
FREE FIELD GUIDE

7 Skills That Kept Me Alive on Naked and Afraid

A field guide from a British TV survivalist
and former 29 Commando soldier.

STEVEN KELLY — SURVIVAL STE
stevenkelly.uk

Read this first.



I've spent 23 years in the British Army — 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery — and faced the Naked and Afraid cameras in the Colombian tropics and again on Naked and Afraid: Apocalypse.

If you'd asked me at 18 what survival was, I'd have said fire, shelter, food. Ask me now and I'll tell you something different: survival is a series of small, boring decisions made under pressure. What you do in the 90% of time when nothing is happening decides what happens in the 10% when everything does.

This guide is what I wish someone had handed me on day one. Seven skills. No filler. Read it in fifteen minutes, use it for the rest of your life.

If you're expecting knots and tarp configurations, you'll be disappointed. Those matter, but they're downstream. This is the upstream stuff — the mindset and decisions that make the skills work when it's you, cold, wet and running out of options.

— *Ste*

SKILL 1

Read the ground before you build on it



Nine out of ten survival mistakes start in the first hour, when adrenaline is high and people want to feel productive. They build shelter in the wrong place. They light a fire where the wind will beat them. They camp too far from water — or too close.

Before you touch anything, walk your ground. Fifteen deliberate minutes assessing your site saves fifteen hours of misery.

- **Water** — how far, how clean, uphill or down
- **Wind** — where will your shelter opening face
- **Drainage** — is this a puddle in waiting
- **Overhead hazards** — dead branches, unstable trees
- **Wildlife signs** — tracks, droppings, game trails
- **Exposure** — where the sun rises, where frost sits

In the Colombian jungle, every one of these got tested. Thorns on every plant, insects in every layer of ground, heat with no relief under the canopy. The site you choose is the challenge you get.

Slow is smooth. Smooth is fast.

SKILL 2

Water first, food second, ego last



The biggest killer in real survival scenarios isn't a predator or the cold. It's dehydration — and the ego that stops you dealing with it. Ego is what makes you skip purifying dodgy water, and what stops you turning back when the day has gone against you.

The rule of threes is a cliché because it is true:

- 3 minutes without air
- 3 hours without shelter in extreme conditions
- 3 days without water
- 3 weeks without food

Your body's priority list is written by biology, not by your feelings. Never wait until you're thirsty — by then you're already behind. Track your urine colour: pale is fine, dark means drink. Purify everything you don't trust. Don't be a hero.

On Apocalypse we were boiling dirty water scavenged from a ruined landscape. Nobody cared how tough you looked. The water discipline was the difference between operating and deteriorating.

Dehydrated people make stupid decisions. Stupid decisions get you killed.

SKILL 3

Fire as a system, not a trick

Most people treat fire as a skill. It isn't. It's a system — and systems fail one component at a time.

Four stages. Miss one and you start again:

- **Tinder** — dry, fine, fluffy. Prepare more than you think you need
- **Kindling** — pencil-thin dry wood. A full handful before you strike
- **Sustain** — thumb-thick wood. A full armful, staged and ready
- **Protect** — from wind, from rain, and from your own impatience

The mistake I see on every course: people obsess over ignition — the ferro rod strike, the bow drill — and forget that ignition is 5% of the job. Preparation is 95%. Split wet wood to reach the dry inside. If everything on the floor is soaked, go higher: dead standing wood.

Build small. Feed slowly. Don't smother it.

Fire is a system. Systems fail one component at a time.

SKILL 4

Shelter that works when it rains

A shelter that looks good in sunshine and fails in rain isn't a shelter — it's a photograph. Real shelter has to work at 3am, in a downpour, when you're exhausted.

Shelter has three jobs:

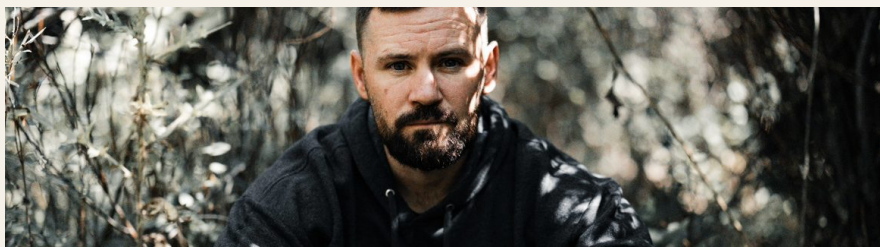
- **Cover** — angle beats material. A 45-degree pitch sheds rain; a flat roof collects it
- **Insulation** — the ground steals heat faster than the air. Never lie directly on it. Bedding 15cm deep, minimum
- **Ventilation** — seal yourself in and condensation will soak you from inside. Leave a gap

And the mistake I see most: building too big. A bigger shelter is a colder shelter. Small, tight and well-insulated beats big and airy every time. Build for lying down, not standing up — you're going to sleep in it, not host in it.

Build for the worst weather, not the current weather.

SKILL 5

The mind is your first survival tool



The Army teaches this before it teaches any weapon system. A trained mind is worth every piece of kit you own. An untrained one is the reason people tap out.

Survival stress does three things to your brain:

- It narrows your focus — you fixate and stop seeing the wider picture
- It stretches time — an hour feels like a day
- It amplifies the voice in your head — and makes it meaner

The trained response to all three is the same: name it, box it, act.

Name it — say it out loud; naming loosens the grip. **Box it** — the feeling exists; deal with it later. You have a job. **Act** — not the whole plan, the next single action. Boil water. Collect wood. Check your feet.

*On Naked and Afraid, the hardest part isn't the hunger or the insects
— it's what happens in your head when there's nothing to do but think.
The mind that keeps moving is the mind that finishes.*

The trained mind acts before it feels ready. That is the difference.

SKILL 6

Read your body before it fails you

Your body signals trouble long before it breaks. Most survival casualties ignored the early warnings. Learn to read them now — in yourself and in anyone with you.

- **Dehydration** — dark urine, headache, irritability before thirst, cramps
- **Hypothermia** — the "umbles": stumbles, mumbles, fumbles, grumbles. Shivering that *stops* is worse, not better
- **Heat exhaustion** — dizziness, nausea, sweating that stops
- **Exhaustion** — missing the obvious, repeating mistakes, wanting to sit down "just for a minute"

The rule: two or more signs in the person next to you — stop everything and address it. If it's you: stop, get warm, get water, get calories, get horizontal. The mission can wait. Your body cannot.

In the jungle, sleep came in minutes at a time between waves of insect bites. Raw skin, no barrier, no door to close. When your body is being ground down that slowly, reading the signals early is the whole game.

The body says it is breaking before it breaks. Listen the first time.

SKILL 7

When to stay, when to move, when to stop

Every real survival scenario becomes a series of movement decisions. Get them wrong and it's over.

Before you move, run three checks:

- **Do people know where I am?** If yes — stay. Rescue works from your last known location. Moving makes you harder to find
- **Is here worse than there?** Be honest. "The other side of the hill" is almost never better
- **Can I actually make the move?** Underestimate yourself by 25%. Terrain, weather, fatigue and cold compound

The mistake that kills people: moving because doing nothing feels unbearable. Movement feels productive. It often isn't. In the military we call it doing something for the sake of doing something.

If you must move: leave sign. Set turn-around times, not just objectives — "I turn back at 2pm regardless of where I am." If you get lost: stop, sit, drink, eat, think. Pushing on is how a mistake becomes a disaster.

Doing nothing, well, is often the best action there is.

One thing to take with you.

Every survivalist you've watched on TV is doing the same seven things in the background. It isn't the fire tricks and it isn't the kit. It's the boring, deliberate application of the same principles, over and over, when they're tired and cold and want to quit.

**You don't need to be exceptional to survive.
You need to be repeatable.**

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steven Kelly — Survival Ste

British TV survivalist, survival instructor, podcast host and former 29 Commando Regiment Royal Artillery soldier. 23 years in the British Army.

As seen on Naked and Afraid, Naked and Afraid: Apocalypse, Naked Alone and Racing to Get Home, Bear Grylls: Wild Reckoning and No Time To Lose.

Founder of South West Survival. Host of The Survival Debrief Podcast.

stevenkelly.uk
southwestsurvival.co.uk
@survival_ste