



ASK ANDREW

Q: *Do you ever go on expeditions with women? Why or why not?*

This is an embarrassing question, as I have only gone on one serious ski-mountaineering trip where a female was part of the team. There have, of course, been many times when I *wished* that Fred, Mark or John would magically turn into a female halfway through a trip, but so far it hasn't happened.

The best part of traveling with women is that they're statistically far less likely to get caught in avalanches, and they're almost immune to the common mountaineering malady known as HATE (High Altitude Testosterone Excess), a largely untreatable hormonal condition that affects all men.

Women also keep the level of discourse somewhere slightly above the level of "gutter," and tend to eschew farting contests in small tents. They also have clairvoyant powers like foreseeing the calamities of eating ramen at every meal, discarding ropes to save weight, or combining your pee and water bottles into one. Females also like to discuss things other than...females.

Nevertheless, the closest I've recently come to a mixed-sex trip was last spring with Kellie Okonek from Girdwood, AK. Kellie's ability to ski and suffer were never in question, but I did wonder if talking about feelings was going to be mandatory, to which Kellie said:

"Andrew, we don't HAVE to talk about our feelings; we GET to!"

The problem is that I, like many male ski

mountaineers, grew up as a motherless test-tube baby completely devoid of feelings, let alone the ability to discuss them. Not only that, but the officially-recognized international language of "expedition" is based on guttural clicks, grunts and spitting, which don't translate well into feelings and poetry. It would be as pointless as comparing Plato to Play-Doh. The most emotional statement uttered during

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most "guy" trips is, "Huh, I'm cold." End of discussion.

Mixed company also means that if any female is going to be invited, she will have to meet my wife's approval. Meeting my wife's approval means that only one female will qualify for the spot: my wife. But going on a trip with my wife means talking about dangers. Talking about dangers means

admitting they exist. Admitting they exist means avoiding them. Avoiding them means not summiting. Not summiting means a hellacious after-party at a strip club. And a party at a strip club means you have to buy lap dances for your teammates (so you can deny ever buying them for yourself). Thus, the whole crux of the female expedition issue is revealed: One of my friends or I will eventually

have to buy a lap dance for my wife at a strip club. Hmmm.

Finally, the truth is that the fairer sex will almost always embarrass us guys by outperforming us on "our" turf. I once went on a trip to the North Cascades with three guys and Petra, a former World Cup ski racer from Slovenia. At one point, we came to a 50-degree sheet of ice with crevasses at the bottom, which all of the guys carefully side-slipped halfway down. There, we pulled off to the side to generously keep an eye on the poor little girl. Petra laid into the ice like it was frosting on a cake and kept up a running commentary all the way down. "Hi, boys. I love this. It is just like racing. I could do this forever. It's fun. It's easy. The skiing is perfect. This is great. See you at the bottom."

We had no other choice but to say we were shut down by the weather and deny the whole trip ever happened. Since then I have not been man enough to go on another trip with a woman.