

d i s t r a c t i o n s

Tommy Travels

A Deaf, Dumb and Blind Travel Guide For The Debutante Traveler

As told to Murray Thorpe by Warren Watson

Mountain Hiking, with the possibility of changing weather conditions, injury and avalanche, is not just a stroll in the park



Artwork by Nina Botten

The beauty and majesty of mountains hold people spell bound. The incredible forces that long ago created these massive sentinels to the valleys below are awe inspiring. The spectacular panoramic views unfold as one nears the summit. It all becomes clear at the top of nature's monoliths why such an arduous journey was made.

Poetic imagery often comes to mind when one thinks of the mountains, and the often harsh reality of the unexpected is often forgotten until too late. The results of catastrophes such as the Hope and the Frank slides in British Columbia are spectacular sights. It is hard to imagine how a great portion of the mountain came roaring down into the valley below, only to continue up the other side removing trees like match sticks.

These massive movements of earth are fortunately not every day occurrences. Even in Los Angeles, mud slides do not occur every year. However, riots, droughts, fire and earthquakes quickly take the place of the slides to add to the excitement of coastal Californian living. This column, by no means can prepare you for the major earth moving calamities, but it will get you thinking about how to prepare yourself for some of the smaller emergencies.

necessary during the winter months.

The buddies I went with gently teased me because I had a 59 pound pack (with skis and ski boots), for just a one day journey. I had enough stuff to spend the night comfortably. Having an accident while skiing the challenging slopes of Tuckermans Ravine was not a pleasant prospect, and could mean an overnight stay.

I had a light space blanket, a heavy duty space blanket, camp stove, first aid supplies including cravats and a ski pole splint, food and lots of extra clothing (gloves, hat, sweaters, ...). I guess I probably would not have been all that

situations less life-threatening. If you prepare for the worst, you will probably live to climb another mountain.

Two years previous to this, I had an experience that made me appreciate that a mountain hike is not just a stroll in the park. It was not in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, but was in the Alps of Switzerland. I was visiting Gimmelwald, Switzerland where I stayed at the Gimmelwald mountain youth hostel. It was accessible by cable car but not by a road, or even a walking trail. That night, as we plugged Swiss coins into the fuse box for the stove to cook our dinner, a group of us discussed plans for the next day's hike.



The Beauty and the Majesty of the Alps

Four US Air Force Officers and myself decided to tackle the Schilthorn, a nearby mountain. I had my usual emergency supplies, but I had not anticipated running into over three feet of snow at the top of the mountain in the middle of July. Conditions at

the top of the mountain cannot be predicted from what the conditions at the base are. A large drop in temperature occurs with a significant increase in altitude.

When we first hit the snow, turning back was not an option as we had already spent several hours hiking and the snow was not yet a problem. Or so we thought. The trail was marked by painted rocks hidden underneath the snow and not by the more visible poles. It wasn't until we had lost the trail for the umpteenth time and had stumbled to the edge of a cliff that we decided to head down. But down where? We, of course had our tracks to follow but seeing our footing going down was much harder than going up. So we decided to press on upwards. I must admit that no matter how dangerous it sounds now, it was an awesome feeling to peek over a cornice and see nothing but the ground many hundreds of feet below me. The fact that our path along this cliff edge was precarious had only occurred to me when two people at the rear of our group expressed their concerns with our path. Dark storm clouds moving in did not help the situation either.

comfortable, since I would have shared what I had with my relatively unprepared friends.

Simple supplies such as candles, matches, first aid supplies and emergency blankets are light and take up little room, and make emergency



Tuckermans Ravine

Preparation and planning are necessary for mountain excursions. Last year, I had the opportunity to hike up Mount Washington, the one in New Hampshire and not the ski resort on Vancouver Island. We went in the spring, so we did not carry the avalanche searching equipment



Wading through the snow on the Schilthorn

We pressed on, and eventually we saw the summit. Yes! A restaurant accessible by cable car. At least we didn't have to walk back down. At the top, we learned from the cable car riders that the cable car conductor had been pointing us out. I suppose he must have referred to us as idiots, but nobody would confirm this.

Changing weather conditions and having to spend the night on the mountain due to injury are not the only hazards. Thinning air, altitude sickness and avalanches are distinct possibilities. Whenever you feel a shortness of breath, you should rest. Over-exerting oneself is not a good idea, especially when you have to hike back out.

Altitude sickness is accompanied by such signs and symptoms as a mild headache, insomnia, loss of appetite (if the mountain air doesn't make you

hungry, there must be something wrong), breathlessness and reduced urine output. The treatment to this situation is to descend immediately. Do not let these symptoms get worse, or otherwise vomiting, loss of coordination, lassitude and irrational behaviour may occur.

The most feared mountain hazard, to skiers especially, is the (snow) avalanche. The only time I witnessed an avalanche was in the Monashee Mountains of B.C. I first looked up for the CF18 doing a low pass, but realizing that there was no Air Force base within hundreds of miles, I looked around just in time to see the avalanche making the chute across the valley just a little wider. Mountains are spectacular and, if respected, are a great place to get that much closer to the heavens, but not permanently. ♦♦♦

Where in the World Contest

Over the next five issues, there will be a total of 12 places to be identified. Answers will be accepted after the 12th picture has been published. Some pictures are tough while some will be obvious. Good Luck! Prizes will be finalized in issue 23.

Where in the World # 1

Hint: These falls have been on T.V.



photos by Warren Watson