

# GUYdelines

A few thoughts for outdoor lovers and leaders from

*WILD GUYde Adventures*, LLC

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## REAL and VIRTUAL

Many of the Wild Caving trips I lead each year are with young people – boy scouts, church youth groups, and junior high school classes. And it is often not long into one of these ventures into dark and drippy caverns that one of the youngsters will exclaim to another, “*Dude, this is like Minecraft!*” Minecraft, for the uninitiated, is that currently popular video gaming production that invites players to survive in the Minecraft universe, and then get creative about combining the various resources of dirt, stone, ores, tree trunks, water and lava, all while being able to fly, and not experiencing hunger.

My immediate reaction upon hearing this statement is to correct the speaker: “*No, caves are not LIKE Minecraft. Caves are REAL; Minecraft is VIRTUAL (meaning, ‘as if real’). So if anything, Minecraft is LIKE caving – a copy or imitation – not the other way around.*” But I realize now that I am seeing where their young life formation has been, and that they have had their start, not in real experiences but largely in virtual ones. So now my thoughts run deeper, and herein lies the purpose of this essay – to explore the dynamics of REAL and VIRTUAL, and maybe to begin to tease out some differences between outdoor adventure experiences and the current AI (artificial intelligence) culture that we are finding ourselves in.

Numerous neurological studies are now confirming the fact that digital media elicits the same chemical response in our brains as cocaine. The release of dopamine is linked to pleasure and euphoria. The rapid and visual exposure/response format of digital media entices, and therefore, the cycle of exposure becomes self-reinforcing and cumulative. Habituation (“*I need more*”) leads to escalation, and eventually anhedonia (“*I don’t feel anything*”) can result. On the moral level, video images are exposing us repeatedly to immorality, violence, and suffering. But because these images are virtual, violence has no real consequences. Truth becomes pragmatic – whatever gets me to the higher score. And there is the ability to “tap out” – individuals can step out at any time. Like LARPing (Live Action Role Playing), a person can simply announce “*For real*” or “*Out of character*” and end the simulation with no penalty or pain. The larger eventual result is moral desensitization -- a form of dehumanization, where nothing horrifies us, as the disconnect deepens.

AI is a simulation of human intelligence. Unlike a separate human, however, the AI model gradually adjusts itself to our choices and preferences. The more we interact, the more finely tuned the model

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becomes, until ultimately it is another version of us, maybe with simply a different face and form. Some have described this as *technological narcissism*, in which our own personality has now taken on a new form, albeit one with whom we will never disagree. The intimacy we feel with our AI companion is really simply self-adulation.

REAL on the other hand is that place in the world where actions and decisions have consequences. Real people will suffer real pain and loss. This necessitates taking responsibility and owning the consequences of our actions. We can't walk away or sidestep our commitments. There might be disagreement with a real person who is a separate and different other from us, and one that we need to listen to, reason through with, and maybe compromise with or ask forgiveness from. This is all a very non-technological process.

Nicholas Carr's insightful book, *The Shallows: How the Internet is Changing How We Read, Think, and Remember* (2011), observes that our growing reliance on technology is gradually rearranging how our brains are wired. We are, according to Carr, losing our ability to think deeply about issues (hence the name of his book). We rely on sound-bites for our political perspectives, and we are no longer reading deeply for meaning, or learning from history. The current reputed enthusiasm for multi-tasking as a way of increasing personal productivity is another example. On the cognitive level, multi-tasking is actually an intellectual impossibility. The brain is not capable of entertaining two different ideas at the same time. The brain cannot receive two streams of data simultaneously. Therefore, multi-tasking is really "switch-tasking" – moving one's attention rapidly between two competing stimuli, thus diffusing true attention and diminishing learning. Mono-tasking, on the other hand, involves deep immersion, investment, and wholistic thinking. By application then, REAL may require that we give very focused attention to conversations, listening to people's needs, reasoning (discerning truth and ideas), skill development (attend, detect, then correct), beauty (creating it, appreciating it), cause and effect (correlation and connections), creating, and conscience.

On a moral level, REAL requires that we confront universal moral absolutes that might conflict with our appetites and preferences. This is interacting with a spiritual world that is larger than and outside of our individual life experience, and this conflict might necessitate changing our worldview, repentance, confession, and surrender of the will – in short, spiritual change.

When I began in outdoor adventure (many decades ago), the educational model that undergirded a lot of what we were practicing was *Experiential Learning*. This notion, drawn from Dewey's progressive education movement, is based upon giving the student *direct experiences* that engage as many dimensions of the learner as possible. We attempt to construct experiences and learning environments that engage the cognitive, the physical body (movement and action), the emotions (fun, fear, excitement) the social world (partnership, group collaboration), the imagination (creating and constructing both art and engineering solutions to problems), the memory (past topics studied and lessons previously learned), and the soul (ethical behavior and moral considerations). The driving idea is that experiences that are robustly engaging will solve the motivation challenge (how to get students interested in learning), that these lessons learned will have more personal meaning and ownership by the learner, and thus that this ultimately will foster both personal change and longer retention.

A second tenet of experiential learning involves allowing ample reflection time for the student. This is where meaning is constructed and personal applications can be fashioned. Reflection can follow the Levin model (*Observation/Hindsight* → *Abstract Generalization/Insight* → *Application/Foresight* patterns in Kolb, *Experiential Learning*, 1984), or as Project Adventure expounds: "*What? So What? Now What?*" Our contention is that, in short, experiential teaching creates more effective and durable learning at every level.

What I am now also seeing is that this approach to learning is focused on expanding one's personhood outward to new growth, insights, and interactions with the external world. Experiential learning then invites me to grow and change – to modify my responses and expand my repertoire to the stimuli of new

encounters, challenging activities, people who are different from me, and strange places. I can learn sensitivity and new skills and behaviors, and I can gain insights into my own strengths and weaknesses, and ways to buttress or compensate for them. I can apply theories and philosophical approaches, both practical and moral, to real-life situations, and draw conclusions about cause and effect from the outcomes.

The counter that we were and are working against is *vicarious experience* – learning through the experiences of another. Examples of vicarious learning include listening to lectures and PowerPoint presentations about how scientists have discovered things, watching videos about places instead of visiting them personally, and reading the findings of experiments instead of conducting the research first-hand.

Today, we might say vicarious learning might look like playing Minecraft instead of visiting a real cave, or interacting with my AI companion (another name for me) instead of sitting down with someone who is truly other and different, and attempting to fashion common ground. Incidentally, it is now possible to secure a CPR certification fully on-line, propounding that I have the skills to save someone else's life without ever practicing my skills on a human or a dummy. Video gaming and AI experience are contemporary versions of vicarious experience; however, with the potential to reward and reinforce the dopamine addiction, they are vicarious experience on Red Bull. The logistical convenience, comfort, and economics of it all make virtual learning a tempting proposition, particularly for politicians, educational bureaucrats and other decision-makers. We must remember, however, that these are virtual experiences – AS IF real, but not real, and they come with their own (what I consider disqualifying) baggage. Unlike direct experience, which continually pushes me out into a larger world, virtual experiences keep me locked in a closed universe of myself, rarely uncomfortable, and never maturing or being challenged or stretched in my intellect or personhood.

A subtle irony here is that, for years, the outdoor recreational adventure experience has been packaged and sold as an *adrenaline rush*. Research has found that some (not all) adventurers seem to have an arousal-seeking personality. My hunch is that what is really happening chemically here is a dopamine rush, since a true infusion of adrenaline into the bloodstream causes the fight/flight/freeze reaction – not a particularly pleasant experience. And this can be monetized, as Rodney Clapp observes: “*So have our feelings become ‘a source of pleasure in themselves,’ and, as we will see, the primary ‘object’ of our consumer culture.*” (Chr. Today, “Why the Devil Takes VISA”, 10-7-96, p. 22). On a deeper level, however, I maintain that employing the experiential learning approach, we can use adventure and even the dopamine experience to move participants toward personal growth and transformation, rather than it simply being a stand-alone chemical arousal event. Divorced from any attempt to connect this to learning and growth, it becomes simply another “liver-shiver” – a virtual adventure like amusement parks and video games.

I am merely scratching the surface of these topics, but my conclusion is that young people need REAL experiences today more than ever. Adventure learning and direct experience are still part of the antidote to a culture that is increasingly self-absorbed, narcissistic, and distracted. Outdoor activities and expeditions can still provide exposure to external challenges and stimuli, and examples of real-life consequences to our actions. (“*Did you pay attention when we learned how to use the map and compass? Guess we are about to find out..!*”) More than this, shared adventures will confront us with other individuals to whom we must listen, interact, problem-solve, and adjust, thus deepening our humanness. The sell will be challenging given the seduction of dopamine, our ever-human resistance to personal change, and the economics of technology. Nevertheless, we just might have a crying need for students such as these in the neighborhoods, communities, and workplaces of the future, amidst a population that has largely forgotten how to think, and is used to interacting mostly with themselves. **Our mandate: Turn off your phone and let's go caving!**

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, wild caving, or paddling.** 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) ) or see [www.wildguyde.com](http://www.wildguyde.com)

**CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE: 2024 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.

**(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 Pote* 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: \$275 1<sup>st</sup> person; \$125 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.

(\$200 1<sup>st</sup> person; \$125 each for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>)

**WILD GUYde Adventures** offers three 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 1 ½ days going through all the climbing, gear spec., and rappelling activity requirements (\$95 each). We also offer the **PCIA (Professional Climbing Instructor Association) Top Rope Climbing Instructor Certification (outdoor)** 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. And we offer the 2 ½ day **PCIA Climbing Wall Instructor (indoor)** course for rock gyms and indoor operations (\$275 each). These PCIA certification courses are very useful for individuals guiding with clubs, camps, 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)

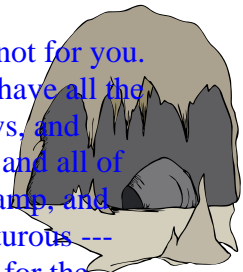


**Pick-up-the-Pace Paddling:** a fuller day of canoeing awaits further down the **South Fork**. This provides a little more excitement for teenagers, adventurous parents, & other paddle pilgrims! A casual start allows a review of canoe strokes and partner teamwork.

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.*

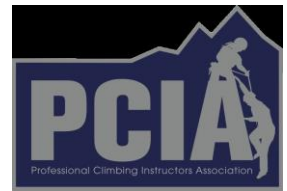
**(\$140 for 1-3 people; \$30 for each additional)**



**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! **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*.



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)