

Mert Kvelland's blueberry picking adventure

Jane Howard

Mert Kvelland is a very determined blueberry picker.

Three broken ribs and a collapsed lung didn't stop him from picking the last of his three quarts of berries as he crept back to his car after falling backwards onto a log Saturday, August 15, 2009.

Eighty-three-year-old Mert was a block or two off the Gunflint Trail near the Seagull Guard Station. He had parked on the south side of the Trail but hiked into the woods on the other side, figuring the berries would be less picked over where the ground was steep and rocky.

According to Evangelical Free Church pastor Dave Harvey, whose wife Gayle is Mert's niece, Mert must have fallen at around 10:30 a.m. If he hadn't found his own way out, only the wolves and the bears might have found him, Dave said. Once Mert reached his car, he didn't speed down the Gunflint Trail because of the pain he felt with every pothole and bump along the way.

Back in Grand Marais, Mert saw Dave and Gayle's car at the church and decided to stop and tell them he was on his way to the hospital. This wasn't until at least 2:00, however, an estimated 3 1/2 hours after he was injured.

At the hospital, Dave put his hand on Mert's back and felt a rip in his shirt. He said, "Is this where you hurt?"

According to Dave, Mert said, "Yes, but this isn't the shirt I was wearing when I fell."

Before heading to the hospital, Mert had gone to his son's cabin in Croftville, where he stays when he's in town, in order to change his clothes. And figuring he might not be back to the cabin for a while, Dave said, Mert decided he'd better haul his outboard motor inside while he was there.

Mert made a few friends in the three hours he spent at North Shore Hospital before being transported by ambulance to Duluth. "He just charmed everybody on the unit up there," Dave said. The North Shore Hospital staff could see he was uncomfortable, and an x-ray showed his right lung had collapsed. Dave thought Mert's broken ribs probably punctured the "vacuum seal" around his lung.

Fellow churchgoer and First Responder Rachel Drake accompanied Mert on the ambulance ride to Duluth.



Photo courtesy of Gayle Harvey

Mert Kvelland, blueberry adventurer, with his grandniece Ruthie Arneson, who was named after his late wife. Kvelland found his way out of a rugged, remote blueberry patch August 15, 2009 despite severe injuries following a fall.

According to Dave, they chatted the first half of the trip until a machine hooked up to Mert started beeping to warn that his oxygen level was too low. "Mert, you're going to have to stop talking now for awhile," Rachel told him.

On Tuesday, August 18, Mert's son drove him to his home in south Minneapolis. "I'm doing fine," he said in a phone interview a couple of days later. "I have to take a few pain pills. Everything is going well."

Mert confirmed Dave's story of what happened. Mert has been coming to Cook County for over 40 years. He had never picked blueberries in that spot before, but he could tell it would be a spot nobody else would try. "There wasn't going to be anybody else in [that] spot, and after I [got] in there, I could see why. It was pretty rough."

"I fell backwards onto a log," he said. When he got up he didn't think he was hurt very much, but he had to stop and rest every few feet. "You don't do very well when you have a collapsed lung!" he said. He didn't realize his lung was collapsed, however. "I just knew

that it was tough getting out," he said.

Mert figured he might as well keep picking whenever he stopped to rest since he was so close to the ground anyway. "I found the biggest blueberries on my way back!" he said.

Mert picked about four gallons of blueberries this year, some of which he froze and some of which he gave away. "Dave and Gayle got all the last ones that I picked," he said.

When asked if moving around was difficult in the days after his fall, he said his broken ribs were in the back and breathing wasn't as painful for him as it is for people who break their ribs in the front.

Mert hopes to return to Grand Marais in the fall to go hunting. His hunting ground is not as rugged as his blueberry patch, however. "I'm not worried about walking back in there by myself," he said.

Will Mert be blueberry picking next summer? "I'm 83," he answered. "Next year, I don't know how I'll be doing. ...If I'm in shape I will probably go out again. ...I'm not going back up in there *this* year!"

DNR seeks comments on state park rules

Staff reports

If you camp in a state park, hunt in a state forest, or bicycle in a state recreation area, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) would like to hear from you by Sept. 30. The DNR also hopes to hear from geocachers, antler collectors, and others who visit Minnesota state parks, state forests, state recreation areas, and state waysides.

The DNR is considering rules and rule amendments that address new and emerging recreational activities and technologies, from camping in camper cabins to skijoring to gathering certain edible plants for personal consumption.

Among other things, proposed rule changes would provide for organized public activities; extend state park and recreation area hours of operation; change camping registration and campsite use requirements; permit seasonal lease of camp-sites; and allow physically disabled persons to use electric mobility devices on park trails.

In addition, proposed changes would identify recreational activities permitted in certain state rec-

reation areas, including target shooting on shooting ranges, dog field trials, and dog training. Some of the proposed changes are technical and the result of a change in state statute. Others are intended to make recreation rules more consistent.

Proposed changes will create distinct and separate rules for state recreation areas and state parks.

The proposals are posted on the DNR Web site at mndnr.gov (click on public input, then rulemaking, then request for comments). You are invited to suggest additional changes for the DNR to consider, as well.

Send comments by e-mail to recreationrules@dnr.state.mn.us; by mail to Recreation Rules Comments, Department of Natural Resources - Division of Parks and Trails, 500 Lafayette Rd., Box 39, St. Paul, Minn. 55155; or by fax to 651-296-1157.

The public review and comment period is open until 4:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 30. For more information, contact Jade Templin toll-free at 1-800-657-3929 or jade.templin@dnr.state.mn.us.

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