

GUIDELINES

A few thoughts for outdoor lovers and leaders from
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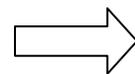
Human Attitudes that Lead to Suffering in the Backcountry (No. 10)

Not many of the so-called *accidents* in the outdoors are actually “acts of God” – totally unpredictable and capricious acts of harsh Mother Nature. Most of them have *human causes* – namely, particular attitudes of bravado or ignorance that place one in a position to have a disaster. In this series of short essays, we are exploring 10 different “**human attitudes that lead to suffering in the backcountry.**” Think deeply about each one – reflect on your own experiences, and prepare yourself and your group mentally before departing, so you don’t get added to the stories that follow.

So far, we have considered nine of these potentially fatal attitudes:

- *An unwillingness to change plans, even in the face of overwhelming evidence, and its companion behavior -- an unfounded need to keep to a predetermined schedule*
- *A desire to impress; overweening arrogance or ego, and its accompanying competitiveness*
- *A lack of awareness of or failure to acknowledge some critical change in conditions (group strength, weather), and its near cousin, a reliance on wishful thinking, instead of dispassionate acceptance of objective data.*
- *A blind trust in personal invincibility, the benevolence of the universe, and a belief that nature cares about me.*
- *An unexamined urge to press on through obstacles instead of evaluating their objective dangers.*
- *Avoidance or denial of personal weaknesses (lack of knowledge, lack of fitness, inadequate skill level or equipment)*
- *A casual approach to details; neglect of due diligence owing to familiarity, laziness, path of least resistance thinking, or faulty communication*
- *Hurry, for any number of reasons*
- *Materialism and greed, leading to ill-advised exploits (either to avoid sacrificing equipment, or to obtain free gear)*

Let’s look now at Number Ten. Read on!



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Human attitude No. 10 that leads to suffering in the backcountry:

Naïve optimism about the demands of the trip, leading to a gross failure to plan (weather, equipment, timeline).

In January of 1992, two Colorado State University students attempted to cross-country ski to Chasm Lake cabin – at 11, 590 feet, in winter, this is not a place to be casual about preparation.

*“Stuffed in Joan’s small daypack were a dress, nightgown, cosmetics, and extra lingerie, but no sleeping bag, extra warm clothing, or survival necessities. Fred carried steaks, eggs, and 2 sleeping bags, but no stove, fuel, or water. They failed to register with anyone. On the fifth day of the search ... her frozen body was found still huddled against a huge rock. Eight months later, Fred’s remains were discovered a mile upstream from his girlfriend.”**

The Ten Essentials are exactly that – ESSENTIALS, and going without them or the knowledge to use them can be fatal. This story and the next one illustrate the importance of planning, and follow-through when traveling in the outdoors.

Those Ten Essentials, in case we haven’t reviewed them lately, are:

Water	Extra food	Extra clothing	Map
Compass	Fire starter	Pocketknife	Whistle
First Aid Kit	Flashlight/headlamp		

Plan ahead, and TAKE EVERY ITEM ON EVERY TRIP OUTDOORS!

*“On July 6, 1934, the two men left friends and set out to do the 13,770 foot Grand Teton in one day -- an adventure for which seasoned mountaineers allow the better part of two. They knew nothing of the route, took neither rope nor ice axe, wore leather-soled shoes, and did not register. Not surprisingly, they did not come back.”***

Both were discovered deceased two days later, having fallen at least 1000 feet. This attitude of naïve ignorance about the demands of the outdoors is repeated many times each year on both a major and a minor scale. Families set off on day-hikes without water bottles, maps, or flashlights, little aware that even daytrips can turn into unexpected overnights. Parents allow children to run on ahead or trail behind, without providing appropriate briefing about directions, adequate clothing or equipment, or instructions about contingencies. DO YOUR HOMEWORK before any outing. Research the mileage, the weather conditions, and the recommendations of the local area. Maybe we should add the eleventh essential: TAKE YOUR BRAIN, know how to use it, and don’t unwittingly follow our two Grand Teton adventurers down the mountain!

**Death, Daring, and Disaster: Search and Rescue in the National Parks*, Charles R. Farabee, Jr., Taylor Trade Publishing., 2005, pp. 302.

*** Ibid*, pp. 123-4.

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