

True Life Bonehead Experiences, or How I Got to Where I am Today!: Part 2

by Bill Burke

My last article generated some great comments. It is nice to know that my candor is appreciated. There are lots of trials and tribulations that build one's character. It's just that when those moments are happening, we don't really give a rat's #@% about character building and life's great experience!



Lately, I have begun to relish (that doesn't mean I look forward to) those situations that make me think outside the normal parameters of backcountry travel. It is dangerous and foolish to think that one can be prepared for every incident that will/could happen in the wilds. I have listened to people who have taught/taken survival courses. I have attended them as well and have found that the biggest common denominator is the internal will to live. You can have all the cool stuff and training available, but not have the internal "will" to continue on!

"Six Days, Seven Nights," a movie I saw with Harrison Ford and Ann Heche, even though it was a comedy, had a line that highlights my point: She said, "I need you to be the Captain. Don't fall apart on me now!" We all need someone to be our "Captain," whether it's our own self, spouse, significant other, mom, dad, brother, sister or best friend. But when the chips are seriously down, your own inner psyche is the most important "Captain."

I am asked continuously if I have ever been really "stuck"--not in the sense of mud bogs, but really up the creek without the paddle type stuck and unable to get out. Well, I'm here today! I have, luckily, always managed to think and act my way out of situations, and I will be the first to tell you with (no ego involved) that I've been more than lucky! I do not push the karma envelope too much!

Experience #4,012 Up to my armpits in deep snow!

There was the time when I was testing out a new type winch, and had one of the first ones off the line. My friend and I finished installing it in the ARB bar on the D-90 and proceeded to the local trail. It had been snowing and there was

enough snow to make it interesting. We chained up at the trail head and started to drive the road into the back area of Slaughterhouse Gulch in Colorado. Using the air lockers got us far enough in to get to a low spot in the road where the snow had drifted. We drove slowly into the deep snow making a track, backing up and going forward.

In the process, we found ourselves sunk deep into the chest-high drift and had to climb out the windows, as the doors would not open. Looking in the back, it was then that we realized that we only had sneakers, blue jeans and coats (read, no winter gear) and only the blade part of the Pull-Pal, no shovel, a gallon of water and one Power Bar. We did have the winch accessory kit--well, we were testing a new winch! Oh, and the Hi-Lift jack was mounted in its spot on the ARB bar!

We stretched the cable out and connected the hook to the tree strap that was wrapped around a great tree. As any of you who operate in the snow can relate, winching a rig out of four feet of snow drift is an arduous process. We had to rig the pulley block and began digging trenches for the tires with the Pull-Pal blade (our only digging tool). Everything was moving along really well until the winch quit! Yep, we weren't really pulling that hard, what with the pulley block and digging the trenches, and the winch was working really nicely.

Later, the winch engineers would give us high marks for finding a potential problem in the mechanism. But, a lot of good it was doing us stuck!

Okay, now it's getting dark, we have 80 feet of cable strung out tight, and no winch. We are in soaking sneakers and looking at each other like buzzards flying over carrion and wondering how human ribs really taste without BBQ sauce!

The rig dug in deeper with wheelspin, and from digging a hole under one of the tires, the road bed was still two feet down. Man!! The Hi-Lift Jack came to the rescue one more time. Only we didn't have any accessories, because they were all tied up to the winch, and the special kit I have for jack use was nice and warm in the garage!

The winch was bound up, the clutch would not release, the cable was too tight to release the hook, and we had no board for the jack base. We used the blade of the Pull-Pal to support the jack, lift the rear up and push the rig sideways to the berm or the road. We then went up to the front and lifted the rig up and tried to push it over, also. Doing this procedure about six times moved the rig enough to loosen the cable. We "butterflied" the wire around the ARB bar and since there was less distance in back than in front, began to lift the rig and try to move it back.

It was now DARK and COLD(er), The many logs and rocks and bits and pieces were doing their stuff and the jack was now working with the chain and tree strap to pull us back. I was very glad it was a 60" and not a 48" jack. Did I mention that we left with only a half tank of gas, and the D-90 has a cruising range of a lawnmower? Yes, you're right, we didn't have extra gas either. So, not wanting to run out of gas, we couldn't keep the engine running for heat!! By now, we had the chains off the tires and were aired down to 8 psi and they were actually floating. After about 40 feet of jacking, the rig finally was able to drive out.

Airing back up and installing the chains again took some time, as did gathering the various items and replacing the logs and other detritus. We were finally happily on our way. Fortunately, we didn't get frostbite on our toes. Our winching gloves were frozen, but hey, we got out--rather inelegantly, but we got home. I can look back now and chuckle at two VERY experienced people blundering big time and in a dangerous environment, but keeping level and clear heads and working closely together to get home yet one more time-- unscathed, but safe and very humble.

Moral of the story? Wear warm socks and clean underwear! ;-)

Experience #3567: The knee-jerk reacts rockily!

It seemed like a simple task. Stack rocks under the tire so it could grab enough to lift the big truck off the frame and then get along up the trail. The big 35" tire was reaching valiantly for the loose rocks that kept spitting out. The frame rails grinding on the three foot ledge weren't helping with forward momentum either.

We all are guilty of stacking rocks precariously under tires only to have the stack tumble down, and the rig settle once more on the frame. It is really easy to just kick the rocks back under the tire, especially when it's spinning and the rock only needs a fraction of an inch to go for the tire to grab it up and send the rig up the trail.

Yeah, just give it a quick kick, don't spin the tire so fast next time, let me just give it a kick, the tire will catch it and...OUCH! DON'T spin the tire! Come back SLOWLY now, easy, easy, that's it. The onlookers are amazed that a leg can be so flexible. That's right, the booted foot gets caught by the tire, not the rock, the big 35" rolls back slowly and all gaze in awe as the tibia flexes while the aired (fortunately) down tire bends it almost four inches.

Calmly, the unfortunate trail guide directs the driver back and off the leg. People rush to the bent leg guy and expect to see a serious compound fracture. But, this time, not so. Being out in the middle of 100 mile nowhere, the query comes

up, what if? Does anybody know how to set a broken leg? Do you call for a "dust off" or do you drive out six hours of trail and four hours to the hospital? LUCKILY all that happened was a bruised leg, swollen ankle and major pride impairment.

Moral: Don't try to use boot rubber for traction if your foot is still in the boot!
And, get some advanced First-Aid training and have a kit to support backcountry emergencies!

Don't be a stick-in-the-mud!

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