HOME ALONE

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ABSTRACT: Providing concepts and protocols of working in the mountains alone. What to take, communication and returning safely.

KEYWORDS: Alone, back county, solo

1. INTRODUCTION

While many of us work in the snow and recreation industry, it is often that we may not get into the mountains as much as we would like. Sometimes our employment limits where and when go. For those of use who are lucky enough to get into the mountains, it is where we feel best, are most comfortable and feel at home.
Many of us who work in the mountains do not have the luxury of having a fulltime ski partner, simply you either go alone or you don't go. Thus reflecting the title, "Home Alone".

2. DISCUSSION

Starting with the reasons for going into the backcountry alone, whether for recreation, therapy (both mental and physical), employment assignments or research. Those working in the backcountry (or ski area) need to become cognoscente of protocols and procedures that will limit exposure. The objective is that everyone returns home safely.

What to take into the backcountry?

Beginning with common sense, the most important asset to any mission. Science hasn't been able to really define or explain common sense and its development. The brain produces emotion faster than judgment. Common sense or not at times anyone can have a lapse to influence a decision. Having a plan, daily, hourly or seasonal. The concept of the plan should be set up to use the same staging areas, departure points and the same check in locations. The goal is to become consistent with the plan, and have all the participants confirming location and checking the same way.
This plan should include areas that are accessible to solo travel and identify parameters. For example, you probably shouldn't go alone to an area you have never been, in high avalanche hazard. Taking the time to identify and avoid different hazards. Understanding the warning signs. Regardless of how many times you may have been there, familiarity breeds' contempt.

There is a huge amount of information on the Internet, with different methods and concepts to reduce the risk. But there is nothing better than practical experience.

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There is a responsibility of each individual who might be traveling alone to comply with the protocol of the plan. In addition it is the employer/supervisor that must enforce those protocols.

In addition to common sense, individual knowledge and respect, communication is the next largest asset to take into the backcountry. Mobile phones, Satellite phones, GPS trackers and radios are all significant communication tools to be carrying while traveling in the backcountry.
While these may be good tools, there is an education process in their use. You need to be familiar with what your taking into the backcountry. It is better to take one and be efficient with it, than to take three and not understand any of them.
It takes practice. When traveling in the backcountry it is your responsibility to be knowledgeable and proficient with your equipment.
In the early days of RMH there were no cell phones and the hi-tech equipment was a "hot dog" Skadi. Now look what we have available. It's endless. But if some of the worldwide adventurers can call home from remote areas of the earth, we can certainly communicate within the local mountain environments we work in.

Take your pack; what's in is up to you.

3. CONCLUSION

The end result is to understand how important it is to get home safely. To understand the consequence of taking risks on a daily basis, and apply common sense.
Knowing where you are at all times, and being able to get that info to someone who can help if you need them.
The last thing any of us want, is to be leaving someone we love, home alone.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most of what you read here is taken from my own experience in the mountains, much of that working alone. To be clear, I wouldn't go alone to a place I wasn't familiar with during high hazard, but I do believe a person can travel in the backcountry during periods of high hazard if there is knowledge and familiarity with the terrain.
I have had the terrific opportunity to work closely with good friends in the ski industry and I continue to cherish those moments I get to visit with them, reminisce of old times and maybe even take a few runs, even if it's only once a year.
I feel fortunate and privileged to work with and train new individuals beginning a new career. Training new guides has forced me to continue my education.
In some classroom situations even though I might be three times older than the youngest student and have over 40 years of experience. What is important is we all work and learn together.
The most important acknowledgment would be to Francy Royer, who has an equal amount of passion for what I do. None of this would ever happen without her.
If through this presentation, I can influence one person, one time to make a conservative decision, follow protocol and to return home safely, then it has been a positive accomplishment.

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