

Safe Collecting

TRIVIAL PURSUITS by Paul F. Hlava

I: Clothing

Apr94 News Nuggets

Ray DeMark, Mike Spilde, and I gave a presentation last November on safety as it related to our hobby. We mentioned a number of major areas of concern - pre-trip planning, gear and supplies, normal collecting paraphernalia, normal collecting methods, special conditions, et hoc genus omne. Since then I have been pressured into putting these items down on paper for future reference. Collecting these ideas into a series of TRIVIAL PURSUITS articles seems to me to be a good way to go. This is obviously the first of that series. I hope that I will be able to knock one of these articles out every month for most of the year so everyone can collect a set of guidelines for safe collecting. For the first article in the series I have chosen the topic of clothing, not because it is the first logical area (it isn't - pre-trip planning is first) but because several people voiced concern about poor clothing choices they saw on our trips.

The natural world may be a beautiful and awesome place but it is also harsh and full of dangers. And we, in our quest for some of the most beautiful of Earth's treasures, often travel into some of the harshest places on (or in) the Earth. When we go into these harsh places, it behooves us to protect ourselves so that we come out alive and in good shape. For get what you see in the movies - Arnold and Sly may be able to fall off the top of a ten-story building and still beat up a dozen martial arts experts but you can't. If you trip and land on your hands, they hurt! If you fall off a ten-foot cliff, you will probably break part of your body. Even the little things out there are bad for you. Your clothing is an important part of your protection from the environment.

Clothing provides several advantages. In addition to thermoregulation and concealment for modesty's sake, your clothing is your First Line of Defense against the rigors of the environment. In many cases, it is your only line of defense. On field trips (and almost any time you are out and about in the wilds of New Mexico), you should wear rugged, comfortable, and expendable clothing. Rugged so that it can protect you from minor cuts and abrasions, comfortable so you can move freely and quickly in case you trip, and expendable so you can concentrate on protecting you and not your tuxedo. What are the "rigors of the environment"? To start with - the sun, but don't forget the wind, temperature extremes, rain, and various combinations, then add to that all the things that can cut, scratch, and scrape. Wear a HAT that acts as a sunshade, LONG pants and LONG-sleeved shirts. But what if it's hot out? - you whine! If it's hot out, the sun is beating down and a bad sunburn is a real possibility. Even if you never burn you can still get sun poisoning. If you must, you can roll up your shirt sleeves (you can roll them down when you start to notice the burn) but shorts are not a good idea until you get back to camp. If you've got really great looking legs, the long pants will help keep them that way. Have you ever seen what a third degree sunburn does to legs?

I have. And what could have been a little encounter with a rock, cactus, prickly brush, or rough surface can become a very painful experience.

WEAR hiking BOOTS! Sneakers are not designed for climbing on rock. Nor are tennis shoes, deck shoes, flip flops, sandals, high tops, high heels, or even street shoes. Ever wonder why there are so many kinds of footwear? Each is designed for a specific job. Boots are designed to protect your feet and ankles against cuts, scratches, and abrasions, and the high top helps to keep your ankles from twisting when you step on unstable rocks, etc. They are also designed to grip well to the things you walk on.

While you are protecting your feet, don't forget the other end. In addition to the hat you should wear sunglasses or safety glasses or both. Oh! You say you never wear sunglasses - they are pretentious. Well, pretend that you are out in the blinding sun all day, instead of dashing from your dark car to your dark home or dark office. People who are outside a lot don't pretend anything; they wear sunglasses.

This article is longer than I had intended and I haven't even gotten to such things as raingear, cold weather gear, and other special condition gear. I will end now but I'm going to end, uncharacteristically for me, on a nasty note

instead of a pleasant one. The VP's of field trips and the other officers (like me) of the Albuquerque Gem and Mineral Club retain the RIGHT and have the OBLIGATION to turn away those who are not properly dressed and/or outfitted for the locale, in order to ensure that all the people on our field trips are reasonably safe from the expected dangers. And I will turn people away, even if we are hundreds of miles from home.

II: Normal Field Trip Behavior

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This month I want to discuss both the kinds of behavior that are appropriate on normal field trips and those that are not appropriate. Most of what I will be writing is common sense. A word to the wise should be sufficient - THINK. Normally, collecting is done out in the field, far from the cozy environment we are used to around our homes. Out there you have to think about where and how you walk, what you wear, the things that can damage you, the things you might damage, a different set of rules for courtesy, a different set of rules for showing respect, the fact that you are with a bunch of couch potatoes who are doing vigorous and dangerous activities that they are not ready for, and your own situation.

First you should consider yourself and your physical condition. Are you really in good enough shape to hike steep trails at 14,000 feet and swing a 20 pound sledge to get to the good stuff? Well, can you handle a two mile walk at moderate altitude in the hot, New Mexico summer sun carrying 50 pounds of rock? Can you make it from your air-conditioned car to the road-cut without getting out-of-breath? Know your limitations and behave accordingly. You don't want to be carried out of the field like a sack of potatoes (or worse).

Even on the gentle field trips there tends to be a lot of walking and moderate climbing. BE prepared for irregular footing, steep hillsides, loose and unstable rock on the ground, and sharp rocks all over (and use the right footwear). Running and horseplay are definite NO-NO'S. And, as a point of field trip courtesy, watch where you walk in regard to others in the area. When on a steep slope avoid walking above others as you may dislodge a piece of rock and injure them. (Corollary - watch out for careless people above you on a steep slope.) If the space is tight and you have to work above others you should warn them about any errant missiles - yell ROCK! when appropriate.

Use tools properly. Wedging a geopick (rock hammer with one pick end) into a crevice and hitting it with another hammer is inviting trouble. I personally know three one-eyed geologists who got that way by using their hammers as chisels. Chisels are soft steel, hammers are hardened steel. When you hit soft steel with hardened steel the soft steel deforms. When you hit two pieces of hardened steel together, one or both tend to form razor sharp chips that fly off at high speed and cause trouble. Chisels are cheap. Buy a set and use them. If you need to use a sledge hammer to bust up a big boulder, use one that is the right size for you. Make sure you have enough room to swing without hitting others with the hammer or rock chips. (Corollary - people should not crowd in on a hammer swinging collector even if he's working on the best piece of material around). And rest before you lose the control needed to hit the rock just where you want.

Time to wrap up. Next time I'll try to cover field trip mores aspects of behavior, etiquette, respect, etc.

Survival in the Desert

Sep78 News Nuggets

At the August meeting, Adair Peterson spoke about survival in the deserts and mountains of our region. Calm and common sense are probably the most useful emergency safeguards for a hiker. To help avoid becoming lost, you should have and know how to read a topographic map. As you travel, be aware of landmarks, changes in terrain, and your relation to prominent stationary objects. If you do become lost, look for your own footprints; some hikers cut a distinctive notch in their boot soles so that they can distinguish their footprints from others.

When you are hiking, an adequate supply of water is essential (few People starve to death). Each person should carry those things necessary for his or her own survival (the pack that Jack is carrying won't be of much help to Jill if they lose each other.) Remember that the weather can change suddenly, and that nights in the deserts and mountains can be very cold. Wool clothing is best for warmth when wet.

If a person with you is injured and you have to go for help, leave someone with him, if at all possible. Mark his location with a bright poncho or cloth, and look for distinct landmarks to help find him. Mark your route with stones or some such thing, so that you can find your way back. When a rescue team is needed in an emergency, call the State Police, not the local sheriff.

Hypothermia is particularly dangerous, as the victim may have no sensation of being cold. In the first stage of hypothermia there is shivering; in the second stage, brain and body reactions are slowed; by the third stage the victim is in a stupor, which can quickly be fatal. To prevent this extreme chilling, keep as warm and dry as possible, and keep your stomach full of high carbohydrate foods.

A very obvious precaution, which most of us probably neglect, when you go into the field on foot or by car, let someone know approximately where you are going and when you should return. I know that on many of our trips we haven't bothered to do so, and then our in the middle of nowhere I realized that if our car broke down, no one would know where or when to start searching for us. So please do be careful when you are out in the field, and don't become another victim for a search and rescue team to find....

Don't Lick the Rocks!!

Jul89 News Nuggets

Interesting (and Unsettling) Fact!

From the Gates Rockhound via Rock Chips via Gemmmm-N-I

Don't lick rocks to bring out the color!! At least one death has been attributed to a fungus contracted by licking a rock specimen. Arsenic, mercury, selenium, some of the boron minerals, and some of the phosphates can be deadly. CARRY A SQUEEZE BOTTLE OF WATER!