

GUYdelines

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

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7 Things you never want to hear yourself say in the outdoors

I have been a part of a good number of outdoor adventures – over a hundred this season alone. So I am with a lot of great people, seeing their attempts, exploits, and accomplishments. And most times, it's great. But I also witness some false starts, failures, and downright not-so-great situations; I have seen a few incidents, and hear tales of even more. With all this in mind, may I replay a few fateful comments that I have heard, and what might really be going on behind the scenes, or what they might lead to ...

1. **"Hey, hold my beer – watch this!"** He's drunk, and he's showing off – a dangerous combo anywhere. In the backcountry, where little details can mean life or death, and situational awareness is key, anything that inhibits our decreases our cognitive function should automatically be off the list. Nevertheless, in the 14 fatalities on the water in West Virginia last year, 9 of them were alcohol-related. When will we learn?
2. **"Hey, let me try that!"** Taking our signals from other people's actions or behaviors is rarely a good idea. Part of mature judgment is correctly assessing our own abilities and limitations, and some of these are situational; just because we can do a double-flip off the jumping rock on a good day doesn't mean we can do it every day.
3. **"He looks so cute! Jimmy, stand up there next to the bear (deer, skunk, snake) and let me get a picture."** Wild animals are – guess what – WILD! My guests in Shenandoah National Park are particularly prone to this one, since a lot of the critters up there have lost their natural fear of humans and behave too boldly for their own good. Keep your distance, no matter how the deer behave.
4. **"It's just a short hike – we don't need anything."** Even short trips can turn into unexpected overnights when a navigation error or a weather change reaches in. Take the 10 Essentials on every trip (*extra clothing, fire starter, flashlight or headlamp, pocketknife or multi-tool, water, map, compass, first aid kit, whistle, and extra food*). Check the weather forecast, look seriously at mileages and elevation changes, and don't impulsively go exploring a hole in the ground or scrambling on a cliff if you are not properly equipped. *(Keep reading →)*

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5. ***“C’mon Billy Bob, be a MAN!”*** Using this idea to motivate conjures up passions that are not subject to reasonableness. My observation of parents who resort to this is that often, it is either an impulsive statement, not born of carefully reasoned intentional parenting, or that it is an expression of paternal embarrassment about the kid’s behavior in front of people the parent want to impress.
6. ***“We’ve got to go on – we’re on a schedule, and besides, it was **THE PLAN.**”*** Flexibility and adaptability are more important survival traits than sticking to a plan, especially when conditions are different than what the plan projected. The Tao proverb states, *“The rigid person is a disciple of death – the soft and supple, a lover of life.”*
7. ***“I’m fine – it’s just a small blister (headache, scratch).”*** Little things become big things in the backcountry. Deal with them while they are small. Remember that the essential definition of backcountry means remoteness, challenging terrain, limited resources for assistance (equipment, other people), difficult access (unreliable cell phone coverage), and vulnerability to natural conditions (weather changes). Any one of these can compound a bad situation exponentially, and when they “gang up” on you, small problems are no longer small.

So there are my suggestions for you – some ways to protect yourself and those within your care. And remember, I am out there quite a bit -- in Shenandoah National Park, in the George Washington National Forest, in the Monongahela National Forest, and in the caves and on the rivers of the Shenandoah Valley. And when there are other groups out there having fun in my playgrounds, I am listening . . . !

HAPPY TRAVELS OUT THERE!

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