

Walking Towards the Storm

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Lessons from a Crisis

Sources and Acknowledgements

Information is taken from our internal review, fall 2013.

Many individuals and organizations assisted in Overland's response to the fatal biking incident in July 2013. We are grateful to Cathy Hansen-Stamp, Kevin Kinne, Michael Fineman and his team, Bruce Palmer and Will Marling, as well as all the individuals who helped our students and leaders in the moments after and the days following the incident.

This presentation is intended to help other organizations learn from our experience.

July 2, 2013

American Challenge (AC) 2

4:30pm CST - 7 cyclists traveling north on a road in rural Arkansas are struck from behind by a motorist.

A 911 call was made almost immediately; paramedics respond within 5 to 10 minutes.

July 2, 2013

American Challenge (AC) 2

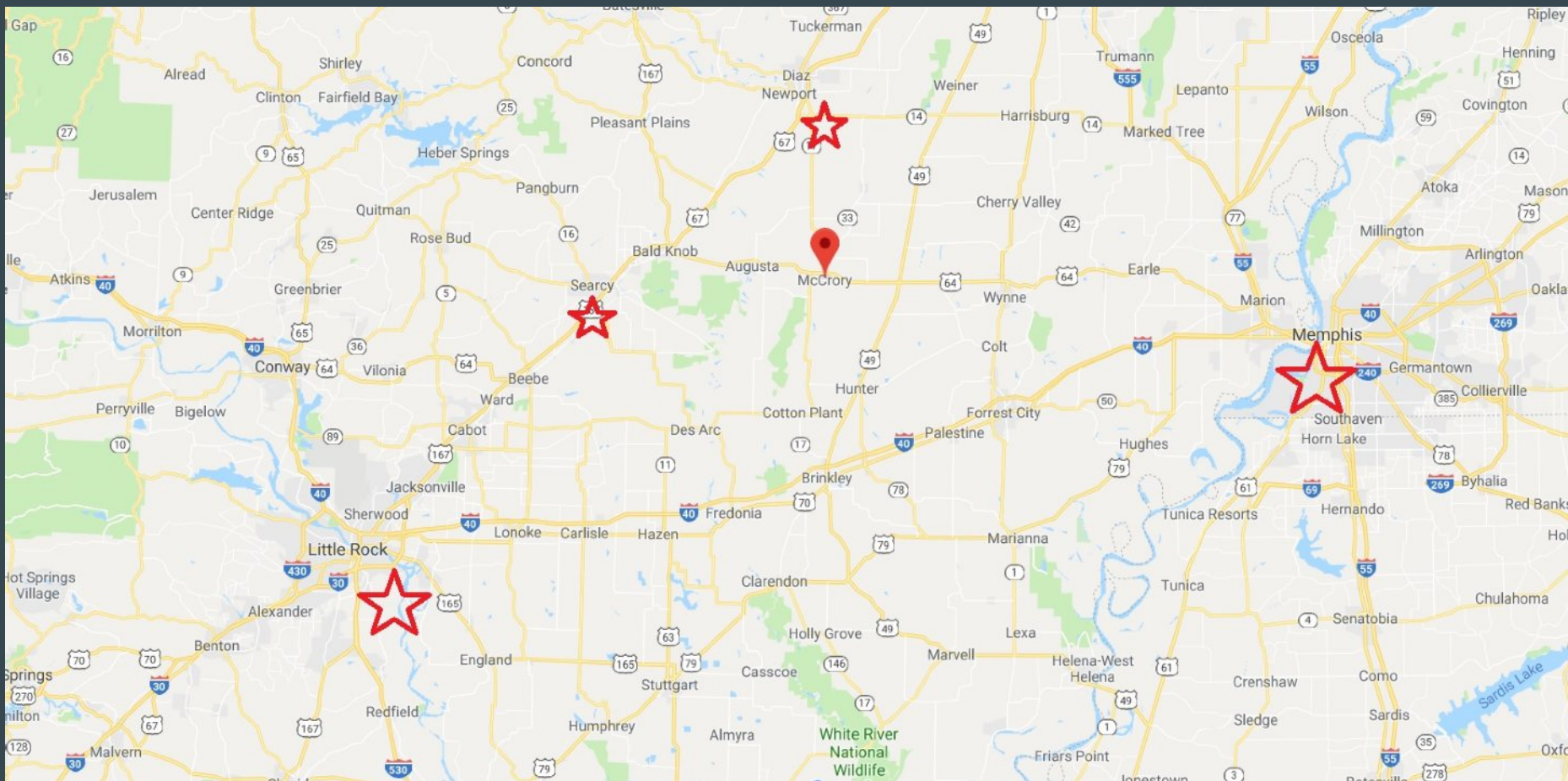
5:35pm EST – Mike (one of the group leaders) calls the office to report a serious accident. 6 injured students and an injured leader.

Tom Costley (Founder) with Alec and Sarah (office staff) gather details about each students' injuries, where they are headed and how they were transported.









July 2, 2013

American Challenge (AC) 2

6:30pm – Tom (the Founder) calls families beginning with those most seriously injured. Some parents had already been contacted by doctors and/or emergency responders.

Tom reaches out to Cathy Hansen-Stamp, Overland's Legal Counsel.

July 2, 2013

American Challenge (AC) 2

7:10pm – We reach out to the trauma center in Memphis. A nurse reports that Merritt is in critical condition, meaning that there is a “life-threatening injury.”

Merritt’s father, Rich, returns a call to our office. He tells us that Merritt is “probably not going to make it.”

July 2, 2013

American Challenge (AC) 2

Our office organizes a private flight from Boston to Albany and then to Memphis for families and Overland staff including the Founders, Tom and Liz.

The five uninjured students and Mike are transported to the home of Jim and Sheridan Chadwell in Newport.

July 2, 2013

American Challenge (AC) 2

9:52pm – KATV Arkansas reports on the incident.

10:46pm – Email inquiry from CNN.

11:30pm – Overland releases an initial statement on our website.

11:45pm – Email to all Overland staff and leaders in the field.

12:40am - Email to parents of all 2013 students (current and future).

Initial Statement on Website & Blog (11:30pm July 2, 2013)

Newport, Arkansas - On July 2, 2013 seven individuals on an Overland bicycle touring program were injured when a car traveling on route 17 struck the group. Police and paramedics responded to the scene. Three of the individuals were airlifted from the scene, including one individual who is in critical condition. The remaining four individuals were transported by ambulance and were being treated at local hospitals. Of these four individuals, two have been released. At this time, we at Overland would like to express our deepest concern for those injured and our gratitude to the emergency response teams.

Overland is based in Williamstown, Massachusetts and provides summer camp programs for kids age 10 to 19. General information about Overland is available at www.overlandsummers.com. Overland will update as more information becomes available.

Dear Overland staff,

We received a call today at 5:35pm from Mike B. (AC 2) regarding an accident involving six students in their group and his co-leader Emily. They were struck from behind by a vehicle driving in the same direction in McCrory, Arkansas. All seven were transported to area hospitals for treatment. Some have been released at this point, others are still being treated and one student is in critical condition. Emily is in stable condition.

Members of our staff including Tom and Liz Costley are currently en route to support the group. We have posted a message on our website and Facebook page and you should be aware that media reports have surfaced.

We'll continue to update you as we get more information. If you are contacted or approached as an Overland team member, please direct inquiries to our office.

Thank you, Chris.

Dear Overland Families,

One of our cross-country bike trips was involved in an accident today. The group was traveling on Route 17 near Newport, Arkansas, when seven of the members of the group were hit by a car. Police and paramedics responded to the scene.

Three of the individuals were airlifted from the scene, including one individual who is in critical condition. The remaining four individuals were transported by ambulance and were treated at local hospitals. Of these four individuals, two have been released. At this time, we at Overland would like to express our deepest concern for those injured and our gratitude to the emergency response teams.

We will continue to update you as more information becomes available.

Sincerely,

The Overland Team

July 3, 2013

American Challenge (AC) 2

12:29am - Call from the Today Show.

4:40am – Charter flight lands in Memphis, TN.

6:08am - One of the airlifted students is released to her mother.

8:45am - Bill Sadler, spokesperson for the Arkansas State Police, returns our call.

10:00am - Bruce Palmer (NOLS at the time) talks me through media interviews.

July 3, 2013

American Challenge (AC) 2

11:00am - Update posted to Overland's Blog.

1. Give the objective facts.
2. Status of the injured and the current response.
3. Express care and concern for the injured, gratitude for responders.
4. Direct readers to the blog going forward.
5. Basic information about the organization.

July 3, 2013

We want to keep you updated on the incident that has affected one of our cross-country bicycle programs. Five individuals remain hospitalized, one in critical condition. The families of participants affected by this incident have been notified directly by our office. Overland's Founders and Directors, Tom and Liz Costley, as well as two additional Overland staff members are on the ground in the area with participants and their family members. We continue to express our deepest concern for those injured and for their families, and reiterate our gratitude to responding emergency personnel, including responding law enforcement personnel. We appreciate the support we have received from professionals, families and friends in the area, as well as the support from the community of Overland families and leaders. We will post additional information on our blog as it becomes available.

July 3, 2013

American Challenge (AC) 2

Do we continue the trip for the students who want to keep riding?

July 3, 2013

American Challenge (AC) 2

9:30 pm - Call parents informing them of our intention to cancel the trip, begin arranging flights for their return. Difficult conversations.

Blog Update after the phone calls:

“After extensive discussion between Tom and Liz Costley and our full time staff, we have made the decision to call off the remainder of our American Challenge Two program. At this point, we believe that this is what needs to be done to allow all involved time to process their thoughts and emotions while surrounded by loved ones...

July 3, 2013

American Challenge (AC) 2

Late in the night, we learn that Merritt is going to be taken off life support the next day. The information is not public.

What do we do about informing the other students in the group?

July 4, 2013

American Challenge (AC) 2

7:00 am - Tom texts Merritt's father, Rich to ask him permission to tell the rest of the group that Merritt will be removed from life-support.

8:00 am - Five members of the group change their flights and travel to Memphis to say goodbye to Merritt.

July 4, 2013

American Challenge (AC) 2

“Outside the hospital in Memphis, as Rich and Anna prepared for Merritt’s passing, they rushed up to meet us with open arms, telling us this was not our fault.”

July 4, 2013

American Challenge (AC) 2

“We held hands in a circle around Merritt, and I could not have been more amazed by the clear-eyed sincerity of our students as they said their final goodbyes to their friend before heading to the airport to take their separate flights home.”

July 4, 2013

American Challenge (AC) 2

3:00pm - After the Arkansas State Police release their statement, we post the following:

This morning we received confirmation that Merritt Levitan of Milton, Massachusetts, died as a result of injuries sustained in a terrible incident that occurred outside of McCrory, Arkansas, while participating in an Overland bicycle touring program. Liz and I, and the entire Overland community, are heartsick by this tragic loss. We extend our deepest condolences to Merritt's family, friends and loved ones.

Sincerely,

Tom & Liz Costley

July 5, 2013 - July 10, 2013

American Challenge (AC) 2

July 5 - Tom & Liz and most students return home. Trip turn-around weekend.

July 6 - Updated statement on Overland's homepage and blog.

July 7 & 8 - 2 more injured students and Mike return home

July 9 - We post that all students and staff have returned home and include details about Merritt's services at Trinity Church in Copley Square, Boston.

We direct donations to Merritt's Way.

After the Storm...

American Challenge (AC) 2

What now?

- Support leaders in the field
- Outreach to families with children on trips and children starting trips (full refunds, no questions asked if parents withdraw)
- Information gathering for our internal report & insurance claims (attorneys)
- Continue to run our programs
- Keep in communications with the families of AC 2 (1 point person)

Internal Incident Report

American Challenge (AC) 2

Contents of the Report

- Chronology
- Injuries (updated to publication date, Fall 2013)
- Conditions (time of day, weather, visibility, road conditions)
- Group Members
- Leaders (biographies, HR files)

Internal Incident Report

American Challenge (AC) 2

Supporting Materials carefully documented

- Student Admissions Process, Screening
- Staff Training and Supervision
- Participant Supervision, Orientation and Training
- Overland Safety and Risk Management Policies for Bike Trips
- Equipment

Internal Incident Report

American Challenge (AC) 2

Conclusions

1. The group and both leaders followed Overland's Responsible Riding Practices.
2. Neither the weather nor the conditions of the road were contributing factors.
3. The group leader, Mike, responded appropriately.

Internal Incident Report

American Challenge (AC) 2

Recommendations

1. Require lights & hi-vis for all bikers.
2. Improve on consistency documenting an incident.
3. Improve protocol around contacting families and speaking with the media.
4. Update the emergency phone list and the list of login credentials.
5. Reiterate the importance of training with students prior to the trip.
6. Document each student's training prior to the trip.

Sample Serious Incident Response Plan (p. 1)

First, ask the following questions:

- Is anyone at risk of further harm? Is the scene safe?
- Have you called emergency help?

Second, gather Group Information

- What is the exact location (address, GPS coordinates, trail junctions, street intersection, etc.)?
- Is the group together or split up?
- Is anyone missing?

Sample Serious Incident Response Plan (p. 2)

Third, find out about the Nature of the Incident

- Which specific members of the group are involved?
- What is the nature of the injury or illness?
- What is the mechanism of injury or illness?

Finally, collect information on Response Resources

- Who called emergency response and at what time?
- If individuals are being transported, to where and by whom?
- Are there other leaders or adults in the area who can help?

Expenses & Legal Charges

American Challenge (AC) 2

Most of the costs were eventually covered by insurance - ours, individual students' and the trip insurance. We paid for flights for the families, reimbursed families for the trip and paid for various other expenses, as well as legal and crisis response.

The driver of the car was charged with negligent homicide. The Levitan family asked that he be given community service rather than jail time. None of the families brought claims against Overland.

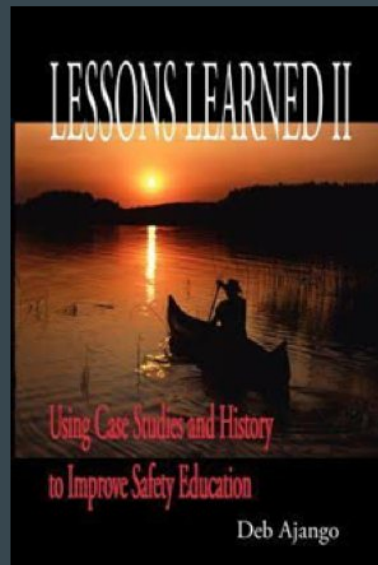
My Conclusions

American Challenge (AC) 2

1. Get ahead of the situation by dividing responsibilities, gathering the facts and responding efficiently (staff the office overnight).
2. Keep the victims at the center of your communications plan and move outward from there (current families and staff, broader community, media).
3. Take care of your team.

Further Reading

Ajango, Deb. Lessons Learned II. SafetyEd:
Safety Education for Outdoor and Remote
Work Environments, 2005



WHAT'S THE WORST ACCIDENT
YOU'VE EVER HAD?

• GIVE FACTS: A driver hit
a group of our bikers and
a girl died as a result of
her injuries.

• PIVOT: The most
common injuries are scrapes
and bruises.

• MOVE FORWARD: Leaders are
PA certified, trained and
have office support 24/7.

ARE YOUR BIKE TRIPS SAFE?

• GIVE FACTS: our programs
have inherent risks & we do
our best to minimize those risks.

• PIVOT: We ride as a group,
always with helmets, safety
flags, a leader in front + back,
constantly reviewing our routes.

• MOVE FORWARD: We work year round
to recruit, train + support our
leaders to create successful trips.

WHAT HAVE YOU CHANGED
SINCE ARKANSAS?

• GIVE FACTS:
• Expanding thorough review
• Hi-vis jerseys required
• Fear leader with flashing
light, always on

• PIVOT:
We remain confident
in who we are and
what we do.

• MOVE FORWARD: All of
our trips will be better
reviewed, better revised
and better planned.



