

# OUTDOORS +

## Going alone

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There is a special spiritual awakening that one achieves when being alone in the great outdoors. It does not matter what your passion might be; hiking, fishing, hunting, camping, ATVing, all have a special rush when you tackle it by yourself.



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

I head into the outback alone for numerous reasons. Sometimes, a partner cancels at the last minute, while other activities are just more enjoyable by yourself.

Take hiking, for instance. When hiking alone, you set the pace, stop when you want and view everything at your own pace. Short detours off the trail to investigate something can be accomplished without prior approval or notification to your partners. Going alone creates a great time to meditate, if you get into that sort of thing.

My wife says I have to go alone because nobody can stand to go with me. I pointed out that often times I have a hunting guide along on my trips. She retorted, “For a hundred bucks a day, guides can put up with anyone.”

I realized there is no talking to her when she is in one of those moods, so I retreated to the woods for a long hike, by myself.

The buddy system, at the very least, is the safest way to recreate outdoors. When there are other participants, someone is available to deliver first aid, summon help, discuss alternate routes, help maintain your course, help be alert for danger and talk you out of doing something stupid.

The last one is something I need on a regular basis. For some reason, I live under the illusion that I am still in my 20s. My body keeps trying to tell me otherwise, but I never seem to get the message.

Each year search and rescue people have missions to save people who have chosen to go at it alone in the outdoors. These people were hunting, hiking and riding an ATV or snowmobile. Some of these people suffered injuries while others just got lost. While there are dangers with anything we do outdoors, that danger increases when we are alone.

I do want to point out that one of the major attractions of an outdoor lifestyle is the ever-present element of danger. The presence of



The buddy system creates safety in numbers, for any outdoor activity. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/ Mark Rackay)

danger causes an adrenaline rush that many of us seek. Just remember, sometimes the mountain wins, and the odds are not stacked in your favor.

Injuries are the biggest problem. No matter how careful you are, an injury is a real possibility when doing anything outdoors. By yourself, you are more apt to attempt a trail that is too loose, jump a creek or try a hill you normally would not. All of these things can lead to an injury.

If you go it alone, you better have a plan to get help. You should also have some necessary first aid equipment to care for yourself until help arrives. I would recommend a class in advanced wilderness first aid for everyone.

Weather is always a concern, but more so when you are alone. You must have with you the extra clothes, supplies and skills to ride out any adverse weather conditions that may pop up. Thunderstorms and cold fronts seem to come out of nowhere in the mountains. While alone, be extra vigilant.

Animal attacks are rare but the chance increases when you are alone. Animals will avoid groups of people far more than a lone hiker. Personally, I am more afraid of an attack from a two-legged animal, especially if you are a female hiking alone. Seems that population is encroaching into our wilderness areas more and more, bringing with it the ever present bad guys. In today's world, things like that are real possibilities.

When you run into someone on the trail, leave him or her with the impression that you are not alone. Let them think you have a partner who should be along any minute. Be polite to people you meet on the trail but don't be overly outgoing.

Another problem alone outdoor folks face is getting lost. You have no one with you to double-check your map reading or navigation skills. Here is a time when a GPS and the skills to use it really come in handy.

As I have always said, never rely completely on the GPS. Use the old fashioned skills at the same time. A compass and landmarks will always get you home, if you keep track of them. The secret to not getting lost is to stay found.

Carry a cell phone with you when you go. Even if you are in an area of no service, a text message may still go out. If you need help, remember the saying: “Call when you can and text when you can't call.” I carry a back-up power supply with me and keep the phone off when not needed to conserve power.

Fish, hunt, ATV or hike only in areas that you are very familiar with, when heading out alone. Know all of the trails, water sources and bailout points. Always stay on the trail and don't go cross-country. Make a detailed plan before you go and stick to that plan.

I like to go through a series of “what if” scenarios in my mind before a trip. Mentally going through an adversity, such as a sudden storm, helps me to prepare and be certain I

have the necessary supplies with me to survive. Remember, you can't properly prepare unless you have given some thought about all the things that can go wrong.

Whenever you are in the backcountry, be sure you have someone back home who knows your plans and itinerary, including all the information about your vehicle and parking area. This is the person who will call for help in the event you are overdue. Any change you make in your plans should be immediately relayed to this contact person. This is even more important when you decide to hit it alone.

An important consideration when doing the solo thing is that you are never really alone. Somewhere behind you, just down the trail a ways, is someone who came along on the trip. Murphy is back there, even if you don't see him, and he just can't wait to wreak havoc on your parade.

In the meantime, I am going to enjoy my hike alone. Maybe the wife will be in a better mood when I get back.

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## A perfect day at Glacier Bay



### Outdoors

By Bill Harris

Our ship, the Volendam, rounded Point Gustavus early in the morning and entered Glacier Bay National Park, headed for Sitakaday Narrows. Soon a much smaller vessel pulled up alongside as the Volendam slowed to a crawl. A National Park Service emblem graced the side of the ship. Several park service rangers climbed on board — they would be our guides for the day.

It was the fourth day of our cruise along the relatively mellow waters of the Inside Passage. When we booked our cruise a visit to Glacier Bay National Park was a mandatory part of its itinerary.

Ever since I read John Muir's article about Glacier Bay that first appeared in The Century Magazine in 1895, I have been captivated by the breathtaking beauty and immense scope of the 3.3 million-acre park and preserve. Watching nature documentaries of the park's calving glaciers and wildlife only whetted my curiosity about the park.

I was up early so I could get a good viewing position. The doors to the main deck were opened so more people could soak in the park's natural beauty. The Volendam spent the day cruising up the 65-mile journey to the Margerie Glacier.

One of the first comments the national park guide made was, “This is a rare day in the park.

Seldom do we have sunny skies and calm winds.” Mount Fairweather, elevation 15,330 feet, and Mount Salisbury, 12,300 feet, in the Fairweather Range were clearly visible, truly a land of ice and rock.

As the Volendam crept along dozens of sea otters came into view, floating on the surface amid underwater forests of kelp. The ship passed by Gloomy Knob and we could see several herds of mountain goats, some nannies with a kid at their side. On two occasions I watched small pods of Pacific white-sided dolphins swim alongside the ship.

Near the Reid Glacier the ship sailed close to some rocky cliffs. With my binoculars I could see scores of birds roosting on the rocky crags. It was a large nesting colony of black-legged kittiwakes, glaucous-winged gulls, mew gulls and pigeon guillemots. The phrenetic pace and cacophony of sounds radiating from the cliffs were a bit disorienting, but a experience to behold.

The highlight of the day was cruising right up to the leading edge of the Margerie Glacier. The shiny, deep blue, glacial dust-streaked sheet of ice came right down to the sea. Big chunks of ice floated on the surface, harbor seals sunned themselves on the bigger floes. Dozens of kittiwakes, gulls and tufted puffins filled the sky and floated on the surface of the water.

Without warning there was a loud crack followed by a huge collapse of ice from the cliffs. Those on deck let out a collective “oooh,” then watched the ice hit the water, sending a huge wave towards the ship. Watching a glacier calve was on our trip bucket list and we felt fortunate to witness such



(Above) Margerie Glacier (upper left) from deck of the Volendam. (Center) Mount Fairweather pokes through the clouds. (Right) Mount Salisbury and Johns Hopkins Glacier. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/ Bill Harris)

an event.

The ship's pilot then adeptly turned the ship around and we sailed back the way we came. We were hoping to see a bear along the shore or a hump-backed whale swimming in the bay, but none appeared. As the ship passed by South Marble Island we could see dozens of Steller sea lions along the rocky shore, part of a large haul-out of

bachelor sea lions.

By late afternoon we entered Icy Strait and said farewell to Glacier Bay National Park. Our weather window had lasted all day! What a fantastic, majestic experience. Out next stop — Ketchikan and a whale of a tale.

*Bill Harris is a long-time resident of western Colorado and author of “Bicycling the Uncompahgre Plateau.”*

### If you go:

Our cruise was booked on Holland America, the Volendam is small enough to be able to navigate Glacier Bay. The bigger cruise ships can't navigate the narrow inlets. Don't forget a pair of binoculars.