

Tracking Column

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THE WAY OF TRACKING © KYT WALKEN

CLIFF LUCAS "SANDDANGO"



CURRENTLY WORKING WITH LAND OWNERS AND RANCHES AS ASSET PROTECTION AGAINST STOCK LOSS AND OR VANDALISM OF REMOTE AREAS.

AN OCCASIONAL SEARCH AND RESCUE OR RECOVERY JOB.

CERTIFIED DIVER AND CRASH FIRE RESCUE TRAINED.

1. Can you describe the area you mostly track in?

My name is Cliff Lucas. My primary area that I work in is the northern chihuahuan Desert. The terrain has many transitions. We can go from soft powdery red sand or caliche drifts which connect to the hard pack and back to the soft sand and then into the Rocky Mountain soil. The altitude here is an average of 4000 + feet and the average temperatures how the lows in the teens and highs near 115 degrees Fahrenheit. There are no ponds streams or available springs in the area. It is kill you dead dry.

2. When did you learn to track?

I was born on the Llano Estacado of New Mexico. The first ground my feet stepped on was sand. I was greatly influenced by my grandfather's indigenous teachings, his Cherokee way. The kind of lessons with no words spoken. No compliment no criticism. Only watch and learn.

The one catalyst that set me as a tracker was because of an incident involving me and my mother when I was almost 2 years old. My father was rarely present because his job kept him on the road for weeks at a time. This continued for decades. As my mom was alone in a desert pregnant.

We had 2 German Shepherds and little 2 year old me. I was a quiet child and only had those 2 dogs as friends due to our remote location and lack of other people in the vicinity. So in essence I was raised by dogs and wandered around the desert with a diaper on while my pregnant mother endured complications.

The day of the incident she put the dogs up as usual so we could walk down to the mailbox. The dogs were aggressive to the postal worker so she put up the dogs when he was near. We waited for the mail a while, then the mail arrived and we started home.

When we arrived home she waddled up the porch big baby belly tiring her out. She leaned back to catch a breath and then she froze. Screaming for me to stay back. A huge rattle snake had her cornered on the porch. She dealt with rattlesnakes regularly but today there was no shovel.

She was coming unglued. I was 18 months old in a full diaper.

I knew about the shovel but it was stuck too deeply in the ground for me to move but I found the broom. Against her screaming I took her the broom. I knew to stay away from the buzzers. She took the broom and I went back to wandering.

She held that rattlesnake down with that broom for hours until help arrived. I saw the slither trail the snake left.

It embedded in my head and tracks in the sand became my obsession.

3. How do I apply tracking in my everyday life?

I use tracking as a direct indication of what has been present that I did not see on my land. The natural flow and any interruption is easy to see. The spot where the hawk caught the bunny, an erratic feral K9 track or a cigarette butt. Everything is a sign, a piece of history. A moment in time. I use this skill now to determine what is intruding on people's properties. I am only a locator, I do no recovery or photos. I find and identify the object or objects. That is it. Someone else does the rest. I am only the tracker.

4. What is the toughest area you have ever tracked in?

The most challenging area for me is tracking in a sand storm when the object is far ahead and only moves when it really blowing and is leaving a false trail to slow me down. When something knows it is being pursued you always face the risk of ambush. Awareness is top priority. You cannot allow your mind to drift. You must stay focused to survive. The nuances of cutting sign are infinite. Once a way of life for all is now a niche skill. Specialty trackers are like specialty doctors. Keep in mind that wherever you find yourself there will be some type of natural flow.

The lay of the land. Before satellites and thermal tracking there was just a piece of paper if you had even that. If you call yourself a tracker then you know that you represent an ancient way and must be prepared and humble.

An open mind absorbing everything like a magnet. Smells, textures, colors, terrain, weather, time etc. The moment this becomes routine to you it is time to step back. You must be well nourished, well conditioned and know your limitations. Training increases endurance and stealth endurance minimizes limitations. This is generalized information and specifics is what you go to "school" for.

The moment you become dehydrated or hungry you judgment deteriorates rapidly, the tables turn and you become a victim. If you do not understand these simple things, stay on the porch. Do not insult an honorable occupation. You cannot fake this. You never stop learning. There is no climax, it is a long journey for the patient and wise. Eyes open, nose open, ears open, mouth shut.

