

Once upon a time we used to go out and just have a good time. We did not have tour leaders, or headmasters, or slave drivers; we did not plan any specific routes, but just went at random through the bush. Anybody who wanted to go back simply went back, often without telling anyone, and drove back to Toronto. Lunch time was a relaxed affair around a camp fire with anything ^{from} scorched chicken and blackened though slightly warmed cheese sandwiches to burnt offerings that once were marshmallows. It is true that the fire warmed up one side while the other one cooled off more rapidly - in vino veritas - but after the fun and games, snowballing and burning of beards, one could sleep it off stretched out in the sun on one's skis.

Somehow we never had any serious accidents, and nobody ever got seriously lost, though we did have a couple of scares. Once we had something like forty people loose in the bush, some in family groups with small children, and there were no less than five camp fires scattered around the Mac Donald River. As far as we knew they all came out sooner or later, but if they hadn't we would have been none the wiser. I have to admit however that everybody seemed to have a good time, and came back happy and dead beat - mostly from the effects of the alcohol! You see we never did more than five miles, and often less than that.

It was really only a question of time before we ran into trouble, but we got more cautious as we went along, and a couple of near scares involving short but frantic searches helped the process.

Sometimes I hear people saying that we should go back to the good old days, and though I must admit that I enjoyed the good old days, the thought of going back to them does not enthrall me. For obvious reasons it would not be practical to do so, and after all we do go up there to ski. Most of us have got used to the idea of skiing well into the bush and though some might prefer the fun and games approach and stay close to safety, the majority would disappear into the hinterland. Can you imagine a loose and relaxed operation, not knowing where anybody was as it began to get dark, not even knowing, probably, where the bus was, if it was at all!

As a comment on all this somebody said to me that things were becoming so complicated and professional and disciplined, and instead of just enjoying ourselves, as of yore, we had to move in straight lines like an army patrol with a sergeant major in the lead, and nobody allowed to have a little side schuss on the way so as not to make two tracks. Not only that, but tour leaders have now to take on a real responsibility and must look over their shoulders all the time to make sure everybody is skiing at attention. If somebody gets hurt the leader must rally his forces and mend and bandage and splint, and then have to worry about getting the casualty out.

I thought about all this, and I had to admit that we are certainly more disciplined than we were in the beginning. The business about being complicated, and having to shoulder responsibilities, and telling people what and what not to do, and then to be sure of getting them back at the end of the day all seems a bit onerous.

But what really has changed? Or has anything changed at all, and if so, for better or worse? In the old days there were no trail maps, few possessed compasses, fewer still knew how to use one, and we undoubtedly took risks out of all proportion to the gain. Once parties became large

cumbersome and spread out, I found I had to spend most of the day riding herd on the group and worrying about the whereabouts of missing members. We had a great responsibility then, but no one ever really gave the matter any thought. We were lucky that we were never called upon to discharge that responsibility

Had anyone become injured or lost, the onus of tending their hurts or locating and rescuing them would have ours and no other's. The difficulties however of responding to these emergencies would have been heightened by the fact that we were poorly prepared physically and mentally to cope with the occasion. Given, even, the fact of good organisation and communications, any on-the-spot operation would have been severely hampered by the lack of adequate equipment and first aid supplies.

Today we have exactly the same responsibilities, no more no less, but we are better prepared to cope with emergencies. Secondly our system of organisation and communications limits the possibility of mishaps and mitigates their impact

I am sure that many have given a lot of thought to the implications of accepting the kind of responsibility we are talking about, and maybe feel that it is not fair that tour leaders should have to concern themselves continually with the wellbeing of their group, and what's more face the possibility of public censure or even legal action in the case of a mishap. It would be unrealistic to imagine that you had not thought very seriously about the position in which you might find yourself, or the complications you could face in case of accident or loss. Nevertheless no misgivings on this subject have ever been presented, at least not within the history of this club, and I assume that you take my own view on the subject. I would like to say that I think Five Winds is very fortunate in having such a group whose attitudes and qualities of leadership are of the best, and I hope none of you will ever feel inclined to join the rank and file - at least not permanently.

However should you ever feel so inclined, you may discover that as a member of a party, your responsibility in case of emergency, and concern for the group as a whole is in no way diminished. In an emergency, the one most capable of responding will come to the fore, whether the party has a designated leader or not, and regardless of any other consideration he will subsequently be judged by the success or otherwise of his direction.

The enjoyment of skiing in a wilderness environment with a well balanced group, of being able to travel through God's country free of the pressures of our daily life, and wholly involved with an interface that is at the same time physically stimulating and mentally refreshing, is something that we cannot accept unless we also accept the concept of our responsibility to ourselves and to our companions. Whether we are leaders or followers, as a group in the wilderness, we cannot survive for long unless we recognise the consequences of human error and thoughtlessness, and are ready and prepared to cope with those consequences whenever they may arise.

The risks we take may be small, but they are, you might say, the premium we must pay in order to profit from the abundant bounty nature has to offer.

Wherever you may be, and whatever you are doing, when you leave the amenities of civilisation, survival is your own responsibility. Amen.



Mike Naughton.