



Surviving Winter

Lessons from an Expert...

By Anne Groebner

Winter is just a few weeks away in the higher elevations of Arizona. The leaves are almost gone, the temperatures are dropping and, if we cross our fingers, the snow will be falling soon. There are still a lot of people, however, who don't know that Arizona has areas with below freezing temperatures, with landscapes that get covered with snow and ice and sometimes, when they travel up the mountain, they aren't prepared for the cold temperatures. In fact, there are many avid outdoors people who may think they know the area but, with unpredictable mountain weather and the trails and roads covered with snow, it is a lot easier to get lost. Knowing how to survive in the back woods in any seasonal climate is good but knowing how to survive in the freezing temperatures of winter is critical. Many outdoor enthusiasts think they know everything there is to know about winter survival but...I can pretty much guarantee that they may not know as much as Cody Lundin.

Cody Lundin, survival instructor and author, is the founder and owner of the Aboriginal Living Skills School, LLC, based in Prescott, Arizona and he is starting his 27th year. His extensive knowledge of surviving in the wilderness through modern and primitive survival skills as well as homesteading, living off the land and preparedness has grabbed the attention of publishers and editors of national media including BackPacker, Dateline NBC, The Today Show, CBS and USA Today.

Lundin invited me to his classrooms in Prescott, where I got to sit down with him and talk about winter survival in the mountains of Arizona. He was very straight forward, and I got the impression that he was very concerned with getting the right information out to the public to contradict the sometimes totally outlandish information that's on reality TV. "People have gotten the context completely backwards regarding the content," says Lundin. "They are mixing up primitive skills with modern skills. If you get the context wrong about the content and you are dealing with people's safety, it gets people hurt or killed." Although Lundin could teach you how to start a fire with sticks, make a knife out of stone and rope out of plants, that wouldn't be what he would teach you about surviving in a below freezing situation. For winter survival, Lundin would teach modern survival skills — he would make sure you had all the modern methods of making fire, like matches or, at best, a magnesium strip with petroleum-covered cotton balls and you would definitely have proper clothing.

"What we want to talk about is going out into the woods and getting lost or stuck and it starts to snow and you find out that you don't have enough clothes and search and rescue gets involved," explained Lundin. "We are dealing with getting lost in the 21st century." So, if you took a course in winter survival from Lundin, it would be a modern course and you would get into what you might think is some pretty boring stuff but it would determine whether you lived or died. His courses teach about clothing, hydration, fire-lighting and how to deal with search and rescue. "You don't want to screw around with winter," cautioned Lundin, this is a time of death." Everything shuts down; you burn more calories because of the cooler temperatures and you need more food to deal with it. What you carry in your car or pack is very important as is leaving a game plan with two people you trust so, if you're not back by Sunday at 6 p.m., they can call search and rescue.

The number one way to stay alive in the backwoods in the winter is having enough of the *right* types of clothing and knowing how to layer. Most people don't dress well for weather. "There should be no cotton what so ever." He says, "It should be synthetic, wool or silk." He lectures for over an hour on how to dress for weather and how to prevent hypothermia (hypo-Greek for low and -thermia meaning heat) — that is what kills people in the wintertime and it is exacerbated by dehydration. "So, the easiest way...the gross-motor way... to deal with hypothermia is to dress properly and stay hydrated," he says.

The reason you need to stay hydrated to help prevent hypothermia is because the circulatory system nourishes the body, eliminates waste products and oxygenates the cells. It also heats and cools the body (important in desert situations as well). "What the core will do, at temperatures lower than 98.6 (the title of his first book), is work hard at keeping all of the vital organs warm. All those organs are located in the core, including the jugular and carotid arteries and the brain which needs a constant source of glucose and heat to survive. The body will vastly constrict so all the veins and arteries in the extremities will get smaller. "So, the body will actually self-amputate," says Lundin, "and that is why toes, fingers and noses get frostbitten." The body knows it can live without a hand or a foot, but you can't live without your torso. Dehydration amplifies this because, when you are dehydrated, your blood turns to ketchup and when veins

and arteries get smaller and the blood is more viscous, the heart has a harder time pumping warm blood throughout the body. “The reason I bring dehydration into the mix is because it is really hard to stay hydrated when it’s cold,” Lundin says. “No one wants to drink.”

One critical aspect of hypothermia, Lundin tells me, is that eventually, a drop in core body temperature will affect you psychologically. “There have been many cases where people have been found in a winter survival situation naked and stuck to a tree,” says Lundin, “because, in advanced hypothermia, their brain thought that it was too hot and they start taking off clothing.” The good news, however, is that there are warning signs before reaching advanced stages of hypothermia. The first sign is shivering. It’s the body’s way of telling you that you need to generate more heat. “It’s saying that it will move your muscles whether you move them or not,” he says. Then it progresses to blue lips, slurred speech and stumbling. “You should know, however,” warned Lundin, “that even though hypothermia is a huge cause of death, the body gives off lots of warning signs to let you know that ‘hey! you’ve got to warm up and dry out... you’ve got to do something about this situation!’” Some people don’t understand that they are being warned and some will just blow it off but that just compounds the problem like a snowball rolling downhill and it gets worse and worse and you find that person naked and stuck to a tree in the woods. And that’s another reason it is always good to travel with a friend or companion.

What scares most people in winter survival situations is that they feel as though they are looking at impending death. This causes their adrenaline to spike and, according to Lundin, when their adrenaline spikes, complex motor skills disappear. “Cognitive thought and judgement skills go out the window,” he says. “No one makes good decisions when they are scared. So, when you get into a fire-making-in-winter situation, which can be very complex, it’s much easier to bring an extra jacket and some matches.”

At Cody’s school, he has all demographics of students. From ages five to 85-years-old. He teaches different levels. For example, for someone who is more aggressive toward survival, there are long hikes, minimum food and minimal gear. For students who are just beginning or have age restrictions, they will meet at the classroom for some instruction and then pile into his 4-wheel-drive van and go out into the field to train. Depending on skill level, they could stay less than 100 feet from the van so, if something happened, he can get them out fairly easily. Everyone fills out a medical form and, when Lundin reviews it, he makes his assessment on which class would be best for each student. “This is real life,” says Lundin, “and, when we get out in the field, students face the reality of what they can and cannot do...and sometimes they find out that what they saw on TV really isn’t as easy as they made it look.”

A lot of people take Lundin’s primitive skills program because they want to do more with less. they are tired of carrying heavy backpacks into the field. He has had archeologists and anthropologists take the course because they want to know how natives did certain skills— and then some take it because it’s super cool when you can catch fish with your hands and make fire with sticks. It takes you to the top of the food chain. “It’s easier to teach someone modern survival skills than it is to teach someone primitive survival skills to the point where they can

just walk into the woods and never return,” says Lundin. “I’m still learning some primitive skills.”

Lundin’s second book is on Urban Preparedness. “People think that because they don’t hike or go out into the woods, they don’t need to learn survival skills. They don’t get it... That, in the case of a hurricane or wild fire and that toilet doesn’t work and you need to learn how to go in the backyard without contaminating your water source, you need to know how.” So, Lundin teaches emergency sanitation and hygiene; how to keep the house warm or cool when the grid’s down and there’s no power or communications. “All of these things come into play and we all take them for granted,” says Lundin. What could possibly happen? Recently we have seen major hurricanes and horrific wild fires. “In some ways,” says Lundin, “these things can mimic getting stuck in a winter situation when you are sitting in a -20-degree living room and the furnace has gone out. The threat of hypothermia is still present.” There are more people in urban areas, Lundin tells me, so urban preparedness is actually more important than modern survival in the woods.

Lundin’s passion is teaching people how to stay alive and he has been an Eergency Medical Technician since 1993. “There is a tremendous amount of physical, psychological and physics in proper survival training,” Lundin tells me. “Because you are dealing with a very scared, complex human organism in the wildly diverse landscape of Mother Nature, where the variables are millions and millions of times over. So, if you deal with human nature under stress, all hell could break loose. That’s why there are so many rabbit holes to go down and that’s why it’s so maddening and so fascinating because I will never know all there is to know about outdoor survival. It makes this profession really cool but very frustrating because Americans want that answer and sometimes, there is no direct answer. The only way to know it is through field experience. You can’t do it on YouTube and you can’t do it on Facebook.”

Field experience means that you are in the field and the reason you go to school with a qualified instructor like Lundin, is because they have made a ton of mistakes and they will show you how not to make the same mistakes...because making a mistake in a survival situation isn’t like flunking a math test...it could truly be a matter of life or death.