

GUYdelines

A few thoughts for outdoor lovers and leaders from
WILD GUYde Adventures, LLC

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Learning from Tragedy

Ed Whymper, the first man to ascend the Matterhorn, said late in his life: *“Climb if you will, but remember that courage and strength are naught without prudence, and that a momentary negligence may destroy the happiness of a lifetime. Do nothing in haste, look well to each step, and from the beginning, think what may be the end.”* In this quarter's issue, we review several human attitudes that lead to suffering in the backcountry. In this case, I am simply going to relate 5 true stories that ended in fatalities, to help us practice *“from the beginning, think[ing], what may be the end.”*

Human attitude no. 1 that leads to suffering in the backcountry: *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.*

Russell and Brenda Cox' hike to the summit of Mt. Lafayette in New Hampshire ended in tragedy when the couple ignored advice about deteriorating conditions and continued their trek upward. Whiteout conditions and 75 MPH winds engulfed the pair on their descent. The local Mountain Rescue Service acknowledged

that this was yet another case of a party pressing on when they should have retreated.ⁱ

Human attitude no. 2 that leads to suffering in the backcountry: *A desire to impress; overweening arrogance or ego, and its accompanying competitiveness.*

A great night talking about "*Stupidity Explored: Why Some People Get Hurt in the Outdoors*," at Peak Experiences in Richmond last week.



“A faint cry echoed from below, followed by the unmistakable sound of a body tumbling into the nearby vertical gully. Ricocheting 600 feet, the young man probably died instantly . . . Wanting to enter the record books as the youngest to conquer the Arrow, the high school junior from Fresno instead became the first modern-era climber to be killed in Yosemite.”ⁱⁱ

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Human attitude no. 3 that leads to suffering in the backcountry: *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.*

"It's such an easy walk," Brian's mother had said. "It looked so safe. It's fantastic -- to think that he could have gotten lost with so many people around." Only 15 minutes after starting what was to have been a carefree hike on Mount Rainier, 14-year old Brian Cornelius was dead" (he slid down a "safe-looking" snow slope, and fell into a freezing waterfall).ⁱⁱⁱ Might the casualness of the parents about the terrain that they were traversing have played into their family's behaviors on the glacier?

Human attitude no. 4 that leads to suffering in the backcountry: *A blind trust in personal invincibility, the benevolence of the universe, and a belief that nature cares about me.*

In December of 2006, three climbers were stranded in a surprise winter storm just below the summit of Mt. Hood. The wife of one of the men told the press that she was sure her husband would make it off the mountain alive because, "we got engaged up there, and he promised that we would spend our 10th anniversary on that mountain." Apparently, neither the mountain nor the storm knew this, because Kelly James was found dead in a snow cave after the third day of searching, and the other two climbers have not yet been located.

Human attitude no. 5 that leads to suffering in the backcountry: *A casual approach to details; neglect of due diligence owing to familiarity, laziness, path of least resistance thinking, or faulty communication.*

"From the moment Walker and his companion hitchhiked into the park, the two did everything wrong. They unlawfully pitched their tent in a restricted area after disregarding advice from a concession employee; they ignored fresh bear scat near camp; they littered the site with smelly scraps and dirty cooking utensils; they left open food when they went hiking."^{iv} By the end of the night, Harry was dead, the victim of a mauling by a 20 year old female grizzly.

The implicit lesson from each story is that the dangers we encounter outdoors are not merely in the environment or conditions. ***We bring danger within us***, in our attitudes, our skills and knowledge or lack thereof, our preparedness, and our decisions. Our awareness of these dangers within us and in our companions, and our willingness and ability to take corrective actions or exercise appropriate restraint, might be the most important safety tools we have. Next quarter, we will look at a few more lessons for the living. As always, I welcome your feedback and reflections, personal stories, and additional advice. Stay safe 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 2015 trip options below, or call to talk about your own creative adventure idea!

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You may also visit www.wildguyde.com

ⁱ *Accidents in North American Mountaineering, 2005*, American Alpine Club, p. 74

ⁱⁱ *Death, Daring, and Disaster: Search and Rescue in the National Parks*, Charles R. Farabee, Jr., Taylor Trade Publishing., 2005, pp. 243.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Death, Daring, and Disaster: Search and Rescue in the National Parks*, Charles R. Farabee, Jr., Taylor Trade Publishing., 2005, pp. 250-1, 441.

^{iv} *Death, Daring, and Disaster: Search and Rescue in the National Parks*, Charles R. Farabee, Jr., Taylor Trade Publishing., 2005, pp. 303-4.

How was your trip with the **WILD GUY**??!

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)