

Special Report

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35 ADVENTURE DEALS OF A LIFETIME

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Issue

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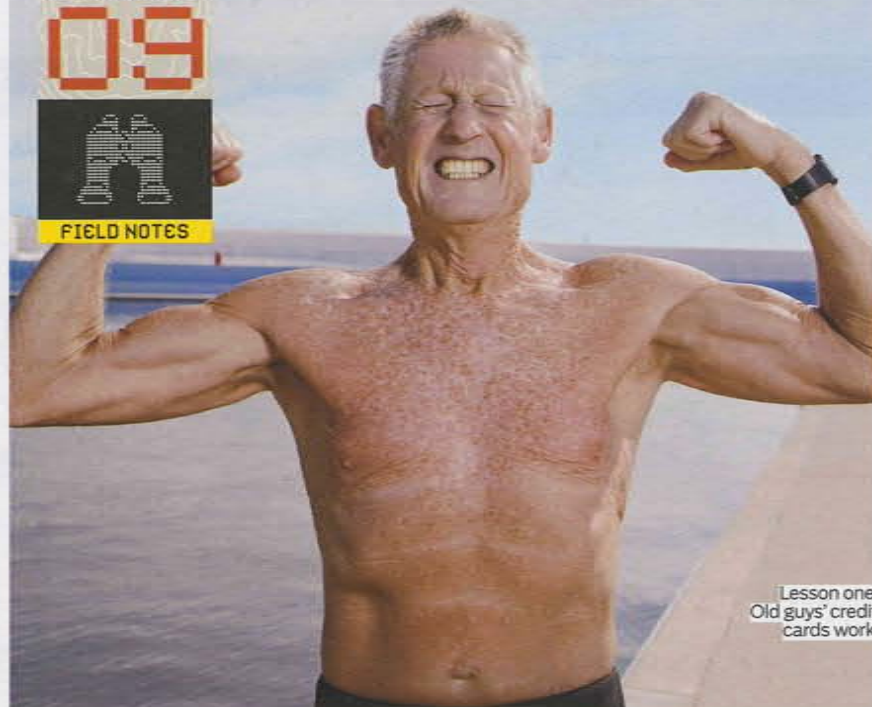
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APRIL 2009



OUTSIDEONLINE.COM



Lesson one: Old guys' credit cards work.

## Who's Your Daddy?

Pay attention, young adventurers—school's in session  
BY IAN FRAZIER

AWKWARD AS THIS IS TO ADMIT, I'm no longer extremely young. True, I'm still fit, tough, competent, and probably one of the leading outdoorsmen in the world. But the former total youthfulness is gone, and I'd have to say, much as I regret the adjective, I'm starting to be more on the "old" side. Not *old* old, but probably older than you. Late fifties. These things happen, as you'll see.

Nowadays everybody in America is, one way or another, 25. Nine-year-olds act as if they're that old, 80-year-olds imagine they're that young. I'm like everybody—25 in my mind. The circumstances under which I found out I'm not, in fact, 25 were that I was staying at a friend's house after a deer-hunting trip, and this friend, who's much younger than I, kindly gave me his bed while he slept on the couch downstairs; and in the late, late hours a girl (young woman, technically) came into my friend's bedroom looking for him, and she found me there instead and retreated in dismay, and then an hour or so later *another* beautiful young babe also looking for my friend shook me awake, and at the sight of my not-extremely-young face she recoiled in frank horror...

Ouch. As an ungenerous person my own age later put it, these girls thought they were getting the Wolf but got Grandma instead—Grandma, of course, being me. This kind of negativity, and especially the unflattering inferences aimed in my direction, enrage me. If I am, in fact, an incipient "old" guy, then let me fill you in on a few things that are great about old guys—some important facts you still-young adventurers out there may not know, and I do.

For starters, old guys rule. I mean this literally. Most countries on earth are ruled by one or more old guys. When you rule, you can go where you want. One old guy I know knows an even older guy who was poet laureate of England, and this poet told him that the best perk of the position was that he received invitations to fish top Scottish salmon streams open to only a tiny number of anglers. Were there lots of young angling dudes wading in this elder poet's water on these Scottish salmon rivers and inconveniencing his casts? Something tells me no.

Old guys tend to have better connections, more influence, and—how to put this?—more money. Their credit cards work. Their cars don't fall apart five miles after they turn off pavement. They have better gear, and they take better care of it. Old guys spend more time sitting up late after the family's asleep, and in these hours your old guy will plan and replan his upcoming expedition, put new laces on his wading

shoes, tie flies, dress in all his Arctic gear in order to see what it's like to move around in, call another insomniac old guy and check out up-to-the-minute river conditions, and so on. Old guys adventure more in their minds beforehand, and that makes them more prepared in the field. Old guys in some cases (not including mine) can do a bit less physically, so they have to use their brains more. You are taken more seriously by people who rent canoes and cabins if you're accompanied by a sober and thoughtful and knowledgeable-looking old guy. On any adventure, it's always an advantage to bring an old guy along as a check and corrective on the more impetuous young. And if he somehow can't or won't be that, at least he can cuss and stomp and have steam come out of his ears in a Yosemite Sam-ish manner.

Then there's the food. A truth I learned long ago is that on any road trip, scout, or expedition, you will eat better if an old guy is along. Old guys understand the fundamental principle that, no matter what, you gotta eat. It's surprising, too, how many young adventurers have not yet come to terms with this. Often your older guys have had the life experience of taking care of their own kids, so they know the food question always must be covered in detail in advance or there will be tantrums. On the hunting trip I referred to previously, my friend and his brother planned the sketchiest of first-night suppers—venison jerky, boiled river water, maybe frosting licked from a Devil Dogs wrapper for dessert, I don't recall—while I and another not-extremely-young hunter in the group had the forethought to

### WHY I DO IT

#### Fred Beckey, Billy Goat

I don't know why I climb. Why does a guy stand for five hours in a river in Alaska, freezing his butt off, hoping to catch something? You can buy fish at the market cheaper, as we all know. I don't think I'm a climb-aholic. But there's maybe some kind of internal drive. Mountains grip me. Say you're driving, out from Nebraska or Kansas across the Great Plains, and the first sight of the Rockies gets you. Wham. There they are. They're beautiful. It's "Hey, I got to get my hands on them. Get tangled up in them." I've focused on first ascents because it's more of an adventure solving an unknown problem. There's no telling what may happen, or what the consequences will be. It's a commitment. —AS TOLD TO JUSTIN NYBERG

Fred Beckey, 85, has put up more than 1,000 first ascents. This year he plans to explore new routes in China.

pack some steaks, baking potatoes, cabernet, dark chocolate bars, etc. When we produced this meal, my friend and his brother fell over in awe, as if we'd done magic out there in the wilderness. Our only secret was, we possessed the traditional food-wisdom of old guys.

**WHAT DO OLD GUYS KNOW?** They know to pee not on the trail but some distance away from it. They know that whenever you enter a cave where there might be bats, you should stay to your left, because bats tend to stay to their left when they fly out. Old guys know that when you shoot, especially if you've been running or climbing, you wait for the moment between two heartbeats before squeezing the trigger. Anglers like me who are no longer extremely young know that whenever your companion hooks a fish, you should reel up immediately, because if you leave your line in the water and you get in your companion's way, and the fish turns out to be the fish of your companion's life, and that fish escapes because of your obstruction, you might never be forgiven; nor should you be. Old guys don't tell people to get over one or another setback, like losing the fish of your life, because some things you won't ever get over, and it's a waste of time to try.

Old guys know never to buy boots in the morning, because the average feet expand in the course of being walked around on during the day. Old guys never wear brown shoes with a blue suit.

When traveling, old guys have learned, it's usually better to sleep in a bed than in a vehicle, and sometimes in a vehicle than on the ground; depending on the truck, you can get a surprisingly restful few hours propped sideways between the seat and the steering wheel. A good place to park where the police won't bother you while you're sleeping is a used-car lot. Regarding helicopters, well-traveled old guys are aware that not all helicopters have the passenger seat on the right, as in an American car—so don't automatically take the right-hand seat when you get in, because if you're wrong, you will look dumb when the pilot shows up. Old guys don't worry about oil stains on the outsides of planes and helicopters, especially in foreign countries, because that means at least the engines are being maintained. Old guys bring their own plastic bags in their pockets, on the principle that you or somebody else can always find a use for a plastic bag.

If the samovar won't draw, some old guys

know to take an old boot with flexible uppers and fit the top over the samovar chimney and work the boot up and down like a bellows to encourage the fire. They believe, correctly, that you can't have too much hot tea or coffee when the place you're in is really cold. Needing their wits about them, they drink alcohol only in moderation, and never on an empty stomach (rules often more honored, as they say, in the breach). They know it's generally a good idea to bring presents, slather on the sunblock, set the parking brake, swallow three witty remarks unspoken for every one they say, keep a life jacket handy, check for

houses away. This particular day, the river was high but still wadeable, and I plunged in and made it to a rock I coveted out in the middle, relying heavily on my foldable wading staff. I fished awhile, and when I decided to move on I looked for the wading staff at my belt, and it was gone. The force of the current had torn the staff from its lanyard and swept it off. Having no other choice, I plunged back in and waded to shore unaided.

A week or so later, the friend at whose river house I'd been staying called and told me that my wading staff had been found and returned to him. Amazingly, the person who found it

**OLD GUYS RULE. I MEAN THIS LITERALLY. MOST COUNTRIES ON EARTH ARE RULED BY ONE OR MORE OLD GUYS. WHEN YOU RULE, YOU CAN GO WHERE YOU WANT.**

ticks, make sure a squirrel is dead before picking it up, and never let a blister go all the way to the bone, because then it can take months to heal. Old guys recall that left makes loose and right makes tight. They phone home. They understand that if they don't, and then they return, and they find their spouse out of sorts, and they ask what's going on, and their spouse says, "All right, if you really want to know—" they *won't* really want to know.

Guys who are no longer extremely young realize that they're not just themselves but a conglomeration, a collaboration of selves. They know that though they may appear to be the only ones to fish a particular spot, they almost certainly aren't, and they fish accordingly. They're past the go-it-alone, time-to-move-on-when-you-can-see-the-smoke-from-the-nearest-cabin phase. They're an enterprise in common. For example, on a fishing trip, they grasp the concept that crazed individual competition as to who catches the most is no fun for the group as a whole; on the other hand, being too laid-back, and not caring who catches what, is sort of slacker and discouraging too. You have to walk a line. Meanwhile—secretly, of course—you generally do always want to catch the most fish. This is regrettable but unavoidable, and must be lived with.

Last spring I was fishing for shad in the Delaware River between New York and Pennsylvania. The Delaware is a big, undammed river through its main stem, and its streamflows, depending on conditions, can go from knee-deep easy wading to 329,000-cubic-foot-per-second apocalypses that wash

was a still-young guy I'd known years ago in my neighborhood in Ohio. Last time I saw this guy, he was big enough not to ride in a stroller, but just barely. How he happened to be fishing that same stretch of the Delaware is too complicated to go into. In any case, this former little kid in the neighborhood was now a semipro fly-fisherman, a go-anywhere wader and angler of real prowess, and he had happened to see my staff in some rapids and had snagged it as he went by.

This development filled me with a hard-to-explain joy. I thought of myself in that river, still wading everywhere though sometimes with a staff, and of this younger, up-and-coming guy, and of the anglers who would follow him; and I felt somehow carried along and sustained, as if I had stepped out of time. What's great about fishing the Delaware—or about any outdoor adventure—is that it puts you in company with everybody who has done it before and everybody who will do it in the future. As an angler, as an adventurer, you belong to your own time, but you're also part of the permanent record of the river or the mountain or the desert where you strive. Your companions are all the people—some of them amazing, skilled, determined, fearless—who did or will do what you're doing. All of you are agelessly alive in a place that doesn't change.

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR IAN FRAZIER'S BOOK *LAMENTATIONS OF THE FATHER* (PICADOR) WILL BE OUT IN PAPERBACK IN MAY.