

When you read this (for those of you who have experienced an evening's entertainment at the ranger station) you gotta sound like the Ranger does when he's near three sheets to the wind, his hat is pulled low and he can't play nothin' but a G chord on his guitar. By the next beer he's startin' to sound like he's from West Texas and he thinks he's about as charming as an Ayrab stud leadin' a parade...

Rangerin' during a West Block June rain storm pretty much means tendin' to the welfare of young folk who bin sent forth by a teacher to make their way in the wilderness with nothin' but a Swiss Army knife on account of "they durn well oughta be growed enough to think for themselves". Hold on now; you thought I meant...no, no - *high school students* - I was talkin' about high school students. Poor, wretched high school students humped up under garbage bag raincoats trying to start wet poplar on fire and drinkin' instant soup mix in a feeble attempt to stay warm. A ranger's gotta reassure 'em that their suffering won't last long 'cos they'll all be mountain lion crap by morning anyhow. The campgrounds are always full of school kids in June.

Now them *other* students over to the field station; why they oughta know well enuff to stay put when the creek's a-churnin' white water and any bat with a lick a sense is stayin' put in a hollered out poplar. When all you got for transportation is a massive, gutless bulk of oxidized red metal that spins to a stop on a slight incline after a heavy dew and it's now rained about half a foot; yessir, you think you'd stay put...I guess that brings us to this here *Oops Award* bizness.

"Ranger, I'm in a bit of a jam" is how that Pennsylvania girl Jackie had put it over the phone. When I got over to the Fort and seen ol' Big Red plumb in the middle of Battle Creek with the water rushin' over her floorboards and her listin' to port side I thought, "Holy----yep, bit of a jam indeed."

Jackie, she's on my side of the creek soaked to the hide and shakin' like a new born calf on three legs and the rookies – that young fella from the city and the Indiana girl – they're on the other bank lookin' just as wet and like they ain't too tickled at this turn of events neither. Me bein' kinda partickler about the temperatures to which I expose my delicate parts, looks at the creek, looks at the rookies and back to Jackie and kinda jokin' asks, "Got waders?"

"Yep", says Jackie, "there's three pairs in the back of Big Red."

I look at the creek, look at the rookies and look back to Jackie 'bout the way my yellow dog looks at me when he tries to figger out why he should fetch some old stick – you know the look – head cocked to one side, kind of a puzzled expression...

Well I figger I ain't gonna be much good to the whole rescue operation if I'm soaked and shakin' like the rest of them, so I send Jackie back in to the creek to fetch me a pair o' them waders. While she's doin' that, I'm fetchin' ol' Golden Boy outta my tool box. (Golden Boy is my hefty yellow tow rope that's never shirked a task during many a rescue campaign; the type of sidekick that makes a good ranger into a *mighty* ranger.)

I put on the waders and unfurl Golden Boy and tell the rookies to head for the field station and Jackie to warm up in my truck for I now have matters well in hand. I strike out into the rushing water figgerin' I'd throw one loop on Big Red's hitch and the other on my pick-up's hitch and the whole deal would be done lickety split. Only I get out to Big Red and find that Big Red don't have a hitch...

I have seen Big Red refuse to start on numerous occasions. I have seen Big Red stuck on even more occasions. I have even seen a wheel fall off of Big Red. Big Red spends more time being towed than operating under her own power. You'd think big Red would have a hitch. I am in freezing water up to my navel, nearly lapping at the top of the waders and now I have to loop a tow strap around the underside of Big Red *'cos Big Red don't have a hitch.*

I'm humped up clear to my shoulder in the water with my ear takin' on spray from the current, flounderin' around tryin' to find a spot to get a purchase with the durn strap and doggone it my hand goes numb. Golden Boy slips from my grasp. I make a wild grab, but Golden Boy is swept downstream. I have a lump in my throat from the loss. I soon realize the lump in my throat is my testicles – the waders have taken on water.

The rest of the story is pretty mundane really. We make another trip to the ranger station for a chain and a hitch; return and yank that ugly hunk a crap outta the water. From then on Big Red pretty much stayed on this side of the creek even during the slightest drizzle and the bat crew *put the waders on* whenever they walked across the creek.

I tell you what,

The Ranger