



He should fight the germs that cause Hattiesville Hattiesville Hattiesville Bad breath



is face down in the back of his station wagon. It's starting to rain as we set out on the food walk. We pick ripe, black lantana berries from the bush. Roots are dug up. Matt sedge grass is as high as your waist, but you can only eat the last two centimetres. Natural food sucks the big one. Its nutrition value is almost nil; it tastes like nothing squared, and a proper meal is really not on the cards unless you can make a bow and arrow and you're Robin Hood. Even if you survived, you'd be really, really depressed.

"The important thing is to learn what's edible and what's not," says McBride. "Sometimes even the taste-test is no guarantee. You can spend ages rubbing a bit on your skin then on your lip, chewing it and spitting it out, eating a bit and waiting four hours – and you'll still eat something that'll kill you."

"The first signs you're looking for are nausea, cramps, diarrhoea, vomiting or persistent belching. However, with death-cap mushrooms, none of that will happen. But you'll be rushed to hospital the next day, let out a week later, and then die."

McBride leads us down to a dammed lake, choked with weed and bulrushes. "At the base of these bulrushes, or cumbungi, are roots you can eat," he tells us, as we wade into the cold water. I feel my penis shrivel to the size of an acorn (*Does he mean "grow"?* – Ed) but Mandy's looking just fine. I ponder the mysteries of nature as I grope around among the weeds. The photographer stands on the bank looking smug and tells us to get on with it.

I can't seem to find my root, so to speak, so I just pull up the whole damn rush and wave it about like an idiot (*Now that's hard to believe* – Ed). "What would this taste like?" I ask McBride. "Nothing much," he replies.

Later still, we stand in a circle in the rain, while McBride scoops mud out of some tyre marks. "This mud needs to have lots of clay in it," he says.

"We're going to cook fish."

Back at the fire, Danna is sat looking like death that tried to warm up, but failed. "Some bastard stole the rest of me Bundy," he complains, holding up the empty bottle. He is hurt when we suggest it might have been him all along.

We don't need to catch our own fish because, happily, they've turned themselves in. All we have to do is cover them in mud and bury them at the edge of the fire. By now it's belting down with rain and I'm thanking God I don't have to spend the night giving

of grub out of the pan and chews heartily. "Mmm," she says, predictably. "Just like chicken."

I give up and pop a piece in my mouth. It's like eating a sausage, only it's got legs. I beat down a gag reflex. It's nothing like chicken, either. It tastes like something you have to eat because you're in the wilderness with nothing but a frying pan and garlic. I'd still rather give up and die than eat them raw.

The light is fading. The weekend is nearly over. In

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my pathetic little shelter a proper test. "I thought this was the sunshine state," I say to Mandy. She gives me the sort of look I've seen before.

"Stand in the rain and look depressed," says Mick. It isn't hard.

We dig up the fish. The mud has baked to it, and when we knock it off, all the scales come off, leaving juicy, ready-to-eat meat beneath. This cheers me up no end. For about five minutes.

I'm alarmed to see McBride carrying around a bag of dead witchetty grubs. "These are very nutritious," he says. He lifts out a nice fat one and passes it around. It has the consistency of a thin sack of pus.

"Well, I'm not eating that," I say.

"Do it for **RALPH**," says Mick, leaning in with his camera.

Bending the rules of survival once again, Danna fries up the grubs with garlic. Katrina picks a piece

the last 30 hours I've honed my survival skills to the point where I won't, at least, die in a stupid way. I won't freeze to death or eat the wrong thing – and when I need to find water, I might at least know where to begin to look.

Danna is packing away the tarps and the cooking gear. "Out here is great," he says. "But the rest of it. It's just f-ked, you know? F-ked..."

I head for the airport, exhausted. I want a beer in an air-conditioned bar and a steak so big it's hanging off both sides of the plate. The bush is a nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to survive there.

■ SEAN McBride's company, Touch the Wild, runs the basic wilderness-skills course approximately every two months. They run from Friday evening to Sunday evening and cost \$290. There is also an advanced course, also lasting two days, and costing the same, and an annual six-day camp, costing \$800. Ring (07) 3822 8119 for further details.



SEDGE

TASTES like peas, but only sometimes. No poisonous sedge is known, but pull out the base to make sure it doesn't taste bitter. If it does, it could be something that looks like sedge that could kill you.



NEW ZEALAND SPINACH

SORT of like normal spinach, but milder. Much milder. Common along beaches and salt marshes, this can make a good cooked vegetable. If you're dying of starvation.



PIG FACES

TASTES like salty grapes – making it a delicacy, obviously. A common beach plant with fleshy leaves and purple flowers, it has a purple-red fruit with two horns. Even the leaves are "edible".



KURRAJONG

A GOOD source of protein, kurrajong has a taste not much like peanuts. The seed pods are held over a fire for 30 seconds then the seeds are scraped out and roasted in the ashes.