



And mum told me shopping bags didn't grow on trees

**W**AKE up needing a piss more than any man has needed a piss before. I'm drunk, but I piece things together as I pull on my boots and stagger around looking for a tree to go against.

I'm in the woods somewhere near Brisbane, surrounded by snoring people on beds made of leaves. Over by a campfire, a drunk man with waist-length hair is telling a blonde in hiking boots the world is f—ked. In the next few hours, I will probably have to eat a witchetty grub...

Survival expert Sean McBride has invited me up here to try one of his regular basic-survival courses. He is one of surprisingly few bushcraft instructors in a country with a lot of bush.

I'm a city boy. I picture myself crouched deep in the bush, wearing a flayed wolf-skin for warmth, smearing hot pig's blood on my cheeks and nursing a grievance against the establishment. Or something. I've seen how to do that reed-breathing thing in rivers, though, so I should be alright.

When I meet McBride, he's not only a friendly bloke, he puts me straight about the aim of the course. "I want to teach people how to survive short-term in the Australian bush," he says. "After this, you might stay alive for anything up to a week."

I'm here for two days.

McBride's a tall, lean man, who's been teaching

folk how to not die for over 17 years. He's taught commandos how to stay alive in the bush; he's even been to Sweden and taught Swedes, even though they have no bush; and now he's teaching me.

## DAY ONE

I arrive on Saturday morning, to find eight people sat around a fire, whittling.

I am given a knife and a length of wood, and told to peel off the bark. "This stick will be your baton," says McBride. "You use it to knock the knife-blade through thicker trees, like an axe."

I sit on a log and look around. We are in Samford Wood, a 40a site to the north-east of Brisbane. It's owned and used by the Scouts, so isn't exactly untracked wilderness. There's a main road and shops nearby, and down the hill some Scouts in tents. If things drag, we can mount a daring raid on them and steal their lollies.

Some people on the course got in last night, and their shelters look crude. Katrina, a slim girl of about 20, says it wasn't a bad night, despite heavy rain.

"Our beds were just debris scraped up, but it was pretty comfortable and I didn't get wet."

I scrape a satisfying length of bark from my baton. "Debris?"

She points at the ground. "All this stuff; leaves and twigs and so on. Today, we actually have to make the beds."

Katrina is here with her father, a grey-haired, silent man, in a singlet he should have quietly binned in 1973. The group is a mixed bunch. Lee and Johnno are two huge Pom ex-pats with a talent for telling horrible jokes; Mandy is a field scientist working on the red-ant problem. There are also two students who seem to have taken a vow of silence.

McBride's assistant is a loopy ex-biker named Danna. Every time he opens his mouth, something weird comes out. The first time I talk to him, he asks me where I'm from, with a look that says he won't like the answer.

"Sydney," I say. He screws up his face.

"Ah yeah, Sydney. I used to live there, but the whole city thing is just f—ked. No-one cares about you. They don't give you the time of day. They'll walk straight over you. I prefer being out here in the woods. Real people out here. Sydney's f—ked." He sticks on a grin and turns back to his frying pan. I back away, slowly.

It's true: we have to make our beds. McBride leads

## BUSH EATING

Bush foods are easy to find, easy to eat, and not very easy to enjoy – but their small amounts of carbohydrates might help your brain carry on functioning and give your body energy over a few days



**LANTANA**  
IS BELIEVED to be totally poisonous, but the berries are actually edible when black – NOT green. Tastes like tomato. More or less.



**PRICKLY PEAR CACTUS**  
THE fruit tastes good, but the skin is covered in tiny, irritating hairs. Cut it in half and scoop out the fruit with that spoon you always carry around "just in case".



**DANDELION**  
AS BITTER as an alcoholic. Has a rosette of edible green leaves, and a small white carrot-like root, which can be roasted and eaten, or ground as a coffee substitute. Of sorts.

