

“In one particularly demeaning hallucination, occurring about ten miles from Melgeorges, I was visited by that most endearing, angelic, Biblical character known for assisting the downtrodden. In an effort to console me, this Good Samaritan specter conveyed with heartfelt sincerity, “*Dear Old Wretched Defeated One, If you try to continue you may well pose a risk to both yourself and more importantly to others. Your pace is that of a snail’s. Your energy is comparable to that of a sloth’s. Clearly, given your state of decline combined with your loathsome despair, it is better for all that you should retire from this endeavor and do your duty as your motto dictates.*” Did I mention that she was young, lovely, and genuine? Her astute declaration acted as confirmation that going forward, having forsaken both DBD creed and sacred oath, my life would now consist of a sad series or episodes of shame, humiliation, and despondency. Destined for the ash heap of the history of adventure. That I would die a broken, forgotten man, devoid of honor...but alas my Webley betrays me”

Above is an alleged entry from the journal of the once proud CPFarrow. *Note 1:* There is some question of its authenticity. *Note 2:* His future as a DBD member is in flux at the time of this publication. His unsubstantiated claims that a frozen holster clip, combined with a rusty and bent firing-pin within his Webley, prevented him from doing his duty are under review by the DBD Honor Board, chaired by Sir George Mallory.

Arrowhead 135 2023 DBD Race Report:

Dear Members of the DBD Adventure Society (both living and deceased), Understudies, Aspiring Manservants, Dogsbodies, and other Persons of Interest,

The Arrowhead 135, as we have all come to expect, was collectively an unmitigated success. A success due to excellent leadership, superb organization, and compassionate volunteers. All of which essentially produced a smooth and calculating operation from start to finish. Note: A special personal thanks to both Al Dixon and Bill Brandt, both of whom assisted, among many others, the writer in crucial time-saving transport logistical matters. Both are highly capable, “can-do” men that seem to always have a quick, albeit well reasoned solution to seemingly difficult race-participant problems and/or ailments.

Yet on a grim note, you have no doubt heard that this Arrowhead 135 was a catastrophe for the once proud D.B.D Adventure Society. A secretive, opaque adventure society that previous to this sad chapter proudly lived up to their venerated creed of *Non Refert Conatus* as well as obediently following a strict adherence to their sacred oath of “*Malo Mori Quam Foedari.*” In short, both

Accomplishment and *Honor* were in short supply at the 2023 Arrowhead 135 for the DBD. A very, very sad state of affairs. You may rightly ask: *Does this performance (or lack thereof) represent an existential threat to the fundamental core of this revered adventure society?* No, not-at-all, for we have weathered adversity in the past and we shall continue to move forward. Let me remind you of the kerfuffle surrounding one of our esteemed members some years past. Namely, Frederick Cook, and his questionable claims of being first to the North Pole. Once it was revealed that he simply made an error in navigation and that subsequently his revolver jammed, all was forgiven. The annals of DBD lore are full of members that when confronted with acts of dishonor, experienced inexplicable difficulties with faulty revolvers.

To offer a further note of optimism for the future, there is serious talk of the universally respected and highly decorated Canadian, Lindsay Gauld, coming out of self-imposed exile for 2024. Not unlike the unfortunate Cook (and others), Gauld's Webley was damaged when he fell from his bicycle whilst on the fabled Iditarod trail and thus his trusty revolver was rendered useless, leaving the hapless DBDer unable to do his duty. Joyously, his name was eventually cleared by the Honor Board, yet even though exonerated of any semblance of dishonor, Gauld felt his honor had been scuffed up a bit—thus the self-imposed exile. We eagerly await his triumphant return in 2024.

Also of positive note (DBD stalwarts all of them): Buffington, Kershaw, McFadden, Stattelman, and Reed have all expressed varying degrees of interest in returning as well. May we pray that they all compete in 2024! Also efforts must continue, at even a more expedited pace, to bring more youth and vigor into the DBD fold. For the evidence is undeniable, a hard truth is at hand—The Old Guard is not what they once were. To the writer, the following are ripe for serious recruitment: Leah Gruhn, Jere Mohr, Chuck Lindner, Joe Clark, Scott Hoberg, John Storcamp, Cousin Jay, Dave Schunenman, Ken Krueger, Heather Krauel, Bo DeRemee, Bryan Sampson, Rosscoe Fraboni, Robb Milburn, Todd True. All those mentioned above immediately come to mind, yet I know I have left some off this list, for that I apologize. Another noteworthy consideration due to his recent effort at feats of honor is Chris Getchell of Marine-on-the-St-Croix although his reluctance to embrace frigid temps is a source of concern.

On a less hopeful note: Dave Pramann, the iconic Arrowhead cyclist and winner several times over, had a difficult Arrowhead this time around. Mr. Pramann was unavailable for comment at the time of this publication. Rumors are that he is considering some form of self banishment. Sources indicate that he may be looking at interning himself within an infamous gulag of some sort located in the far northwestern regions of Siberia for an extended period of self-reflection. Like the writer, his case is currently under review from the DBD Honor Board.

Vicious, unsubstantiated rumors include that to save weight, he purposefully left his revolver in his car before the start of the race, thus preventing him from living up to his oath. To end these vile speculations, let he (or she) who has made such a claim come forward and accept my call for a manly duel. Be ready to feel the wrath of Pramann in 2024.

This segment of the correspondence shall be relatively short as no one wants to read a narrative of defeat. Stories of DBD members that failed in their quest for honor and heroism are not interesting, much less inspiring. No one is interested in excuses or sorrowful lamentations. Just as there is no stomach from the public, or members alike, for reading a story of woe and incapacitation involving a weakened, aged malcontent shuffling along feebly behind a kick-sled. Pathetic accounts of self-loathing, self-misery, self-doubt, gastric and bowel dysfunction, and the like will not suffice to garner intrigue or even morbid curiosity amongst the readers. Just as there is no hunger for a tale of negligence regarding a once proud member, now in decline, forgetting to check the integrity of his revolver before embarking upon the race course. In this specific example, not unsurprisingly, the claim that his holster was frozen has fallen on deaf ears or met with ridicule. No one cares that the snow conditions did not afford a degree of glide that was acceptable to the wretched incontinent one.

The only saving grace that can be gleaned from this forlorn story of failure is that DBD members were reunited with many wonderful friends, competent and enthusiastic race officials, supportive volunteers, and inspiring endurance athletes from all walks of life and locales. Many demonstrations of inspiring efforts were presented on those recent three days from I-Falls to Fortune Bay. The writer was particularly impressed with several efforts that came from folks whom he met along the trail or have known for many years. Heather Krauel from little Carlton County, Minnesota was amazing. Joe Clark continues to impress, a chip off the old block. Ben Doom wins! It's always nice to see a really nice guy win! Steve McGuire and Don Wood are always "steady as a rock." Plus their bikes are soooo cool. Phil Jemielita pulls it off even though he is staring fearlessly at 70 in the not too distant future. However, if I have to pick my number one performance it would be Travis Van Neste's unsupported effort on his kick-sled. Conditions were really difficult for those modes of travel relying on glide, just ask any skier or kick-sledder. He is one tough cookie. Misery loves company and the act of surrendering can be contagious. Thus, while the writer was desperately seeking to recruit a comrade-in-sympathy to embrace defeatism as they together approached Melgeorges, Van Neste never took his eye off the prize. He finished the race. A most impressive display of full-on **true grit!**

Although disgraced, hobbled, and humbled, the DBD shall return for next year's Arrowhead ready for battle. For no other reason than the winter long distance

cycling, running, skiing, and senior citizen Kicksled communities deserve better from the DBD. We shall redeem ourselves to the Arrowhead community. There was a day when DBD members such as Pramann, McFadden, Buffington, Kershaw, Gauld, and Reed would vie for top spots and other lesser members would at least finish the damned thing! But I digress for again no one cares about what once was...I am reminded of a poem I once read during my long-gone college days. I was a Man then. Now I am a decaying mollusk.

*This body that does me grievous wrong,
O'er aery cliffs and glittering sands,
How lightly then it flashed along:—
Like those trim skiffs, unknown of yore,
On winding lakes and rivers wide,
That ask no aid of sail or oar,
That fear no spite of wind or tide!
Nought cared this body for wind or weather
When Youth and I lived in't together ...S.T. Coleridge*

To end on a positive, somewhat cerebral note. Disclaimer: *You may want to skip this segment and go straight to 'In conclusion' for if you continue on, you will find out why so many of my students and colleagues contend that I can be so annoyingly wordy, as well as a product of the last thing I read in the New York Times. And it may also cause you a degree of pain.*

Looking forward to redemption, The DBD Adventure Society has already begun a mental preparatory regimen or mindset for use in the 2024 Arrowhead 135. This approach is based on a Swedish notion of embracing what they refer to as, "*kärt besvär.*" Which according to an article that appeared recently in the New York Times, means something like "cherish the pain." Here is a very brief excerpt to help with the meaning, "*As our life progresses, there seems to be no choice but to see every burden, every worry, every pain as something that is also lovable, that one must find a way to appreciate.*" To be clear, the context of the article involves a review of a recent book written by an eighty-six year old Swedish woman. The title says it all- "*The Swedish Art of Aging Exuberantly: Life Wisdom from Someone Who Will (Probably) Die Before You.*"

As I reflect on my effort in the recent Arrowhead, I feel a direct kinship to women in their late 80s. Again the term is *kärt besvär*. Or in other words, the way I see it, at the personal or psychological level, when one is having to deal with something that's hard, that's physically and mentally draining (like the Arrowhead 135), it is beneficial at the cognitive level, to force one's mind to embrace the wonderful, liberating, albeit mere fact that since you are involved in the reality of the

situation, of the experience, there can be no conclusion other than– **you are still relevant**. You are still alive, you still have purpose, you can influence your situation. *Purpose* and their sister, *Relevancy*, are essential human needs. To have purpose is to also have the opportunity to deal with pain. Accordingly, as the practitioners of *kärt besvär* see it, it stands to reason that to be alive is to lovingly accept and/or cherish the feeling of pain because pain is inevitable, to welcome societal/personal stress because the world is stressful, to feel empathy for others in distress because your friends need your compassion, to greet physical and mental exhaustion because real achievement can be exhausting. To be exhausted is to be alive! To reason that the steps one must take to alleviate, ease, or at least mitigate these stressors is a wonderfully empowering thing. Because it means we are among the righteous living. Wait, back to the Arrowhead, I don't mean to imply that one should end the pain by quitting the race. Don't quit unless you are totally "done in." I mean that the acceptance of pain as a symptom of relevancy and participation in life is a positive mental coping skill. Consistent training and proper preparation are the ingredients for working through the stressful, difficult times. Again, I know I am repeating myself, but hear me out. To feel or even to invite pain (or discomfort) means you are alive and up to the challenge to render a solution. Or in other words, when you are confronted with dealing with some task or endeavor that's really hard, physically and/or mentally draining, like the Arrowhead 135, it is helpful (and healthy), **cognitively**, to force your mind to embrace the reality that the mere fact that you are involved in the calculus of the situation means that you are still relevant, still alive, still able to be in the mix. **You are a participant!** To be really alive is to feel your own pain and anxiety and (**more importantly**) to be really alive is to be able to assist others in their management of tough, painful situations. Perhaps this is the definition of empathy. This Swedish concept caused me to think of my father, of whom I am still so in awe of. For the vast majority of his life, even in his early eighties, he was my altruistic, sage advice giver, the guy I went to for the most important consults, even as I grew older. He was always the 'go-to" guy. Yet as he became older and feeble, I held my troubles from him. I did so out of love, I wanted to protect him, and yet by doing so, I added to his growing sense of irrelevancy.

In conclusion, for next year's Arrowhead 135, the DBD will be relevant. If not pain free.

Best regards,
CPF