

# GUYdelines

A few thoughts for outdoor lovers and leaders from

*WILD GUYde Adventures, LLC*

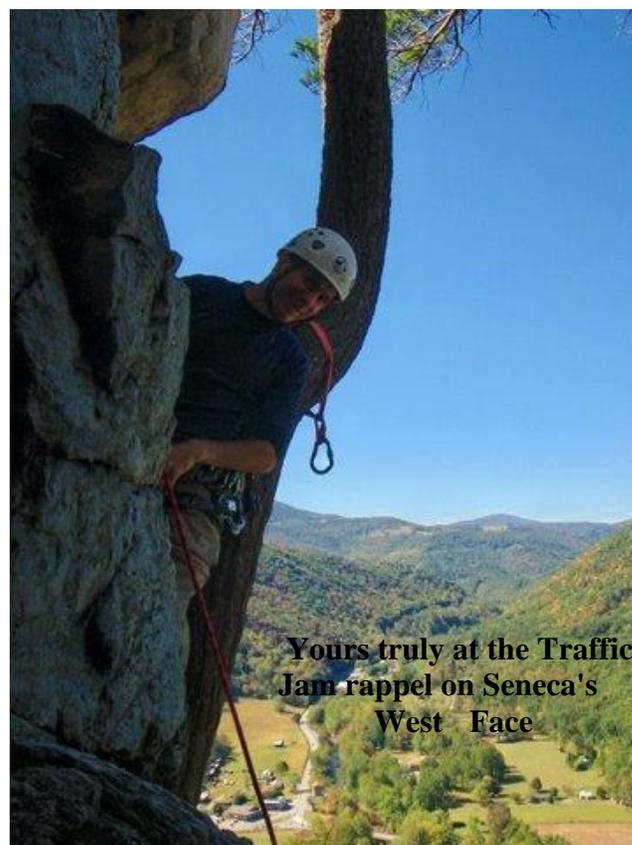
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## Learning from 2014

It is the last day of 2014, and I have been spending the week doing my end-of-year program and financial summaries and reports. Sounds boring I know, but I actually find it quite rewarding. It gives me the chance to look back over the year, and see some objective evidence of what we did. We led 170 events this year, and served just over 1,700 guests, in caves, and on cliffs, rivers, and trails. But this time of year also invites me to reflect on our experiences and learnings. What actually happened out there, and can it instruct us? So for this GUYdelines issue, I am sharing some of what we experienced this year with you, our clients and guests. It won't be completely unvarnished, but there might be a few comments or observations that catch you by surprise. Please know that none of these are intended to mock or demean, but in each year's events there is learning available for us. As guides, our goal ultimately is to learn from our experiences and the past, and to provide happier, safer, and more edifying outdoor adventures each year. So here are some glimpses from our 2014 Program Log, and a little interpretation of each.

1. *"You've gotta want it!"* I had numerous experiences this year of folks not particularly in their element, but coming through on the strength of their fighting spirit and enthusiasm. One particular recollection is of a very large boy scout making the



**Yours truly at the Traffic Jam rappel on Seneca's West Face**

strenuous climb-out in Kees Cave with a lot of sweat and grunting, some assistance from his team, and multiple efforts without giving up. Henry Chestor said, *"Enthusiasm is the greatest asset in the world; it beats money, power, and influence."* When it gets hard, I try to remember the words of Charlie "Tremendous" Jones: *"Learn to get excited about your work!"*

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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),  
[www.wildguyde.com](http://www.wildguyde.com)

2. **Partnering up is usually a good idea.** One of our clients jumped back down to the trail while bouldering, then back stepped, tripped over a log, and tumbled down an embankment off the trail into the bushes. A few bruises (to hips and ego), and the lesson is learned -- having a spotter even when on low non-technical terrain would have saved her some pain and some embarrassment. Where are the places that your Lone Ranger approach to life might be unwittingly putting you at risk, or making things harder than necessary?

3. **Older people can have fun too.** We have numerous guests in the "fifty and wiser" category each year. My personal favorite this year was the grandfather who went caving with his three grandkids. I applaud his courage and grit, and I affirm (now as a granddad myself) his desire to put his time and money into *experiences* with his family rather than into material stuff. I also thoroughly enjoyed the 10 retirees who all signed up for my 2 Navigation Clinics, and found themselves dutifully following the compass bearing, bushwacking off-trail through the woods, and splashing across the creek, all in search of an elusive ammo box laden with M and M's! Baby-boomers, let us know you are coming, and we will adapt and adjust the trip so you can have a great time with the youngsters!

4. **Read the What to Bring list, and then pay attention to it -- it knows more than you do!** We had an uncanny number of guests show up this year underprepared. Nothing beats good equipment when you are in the outdoors: good weather gear, quality footwear for the terrain, replacement batteries for your headlamp, ample water on the hot July days, and enough snack and energy food. The outdoor environment is not the place to "wing it" on the strength of your personality or professional reputation -- the dangers are real, and they don't care much about you personally. The *What to Bring list* represents our best suggestions about how you can help yourself to have an enjoyable and safe day. If you really want to impress your guide, check the area weather forecast the day beforehand, and come prepared for what might be moving in.

5. Here, we pick on the younger generation (and in the next item, we address the older set). **We are seeing more and more young people (children, preteens, and high schoolers) who are very unsteady on uneven terrain.** Our unavoidable

conclusion is that young people today are not venturing outdoors, so simple challenges like negotiating rocky trails, descending gullies, and walking through the woods are increasingly foreign. Large muscle activity is falling victim to hours consumed by computers and gaming, and basic movement skills and physical fitness are suffering mightily. Richard Louv documents this alarming trend in his compelling book, *Last Child in the Woods* (2008). Parents and scout leaders, GET THEM OUTSIDE early and often.

6. Now older folks: **We seemed to have more guests than ever before struggling with overweightedness, smoking, and low fitness.** The good news, I guess, is that these people are calling us to book trips, and are availing themselves of these activities. It seems that adventure is being seen as more accessible to more people. The bad news is that, if you are unfit, overweight, or have poor cardiovascular health, you are going to struggle on these physically demanding and vigorous activities. They are just MUCH MORE FUN when you are healthy enough to enjoy them. You can carry the pack without wheezing, squeeze through the cave passages without fear, and pull the climbing moves or make the canoe go where you want it to in a swift current without your arms melting. "*You cannot fly like an eagle with the wings of a wren.*" Get active and improve your fitness. We will never be Olympic athletes, but we can each improve our health, and we (and those who love us) will be grateful that we did.

7. **Finally, it is often the easy places where incidents happen.** If you have read any of my previous newsletters, you would expect sooner or later that we would get to a safety reminder. So we did have a few injury incidents this year, thankfully none of them catastrophic. But it strikes me that several were in places on the trail or in the cave where no one would expect an issue. On complex or technical terrain, we are all careful and attentive. When the going is supposedly easy, however, our vigilance relaxes, and we tend not to concentrate as much on our movements or the surrounding environmental clues. So one cave entrapment this summer was a boy scout who got his foot stuck when simply sliding down a chute. Another bruising fall happened on a low angle mud slope. Most vehicle collisions happen within 5 miles of home, where we know the roads, and so our

attentiveness lapses. It is no different in the backcountry, except that the ambulance will have a harder time finding us than in the home neighborhood. The lesson is to maintain mindfulness, and remember that every day is new and different, every situation has idiosyncrasies of its own to attend to, and you never step in the same river twice.

Happy adventuring out there in 2015! **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 the Mountain State. Check out the 2015 trip options below, or call to talk about your own creative adventure idea! Contact us at 540-433-1637 or [lester@wildguyde.com](mailto:lester@wildguyde.com); You may also visit [www.wildguyde.com](http://www.wildguyde.com)

### 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)