

# GUYdelines

A few thoughts for outdoor lovers and leaders from

*WILD GUYde Adventures, LLC*

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## Preparing for a Happy Adventure

At year's end, I do all the data to summarize our guiding year - dollars, numbers of guests, etc. I also read all our incident reports, trying to understand when things did not go quite as planned on particular trips, and how we can continue to improve our service and our guest experience. As I read and remembered through this past year, and recalled flipped canoes, blisters, bumps and scrapes, the thought occurred to me that I could offer a few tips for creating the "*more perfect experience*." This is experiential learning – taking actual experiences from the past, reflecting on them, drawing out "abstract generalizations" (applicable principles), and turning them into positive change plans for future experiences (see David Kolb, Experiential Learning, 1984). It is true that the outdoors is a dynamic environment, and we can't predict or prevent everything. But many of the incidents we encounter out there do have human antecedents, so we can take care to prepare ourselves appropriately, and thus reduce our chances of having an epic or catastrophe. I am particularly sensitive to the family experience; I am a Dad and now Grand-Dad who involves my family in adventures, and I resonate with the desire to avoid the *Dad-saster* – the Dad-led experience gone horribly wrong. Here is my list of happiness suggestions for you if you decide to engage us, or any guide service, for an adventure this coming year.

1. **A great guide-led adventure is a partnership** – you and the guide together planning and executing the best kind of experience for you and your crew. I suggest reading websites carefully, and discerning if the particular adventure you have in mind is congruent with the provider you are engaging. As you are researching and planning your trip, ask questions, and read Trip Advisor or Facebook reviews, to understand exactly what kind of experience this guide's guests are actually having. Today, there are many options in the marketplace. Some guides focus on white knuckles and adrenaline, some create a more primitive event, while others make it cushy and comfy. Some guides are educators, and others pride themselves on offering more of a dirt-bag experience. The better a read you can get on the operation, the better a match you can create for your family.
2. **"I'm not the man I used to be – in fact, I never was!"** It is important to be honest, first with yourself and then with the guide, about personal or family limitations. If you have not been as fit and active recently as you were back in college, own this and acknowledge it up front. If a family member has a



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learning or behavioral issue (ADD, spectrum) or a physical limitation (low fitness, recent injury, surgery), bring this up early on in the planning conversation. Many adventure providers have excellent ways of accommodating these, but they need to know. There is a phenomenon that guides see occasionally among clients called “*failure to disclose*.” These are clients who will not reveal these limitations on the Medical Form because they might be afraid of being disqualified from the experience. On the contrary, most guides are eager to serve and flexible enough to adapt, but the more advance notice they have, the better they can prepare themselves and you to have a great day. Advance notice allows them to bring adaptive equipment, modify the activity, or suggest the best location or trip challenge for the particular individual or group. If you show up and surprise them with some new info, they are on their back foot and may not be able to produce the best experience for you. BE HONEST.

3. **Your children might be average.** In Garrison Keillor’s homegrown tale, *Lake Wobegon Days*, he observed that in his mythical hometown, “*All the children were above average.*” Now you and I know rationally that this is not a statistical possibility. Nevertheless, as parents, most of us tend to think that



our children are the standouts, in their fitness and skills, their manners with strangers, and their temperaments (tolerance for adversity, responsiveness to authority, etc.). The fact is that your children may surprise you on an outdoor event, and not always for the good. Children can get fatigued and whiny, or a moderately scary experience can temporarily throw them off their emotional equilibrium. This can have the reverb effect of tempting parents to scold, or worse yet, to be embarrassed for their kids. To prepare for a happy adventure, think carefully

about each of your children, and what they are ready for developmentally and temperamentally. *Dad-sasters* are more likely when a parent has an overly ambitious personal agenda, has inappropriate expectations for the ages of their kids, or is inattentive, distracted, and self-involved. It is also helpful for you to accept that for the adventure day, the guide will be a partner-parent with you for your children. Help your kids understand this beforehand, and then model a responsiveness to the guide’s leadership and authority in areas that matter.

4. **That What to Bring list – take it seriously, and do the details.** We had numerous situations this past season in which guests arrived with inappropriate footwear (for hiking or paddling), or were unprepared with a good layering system for caving clothing. Lots of people underestimate how much water they will actually need to make it safely through a hot summer day of hiking and rock climbing without dehydrating. Surprising to us is the number of Boy Scouts that show up without the requisite gear (that BSA motto, after all, is “*Always be prepared*”). When questioned about whether they read the *What to Bring list*, far too many responded with some variation of: “*My parents packed my bag,*” or “*Nobody told me...*” Most of the guide services that I am aware of provide a *What to Bring list*, and this list has been carefully curated and refined over time, so the suggestions are sound ones. Take it seriously, and ask questions beforehand if anything is unclear. Then, the day before, check the weather forecast for the local area, and make sure your clothing and gear are up to the standard.
5. **Finally, on the adventure, accept some ambiguity in the day.** In the outdoors, not everything can be predicted or compelled into a strict schedule. A less-than-fit client may slow the hike down, or a trail-side scrape may introduce a delay. I periodically will have a client wanting to know exactly how long we will be and precisely when we will be returning to the vehicle. This is difficult to predict and I tell them this. A former colleague of mine used to lead student trips to South Africa, and when things would not happen on schedule, he would bellow, “*TIA – This Is Africa!*” Our counterpart here might be “*TITO – This Is The Outdoors!*” Don’t plan a dinner date right up against your return time after an adventure, keep that Semper Gumby attitude (*Always Flexible*), and relish the spontaneity and joy of the day.

Happy adventuring! LRZ

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 2024 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: 2024 Daytrips with WILD GUYde Adventures,**

**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.

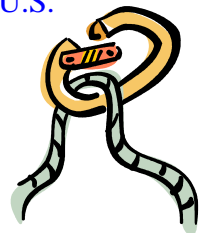
**(Full day \$250 for 1-3 people; \$60 for each additional. ½-day \$175 for 1-3, and \$45 for each additional)**



**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 famed 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. **(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 great 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)

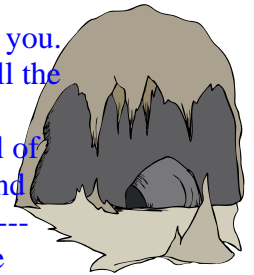


**Pick-up-the-Pace Paddling:** a fuller day of canoeing awaits further down the **South Fork**. This provides a little more excitement for teenagers, adventurous parents, & other paddle pilgrims! A casual start allows a review of canoe strokes and partner teamwork.

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). *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.* (\$140 for 1-3 people; \$30 for each additional)

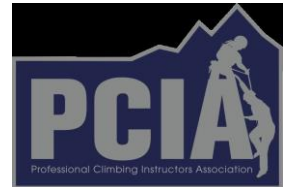




**Design Your Own Adventure:** Numerous other options exist, including hiking and climbing guiding along **Virginia's Blue Ridge** or at the **NROCKS** (WV), group orienteering challenges in the National Forest, a climbing self-rescue clinic, outdoor fitness training, and flatwater paddling instruction 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 an *Instructor Provider* with the Professional Climbing Instructors Association. He has been leading wilderness adventures and training camping leaders for 40 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. You may also check us out on **Trip Advisor**, **YELP**, or **Facebook**.



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- **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 *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, rappelling, 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)