



Chittenango Falls, a beautiful place, but also one where people constantly walk out past the signs that tell them not to.

by John Haywood

It's no secret that accidents on trails and at waterfalls happen every year; ALMOST all of which could be avoided. We've put together a list of safety and preparation items that would be beneficial for people to follow.

Visiting waterfalls often involves hiking over various terrain and through differing environments. Whether it be a state park or a trail in the wilderness of the Adirondacks, certain precautions can be taken to help you get to and from your destination with lasting, happy memories rather than a tragedy.

By following a few pointers, and exercising diligence and common sense, a trip to a waterfall can be a lasting, joyous memory rather than a tragedy.

Waterfalls, by their very nature, are an attraction for people to climb on, swim near, or jump from. If you decide to jump (please—never dive!) into an inviting pool at a waterfall, it is imperative that you first check out the water for unseen objects. Trees, branches, and other debris can wash downstream and become lodged under the water's surface, creating an unseen and deadly hazard. Large trees, boulders, and even debris like rope or netting can ensnare someone, with disastrous consequences.

When water levels are high and waterfalls really get going, there will be not only be an increase in the power of the current, but an increase in foam and aeration (air bubbles in the water) as the water shoots down into the pool from above. This aerated water does not afford the same resistance that swimmers are used to when they try to surface.



This one speaks for itself, but people are always going out near the edge.

Increased water circulation and the force of the onrushing current can also push swimmers into or under underwater ledges and debris, giving no chance for escape. Many swimmers have perished because they underestimated the power of moving water. Do not swim when conditions even look remotely dangerous. Chances are, they are. A place famous for this is the Flume in Wilmington, NY where a number of people have drowned due to aerated water. Do not get too close to the edge of the waterfall's crest. Too many people have fallen to their deaths by trying to get a better look or by getting that photo or selfie. **NO PHOTOGRAPH OR "SELFIE" IS WORTH YOUR LIFE.**

If signs are posted, pay close attention and do not go where they tell you not to. They are there for a reason. Just because you may see others doing things that they shouldn't be doing doesn't mean it's allowed and that you should. Instagram stardom doesn't mean a thing if you're dead. In fact, you'll only be ridiculed and made fun of in the comments from people who don't even know who you are!

Be mindful of your surroundings. If you are in a gorge or area with high walls, look around for potentially hazardous objects that might fall. Nothing should be discounted here. Boulders, trees, and blocks of ice can break loose from above and come crashing down. When in doubt, make the safe call.

Crossing high and/or turbulent water should only be done if you are properly equipped to do so and have an exit plan if you should get swept off your feet. Rushing water is deceptively powerful. One may not think it to be a problem to cross a rushing waterway but, if knocked off your feet, you're going where the water takes you. The most common cause of death when this occurs is not from drowning, but from being bludgeoned over rocks and boulders as you're swept away.

Wear proper footwear; something with good traction and support that will help prevent slipping. NO FLIP FLOPS! NO FLIP FLOPS! NO FLIP FLOPS!



Traction devices, like the Hillsound Trail Crampons shown here, help you maintain traction while walking on ice by digging in with their pointed teeth.

If visiting a waterfall in the winter, wear micro-spikes or other traction devices to keep you from slipping on ice. And the answer is always going to be YES when you ask "Do I need to bring microspikes?"

Always wear proper clothing. When wet, cotton and denim will remain damp for prolonged periods, potentially leading to hypothermia (a dangerous cooling down of the body), even in moderate weather. If for some reason you get stuck outdoors overnight, the chances for hypothermia increase ten-fold. Hypothermia occurs when the body shuts down non-vital

parts of the body in an attempt to maintain a warm core. After prolonged periods, the body will shut down completely, leading to death. This can occur in the the warm Summer months. If it's 90 degrees and humid and you're sweating, your clothing may become damp. If something were to happen and you became stranded on a mountain, the air temperature Carry a fire-starting device; lighter, waterproof matches, magnesium stick. It's a small item to throw in a backpack and could be a life-saver if you're ever stranded. Keep in mind that fires are not allowed in certain areas and above certain elevations, however, if you are at risk of hypothermia, by all means get one going safely.

Always carry a flashlight, headlamp, or other form of light in case your hike goes on longer than you had planned, and it gets dark. Don't rely on a cell phone flashlight.

When on the longer hikes or on hot days, carry a water filtration system in order reduce weight and to make it possible to drink water from a water source along the trail. No matter what, always bring water, a sports drink, or even sipping broth. Dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke are serious conditions that can set in quickly.

Always respect posted and private property, and practice "carry in, carry out" with any trash you may have made from wrappers or bottles.

Those who plan on hiking should make the necessary preparations and consult the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) website at www.dec.ny.gov for bulletins, weather alerts, and other important information.

Using drugs and/or alcohol is not recommended when visiting waterfalls, as impaired abilities can, and will, lead to accidents.

We cannot stress enough the importance of being prepared and cautious when near waterfalls. No matter what time of year it is, the danger is ever-present to those that chose to ignore these warnings. Remember, if you choose to ignore signs and hop fences, and enter places where you shouldn't be, **YOU ALONE ARE TO BLAME FOR WHAT HAPPENS.**

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