

THE GREAT BOOK OF BASE

3rd Edition, 2018

For the friends we have loved, and lost.

And because I love this life
I know I shall love death as well.
The child cries out when
From the right breast the mother
Takes it away, in the very next moment
To find the left one
In consolation.

*-Rabindranath Tagore
from Gitanjali*

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On the Cover: Chris LaBounty opening Southern California's first wingsuit
BASE exit in February, 2016. *Photo by Austin Trigg.*

Chris was one of the most prolific openers of technical backcountry wingsuit exits in the world, and certainly the most prolific in the United States. In the relatively short time that he was actively jumping, he opened dozens of new exit points in locations that few people expected new jumps to be possible in. This photo, taken just a few miles outside of San Diego, CA is perhaps the most striking example. If you had asked any BASE jumper including me, prior to this day, if there was a wingsuit BASE jump in southern California, the answer certainly would have been no. Few, if any, were even searching. But Chris was a searcher, and an expert one.

Opening a new BASE jump is fraught with challenges. In addition to very real consequences for miscalculation, there is the psychological factor of "no prior success". Instead of knowing that a person has already successfully executed the jump or flight, opening a BASE jump requires the transfer of similar previous experiences, sometimes with very little margin for error. In Chris's case, on multiple occasions he was opening new jumps that were within a relatively small percentage of what was humanly possible in a wingsuit. The significance of this can't be overstated - to stand on top of a new exit point, deep in the backcountry, alone, and knowing that (based on laser-range-finder measurements and some math) the flight in front of you was close to the limit of possibility *and* had never been done... the weight of such thoughts requires a strong mind. In addition, Chris's exits usually combined his love of climbing and mountaineering, meaning that descent and retreat were technical or dangerous, the ascent was fatguiging, and he was usually jumping down extra equipment such as ropes and protection.

In June of 2016 Chris passed away below the Tori del Vajolet, in the Italian Dolomites, leaving behind his wife and two daughters. In a sport as small as BASE, one person can make a significant difference, and Chris is an example of one who shifted the perception of what's possible in our sport.

Inside Cover Page: Matt G in the Gorges du Verdon, France, circa 2008,
when camera drones ran on gasoline... *Photo by Dom Daher.*

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Warning!

No reason to sue, it's your fault

READ THIS!!! WARNING: this book discusses a dangerous and lethal activity!

BASE jumping is extremely dangerous. It is so dangerous that we seriously encourage you to not do it. In fact, we honestly think it's a bad idea.

The Great Book of BASE is NOT an instruction manual. You cannot learn to BASE jump by reading this book. The content here is offered for entertainment purposes ONLY.

YOU and ONLY YOU are responsible for your actions and for your life. By reading this book, or even opening or barely touching it, you agree to take FULL RESPONSIBILITY for your actions in life.

If you BASE jump, or even attempt anything like BASE jumping, YOU COULD DIE. This book discusses an activity THAT CAN KILL YOU.

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The first edition of this book was published in 2010 with only one mission: To improve knowledge and therefore safety in the BASE world.

As I write this it is ten years since I began efforts on that first edition, and forty years since the birth of modern BASE. In the past decade the landscape of our sport has undeniably changed, morphed largely by the internet. A massive glut of online content has led to an accordingly increased participation rate, and jumpers around the world are more connected than ever. But some things are constant, one thing in particular: what it means to be a good BASE jumper has not changed.

Ethics still matter. Community still matters. It's still important to not die, to not be a dick online or in person, to help your friends, and to support those around you as we all, together, try to make it through this sport alive, and keep this sport alive. This book is all about helping you to stay alive, while preserving the sport of BASE and our still small, still fringe, simultaneously tight-knit and sprawling, BASE community.

It is difficult to assess the current fatality rate due to our lack of knowledge of total jump numbers worldwide, but it is a safe assumption that although there is currently more information (good and bad information) available to the jumping public than there was a few years ago, we're not much safer. As safety margins increase through improved systems and the information available, we seem to inevitably change our behavior to eat up those margins.

When it comes to community, while social media has done wonders to connect jumpers around the world and facilitate immeasurable amounts of fun it has also enabled the worst among us, and worst parts of us, to slither onto each other's screens.

It is my hope that a turning point will come and the sport is taken seriously enough to where its participants invest in safety & preparation far more than costume parties, and we realize how the miniscule size of the BASE family is a benefit to us all - an opportunity to help people we know do better in a severely dangerous adventure.

The new content in this third edition is technical information relating to wingsuits, BASE equipment, and strategies with which to approach BASE and then escape from it without injury to yourself or to our sport.

I can't know what your goals are as you sit reading this book, but I can tell you what most people are thinking when they begin BASE jumping, and how most people have died so far. Nearly 200 fatalities have occurred since the first edition of this book was released, and around 125 of those were in a wingsuit, the majority in the Alps or Norway. Regardless of age, nationality, experience, skill, or gender, BASE jumpers today are most likely to die flying a wingsuit somewhere in Europe.

Most of these BASE deaths are caused by a lack of education combined with poor judgment. BASE, particularly wingsuit BASE, isn't just "jumping". It's a form of aviation. Our biggest problem remains our inability to take aviation seriously, and a lack of effort to educate ourselves and respect the amount of time and preparation it takes to aviate safely, and the amount of restraint it takes to excersize good judgment.

There are technical minutae needed to learn to "fly" safely, and some study is needed, but taking BASE seriously mainly comes down to excercizing good judgment. If you progress slowly, forget about getting radical video, train for each step of your progression, and choose your conditions wisely, then your odds are good.

ON ACCIDENTS

Human emotion can be so predictable, and we exotic, extreme, and eccentric BASE jumpers are no exception. When fatalities are reported, the BASE community follows a seemingly predetermined script of behavior; We lament the deceased, search for answers, point out his/her mistakes, and tell ourselves that we would never have done that or never will. In this way, we allow ourselves to continue to believe that we are less likely than they were to die in this sport, which is of course usually bullshit. BASE kills an almost unbelievably high percentage of participants, and no one is immune. People make mistakes. Mistakes kill in BASE.

Every single BASE jump is intensely dangerous, no matter what object you are exiting from, what aerial you execute, or what line of flight you choose—making us all daredevils. Yet we seem obsessed with applauding the actions of the most daring in our sport. Most humans just can't help but compare ourselves with each other, and we tend to make the most intense comparisons amongst our own peer groups. It seems to be a question of ego, and as stated in several parts of this book, ego is a driving factor in many BASE deaths. I am thankful that I survived my video-count phase, during which I watched with naïve pride as my videos whirled through the BASE scene and racked up millions of views. It's hollow reason to push the limits of a ridiculously dangerous sport, and I'm no longer proud of it. Online image sharing could simultaneously be the best and worst thing that has happened to our sport.

There is little doubt now that the capturing and sharing of images has redefined our sport and pushed it to a level of public awareness that our predecessors never could have dreamed of (except maybe Carl Boenish, whose 1980s hallucinations still cannot be fully fathomed, even if his ram-air jumpsuit prediction was half-prescient, see clipping).

SKYDIVING IN THE 80'S

(Reprinted from PARACHUTIST Magazine)
February 1980

(Several months ago PARACHUTIST magazine polled many of the best-known jumpers in this sport to find out where they thought parachuting was going in the 1980s. Some of their responses were upbeat, some serious, some hopeful, and some were harbingers of doom.)

"I see every first Sunday of the month between 6:00 and 8:00 AM, police cordoning off a two block sector in New York City and 50 skydivers will be permitted to jump off the World Trade Center. It will be so common-place the press won't even bother to cover it. I bet by then skydivers will be landing ram-air jumpsuits and won't even need their canopies!"
Carl Boenish, D-2556
Hawthorne, CA

Carl's starry-eyed 1980 claim that one day police would cordon off city streets in downtown New York to allow BASE jumpers to land unobstructed. As of 2018, this appears unlikely.

It has also shaped the way that people enter, and exit, the sport, and provided a new goal for new jumpers. When social media (and thus image sharing) did not exist, instantly sharing images of ourselves with all of humankind was not possible and therefore not a goal of people entering the sport. That has changed.

Regardless of why you have been drawn to BASE, I'm glad you picked up this book. But reading it is not enough. You cannot yet comprehend how easy it is to die BASE jumping - the level of training, patience, and humility that is needed in order to maximize your chances of survival is almost inhuman.

~ Matt Gerdes

A BACKWARD FORWARD

by Dorkzonehero

Hello, my name is Dorkzonehero, and I am a BASE jumping expert. I wrote a blog once at [dorkzonehero.net](#). Far more BASE jumpers are familiar with my blog than with the website of the author of this book, so enough said about my credentials — they are rock solid.

First of all, let me congratulate you on entering the world of BASE jumping. This is a world where individualism is still strong, where there are no rules, and where nobody decides what you do or how you do it. You are completely left to use your own good judgment and decision-making skills.

Maybe you are holding this book because the thought of complete freedom appealed to you. Climb up, and jump down. It's as simple as that, with no dropzone hassles. Nevertheless, you are holding in your hands a book that tells you, for more than 300 pages, about what someone else thinks about BASE jumping. Well, good for you, now you can use the energy that you would normally spend on thinking for yourself to edit a video from your GoPro camera that totally syncs the beat of the music to the parachute openings.

Luckily, this book does not have all the answers, and there are still important questions which have no easy answers. For instance: When is it funny to drop a pilot chute assist too early? Can I jump objects in San Francisco during the daytime? How drunk can I be while BASE jumping? Can I stick the landing if the wind is 32mph and I front riser turn as hard as I can into a bush with my smallest canopy? I know the answer to all of these questions and it was a fun adventure to figure them out.

You should go out there and find your own questions and get your own answers. I have not read this book. It's probably a lot of stuff about how to minimize the chances of fucking things up. Nobody likes to fuck up, but nothing teaches you an important point like a good fuck-up either. My advice is to fuck up and then harden the fuck-up, in that order.

-DZH

WARNING!!!
For more DZH humor, go to Appendix C. The comments above and those in Appendix C are not serious comments. Do not take them seriously. You are responsible for your own actions and your own interpretation of the material here.

SAFETY FOR JUMPING

SICHERHEIT FÜR SPRINGEN - SÉCURITÉ POUR LE SAUT

No drugs, drink, landing or freefalling

Cheststrap

Legstrap

Slider

In flight

No AAD

No tumbling

No smoking

Helmet

Hook-It

HanWags

PCA/SL <= 50m
Low freefall

1. Jump

2. Fall

3. Deploy

3. Land

1. Impact

2. Free parachute

3. Free DV tape

4. Prosper
eay
YouTube

Please do not remove from exit point

www.dorkzonehero.net

Courtesy DZH

Photo by Bryan Rapoza

- V -

THE GREAT BOOK OF BASE

B.A.S.E.

At once an intense adventure sport, a hobby, a crime, a passion, a profession, and a pastime, BASE jumping is an experience that only a few thousand people out of the billions on our planet have experienced. This book is the first and most complete compilation of information on, and stories about, this enigmatic sport... or hobby, or passion. In the end, whatever BASE is for you, or may become for you, this book will guide you into a more thorough understanding of it.

Twenty years ago, you had to know someone, and maybe know them well, to have any chance of experiencing this sport. BASE jumpers were few and far between, and the chances were that there wasn't even anyone capable of "mentoring" you in your area. High barriers to entry kept the numbers low, and jumpers were, by necessity, usually highly dedicated and ambitious.

As the number of experienced BASE jumpers multiplied, so did their networks, and by the early 90s all you had to do was have a few skydives and then find the token BASE hero at your local skydiving dropzone. Then, with the mass popularization of the World Wide Web and several manufacturers beginning to produce BASE-specific equipment, the foundation was laid for the exponential growth that occurred from the late 1990s to present day. In just a few years, the official learning process evolved from paying dues in the form of legwork and finding a trusted mentor, to paying money and signing up for a class. In the public eye, the sport went from a suicidal quirk practiced by idiots, to mainstream "extreme," as even a Tom Cruise character in a Hollywood movie landed his BASE gear safely.

AND TODAY, THERE EXISTS THE GREAT BOOK OF BASE

This book contains enough information to fill your mind with much of what the world's most experienced BASE jumpers currently know. You can be, after reading this, a virtual expert. However, without real life experience, dedicated training, and the guidance of trustworthy instructors and mentors, you will never jump safely, and, should you attempt to BASE jump without said training, you will probably die.

This book is a reference, but must not be your sole reference. This book is not a guide, and cannot be your guide. If this book convinces you not to jump, then it may be the cheapest life-saver you've ever purchased, and if you still want to experience BASE after reading every word, then your adventure will still have not begun.

The information in this book is not the result of one person's experiences or ideas. The roots of the knowledge presented here run four decades deep. I have drawn on the experiences of not only the hundreds of people that have directly or indirectly contributed to this book, but also, by default, the people who passed that information onto them. Lessons in this sport are often learned the hard way, and I have carefully included knowledge gained from many recorded BASE fatalities and countless serious injuries.

You may choose to browse through this book and read chapters, or parts of them, at random. BASE adventure stories, sidebars, and history nuggets are spaced throughout the book and provide glimpses into the lives (and deaths) of experienced jumpers.

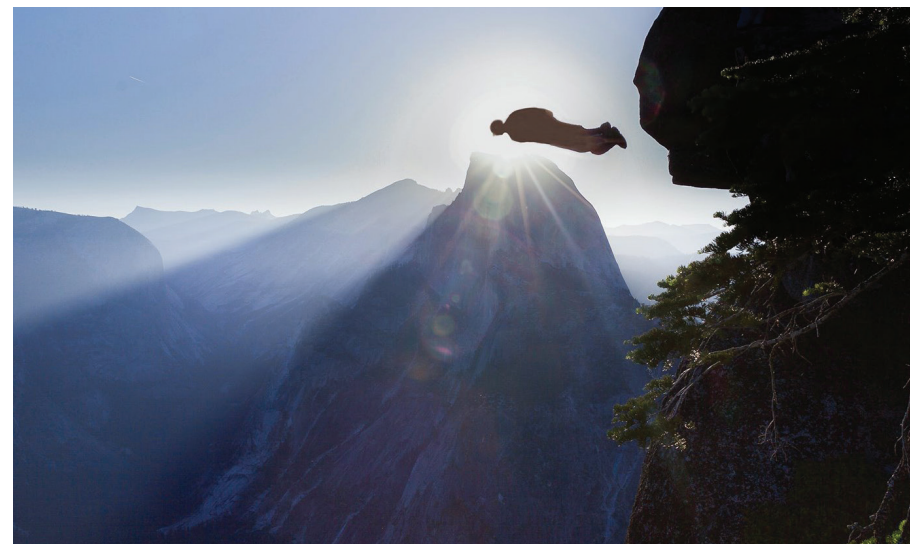


Photo by Austin Trigg

If your end goal is to achieve a more thorough understanding of the sport of BASE jumping from this book, then I recommend that you start at the beginning and review the information in the order that it is presented.

I also compel you to follow the instructions of responsible, qualified people in the skydiving and BASE jumping communities, and take nothing, in this book or anywhere else, as gospel. Gather information from other sources and develop practices that work for you, and feel right to you. While this book does contain many words on BASE, as a sole reference it could only be considered incomplete and insufficient. Your life depends on a massive amount of careful research, training, and practice that this book cannot physically or theoretically encompass. You must take full responsibility for your life and your decisions at all times; self-reliance is the very core of surviving and enjoying the activity of BASE.

A NOTE ON DANGER, DEATH, AND RISK

BASE jumping is dangerous. Throughout this book, that sentence will be repeated in myriad ways, and the language contained within these pages may seem unnecessarily cautionary and even alarmist at times.

But, the thing is, BASE jumping really is dangerous and unforgiving of human error and we want to get that point across. Of course, so are a lot of other sports. People die mountaineering and backcountry skiing, regularly. They do because the allure of summits and deep powder is sometimes greater than our concept of the risk involved and our understanding of our likelihood to be a victim of our decisions in the face of that risk. For BASE jumpers, the pull of the void is often greater than our understanding of the risk, and what you don't know about BASE, and what you don't know about how much you know, can kill you.



Kristian Geissler at the first ever legal BASE jumping event at the Auburn bridge; organized by Martin Tilley of Asylum Designs. Photo: JT Holmes

Only you can prevent your BASE injury or fatality. The best way to do this is to not jump. This means having the strength to decide early on that the conditions and/or your abilities are not yet adequate. It is an arduous test of your ego and humility to admit that your abilities are inadequate to perform certain jumps flawlessly, so it may be easier for you to blame it on the conditions not being right, and all too often, they aren't. Exit points have poor footing, ledges protrude from cliffs, landing areas are small, winds aren't right, and some objects are too intolerant of off-heading openings. Those are condition-based factors that you must recognize and cite in your decision to jump a safer object and live another day. Much of BASE jumping is understanding where your limits are and how to live within them.

The second best way is to jump at a level that is below what you are capable of. Even if you know that you can graze your knuckles on the side of the cliff and not crash your wingsuit, try to be content with flying a meter away—that's close enough to impress anyone. Even if you know that you can nail a twisting double-gainer, be satisfied with a single and a high pull, it's impressive enough. Even if you know that you can go stowed, take pleasure in going hand-held from that lower object, it will still be a completely awesome jump. In addition to understanding your limits, you must learn to leave yourself some margin for the inevitable error.

If you learn everything before you need it, progress slowly, and you are consistently over-cautious, then you might live to jump another day.

I'LL SAY IT AGAIN:

You can't learn to BASE jump from this book!

What you can do:

- Read this book and sound like a BASE jumping expert when you're picking up women (or men) in a bar.
- Allow yourself to be inspired by the images and words.

What you cannot do:

- Learn to BASE jump from this book.
- Teach yourself to BASE jump using this book.
- Learn to BASE jump without a qualified instructor and mentor.



Shane McConkey rolling over a TARD (Totally Awesome Rapid Deployment) at Twin Falls, ID. Photo by Corey Rich

Before You Begin

BASE jumping is the practice of parachuting from fixed objects. Fixed object parachute jumping from towers and other objects has been a part of history for several hundred years now, since well before the arrival of powered aircraft. Even in the 18th century, parachute jumps were made from tethered balloons.

As the use of powered aircraft became more widespread and the growth of aviation far outpaced the reliability of early aircraft, the need for more reliable parachute systems became apparent. WWII saw widespread use of these systems, and sport parachuting began soon after. Most early equipment for sport skydiving was in fact surplus military gear until sport specific equipment was designed. Using the rounds developed for early sport parachuting, and even some military equipment, fixed object jumping continued through the 50s and 60s in rare instances, including from El Capitan in Yosemite, California, in the Dolomites of Italy, and from many bridges around the world. (For BASE History, see Chapter 11.)

The sport as we know it today is generally considered to have been born in 1978 when a few jumpers exited from the summit of El Capitan, tracked away from the cliff, and opened ram-air parachutes.

Carl Boenish, who was one of the major protagonists of that El Capitan adventure and was the first to apply the acronym of B.A.S.E., for Building, Antenna, Span, and Earth, subsequently began the tradition of offering “BASE Numbers” to those who had completed at least one jump from each of the four objects. As of 2018 there are over two thousand jumpers who have received their BASE number, although there are many more people around the world who have experienced BASE jumping from at least one type of object and many who have experienced all four objects but do not feel the need to apply for a BASE number.

The recentness of the sport’s modern history, coupled with the fact that the vast majority of BASE information has been passed person to person within a tight knit community of jumpers, means that a great deal of information has been shared by the generous and experienced with the uninitiated. This book is a compilation of that information and those lessons, which have been the result of hundreds of thousands of trial and error experiences, and lessons learned from injuries and fatalities.

This book does not contain groundbreaking new theories and techniques, nor does it purport to contain anything new at all. What it does do is bring together ideas and vital techniques that may entertain or inform you, but may not help to keep you alive should you become convinced that BASE jumping is a good idea.

BASE Definition:

A smartypants defined “Extreme Sports” as, “Independent leisure activities where the most likely outcome of a mismanaged mistake or accident is serious injury or death” (Brymer, 2005).

IS BASE JUMPING FOR YOU?

If you make it to the end of this book and still have to ask yourself this question, then the answer is probably no. This is a sport that requires more than weekend commitments, or a casual interest. It requires that you risk more than losing a Saturday to poor weather, and the penalties for inadequate spatial awareness and reactions can be death, or worse.

You can begin downhill mountain biking or rock climbing part time, casually. You can roll down easier trails, or stick to well-protected cliffs where, although thrilling, the likely worst case scenario is a fractured ankle or clavicle. But on even the most basic and straight forward BASE jump, you are absolutely and without question risking your life. Even skydiving does not fit into the same category of risk, as with a reserve parachute, an automatic activation device (AAD), and thousands of feet (thus far more time) to react it is a comparably mellow activity.

BASE goes against modern Western civilization’s intense abhorrence of risk. It is a step back in time, back to the “Wild West” and a step away from guard rails and safety nets and other second chances. Fall out of the plane and fall asleep? Most skydivers have AADs. Driving too fast? Well, you’ve got anti-lock brakes. Crash anyway? Your airbags will likely save your life. In contrast, the penalty for inattention or inaction in BASE is death or serious injury, or worse: serious injury and then death. There is no safety net, no release of liability between you and the edge, and no second chance. BASE purifies the sport, and keeps it beautifully primitive.

Not long ago, our survival depended on our senses and our alertness. Uncoordinated or slothful humans went hungry as their lithe, athletic colleagues feasted on nature. The fit survived, and lived better.

To be successful in BASE jumping for any length of time, you must be attentive, cautious, and responsible. The penalty for complacency and errors is death.

If you have ever been prone to cutting corners in any walk of life, if you succumb to bouts of carelessness, or if you have not performed well at virtually every physical activity that you have engaged in during your lifetime, then BASE jumping is not for you.

This is how BASE is decidedly un-modern. Nowadays, for the vast majority of recreational sports and activities in Western civilization, the only barrier to entry is money. But just because you can afford to become a BASE jumper doesn’t mean you should, and doesn’t mean that you will survive the experience for long.

The most recent generations of humans only have to listen carefully enough to their television to know which brand of olfactory-murdering deodorant to buy, and only have to see clearly enough to choose their favorite package of MSG-laden snack food in the market or to not smash into the three brilliantly illuminated tail lights in front of them while driving. Outside, bright street lights have made the night sky obsolete, along with the need for developing our natural night vision. It has been said that before our senses were dulled by lack of necessity and use, Jupiter’s reflective glow cast a detectable shadow on moonless nights.

Although it won't re-train your eyesight to the acuity of a Paleolithic hunter, BASE jumping will offer you the chance to re-experience your range of senses, to hone your athletic potential and to immerse yourself in the immediate present. For many jumpers, the moments of dead air freefall after leaving a fixed object feel eternal in length, and provide a deep sense of meditative focus.

Comprehending Risk

BASE jumping is probably even more dangerous than you think it is. At a site in Northern Europe where the BASE environment is heavily regulated and the number of jumps made each year is recorded, approximately 1 in every 3000 jumps ends in fatality.

If the odds of winning the lottery were that good, everyone in the world would play.

But since winning the lottery in this case means dying, BASE jumping remains a rather unpopular sport and is, perhaps justifiably, viewed by the general public as a crazy and unreasonably dangerous activity. Seriously, you have to admit that it doesn't even look safe in photos — jumping off of a cliff, wearing a parachute? Even if you know nothing of the inherent risks — the regularly occurring off-headings, the potential canopy malfunctions, the vast opportunities for human error and common lapses of judgment — it is easy to imagine how deadly this activity can be and it disagrees with most people on a very instinctual level.

Yet, somehow, a few of us are drawn to it far more strongly than most are repelled by it. Out of the nearly seven billion people on earth, a few thousand consider BASE jumping to be a beautiful, high stakes, game.

Then and Now

Even Yosemite Park Rangers, who have since developed a worldwide reputation as the world's foremost BASE haters and most blood-thirsty BASE police, didn't know what to think when people first began to regularly parachute from cliffs inside the park. Was this illegal? Surely it must be, even if rock climbing and hang gliding were not, as nothing as new and fanciful as parachuting from a cliff could be allowed in one of America's premier National Parks.

Ironically, it was the early participants of modern BASE who ruined America's most classic site; Carl Boenish and friends jumped Yosemite until the Rangers couldn't stand it anymore, and a legal agreement to allow limited BASE jumps blew up in the face of BASE jumpers who couldn't adequately respect the rules that they themselves had helped to create, setting a pattern that has been repeated by jumpers worldwide ever since. Selfishness and the BASE jumper's natural tendency to flagrantly disobey rules has never once helped the accessibility of a BASE object. Does being drawn to BASE mean being incapable of excersizing self-preservation, and generally behaving?

Even the first sets of rules, we rushed to break. Even the very first semblance of organization was disorganized, and the stage was set for a sport to be globally unregulated but at least partially self-regulated, with jumpers developing a vague set of ethics and codes which they would choose to sometimes practice, and sometimes disregard.

In the 80s and early 90s, the first jumpers that were caught using many objects were treated with a confused form of admonition by authorities, who were perplexed by an activity that was not overtly harmful, but clearly irresponsible. When the owner of one Northern California object confronted the first people to jump from it, they replied, "We didn't see a sign that says no jumping from tram!" Miffed and slightly amused, the owner didn't bother to press charges... but he did post a sign.

This pattern of puzzlement, recognition, and prohibition has repeated itself around the world countless times since the early 80s, and once BASE jumping was grandiosely banned from America's premier National Parks and National Recreation Areas, it went from being a crazy stunt to being a "crime" in some places, in just a few short years.

With the mainstream popularization of BASE jumping having been accelerated by the internet and even Hollywood, now security guards and parking attendants everywhere can recognize it at first glance. Having been trained by us via the web, they point and think, "Hey, that stuff is illegal" and rush to attempt to capture the offending perpetrators, sometimes even in places where BASE jumping is not actually prohibited. In many cases, we've been made out to appear criminal, largely thanks to the harsh punishments doled out by the US National Park Service, which has been proud to lead by example.

BASE videos and social media has made the sport recognizable independently of skydiving. The current generation is a far cry from our cagey forefathers who were cautious about telling even their skydiving peers that they engaged in night BASE missions. That being said, one must only troll through a few of the early 80s BASE news articles to see that the "Hey, bro, check me out" phenomenon was not born with the invention of YouTube, and has been an aspect of human nature since time immemorial.

But a few BASE stunts appearing in a few local newspapers is nothing compared to the literally tens of millions of people that have seen BASE jumping clips on the internet, Hollywood movies, and network TV. Nowadays, it is safe to say that the sport has become recognizable in the mainstream even if it is still only practiced by a miniscule fraction of the population. Undoubtedly, it was the ease with which we can now share images of BASE jumping on the internet that played the most significant role in exploding the sport.



Hartman Rector plotting on the long walk out at the Perrine Bridge. Photo by Loren Cox.

BASE jumping’s ubiquitous presence has made it appear not only more accessible, but easier, as well. The former may be true, as after a simple Google search you will arrive at one of several BASE jumping forums which are full of information on beginning the sport, alongside tens of thousands of posts from BASE jumpers who are more than eager to share their opinions with you. But BASE jumping is no easier than it was twenty years ago, when most manufacturers didn’t even have a website of their own.

In fact, the risks remain identical and the sites mostly unchanged. What is changed is the perception of risk based upon the normalization of the activity; if so many people are doing it, then it can’t be that dangerous, right? And so the barriers to entry become lower and also appear lower, and the sport continues to grow at an exponential rate despite the real danger and the dangerous reputation.

What the future will bring is uncertain, but one thing is sure: BASE jumping will continue to grow, no matter how many fatalities we have per year. Some people will always be attracted to the idea of parachuting from objects regardless of the danger, and some people will be attracted to it because of the danger.

“It doesn’t matter who you are, where you come from, or what you do: when you are on the edge prepared to take that step, we are all the same.”

-mthead



Living BASE legend, Maurizio di Palma, who currently has over 5000 BASE jumps (as of 2018). Photo by Bryan Rapoza

Facing Page: Mario Richard flying away from Castleton Tower. Photo courtesy of Steph Davis

