

# GUYdelines

A few thoughts for outdoor lovers and leaders from

*WILD GUYde Adventures, LLC*

Vol. 10, No. 2 (Spring, 2016)

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## Preparing for the Worst

I just returned last night from recertifying my Wilderness First Responder card -- an every-three-years weekend ordeal to stay current with best practice and revised protocol in backcountry medicine and rescue. Please allow me to share a few thoughts and applications I had as I drove home from PA yesterday afternoon.

Being able to handle a backcountry emergency or injury has a lot to do with preparation before we ever head out the door. Many incidents occur, or are made worse, because we don't think through possibilities and probabilities before leaving home. It's that *invincibility* thing again -- "it won't happen to me." We have tangled with this fiend previously in this newsletter. So here are a few suggestions about **preparation:**

1. ***Have you gone through your first aid kit lately?*** Do you have one? Here is an encouragement to go through it each season, to keep medications current, and adapt the kit to the areas you are visiting. If you are paddling Virginia's rivers, you will want to be prepared for poison ivy. If you are in the George

Washington National Forest (or anywhere else that deer are abundant), you will want permethrin for ticks.

2. ***Know your group medically.*** Anyone obese or low fitness? Any diabetic or exercise-induced asthma issues? Are the females menstrually prepared, not just for business as usual, but for possible changes that come with a new environment and a different activity level? Anyone in your group need a rescue inhaler or an Epi-pen? If they carry it, do you know where to find it and how to use it if they are incapacitated? Have those uncomfortable conversations with your friends and group members before leaving, so you are better prepared for what may sneak up on you out there.

3. ***Research your area.*** River level gauges are now available on line in real time, so you can check before you go ([www.waterdata.usgs.gov](http://www.waterdata.usgs.gov)). Our ceiling for getting on the South Fork of the Shenandoah is 3.5 feet at the Luray gauge; this past week, the river was swollen and running at 7 feet! It would have been a big mistake to jump up and go paddling just because the weather was gorgeous on Saturday afternoon.

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Fire danger is tricky right now as well. Just before this rain, we had a stretch of about 2 weeks of dryness, and the Rocky Mount fire in Shenandoah National Park demonstrated the potential for a lot of dry winter fuel to explode when things suddenly turn warm.

#### 4. *Update your first aid knowledge and skills.*

If it has been a while since you took Wilderness First Aid, register for the course and go through with it. Exactly because most of us are not doing this stuff on a daily basis, we need occasional refreshers. Also, what we think we know about medicine continually changes, so it pays to periodically hang out with the experts, and get our knowledge base updated. For \$240, you can contact my friend Chris Tate ([www.wfa.net](http://www.wfa.net)), spend a weekend practicing your skills, and come away with a pile more confidence in your readiness. If you want to go further and get the Wilderness First Responder certification, check into Wilderness Medical Associates ([www.wildmed.com](http://www.wildmed.com)), the Wilderness Medical Institute ([www.nols.edu/wmi](http://www.nols.edu/wmi)), or Stonehearth Open Learning Opportunities ([www.soloschools.com](http://www.soloschools.com)). Courses are happening all over the country, and particularly available now in the spring, when a lot of camps and outdoor programs are gearing up their staff members for the summer season. Beyond medical readiness, what about paddling skills, climbing skills, backcountry hiking and camping (stream crossing, navigation, etc.)? My advice is that we never be too proud to take a class, hire a guide for day, or ask for coaching, if it will improve our preparation before we head out there. The outdoors does not spare you just because you are a nice person (though you undoubtedly are!).

When you feel amply prepared, there are, of course, a few things to remember about actually managing an outdoor emergency. These will be generalities but might serve as useful reminders:

1. *Scene safety:* If you walk into an emergency situation, the first question is not, "What can I do to help?" but "What do I need to do to keep myself safe?" The mantra for the first triangle in the Patient Assessment System is: "Don't just do something -- stand there." The idea is to

survey the scene, and if it is not yet safe for you to enter, resist the impulse to rush in. Is there dangerous water, a rock fall or avalanche hazard, a bear or snake still loose in the area, or a swarm of bees on overdrive? You are worthless as a rescuer if you are compromised, so protect yourself, both from harm, and from your patient (Personal Protective Equipment, etc.).

2. In managing an incident or injury, *stay with what you know and can do*. This is not a time or place for amateur surgery, conjecture, experimentation, and foggy memories. You can make a positive contribution, if in no other way, by protecting your patient from further harm until qualified help arrives. Put the ego of "Super Rescuer" on the shelf, and work within your limitations and the boundaries of your certification.

3. Finally, *avoid high risk solutions to low risk problems*. Calling in a helicopter for a broken leg or even a grossly mangled but controllable bleeding wound represents an irrational cost benefit analysis. Injuries can be serious without being emergent; not every dramatic injury requires an urgent evacuation or a desperate stream crossing, or the additional risks that accompany an inadequate litter carrying team that becomes exhausted. Good decisions reflect the clear assessment that the benefit outweighs the risk.

It is my hope that you never need to face situations that may make these suggestions any more than academic to you. Nevertheless, the more days we spend outdoors, the more likely it is that we will either experience or encounter danger and injuries. I hope you can benefit from a few of these suggestions, and move into this exciting new adventure season with confidence and competence. Happy adventuring out there!

LRZ

Are you coming to Virginia for a family vacation, church group trip, boys' club event, or escape weekend? Why not experience Virginia adventure with **WILD GUYde Adventures!** WGA offers guided beginner level outdoor adventures and competent instruction in activity fundamentals. We can take you **hiking, rock climbing and rappelling, caving, or canoeing**. We use various activity areas in the George Washington and Monongahela National Forests, along Virginia's Blue Ridge, and in the Potomac Highlands of West Virginia. Check out the 2016 trip options below, or call to talk about your own creative adventure idea!

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### How was your trip with the **WILD GUYde**?!

Thanks again for guiding us – the trip was awesome! I'm a little sore and bruised today but it makes me happy because it reminds me of everything we did. The info was clear and the location appropriate. I also really enjoyed how you incorporated learning and team building elements into our trip. (Sarah, 2012)

We arrived back in Florida late Thursday night. We had a wonderful time on our adventure with you and we have all been raving to everyone about how great the trip was! Your professionalism and encouragement allowed us to continue on even when some of us were reluctant to try (me, of course)! The boys raved about the caving and the fact that it looked scary, but once you got through it, it wasn't as difficult or scary as you thought it would be. Todd and I were both thrilled with the learning experience for the kids and feel that we have all grown as a result of facing our fears. Everyone talked about what a great guide you were for us! Overall, our adventure was a wonderful experience and the highlight of our trip to VA! (Christine, 2012)

We had a blast, everything was perfect, and you did an amazing job! The pictures are AWESOME! We would recommend you to any outdoor lover! We agreed that we learned so much from you. (Nina, 2012)

Thank you so very much for a wonderful adventure rock climbing last week. It was wonderful to share the time with my daughter. We both really appreciated your teaching style and the knowledge you imparted. I found a whole bucket-full of sermon illustrations. The location was excellent. We appreciated the fact that we were alone on the climb (except for the beautiful hawk). The photos you took came out well, and we showed them to my wife who appreciated our joy, but was thankful that she chose a more Hobbitish way to spend the day (reading). (Pastor Chris, 2012)

Your customer service was outstanding. Despite my late contact, you found a way to get us in on an adventure. The experience was excellent. The kids had a blast but you were appropriately serious in your approach. Safety was a clear priority as it must be. The experience was well structured and presented a number of great challenges. (Mark, 2012)