

'SKETCHY ANDY' LEWIS vs THE UNITED STATES of AMERICA

The Slackline/BASE jumper/Daredevil Goes to War with Arches National Park

Jim Stiles

EDITOR'S NOTE: Be advised that there is language in this story may be offensive to some readers. However, for accuracy, we have transcribed quotes as they appeared originally, in this case, on Andy Lewis's publicly accessible facebook page.

'As I felt the heat and watched the flames I came to find peace, but part of me still feels as if its just not real. Regardless, I've finally found my smile! Love u D\$, it's time to rage!'

-----Andy Lewis, December 10, 2013 via facebook

Andy Lewis likes "to rage." It's how he makes his living and why he gets up in the morning. He rages without apology or condition. Raging is what "Sketchy Andy," his nom de guerre, claims is the essence of Life itself. He is a self-taught aerobic daredevil. He is a BASE jumper, a rock climber, he is the master of the 'Slackline.' The 'High-line.' Just last week Lewis claims to have set a new world slacklining record, traversing 554 feet on cord almost 600 feet high, between two skyscrapers in Bangkok, Thailand.

His Wikipedia page designates him a "Performer." That characterization cuts closest to the mark. He is an extraordinary athlete, with un-earthly skills and has managed to combine that natural talent with an outrageous, belligerent, defiant, sometimes offensive personality to create a persona all his own. He has marketed that image brilliantly and successfully, and has created his own cult of personality. Sketchy Andy is adored, even worshiped, by his followers. Indeed, he is 'followed' by 6000 disciples on his publicly accessible facebook page. He makes a living via his sponsors, corporate and otherwise, and the venues that hire him and his high altitude stunts to draw the big crowds around the world.



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His list of slackline conquests is staggering, if not at times bizarre, and a full accounting of his successes in the air can be found on his Wikipedia page. But Lewis continues to trump himself as he constantly seeks the spotlight. Last year, he gained world attention when the British tabloid 'Mirror' proclaimed:

"American man crosses tightrope with safety harness tied to his GENITALS"

The article described the event. "Balancing 30 metres above ground, these slackliners take the expression of living dangerously one step further - by tightrope walking NAKED...The brave adventurers leave their clothes behind and wear only a single safety rope secured tightly around their waists, ankles, and - in the case of American Andy

Lewis - even their private parts."

Here's the link to read the story and view the gallery of photos:
<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/weird-news/american-andy-lewis-crosses-tight-rope-2859287>

If you're a high-flying performer like Sketchy Andy, you can't beat a headline like that. Whether attaching a safety line to one's testicles is an act of bravery or something else is a matter of opinion. But in the decade since Lewis decided to pursue this life, his reputation has gone global. He performed at the Super Bow with Madonna in 2012, and according to his Wiki bio, "he was offered a high paid position on Madonna's World Tour, but turned it down for the 'Slacklife.' He appeared in News around the world, was parodied on Saturday Night Live."

Andy Lewis, at 27, has become a star. And he makes his home in Moab, Utah.



'Daniel Moore, I cried for you over your lifeless body last night...i left you on the talus, too upset to help your body down. AS your best friend, i still can't understand my weakness in the moment... I will forever live differently in my day to day life trying to be more like you were. Always happy, always positive, always full of life, spirit, and stoke.'

Lewis discovered Moab on a road trip in 2008 and soon made the tourist boomtown his world headquarters. Since then, his mere part-time presence has pulled in 'Sketchy Andy Wannabes' from around the country and beyond. The numbers of BASE jumps especially, throughout southeast Utah has reached epidemic numbers, if I can use 'epidemic' to describe the situation.

While Lewis has managed to escape unscathed from his hundreds and hundreds of aerobic maneuvers, others have not been so lucky. Climbing-related incident and deaths in the Moab area in 2013 broke all records. Among the fatalities were Lewis's close friends. In June, his friend Luke Chappel died when his chute snagged on his helmet camera and failed to deploy. He died instantly. A few weeks later, world class jumper and a mentor to Lewis, Mario Richard, died while wing-suiting in Italy. In August, Lewis's friend Ammon McNeely narrowly escaped death and literally snapped his leg in half in a BASE jump gone wrong. Lewis and friend/BASE jumper Daniel Moore were on the scene when McNeely crashed near Moab. Moore himself would die when he "late pitched off of Moab's closest cliff, and died November 23, 2013."

Briefly, the usually unflappable Lewis found himself questioning his own life and purpose. The day after Moore's death, Lewis wrote:

'Daniel Moore, I cried for you over your lifeless body last night. Gasping through tears in the beautiful fresh snow, i left you on the talus, too upset to help your body down. AS your best friend, i still can't understand my weakness in the moment. I can't believe how much I loved you, how much you inspired me, and I will forever live differently in my day to day life trying to be more like you were. Always happy, always positive, always full of life, spirit, and stoke. As the car with your crying parents and absolutely crushed girlfriend rolled away at 7am this morning... I am only left with one question. Is this really worth it?'

But the heavy-hearted self-scrutiny didn't last long. Three days later, Lewis posted, "I wish i could feel good about glorifying BASE jumping right now, but honestly this sport is a Fucking bitch." But then he added, "Hope you can enjoy my new epic tv video..."

Sketchy selfish jumping... To the max. Go~” On December 3, his fb offering complained, “Lol, Facebook took down my international news paper cover of my cock and balls leash... And I thought I finally gotten Some positive press ;D.”

And finally on December 10...resolution. His friends had gathered around a bonfire in the cold winter air near Moab to say a final goodbye to Daniel Moore. Lewis wrote, “As I felt the heat and watched the flames I came to find peace, but part of me still feels as if its just not real. Regardless, I’ve finally found my smile! Love u D\$, it’s time to rage!

“...it’s time to rage.” The grieving period was over. Time to move on.

It was after Moore’s death that I began to follow Andy Lewis facebook posts regularly. And by last spring, his comments began to display a more defiant and defensive tone. In December, he complained, “I fucking love being the scapegoat... It’s so fun. All the time. Every time.”

As he pushed forward with his ‘slacklife,’ he was only occasionally de-railed. He posted one comment in March, a reference from a friend actually, who had asked Andy, “When a heroin addict overdoses... Is it respectable because they died doing what they loved?”

But predominantly his posts were dominated by a supreme self-confidence in his own righteousness. He wrote:

“You can’t not be effected by all the accidents in our community lately, but I just want people to know that not one of my fallen comrades died in vain because they all stood for freedom, something most people these days take for granted... and soon it will be gone forever... and the sad thing is most people won’t even see that its missing.

“What would you die for? Or would you die for anything? My bet is that most people in America would choose to be a coward like the rest of the brainwashed, default, uninspired, pathetic populous that crowds our lands like mosquitos in a stagnant pond.

“ME? I stand for freedom; and its worth dying for. Where do you stand?”

His idea of freedom didn’t extend to everyone, however. In June, he posted on his fb page: “I think we should ban fat people from hiking there cause it negatively effects my visual experience.” Let’s hope Andy never gains weight.



If his self-confidence felt more like supreme arrogance to some, Andy Lewis appeared un-stoppable. The world was his slackline oyster, to be leapt upon and crept across from considerable heights. This was, as he noted, “how he makes his money.” But then one day in May, he ran into some tourists and the National Park Service at Arches National Park.

THE INCIDENT

Lewis’s run-in with Arches NP rangers occurred on May 2, but there was no media coverage and consequently, I was oblivious to any alleged park violations until Lewis posted a cryptic message on his fb page:

May 28 near Cedar, UT

Yey! Driving to Salt Lake to appear In federal court over jumping off a rock... #hatersgunnahate #itiswhatitis #lolseriously

The next day, in Salt Lake City, he added, “Want to know the difference between me and the rangers? I make this shit look good~#ftp #slacklife #livingthedream.” Still I could find no mention of Lewis in the local papers. I scoured his fb photo page and found one image of Lewis standing atop what appeared to be one of the Three Gossips. I could see Sheep Rock and Courthouse Wash in the distance.

In June Sketchy Andy ramped up the rhetoric big time. Here are some posts:

June 12 near Moab, UT

Lol, I am sorry I had to delete my favorite post about stupid rangers acting stupid. If anyone wants to complain about how unjust laws are stupid and a waste of time and money, U can continue on this thread. ;) love you guys...

June 25 near Moab, UT

Well, people are banning the rope swing at Corona arch! This bullshit is going to start a war... I’m not sure whether this world is filled more with pussies or retards... Either way, I think we should just ban fun entirely and be done with it. #fuckyoupeople

June 27 near Moab, UT · Edited

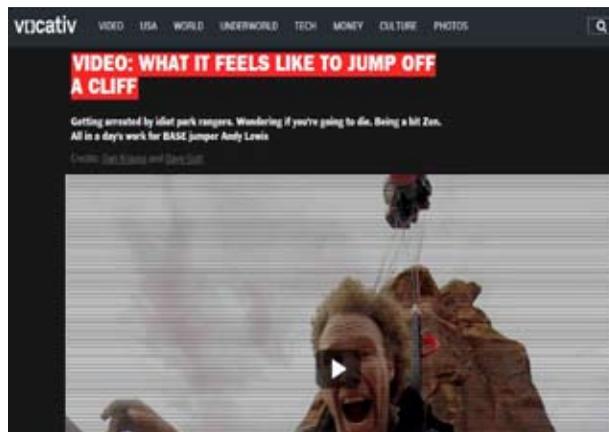
You know how much money we waste on national parks? \$175,000 a day... All For the government to pave over and transform our most beautiful and magnificent lands into profitable tourist traps that attract literally millions of people per year. Well I call bullshit. Fuck u all, keep lying to yourselves, and one day you’ll realize that without all this money for developing handicapable access to literally Everyone and their RV, the people who would still venture to these parks, are people like me; the people who actually fucking use them. One day ur funding will fall, and all u gov employees will just be cast out. And on that day I will laugh and say... Told u so. #getoutofyourRV #realtalk #somebodyhastosayit #thisiswar

He attached a video link to his June 27 post, where Lewis went into more detail about his confrontation and apparent arrest by the Park Service. He told the interviewer, in part:

“They can’t judge what we’re doing because they have no idea what were doing. I was just arrested for that...for BASE jumping and landing with my parachute in a national park. And they detained me for the entire weekend. And, like sure, I was prepared to pay the consequences, but I didnt realize BASE jumping at Arches was going to be like, 25 rangers coming after me on a Friday afternoon and then calling it for safety. Like, by them arresting me and taking my shit away, they’ve now affected my well-being as a human. Did I affect their well-being as humans by jumping off a tower? Absolutely not. This is my job. This is what I do. I BASE jump. For a living. Like, this is like how I make my money. They could have let me walk to my car and go on with my life and nothing would have changed. Not a single thing. They could go, I don’t know, and take care of lost hikers. What do they do? What do park rangers fucking do? Nothing. They don’t do anything. Fix trails? help handicapped people see a waterfall? Like the list is very short.”

Here is the link:

<http://www.vocativ.com/video/culture/sport/base-jumping-with-andy-lewis/>



‘Like, by them arresting me and taking my shit away, they’ve now affected my well-being as a human.’

Finally, on July 16, Lewis vented even more effusively than usual, ranting:

“After 4 1/2 years in the sport, 160 objects, 50+ I’ve opened, \$12000+ in fines, losing freedom in all US national parks, some national monuments, and all MGM properties internationally indefinitely, as well as getting dropped from a handful of my sponsors, I still managed to meet tons of rad people, have a shit load of fun with them, saw some of them go, and now that I have obtained 4 rigs, many skills, and have not sustained a single injury while doing so... I stopped to grab this quick shot of the ramp on high ultimate before my 800th BASE jump! So, Liza from NPS, go fuck yourself-- you need it you stupid bitch. Hooray me. #fuckthepolice” #seriouslyfuckthepolice #suckitliza #slacklife

It appeared there had been some resolution to the case, according to Lewis, though nobody, beyond those people reading Andy Lewis’ facebook page, knew there was a case to begin with. And I had no idea what MGM properties had to do with a lifetime ban in national parks, but I decided it was finally time to separate the wheat from the chaff and get the hard details of the case. I contacted the National Park Service at Arches NP and hit a brick wall.

The Arches rangers involved would not provide any details; in fact, they would barely admit that the incident occurred. In a terse email, Supervisory Park Ranger Mike Henry wrote, “... since the case still remains active and in the legal system I cannot comment at this time.”

Further efforts to contact other NPS officials, including SE Group Superintendent Kate Cannon, were unsuccessful. I was unable to even obtain a list of charges or when the violation happened. The NPS, for unknown reasons, refused to discuss any aspect of the case. (NOTE: This strange NPS stonewalling will be the subject of a future Zephyr essay)

Subsequently, I turned to the federal court in Salt Lake City; via its web site, I was able to obtain all the documents relative to the incident. Finally, I was able to at least understand the chronology of the case and, from the NPS perspective, the events of May 2.

Andy Lewis was charged on May 6 with five Class B Misdemeanors:

1. Knowingly giving a false and fictitious report to an authorized person.
2. Interfering, resisting, threatening and intimidating a government employee.
3. Delivering and retrieving a person or object by airborne means.
4. Gathering and possessing undesignated natural products.
5. Violating closure, designation, use and activity restriction, and condition of public use restriction.

The court documents offer a narrative of the May 2 violations. They were written by the Arches NP arresting officer, Ranger Liza Kent..

OFFENSE DESCRIPTION: Provide false information

“I state that on May 2, 2014, while exercising my duties as a law enforcement officer in the Central District of Utah, Within the jurisdictional boundaries of Arches National Park, the following events occurred in my presence. While investigating a BASE

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