariz. — Millions of Americans will head for the hinterlands this weekend for a little exploration and excitement in the great outdoors. Inevitably, however, some will not make it home — on time or ever — because they forgot one thing: Where the road ends and the fun begins, you need to know more than "9-1-1."

"People today think they can just grab their cell phones and boogie," survival trainer Cody Lundin says. "They don't understand that Mother Nature is the boss."

And those who have not quite grasped that cruel reality are getting into jams and wreaking havoc for rescue teams like never before. Though no agency tracks national totals, government figures reveal a 30% increase in searches initiated in the 1990s by the National Park Service alone. The raw numbers show searches and rescues in our national parks up from 4,875 in 1990 to 6,338 last year. And it's not because the park service is dropping its guard.

## Peril in the parks

While total visitors grew 18% in that period, every category of serious peril — except survival situations — was down. Assaults reported on park property, for instance, dove 64%.

So why are people, left to their own devices, putting themselves at risk in alarmingly increasing numbers?

They simply don't get it. "We've gotten too far away from teaching people how to take care of themselves," says Chuck Mills, a program director for the National Association for Search and Rescue.

"We run into problems every day with citizens who think there's nothing to it," park service spokesperson Elaine Sevy explains. "They say, 'I can do that.' But they are totally unprepared and have to be res-

## Life lessons

Dozens of schools and organizations offer instruction in survival skills. Before choosing one, be clear on what's offered and if the course covers the geographical area you will be using. Here are a few.

► **Aboriginal Living Skills School**, P.O. Box 3064, Prescott, Ariz. 86302; (520) 636-8384; [www.alsadventures.com](http://www.alsadventures.com). Prices range from \$230 for a two-day course to \$830 for an eight-day course.

► **Boulder Outdoor Survival School (BOSS)**, P.O. Box 1590, Boulder, Colo. 80306; (303) 444-9779; [www.boss-inc.com](http://www.boss-inc.com). Prices range from \$775 for seven days to \$2,625 for 28 days.

► **Tom Brown's Tracker School**, P.O. Box 173, Asbury, N.J. 08302-0173; (908) 479-4681; [www.tracker-school.com](http://www.tracker-school.com). Prices are approximately \$700 for a week-long course.

cued, often suffering from dehydration and exhaustion."

Lundin estimates that search and rescue operations cost taxpayers \$370 million a year. The crime is that it doesn't have to be this way. Dozens of organizations coast to coast teach survival skills.

Lundin (pronounced *lundeen*), operates the Aboriginal Living Skills School not far from this picturesque former territorial capital. He's a 32-year-old entrepreneur in braids and bare feet who goes by the e-mail handle "Abodude." He's building a dirt home in the wilderness, drives a trashed Jeep, has lived on \$2,500 a year, and is "a huge fan of road kill."

Yet he is one of the USA's most eloquent proponents of self-sufficiency education and is an outspoken critic of the hype that has put survival "in vogue" and has created a booming industry founded on fright. Though he teaches programs on home preparedness, Lundin denounces current scare mongering as "all this Y2K b.s."

"The more you know, the less you need," says Lundin, repeat-

ing the mantra that appears on every piece of his company's literature. He wonders, though, if anyone is paying attention.

"Americans are into gimmicks," he says. "But in the end, there is very little you can buy that replaces knowledge."

## Death in three hours

Gadgets and food are not the issue, he maintains. "People think survival is a Leatherman tool (he carries one, too) and Meals Ready to Eat, when, in fact, it is all about regulating body temperature. With either hypo- or hyperthermia you can be dead in three hours. But then that doesn't sell stuff. What good is gear when you're scared and shaking?"

Lundin, of late, has come to dislike the mere term survival. "It's a misused word. But fear sells. We have trivialized the whole thing. The fact is, if you don't get out, you die."

Though those with multiple outdoor interests were counted more than once, the National Sporting Goods Association estimates 153 million Americans spent at least one day in 1998 backpacking, overnight camping, canoeing, rock climbing, fishing, hunting with firearms or bows and arrows, kayaking, rafting, off-road mountain biking and cross country skiing. Every one of them, no matter what the actual number and whether they realized it or not, risked death by exposure because of mishap, miscalculation or just plain stupidity.

Here, from Lundin, are ways to overcome that:

► "The one-size-fits-all survival kit is a lie. Choose items for your own needs and for the area you will be in.

► "By the time you realize you're in trouble, you're already whipped. Take candy bars along with plenty of water.

► "The easiest way to regulate body temperature is with clothing. It's your lifeline.

► "Rotate items in your survival kit. Matches deteriorate, batteries weaken, lighters rust.



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Skylight: Cody Lundin peers through a hole in the middle of the mirror that he carries for signaling an airplane.

## Flashing for help

When it comes to communications power, Cody Lundin favors a real-glass, sightable signaling mirror. In good sun, a lost hiker peering through the hole in the center of the mirror can sight onto and flash a signal to an airplane 35,000 feet up and miles and miles away. "Pilots notice such things," Lundin says. "They are trained to be aware of lights tracking them through the sky."



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Magnesium block: Lundin uses one to start fires.

## The spark of life

To light a fire, Lundin scrapes the striking bar of a store-bought magnesium block with a short piece of high-carbon hacksaw blade. Scraping with the narrow end of the blade gives it some flex and makes for a bigger shower of sparks. The sparks will easily ignite a cotton ball, which will generate about 30 seconds of flame. Or, you can scrape some of the magnesium from the block to create a pile of tinder that will light under any conditions. Lundin prefers cotton balls smeared with petroleum jelly, which he calls "techno tinder from heaven." The untreated fibers must be exposed from the inside if sparks are the only source of ignition. Still, one treated ball produces 5-6 minutes of flame. "You can get these magnesium blocks at any store but Wal-Mart," Lundin quips. "And the only reason you can't get them there is because they won't let you in when you're in bare feet."

► "Carry three kinds of fire in three different places. Overkill is better than getting killed.

► "If you can't touch your thumb to your little finger, you're too cold."

Mike Townsend, a member of the Yavapai County (Arizona) Sheriff's Response Team, who has searched for more lost people than he can remember, worries over the number of people who don't get rescued because they didn't tell anyone where they were going.

His advice: "Tell someone who is going where and when you'll be back. Our worst case is a lack of information. It's a very helpless feeling when you have nothing to go on."

Townsend has found enough lost people to know what he's dealing with. "Frankly," he

says, "I wonder how some of these people found their way out of their own yards."

## Learn or die

Lundin is trying to rectify that. Several hundred people a year are treated to his skill, wit and wisdom through lectures and consulting, courses in his own domain, custom instruction — he even does corporate team building.

But, he admonishes: "I'm not into all this puppy mill bull where you go out and slam down some margaritas and toss around a beach ball. A lot of people want to go out in the bush and bake a Bundt cake. They just don't get it."

"A thousand years ago, if you didn't learn this stuff, you died."

## Lundin's fanny pack survival kit

Cody Lundin recommends taking a small survival kit on any outing, be it a car trip, kayaking, hunting or hiking. "Even a little day trip. And, you already have most of this stuff in your kitchen or medicine cabinet." Into a fanny pack or the eye-glasses pouch of many back packs, he stashes:

1. 4-5-inch piece of hacksaw blade.
2. Magnesium block with striking bar. ("I've heard of people being rescued who had one of these but didn't know what it was. Don't carry what you don't know how to use.")
3. Condom, for carrying water.
4. 100 feet of dental floss. "Any kind of cordage is mandatory."
5. Business-card-size plastic magnifier. ("For starting a fire or reading a map after you've lost your glasses.")
6. Blaze orange survey tape. ("Tie strips to branches to mark your return path or leave a trail for rescuers.")
7. Plastic "space blanket." ("It reflects heat when you need shelter in the desert; it holds body heat turned inside out in the cold. Flap it for a signal.")
8. P-38 can opener. ("I've found unopened cans of food in the bush that people just left behind.")

### Other items

- Small sheath knife with high-carbon steel blade.
- Cotton balls slathered with petroleum jelly stuffed in a film canister.
- Adjustable-flame, non-child-proof butane lighter with see-through fuel cell.

► 1-quart and 1-gallon zip-seal freezer bags.

► Plastic, waterproof match case filled with fresh, paraffin-dipped, strike-anywhere matches "packed so they don't rattle."

► Small, 2-AA-cell aluminum flashlight with 2 spare batteries. ("This gives you 8 hours worth of light. Wrap duct tape around the light so you can hold it between your teeth. Tape the spare batteries together and write the purchase date on the tape.")

► Small plastic bottle of 2% iodine. ("Five drops disinfects a quart of water and you can treat a wound. Iodine tablets for water treatment lose potency fast. Liquid lasts 4-5 years.")

► Glass signaling mirror. ("This is how the Army communicated and caught Geronimo.")

If the item is not already brightly colored, Lundin recommends yellow paint or tape. "Make it as obnoxious as possible." Hence, you can find it when you drop it or searchers can spot it readily and know someone has been in the area.



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Checklist: Cody Lundin preaches preparedness. Pictured are many of the items he recommends people carry on all of their outings.