

TACTICS AND PREPAREDNESS

SKILLS AND SURVIVAL FOR ALL SITUATIONS



HUNTING WITH THE

M-4, M-16 AND AR-15

BY: KELLY ALWOOD / PHOTOS COURTESY KELLY ALWOOD www.kellyalwood.com

Not too long ago, in high mountain desert, I prepared to take a shot.

EASILY CONFIGURABLE, LIGHTWEIGHT AND VERSATILE, THE AR PLATFORM SHOULDN'T BE OVERLOOKED FOR HUNTING.

The terrain was rough and the shot would be no closer than 100 meters. I was confident though, that my 5.56 rifle would do the job out to 500 meters and beyond. I quietly made my way to the top of the ridge, being careful not to silhouette myself over the peak. I looked for my deer. My camouflage was good and my pre-season scouting was done. Now I just had to wait and remain invisible. I melted into the terrain, rifle ready. Finally, I saw movement. I estimated the range to my target to be around 240 me-

ters. I adjusted my sight picture accordingly with my ACOG scope (which was calibrated for my 5.56 and was very fast to factor range adjustments with.) At that range I wanted maximum tissue damage, so I waited for him to give me the angle I needed to get a heart and lung shot in one. He presented himself perpendicular to me and I smoothly pressed the trigger. The shot was good. He immediately jumped when the round impacted, then stood still momentarily. Before he could sprint off, I recovered my sights and pressed

off another shot. This one was on target too. One more good hit and he went down. I now had an ample supply of meat.

The AR-15 platform is extremely popular, but not everyone has put theirs to the test hunting their dinner with it. While the military and government have been using this platform for decades against enemies in warfare around the globe with favorable results, hunters have somehow been reluctant to employ this tool for game animals for the most part. Given the problems of *continued on next page*





THE 10 STEP DRILL FOR TRACKERS

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We are part of this planet because
our ancestors could track and hunt.

Tracking is about pattern recognition. A human moving across the ground creates a change in pattern or change in the baseline of the ground. A footprint compresses the ground, it crushes the vegetation, it alters the baseline of the ground, how it reflects light and many other changes to the baseline. Learning to see the changes to that baseline caused by the foot striking that ground and any other sign left (threads

on thorns, snapped twigs, bent stalks etc.) provides a tracker with the ability to follow a trail. Whether you are a young soldier learning to patrol or a property owner interested in determining who is spending time on your land and what they are doing, you want to be a tracker.

Tracking humans is an apex predator behavior. No one moves without leaving a trace of their passing and learning to track is not

hard, but it requires effort. The process of learning to track may come best from learning to track oneself. Research done by an advanced technology group while I worked at Apple dealt with pattern recognition. The research was intended to find out the minimal level of visual data required for test subjects to recognize the person in the pictures. The pictures started out as detailed pictures or photographs, but were increasingly pix-

left: Place your left foot down hard onto the ground. Place a popsicle stick into the ground right behind the heel.

below: Walk forward until you have walked out ten steps. On the tenth step, which should be your right foot, stop and place another popsicle stick into the heel.



elated. The final pixel count on a picture of Abraham Lincoln was ridiculously low. It was hard to imagine that people could recognize Lincoln in a five by seven pixel picture, but most could.

The more familiar the subject, the better the rate of recognition. Iconic pictures of Einstein, Churchill, Lincoln and Washington all had high recognition levels. As I thought about this, a tie in to tracking evolved. Why were the iconic pictures so recognizable? Because we are so used to seeing them. Even with very little visual data, we recognized them. Seeing tracks is much like this. The more tracks we have looked at, the easier the patterns are to recognize, even when the amount of visual data is minimal. When I first started tracking, I was looking for footprints. But as I tracked more and more, and filed first hundreds, then thousands of track pictures into my brain's filing cabinet, I found I needed less and less visual data. Instead of footprints, I began to recognize a partial print, a small section of tread pattern, a toe dig or a heel cup, a smudge on a leaf or a slightly displaced rock.

As this occurred, I found my ability to recognize some of the more subtle indicators of tracks increased. Soon, I could recognize a track compression in grass, a compressed pine needle or a slight difference in reflection of the light indicating that the dust had been compressed on a hard surface.

This led me to realize that a drill I had learned from my mentor many years before became very important in learning man tracking. It is called the Ten Step Drill. I recognized that one of the key purposes of this drill is to fill your brain's track filing cabinet with thousands of pictures and in so doing, reduce the amount of data needed to recognize a track.

To do this drill you will need ten to twenty sharpened popsicle sticks. Here is how it works:

Find an area of clear terrain where people have not previously walked (for a while) that allows you to start facing the sun. You will repeat this exercise hundreds of times in all different types of terrain, increasing the difficulty as you go, so pick something relatively easy such as a sandy substrate with a smattering of vegetation. Place your left foot down hard onto the ground. Place a popsicle stick into the ground right behind the heel.

Now walk forward with the right foot, then left until you have walked out ten steps. On



Framing a track helps you define in your mind the detailed shape of the compression and makes finding the heel much easier.

the tenth step, which should be your right foot, stop and place another popsicle stick into the heel. As you are just learning do not be afraid to strike your feet fairly hard to give a clear track. Remember, you are trying to fill that filing cabinet in your brain with track pictures. Soon enough you will start to challenge yourself.

Now circle around to the first stick that marks out your first track. Between that stick and the tenth stick are eight tracks. You know they are there. You know there will be indicators of the tracks. So it isn't a question of you believing the tracks are there. You know with a certainty they are. Now you just have to study the ground until you see them.

Start with your second track. You know it will be the right foot. You know your stride will be between 26 and 34 inches, so you have a pretty good idea of where to start looking. The big mistake I always made as a beginning tracker was to try to see the whole footprint. Instead, look at a wide section of ground to establish the baseline. Then look for anything in the area the track should be in that is a variation to that baseline. Is there crushed vegetation, discoloration on leaves, heel cups where the heel stuck or toe digs where the toe pushed off? Is there anything that is not the same as the surrounding ground? If I do a good job of establishing the baseline of the ground, then finding the variations to

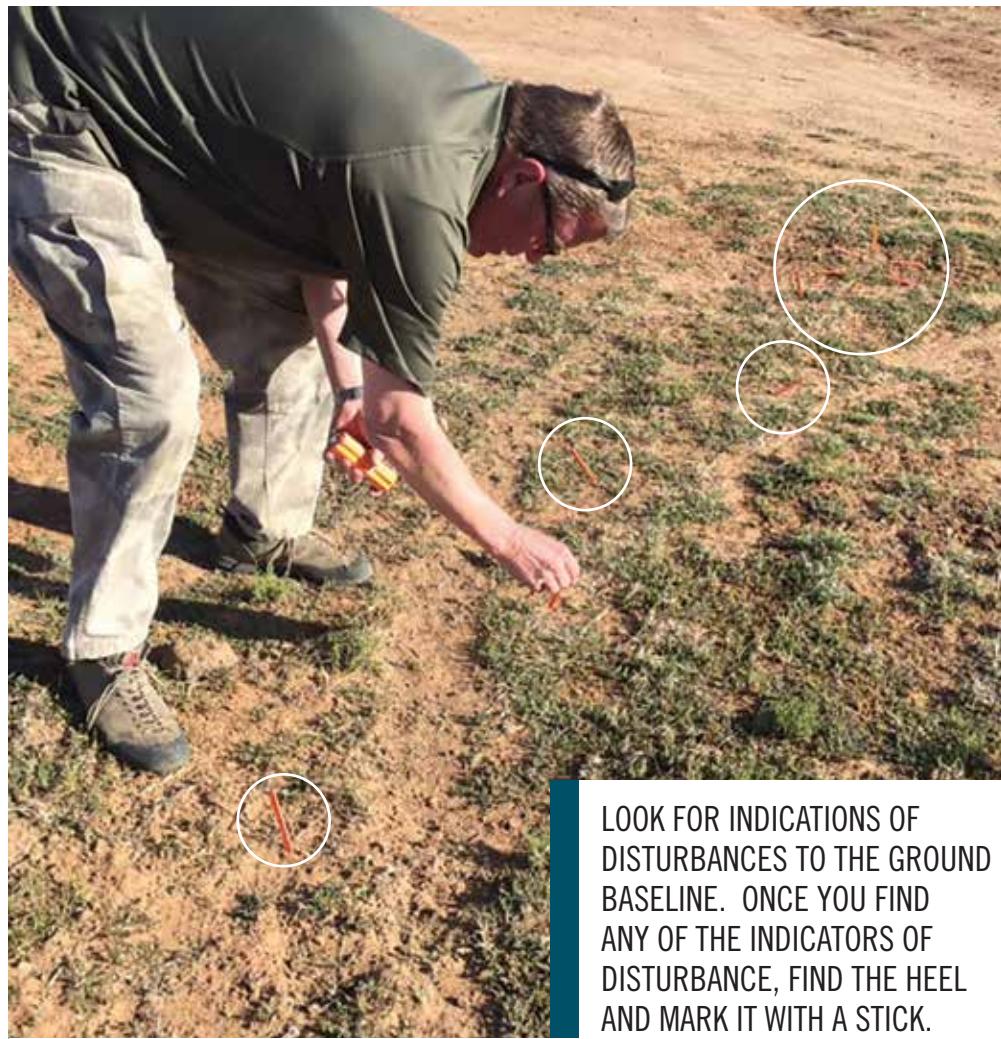
that baseline are generally part of the track.

After you find the right track, place a stick in the heel. Move on to the third track, a left. Using the distance between the first two tracks as a gauge, look for indications of disturbance to the ground baseline. Once you find any of the indicators of disturbance, find the heel and mark it with a stick. Now back to the fourth track. Continue until you have found all eight tracks. As you stand back at the beginning and look down your trail, you should see an alternating pattern of evenly spaced tracks. If for some reason you have two left tracks in a row, go look at that second track and see if you missed something.

The value of this drill is that you know the track is there, you know approximately where it is. You just have to practice pattern recognition and disturbance to baseline until you see it.

FRAMING

Lay a set of tracks and circle back to study a section of ten consecutive steps. Mark the tenth and then mark the first. Study that track for a few minutes. Start to identify the edges of the compression. Place a stick on the ground to indicate the inside of the heel, and another to indicate the outside border of the heel. Then repeat with the inside edge of the ball and the outside edge of the ball of the foot. Then place a final stick at the edge



LOOK FOR INDICATIONS OF DISTURBANCES TO THE GROUND BASELINE. ONCE YOU FIND ANY OF THE INDICATORS OF DISTURBANCE, FIND THE HEEL AND MARK IT WITH A STICK.

of the toe. Now you have the track marked around its edge. This exercise helps you define in your mind the detailed shape of the compression and makes finding the heel much easier. Try framing the first two tracks before you go forward to the third track.

SUBSTRATES

The ten-step drill should be practiced first in soft soil or sand. Once you have done it many times in easier soil, you can try harder and more difficult substrates. After years of practicing this drill, I was able to track pretty well on the slick rock of Southern Utah, but that was after literally hundreds and hundreds of runs on different soils, different vegetation, on hard-packed snow, frozen ground and as many different substrates as I could imagine. Sometimes, lighting and reflection was perfect and I finished in two minutes, and sometimes it took two hours. To be a good tracker requires a high level of commitment (this is why there are not that many good trackers.)

Another rule I imposed on myself was that I could not skip a track. Often, for example, the fifth track is plainly visible, but you may invest twenty minutes on four. However, my

rule was not to jump ahead and mark five until I had found four. In any set of tracks, there will be some easy and some hard. This is OK. In fact, this difficulty is what sharpens your skill each time you practice the drill. Just focus on the track in front of you.

If you are ever involved in a tracking search, you will be tracking as fast as you can to either catch the bad guy or find the lost child. You will not be able to look for every track *and* still catch up. You will need to make some educated predictions. This process in the ten-step drill is simply a discipline to practice to get you to learn to see tracks.

INTERVAL

Always circle back around to the first track and look at the pattern of sticks to make sure the pattern makes logical sense. Three left tracks in a row is pretty hard to accomplish. One stride that is twice as long as the stride on the opposite side is unlikely. So study the track pattern and intervals and adjust as necessary. After you are satisfied with the pattern and spacing, pull your sticks up and move to a new location and repeat the process. I made a goal to do ten drills a day. At first that was

easy, but as I challenged myself with harder surfaces and lighter tracks, some days one or two was all I could do. My mentor told me he practiced till his eyes bled. I discovered that did not fit well with my adult responsibilities, so I only tracked until I could no longer see. Some days that was only one ten-step drill.

CONCLUSION

I was obsessed with tracking when I learned how to do it. I am sure all the Sherlock Holmes and Hardy Boy mysteries I had read as a boy played into that. I loved the mysteries of the track, the interpretation, the aging, the challenge of unraveling the “what happened here” question. However, once I got into pursuit (high speed) tracking, I had to focus hard for a while on learning to see tracks with minimal visual data apparent. Trailing was crucial. Once I developed that skill, the mysteries were once again a course of study. But being able to follow a trail when time is of the essence was essential.

The great thing about the ten-step drill is that it never gets old. The challenge of finding the next track is endless. When I do the drill frequently, my speed stays pretty consistent. But it is a perishable skill. If I do not practice, I lose speed. It takes me a long time to pick through the hard tracks.

Remember, the first purpose of the drill is to get thousands of pictures in your brain's filing cabinet so that when you see a partial track or slight smudge you can find the rest of the track. The difference between an experienced tracker and a beginner is ten thousand tracks. The ten-step drill makes that ten-thousand track journey much faster and easier. Over time you can practice it in different terrain, under different lighting, wearing different footwear, moving at different speeds and carrying different loads. Have fun and practice with the people you care about. ✓

BIO

Kevin Reeve is the founder and Director of OnPoint Tactical Tracking School (www.onpointtactical.com). Kevin has provided training to law enforcement, SAR teams and the U.S. military in the arts of tracking, survival, escape and evasion and urban operations. Kevin also worked at Apple Computer for five years doing organizational development and executive coaching, as well as platform training and curriculum development.