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Is it true? There's safety in numbers?



Aside from the four yahoos painting the pool, it is widely believed that the best decisions are made in a group of 3 or 4. The following is an article I found in my "items for future newsletter" archives. It was taken from the Backcountry Beacon, a newsletter for backcountry.com.

*Unfortunately, I am unable to track down the information about the author, except to say his name is Adam. The article is applicable to many of our outdoor activities. **Leaders:** please teach your participants about these and other avalanche safety tips. Encourage them to take one of our avalanche safety courses.*

Enjoy.....Deb Robak

"Think for yourself / Question authority" — Tool (channeling Timothy Leary)

I took my first avalanche course about 10 years ago and learned a lot about the causes of avalanches. But the most important thing I learned was how to have an opinion and speak my mind when I didn't like something. My instructor's lesson was very simple. He skied out in front, and we all followed along. After a while, we ended up above a creek and below a nasty-looking slope. It was a terrible place to be, but I hadn't even noticed. Then he turned and asked me if I was comfortable standing where I was. I looked around and answered no.

"Then why the hell are you here, Adam?" he asked me.

"Because I was following you."

"Well, why did you follow me into here?"

"Because you're teaching the class."

So?" he finished. And I turned around and got the hell out of there.

The lesson stuck, and I always take it with me into the mountains. Timothy Leary was right. You should think for yourself and question authority (such as more-experienced skiers). It may just save your life.

Many backcountry tours are comprised of skiers with a wide range of experience and ability. As a result, the most experienced (or sometimes just the loudest) skier in the group becomes the leader by default, and everyone else just follows blindly along. It's amazing how quickly experienced skiers can fall into the role of sheep in these cases, and plenty of accidents and close calls have happened to large groups of skiers with only two functioning eyes. Whether you're out front breaking trail or bringing up the rear, keep your peepers peeled, and open your mouth when you feel the need.

Pay Attention: If you don't know what's going on, then you can't have an informed opinion. Watch the weather, read the avalanche reports, pay attention to what aspect you're on. Do not assume that your ski partners are going to see everything that you're going to see.

Plan your own route: As you're skinning up or picking lines for the way down, look and decide where you would go. Think about the hazards as if you were running the show. If the group isn't going where you would go, then say something about it. Maybe your route isn't the only safe route, but if your route is, then you want to make sure that's where you're headed.

Take your turn in front: Not only is it more efficient to take turns breaking trail, it gives you a different perspective and ensures that everyone has to think about the route and the hazards.

Don't be a dictator: One of the most experienced people I ski with is an avalanche forecaster for the Utah Avalanche Center. He has forgotten more about what causes avalanches than I will ever know. So, it surprised me on our first tour together that he kept asking me what I thought about the snow or where I thought we should put in the skin

track. Since then, I've noticed that, as a general rule, the more a skier knows about avalanches, the more he or she talks with the other people in the group to make sure he or she is making the right decisions.

Listen to your gut: "I have a bad feeling, man." I've heard this phrase plenty and said it myself many times. Occasionally I could back it up with an observation, but most of the time something just ... felt off. I used to ignore my inner voice because I thought I was just being a wuss. After a few near-death experiences and some serious epics, I've learned to listen to my gut. If you have a nagging feeling, say something. You'll be surprised how often your partners feel the same.

Speak your mind: I've skied with a lot of people who are way more experienced than me, and I have never once had a negative response because I brought up a safety issue that was on my mind. Whether I spoke my mind about traversing under a slope, venturing onto a different aspect, the time, the weather, or just a bad feeling in my gut, my partners have always respected my thoughts. More times than not, the person who I was skiing with happened to have the exact same feelings.

Not just skiing: Although the herding mentality is common on backcountry ski outings, they also affect people on hiking, snowshoeing, canyoneering, mountain biking, boating, and climbing trips. Blindly following someone is always a bad idea, no matter how experienced that person is. When I was a river guide back in the day, one of my fellow guides had "DO NOT FOLLOW!!" written in marker across the back of his PFD. He wrote it as a joke, but the message is loud and clear: take some damn responsibility for your actions.

Please take the time to read the New York Times article on Tunnel Creek where 16 expert skiers set out for a day of epic powder skiing. It is an in depth, well-written article about the events leading up to a recent fatal avalanche, complete with photos, short videos and graphics. It is long but captivating so pull up a chair with your cup of coffee (or beer) and a snack. Here is the link: <http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2012/snow-fall/#/?part=tunnel-creek>

MY Two Left Boots

(A tale from one of our “seasoned” leaders)

I have been leading CMC hikes for the last five or six years, so I am fairly comfortable with the process of organizing and leading a hike. Generally speaking, the hikes turn out pretty well ... but not always.

Last summer, I put a hike in the schedule to go to Goose Creek and to climb up to see the big arch. After I put the trip into the schedule, I went on vacation and when I returned, I had a bunch of e-mails and a few phone calls asking about the status of the hike. “Hey Dave, is this hike going or not” ... “I’m trying to make plans and I really don’t know if this hike is on?” I had forgotten to “Confirm” the hike.

I either called or e-mailed all the people that had inquired, apologizing and ensuring everyone that the hike was indeed on and we were going to have a great time, so please sign up. You may recall that when you confirm a hike there is a little check box “Guests OK” and just below the “Guest OK” box is the “Call the Leader” box. Goose Creek isn’t that difficult, so I decided that if anyone wanted to bring a guest, it would be OK with me. When I went into the system to confirm the hike (you can see where this story is going) I accidentally checked the “Call the Leader” box.

So, here come the calls again. “Dave, what do you want to talk about?” “Dave, you know me, why do I have to call you?” I apologized again and called everyone on the hike to tell them that there is no need to call me, I just made a mistake on the input screen.

The day of the hike finally arrives and I am thinking that the group must think that I am a few cards short of a full deck. We meet at the “Fort” and I get everyone divided up in three or four cars and we drive to the Goose Creek trailhead. It is easily an hour’s drive and the last 12 miles is dirt road. We arrived at the trailhead and started to put on our boots and get our packs ready. I reached for my boots and discovered that I had brought two left boots!

This is indeed a dilemma. After all my earlier screw-up’s, if I cancel this hike because I brought two left boots, they are going to throw me out of the CMC. I’m wearing open-toed Tevas. Can I get to the top of the arch in Texas? Should I wear one boot and one Teva?

Finally Jeff came to my rescue. He said, “I have an extra pair of running shoes.” I said, “Jeff, I love you!”

We completed the hike and everyone seemed to have a good time, but even after a year I am often greeted, “Hey Dave, Mister two left boots.”

TRAIL TIDBITS



WE KNOW YOU TWEET, BUT DO YOU TOOT?

As leaders we are taught that three toots on a whistle signals HELP but do you use the recommended toots to communicate other situations?

Freedom of the Hills, 7th Edition, recommends using the following communication situations:

“Where are You?” One Toot

“I’m here & Ok” Two Toots

Whether you use the recommended communication or develop your own, it is critical to communicate your plan to hike participants during the introduction circle in advance of leaving the trail head. A situation as simple as a hiker taking a bathroom break and wondering in the opposite direction of the pack he/she left on the trail could warrant the use of the whistle and the recommended sequence of toots listed above.

How many of your hike participants carry whistles but have those in the bottom of the pack? A simple reminder from you as a leader about the importance of having whistles accessible on the outside of the pack may aid communications in an emergency situation also.

So tweet when you feel the need, and toot when the situation calls for field communication.

Announcements

Welcome:

New leaders:

* Celia Dunlap * Ricardo Duarte * John Martersteck * Linda Koshio Rogers * Steven Haymes *

New DS&L Committee Members

* Pat McKinley, who a WTS instructor * Uwe Satori, who is also our new TLS Director *



Farewell to our long serving members who will be sorely missed:

- **Martha Mustard** has served on the committee since '05 in addition to WTS. She was the TLS Director and brought that school online.
- **Bill Markley** has been an instrumental member of the committee in various capacities from Chair to Historian for many years. His service to the club has been invaluable.



to the leaders who have schedule the following special trips.

Participants enjoy knowing there are certain levels of activities on a recurring basis which allows participants to schedule their personal calendars in advance and develop camaraderie with the leader and other regular participants.

Pizza Hikes: Roger Wendell offering trips focused on new members and teaching Denver Group protocols with a pizza stop after every trip.

I-70/Hwy 285 Snowshoe Series: Linda Lawson and John Walters. This includes the "Never Ever Snowshoe Orientation"

After Work Hikes: Linda Jagger's popular after-work, fast-paced hikes are well subscribed in all seasons.

Suburban Hikes: Anne Keil offers A & B hikes on Suburban Trails.

LEADERS AS AMBASSADORS

Although our members may join CMC “just to hike, climb or get out”, our organization has so much more to offer. Be an Ambassador by informing your trip participants about these upcoming events and our fabulous Denver Group Schools during your introduction circle:

Avalanche Education in February:

- **Avalanche Terrain Avoidance** for those who do not want to travel in avalanche prone terrain. This is the last class for the season.
Lecture - February 12th; optional field day February 16th. Register on line.
- **AIARE Level 1 School** for those who will be traveling in avalanche terrain territory. Students must furnish their own digital beacon, probe, and shovel. Register on line.
Session 1: Lecture - February 1st; Mandatory Field Days - February 2nd & 3rd
Session 2: Lectures - February 26th & 28th; Mandatory Field Days - March 2nd & 3rd

School Start Dates:

- Wilderness First Aid February 4
- Telemark Ski School February 5
- Trip Leader School February 19
- Ski Mountaineering March 7
- Basic Mountaineering School March 11
- Fly Fishing March 27
- Wilderness Trekking School April 2
- Alpine Scrambling School May 21
- Basic Rock Climbing School May 28 & June 3

Upcoming Events:

- February 28 & March 1 - Banff Film Festival
- March 15 - Mountain Fest
- July - In State Outing Ridgeway State Park (outside Ouray)

Wanted:

- DS&L needs a secretary who has administrative skills, including standard knowledge of Excel & Word. Skills in newsletter layout and editing would be a plus.
- This is **your** newsletter so I need **your** input. Send articles, suggestions, news, tidbits, & announcements for future newsletters to Deb Robak at kaborbed@comcast.net