

How to Achieve a Period of

Story and Photo by Mark Harfenist

Begin by accumulating long-term sleep deficit.

Join persons more vigorous than self for an outdoor adventure.

Over-estimate abilities.

Under-prepare.

Get a late start. Remain optimistic.

Push harder than accustomed.

Admit inability to achieve desired objective only when dehydrated, fatigued, and threatened by imminent darkness.

Get separated from partners. Make incorrect route choice.

Down-climb approximately 800 vertical feet chossy, exposed, class 4 and 5 headwall, alone and in gathering dusk.

Do not fret. Maintain optimistic outlook.

Take sharp right-hand turn at bottom of cliff when should go opposite direction. Shout for partners.

Witness spectacular sunset over faraway saltwater. Turn on headlamp and continue in wrong direction.

Continue shouting for partners, puzzled at failure to find them or the desired route back to food, potable water, comfortable bedding, and free-flowing conversation.

Run out of drinking water. Eat last of solid food. Permit slight fraying of optimistic outlook.

Stumble around by dim light of headlamp up and down sections of steep, crampon-worthy heather, impenetrable krummholz, heinous scree fields, and short bits of class 4 rock. Do this for a minimum of two hours without making noteworthy progress. Recognize that something is askew when all directions lead to cliff-tops surrounded by infinite, black space.

Do not fall off cliffs, nor tumble down slippery heather, nor

break legs in scree. However, allow ankles and knees to be flailed by alpine vegetation until raw and bloody.

Find tiny, not-too-precipitously-steep spot directly above a cliff. Try not to think about consequences of shifting around during night. Put on every available article of clothing, though these are few in number and scant in warmth. Open package containing Mylar emergency blanket, carried for no particular reason for the past several decades. Marvel at own cleverness for bringing this item along.

Wish drinking water were available. Wish a toothbrush were part of emergency kit. Eat two packages of Gu instead. Maintain world-weary, philosophical attitude about this.

Wrap self securely. Place head on handy rock. Drift off to sleep for an hour or two at a time while sliding steadily downhill toward cliff. Awaken periodically, shivering mightily. Imitate inchworm crawling uphill to the handy rock. Practice isometric exercises within constrictive Mylar sheath to generate warmth. Repeat as necessary until morning.

Note morning light. Shiver some more. Poke head out, sniffing the air. Note that Mylar has shredded to the point where legs were outside in the cold for much of the night. Note frost on surrounding heather. Try to resume sleeping fitfully until frost disappears.

Decide all evidence suggests that life goes on. Clamber to feet, groaning loudly. Stagger around a bit. Marvel at the fact that it is effortful and far from hazard-free to extricate self from this spot, even now in full light of day. Marvel that one could navigate



Deep, Uninterrupted Sleep

such terrain in darkness without breaking leg, poking eye out, or plummeting off cliff to certain-death. Note distinct adrenal slam in extremities, faint metallic taste in mouth. Resume asserting positive attitude, although not without a few misgivings.

Trudge slowly through broken alpine terrain in the general direction which should have been taken last night. Note distinct dryness of mouth. Find melt-water stream below glacial remnant high in cirque. Fill water container and drink fully. Evade random thoughts about cryptosporidium, giardia, campylobacter, and leptospirosis.

Arrive at proper route in approximately three hours. Interact with kindly souls who inform that they have met partners, who are worried and have departed to call for Mountain Rescue services. Cringe, and hope this is not true. Imagine name in local media in this connection. Cringe some more.

Arrive at trailhead along logging road in approximately another

hour. Lie down and indulge in hard-earned whimpering for at least 10 minutes. Begin downhill amble which should end at forest service road mid-afternoon, then public highway by early evening.

Act suitably welcoming when accosted by sheriff's deputy, who is leading relieved partners in remarkably comfortable 4x4 truck. Eat heartily of the food they brought. Drink appreciatively of their hot coffee. Describe certain obvious lessons which an observant participant with battered ankles, knees, and self esteem might learn from the previous night's adventure.

Accept delivery home by late afternoon. Do not look in mirror, take off shoes, or check email. Lie down...dreaming sleep, dreaming life, dreaming mountain-song, dreaming endless starlight and the timeless karmic dances by which we are - perhaps - rendered eventually whole.

Rest.

ANW