

# GUYdelines

A few thoughts for outdoor lovers and leaders from

*WILD GUYde Adventures*, LLC

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**Warm-up and Engage:** Can you recollect a recent situation in which plans had to change, or conditions were not what was initially expected? Ruminates on this for a short while, thinking in particular of the human interactions that accompanied the event.

## **Rigid with data and objectivity but flexible with planning**

Imagine sitting at the kitchen table, as many of us have, with friend and trail map, plotting the perfect backpacking trip. And in the flushed anticipation of the event and the excitement of planning, the mileages sound perfect, the campsite locations are nicely spaced, and the challenges seem very manageable. The greater test of our wisdom occurs later, however. Out on the trail, the weather turns raw, a team member is not as strong or fit as we expected, or a navigational error introduces a 3-hour delay into the day. What now of the plan – do we flex and change, or do we doggedly believe that, because it was perfect at the kitchen table, it must continue to be adhered to? *“When the going gets tough, the tough get going!”* The data suggests that a remarkable number of us will continue to “push the plan,” sometimes even in the face of overwhelming evidence that we should adapt or abort.

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. <sup>1</sup>

Sometimes, this error is manifest in an unfounded need to keep to a predetermined schedule. *“Headed for the summit (of Mt. Clark, CA), Michael Kalantarian, alone and running way behind schedule on the second of his two days off, knew he was pushing his luck when he encountered a steep icy slab partway up. Unroped and forced to move onto even steeper rock, the 30 year-old soon slipped and tumbled 70 feet to the rocks below.”* <sup>2</sup>

There are also occasions when we allow other forces to take over our minds. Regarding Tom Ashwood’s evacuation from the Diamond of Longs Peak (CO) in September of 2000, *“contributory causes discovered by investigating park rangers included an obsessive desire of Ashwood in wanting to complete this climb at any cost. Also, there was commercial interest on the part of Ashwood’s partners, amateur guides intending to profit from the publicity they got for hosting the climb (Ashwood had cerebral palsy).”* <sup>3</sup>

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Lester R. Zook, *WILD GUYde Adventures*  
1047 Stuart St., Harrisonburg, VA 22802  
(540) 433-1637 [lester@wildguyde.com](mailto:lester@wildguyde.com)

King Solomon was not a mountaineer, but he seems to have understood something about this human tendency to fall in love with a plan, even at the expense of rationality and flexibility: *“The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going, and suffer for it.”* (Proverbs 27:12)

On an early spring backpacking trip in the Otter Creek wilderness and high country, we ran into snow on Day 1, and so rerouted down off the high ridgeline into more protected terrain to camp for the night. The next day, at our anticipated stream crossing, the creek was chocolate milk – swollen, fast, and dangerous -- so we rerouted again. This crew was getting an early experiential lesson in flexibility as a survival trait, instead of bull-headedness. That evening around the campfire, I offered the student trip members some of these ideas about adaptability, capping off my comments with a delightful quote of Chinese philosophy from the Tao Te Ching: *“The rigid person is a disciple of death; the soft, supple, and delicate are lovers of life.”* The oriental image of the willow comes to mind – bending so as not to break. The students liked it so much that, by trip’s end, they had developed their own rap rendition (♫ *“Don’t want to be no Disciple of Death...”* ♫)!

A *plan* is simply our best attempt to forecast conditions, and design appropriate strategies. But when the conditions are different than anticipated, the strategies that are dependent upon them must of necessity be reconsidered. And so the most capable outdoorsman is always reevaluating and tinkering with the plan, continuing to fit it to present realities. Rigid unexamined adherence to plans or rules is always dangerous. Preserve an open and flexible mind, adapt and change as necessary, don’t attach your ego to “completing the trip as planned,” and you will successfully avoid becoming a *disciple of death* – the deceased adherent of an inflexible plan.

Closely related is the unexamined urge to press on through obstacles instead of evaluating their objective dangers.

*“Throughout the day on June 17 [on the West Buttress of Mount McKinley], several expeditions passed Horoyaki Hoshino and his companions between 18,000 and 19,700 feet. Everyone who passed Hoshino and was later interviewed said that Hoshino looked exhausted and shaky. A ranger*

*patrol descending from the summit stopped to talk to Hoshino and in no uncertain terms tried to convince him to go down, but was unsuccessful.”* 4

This story had a tolerable ending only because two aircraft were eventually deployed to manage an emergency evacuation of the stubborn and ailing climber.

Sometimes this dogged determination takes the form of a dogmatic loyalty to particular “rules of thumb” or ways executing particular skills. *“What is the smallest diameter tree that you should use for a natural climbing anchor?”* The recent graduate of his first ever climbing skills course pipes up, *“Six inches!”* The correct answer is, of course, *“It depends...”* *“If you come upon a victim who is not breathing, how many chest compressions should be administered?”* The newly minted Red Cross first aider quickly volunteers, *“Sixty per minute!”* The correct answer again is, *“It depends...”* If the answer to both is *“It depends,”* let’s ask the next question: *“What does it depend ON?”* Regarding natural climbing anchors, we need to ask, *“Is the tree healthy? Where is it positioned in relation to our intended master point? Does it sink into topsoil or does the root mat lay on top of exposed rock?”* A 3-inch live tree may be much stronger than a 6-inch dead one. In our CPR question, we need to know if this is an adult or a child, if they have a trauma-damaged respiratory or circulatory mechanism, or if the scene is not safe for us to enter (in which case, the answer to compressions-per-minute question is zero). If the correct answer to any question in the outdoors is, *“It depends,”* then when we push our students and followers to ask the next question, *“What does it depend ON?”* we are now teaching them wisdom – to identify the variables and make judgements about their relative value. *“A little knowledge is a dang’rous thing,”* so what is the poet’s advice? *“Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring...”* *“Rules are for fools,”* quipped Paul Petzoldt, founder of the National Outdoor Leadership School.

Let’s remember back to the expedition examples at the start of the chapter, and take a few minutes to think about this obstinate insistence on continuing a trip, even when all the objective data suggests that we should be turning back. What might be the psychological dimensions at work here?

Is it *pride* – we don't want to appear as failures in front of those back home if we turn back. Harvey Manning, author of Backpacking, One Step at a Time, says, “*Beginners die on the trails because they do not have the guts to be cowards.*”<sup>5</sup> Have we unwisely linked *stopping, waiting, or turning back* with *weakness, shame, or defeat* instead of correctly tying it to *wisdom and care for our group*?

Is it *denial* – a desire to avoid thinking deeply about unpleasantness – that we might really be lost, “*up a creek without a paddle,*” or doomed, and so we plod on, hoping things will miraculously get better when all the logic says that they can only get worse. Does pressing on seem to hold the illusory promise that hope is being kept alive? I have been with groups having a bad day, but no one will verbalize the truth, because actually saying or hearing it somehow threatens us – makes it seem more real. In actuality, speaking the truth about our reality is the obligatory first step to changing our reality. I have been with navigationally confused students who have blamed inept map-makers, or claimed that the mountain “*that should be right there*” must have been removed by strip-mining. Denial takes on many faces.

Is it “*group-think*?” We are unwilling to oppose the prevailing mindset of the group, and so no one is strong enough to stand up and say that things have gone from bad to worse, and that we should consider abandoning ship? Sure, we knew it would be hard, and we expected challenges – but there is no textbook about when it's time to transition: from simply working hard overcoming challenges to recognizing that they might be fatal. And, we tell ourselves, “*No one else seems to be worried . . .*” Some creative and sobering research has illustrated the absurd notions that an individual will defend in order not to appear different from the group.

Is it *fear*, compounded by *the fear of appearing fearful*? Do we lose objectivity in direct proportion to the mounting emotional experience at work within us? So possibly the more dangerous things become, the less intellectually equipped we are to handle them correctly?

These are all scary thoughts, because they suggest that we might lose rationality when we need it most. Al Siebert, in his study of The Survivor Personality, observes:

*“The survivor does not impose pre-existing patterns on new information, but rather allows new information to reshape [his mental models]. The person who has the best chance of handling a situation well is usually the one with the best . . . mental pictures or images of what is occurring outside the body.”*<sup>6</sup>

Notice that the four explanations for irrational perseverance (pride, denial, group-think, and fear) are all *internal* states. Seibert points us outside ourselves, beyond our egocentric preoccupation to *external* conditions. Think of harsh reality as that alarm clock that jars us awake and away from our pleasurable albeit surrealistic dream world. This is what it is to be rigid with data and objectivity.

There are no quick fixes for this dilemma. Leaders-in-training need to be brought through learning experiences in which they have to radically revise plans in order to succeed. They need to have their decisions evaluated and judged by mentors. Training should include stories that affirm flexibility and proactive caution, where the willingness to stop is called *courage* instead of *cowardice*. Current leaders should critically debrief every incident, close call, and near miss with someone who is willing to be objective even about the failures. And we all need to recommit ourselves with every trip to the elegant simplicity of the Hindu proverb: “*No matter how far down the wrong road you have gone, turn around . . .*”

<sup>1</sup> American Alpine Club, Accidents in North American Mountaineering – 2005, Golden, CO., 2005 (p. 74).

<sup>2</sup> Farabee, Charles R. Jr., Death, Daring, and Disaster: Search and Rescue in the National Parks, Lanham, MD, Taylor Trade Publishing., 2005 (p. 390).

<sup>3</sup> American Alpine Club, Accidents in North American Mountaineering – 2000, Golden, CO., 2000 (p. 56).

<sup>4</sup> American Alpine Club, Accidents in North American Mountaineering – 1998, Golden, CO 1998 (p. 23).

<sup>5</sup> Manning, Harvey, Backpacking, One Step at a Time, Vintage Books, New York, NY, 1972.

<sup>6</sup> Seibert, Al, The Survivor Personality, Penguin Putnam, New York, NY, 1996.

Are you coming to Virginia for a family vacation, church group trip, troop 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 2021 trip options below, or call to talk about your own creative adventure idea!  
(540-433-1637 or [lester@wildguyde.com](mailto:lester@wildguyde.com) )  
You may also visit [www.wildguyde.com](http://www.wildguyde.com)

## CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE: 2021 Daytrips with WILD GUYde Adventures, Harrisonburg, VA

**Top-Roping at Hidden Rocks, Virginia:** This is the rock climbing trip for the adventurous beginner – you don't have much experience, but you want a great outdoor day with your family or special friends. Thirty minutes west of Harrisonburg, we'll park just inside George Washington National Forest, gear up, and hike a scenic 20 minutes through rhododendron and hemlocks and across some mountain streams to a secluded sandstone cliff. There will be pink and white mountain laurel in June, and wild huckleberries in August. You'll be introduced to harnesses, knots, helmets, and the *belay system*; then we'll try some easy warm-up climbs to remind you that the kid inside you still likes to clamber on things. We can go on to some harder climbing that invites you to try new skills and movements. And we'll finish the day with a rappel – backing over the edge, with nothing between you and the ground below but 60 feet of air and a great view! Closer to Luray or Northern Virginia? We'll visit **Waterfall Mountain** in the Massanutten Range, or **Little Stony Man** on the Blue Ridge for TALL climbing and spectacular Shenandoah Valley panoramas! Closer to Lexington or Roanoke? We'll visit **Goshen Pass** and climb above the gorgeous Maury River!

(Full day \$250 for 1-3 people; \$60 for each additional. ½-day \$175 for 1-3, and \$45 for each additional)

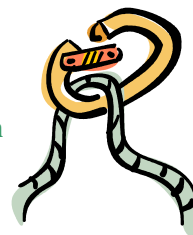
**Beginner Climbing at Seneca Rocks, WV:** After 90 minutes of curving mountain highway (okay, *country two-lane*), you'll gasp to see a spectacular blade of Tuscarora Sandstone, whose summit sits almost 1000 feet above its North Fork Valley floor. Seneca Rocks is a scenic place for the beginner or family to learn the rock climbing basics, top-roping and rappelling to an awesome West Virginia backdrop. Easy routes guarantee early success, but more challenging climbs also wait to test your skills. Seneca Rocks is an awesome place to climb, just beyond the sign: "*Here ends the realm of the hiker!*"  
(Full day \$275 for 1-3 people; \$65 for each additional. ½ day \$200 for 1-3; \$50 each additional)



**Multi-Pitch at Seneca Rocks:** A little more experienced in climbing? Maybe you tried it at camp or the local rock gym? Ready for the next step? Join me for the multi-pitch experience, seconding the route as we lead-climb to the top of the fabled South Summit! This is the only technical summit in the U.S. east of the Mississippi. Seneca has routes at all ranges of difficulty, from starters like *Old Ladies Route* (5.2) to mid-range classics (*West Pole* 5.7) to old school hardman routes like *Crack of Dawn* and *Madmen Only* (5.10). Every one of them will give you a new appreciation for the expression "*high and vertical.*" Register your accomplishment and ruminations in the summit journal, wave to tourists way down in the valley, and then head down to *terra firma* via the three-pitch rappel. Finish the day with a splash in the North Fork River swimming hole at "Gravel Beach"; then pick up a cold drink and a West Virginia memento at Harpers General Store before sleeping the ride back to Virginia and "the Burg."

(Full-day: \$225 1<sup>st</sup> person; \$150 each addl.)

**Instructional Climbing:** This is a tutorial for those who have a little exposure to climbing, and want to gain eventual autonomy. Lots of instruction in current best-practice and hands-on trying it for you in rigging top anchors, belaying skills and equipment alternatives, movement coaching, and rappel setup



and protection. There will be individualized attention and repetitive practice as well as some exploration of the historical evolution of climbing equipment and protocol. You will finish the day with a lot more confidence in your basic skills. Bring a partner so you'll have someone to climb with later.

**(\$175 1<sup>st</sup> person; \$125 each for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>)**

**WILD GUYde Adventures** offers two other rock climbing options: a **Boy Scout Rock Climbing Merit Badge** tutorial for troops and leaders. We send a booklet to get troops started on their knots and First Aid requirements ahead of time, and then spend two days going through all the climbing, gear spec., and rappelling activity requirements (\$90 each). We also offer the **PCIA (Professional Climbing Instructor Association) Top Rope Climbing Instructor Certification** course and exam. This 3-day course (\$450) and 1 day exam (\$150) is for recreational climbers who want to add an instructor certification on their resume. It's also very useful for individuals guiding with club, camp, or university outing programs.

**Peaceful Paddling:** Canoe a ½ day stretch of the **South Fork River**. This Class I and II water is ideal for families with elementary school children – just long enough to be engaging without getting boring. As we wind through pastures in the Shenandoah Valley, you'll learn basic canoe strokes and maneuvering. Dangle your feet or plunk your head to cool off. And keep watching for blue herons, turtles on logs, and cows in the water!

**(Half-Day: \$140 1-3 people; \$35 each additional. Full-Day: \$175 1-3 people; \$45 each additional)**

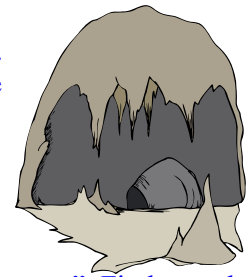


**Pick-up-the-Pace Paddling:** A full day of canoeing awaits further down the **South Fork**. This provides a little more excitement for teenagers, adventurous parents, & other paddle pilgrims! A casual start allows a review of canoe strokes and partner teamwork.

An amazing rope-swing breaks the quiet – you won't believe what comes out of your mouth when you let go (“*Geronimo!*?”) More paddling through runs and pools, always under the shadow of Massanutten Mountain. Lunch on the bank and then back into the boats. Finally, at Milepost 17, *Compton's Rapid* – a great shoot-through with some higher standing waves! Paddlers call it a “Fat II” but stay wide of Pillow Rock! Below, there's a jumping rock for another cool-off before paddling the final mile to the take-out. Load the boats and start the drive home – happy, tired, and maybe a little sun-tanned! West Virginia travelers may want to visit the gorgeous “Trough” on the **South Branch of the Potomac**. High and remote mountain walls on each side of the river, and keep your eyes open for bald eagles!

**(Half-Day: \$140 1-3 people, \$35 each additional; Full-Day: \$175 1-3 people; \$45 each additional)**

**Half-Day Caving:** The underground sidewalk and the tourist cave light show are not for you. You want to see it the way it was before the electrician got there! Primitive caves have all the features of the subterranean world – *speleothems* (stalactites, flowstone, soda straws, and columns), *lots of real mud*, and sometimes even *bats* (but most of them are asleep, and all of them are harmless). Pull on your coveralls, clip on your helmet, adjust your headlamp, and down we go. There are squeezes if you want them, and belly crawls for the adventurous --- but there are also corridor ceilings higher than your house, and large cavern rooms for the claustrophobic. Learn cave travel safety, underground navigation, and some “total body movement.” Find out what the year-round underground temperature is, and then finally emerge back into sunlight with a new appreciation for what happens underneath Virginia when limestone and groundwater meet. The gleam of your smile might be the only thing shining through the mud on your face! Caving trips can be **Beginner Caving** (mostly horizontal movement – walking, stooping, or crawling) or **Intermediate Caving** (for folks fit enough to handle strenuous vertical moves, and more sustained physical effort). Various locations are available in both Virginia (20 minutes from Harrisonburg), and West Virginia (between Franklin and Elkins). *Caving trips are not advised for individuals who might be unfit, excessively overweight, or who live an extremely sedentary lifestyle, or for very young children.*



**(\$125 for 1-3 people; \$25 for each additional)**



**Design Your Own Adventure:** Numerous other options exist, including hiking and climbing guiding along **Virginia's Blue Ridge** or at the **NROCKS (WV)**, group orienteering challenges in the National Forest, a climbing self-rescue clinic, outdoor fitness training, and flatwater paddling instruction for beginners and children. We can customize to meet the interests of your family, scout troop, or youth group. Call to talk about your needs.

## Things you oughta know:



- **Lester R. Zook** is the **WILD GUYde**. He is a *Wilderness First Responder*, and is a certified member of the *American Mountain Guides Association (Single Pitch Instructor)*. He has been leading wilderness adventures and training camping leaders for 30 years, and loves to take people outdoors! **Ethan Zook** has been a camp counselor and adventure leader at numerous camps. He is a *Red Cross Lifeguard* and a *Virginia Paramedic*. **Aaron Zook** is a climber, caver, and paddler, a *Red Cross Lifeguard*, and has been through *Wilderness First Aid*. **Mary Tapolyai** is a *WFR*, and a *Leave No Trace Master Educator*. Together, we are a small family business that strives to provide exceptional service, and create value in the lives of our guests.
- More detail on activity possibilities is available by visiting [www.wildguyde.com](http://www.wildguyde.com). Call or e-mail to ask questions and to arrange dates, rates, and meeting points:

**(540) 433-1637 or lester@wildguyde.com**

- **WGA's** guiding season is 7 days a week. Rock climbing is March through October, paddling is best in the spring and summer, and wild caving is year-round. Call early to reserve; weekends in particular can fill quickly.
- **WILD GUYde** will provide all technical equipment (ropes, harnesses, helmets, etc.). A personal *things-to-bring list* (clothing, water, lunch, etc.) will be provided.
- We can also help with **lodging ideas**. We can recommend from *primitive* to *posh* – National Forest campgrounds, drive-up motels, and some delightful Bed and Breakfast inns!
- For groups of 10 or larger, we disregard the starter fee and simply bill the per-person rate.
- Payment is by cash or check, payable to WGA; unfortunately, credit cards cannot be accepted at this time. Gratuities are never expected, and always appreciated!
- Some activities have inherent risks – that's the meaning of the word *adventure*. Participants will be asked to fill out a *Medical Form*, and sign a *Participant Agreement* acknowledging certain dangers. Some activities are physically strenuous, emotionally demanding, or require sustained cognitive attention to task and detail. We make every effort to create a great day, but **WGA** guides do reserve the prerogative to deny access/participation if, in our judgment, the client is not likely to be successful, or might pose undue hazard. Clients also may not be “under the influence” or “feeling the effects” of alcohol or recreational drugs at the time of the event.
- **WILD GUYde Adventures** incorporated in Virginia in 2004, and is fully insured. **WGA** is a permittee with the George Washington and Monongahela National Forests, and along Virginia's Blue Ridge. **WGA** is an equal opportunity provider and employer. **WGA** practices environmental stewardship, and is a member of the *Access Fund*, the *National Speleological Society*, the *Virginia Tourism Corp.*, the *Christian Adventure Association*, the *Shenandoah Valley Travel Assoc.*, and the *Harrisonburg-Rockingham Chamber of Commerce*.

## 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)

Our 3 children (25, 21, 16) went on a rock climbing adventure with Lester. They were beginners and Lester was an excellent guide. He was knowledgeable, safety and detail oriented, and an excellent teacher. They came back smiling and a little sore. Our family isn't the outdoorsy type, but they all said they would definitely do it again! Well worth the drive and the time. (Meredith, 2021)

This was my and my husband's first time rock-climbing. All I can say is that it was an amazing experience. We have done activities from zip-lining and parasailing to sky-diving and I can say this is right up there with all of those activities. I was a bit nervous to start my repel over the edge but Lester makes sure you are confident that your equipment is holding you. Now that I have experienced it, I want to go back and do it again and again. This was a great learning experience and Lester was full of knowledge about rock climbing, repelling, nature, and just life in general. Would recommend to anyone looking for some adventure! (Krysten, 2021)

Lester, we absolutely loved climbing with you! We will be climbing more – that was so fun and challenging yet doable with an incredible adrenaline rush and boost of confidence. Things we learned: How to tie a strong knot; Small footholds do a lot for you; Look down! The harness is holding me; Screaming helps; The hike is not the hard part; You will get giant leg bruises after rock climbing; Don't give up cuz you can make it; Safety, positivity, and being good to nature; Talking with people makes hikes less exhausting; It is quite thrilling to climb 70 feet without falling knowing that you could've done it without a rope. (Haley and Sam, 2021)