

Back Pain in Whitewater Rafting Guides

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Submitted to the Journal of Wilderness Medicine, Spring 2005

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study was to quantify rates of back pain among whitewater rafting guides and to look for correlations between the presence of back pain and specific activities associated with guiding. The secondary objective was to provide suggestions for outfitters, based on the results of this study, which may help keep their guide staff healthy, happy, and productive.

METHODS

A mail-out, mail-back survey was sent to 2510 rafting guides working in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, Colorado, and the Grand Canyon during the summer of 2004 to quantify whitewater raft guiding characteristics and incidence of back pain.

RESULTS

Of the 390 surveys returned, 77.4% of guides reported back pain while guiding and 20.8% had back pain lasting more than one week at the time of the survey. Stacking five or more inflated boats for transport was correlated with the presence of pain ($\chi^2=8.4$, $v=1$, $p<.01$) and loading / unloading rafts while guests are waiting was correlated with back pain lasting more than one week ($\chi^2=8.1$, $v=1$, $p<.01$).

CONCLUSIONS

Rates of back pain among whitewater rafting guides appears similar to the general population. Although determining a particular cause of pain is difficult, the typical injury

seems to result from overuse and be relatively minor in scope. Rates of back pain may be reduced by: increasing the number of people lifting heavy objects, and improving communication and coordination among guides when performing lifts.