



Leap of Faith

Arriving at the top of a cliff, the lemmings in the front row screech to a halt, peering cautiously over the edge to determine their next move.

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ILLUSTRATION
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Ask anybody over the age of 14 who isn't actively engaged in the pursuit of a rock star career about lemmings and you will get the stock definition. They are small rodents who are dumb enough to follow their leaders over cliffs thus satisfying an inherited "mass suicide" gene. This is a myth and a misconception. The fact is that lemmings breed like there is a government program subsidizing large families. Because of being equipped with continuously growing incisors that allow them to devour areas as large as Delaware in a single afternoon, they eventually have to move on like migrating caribou in search of food.

Arriving at the top of a cliff, the lemmings in the front row screech to a halt, peering cautiously over the edge to determine their next move. "Whoa!" they cry, frantically waving their little paws to alert the mob behind them. Obeying one of Newton's immutable Laws of Motion that states a mob in motion tends to remain in motion until hosed down by water cannons or police batons, the results are inevitable — they protest to the gathered media and the ACLU moves

in swiftly. No, actually they all go over like base jumpers who have forgotten their chutes.

With that in mind, turn your attention to a state park in Montana some 23 miles south of Bozeman. This is the Madison Buffalo Jump State Park, a site featuring a limestone cliff where for 2,000 years buffalo used to hurl themselves off into space playing a fatal game of follow-the-leader. In this instance, the leader was an American Indian dressed up in a cheap buffalo suit. Behind the thundering herd were other native Indians waving wigwams and shouting, "Go, buffalo!" Picture a thousand Dumbos without ears. Consider a lot of American Indians without refrigerators coping with 200,000 pounds of buffalo steaks.

The result was inevitable because buffalo, individually and collectively, are

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no smarter than cows and would make the average lemming look like a Mensa candidate. Aerodynamically challenged, their remaining survivors hang around places like Yellowstone National Park and would probably still jump off a cliff if they could find one. Today, there are signs posted at the park prohibiting visitors from disguising themselves as American Bison and importuning the beasts to follow them to the nearest hazard. If a nostalgic buffalo, reviewing the glories of the old days, should launch himself off a cliff of his own volition, it simply means six more weeks of winter.

Stay with me here. The grizzly bear is an animal with plenty of smarts, as evidenced by its point-blank refusal to leap off cliffs. Lacking any ordnance beyond his claws and a set of teeth capable of devouring a Volkswagen, the grizzly nearly was hunted to extinction by people who should know better. They bought into the myth the bear's strength would be magically transferred to any daring sportsman who could dispatch the animal with a cardiac-piercing bullet safely beyond the reach of tooth and nail. Others wanted a taxidermist to stuff the 9-foot-behemoth to impress other like-minded morons.

Although the Adopt-a-Grizzly program never got off the ground, thanks to overprotective mothers, the Friends-of-Ursus Arctos Horribilis enthusiastically convinced the government to fund a \$4.8 million dollar five-year study to determine if a committee could be formed to study the feasibility of creating a series of subcommittees that would put together a program dedicated to the environmental impact study of a Grizzly Awareness month. As a result, the U.S. Geological Survey recently announced the number of grizzly bears in Montana had now

reached 765 individuals. They have rebounded! The bears, in turn, announced there would be no more help from them until the name "Horribilis" was removed from its Latinized designation. It sounded too much like Hagar the Horrible.

The point is, they rebounded, thus giving heart and encouragement to a group of old-fashioned dentists who are not comfortable with their view of where dentistry as a profession is going. It's one thing, the solo practitioners say, to see large clinics employing dozens of dentists embodying all the specialties

and advertising their wares to the public in every media, but it's quite another to see restorative and preventive dentistry sharing seemingly unrelated amenities. Hand and foot massages, Botox injections and dental hygiene supplies for sale, they deplore, are more appropriate in an atmosphere commonly found at Costco and MiLadies Spa.

Take heart, you old timers, you solo operators in your 1,000-square-foot-kingdoms. Extinction is possible, of course, but so is rebounding. You don't have to jump off the cliff. ■■■■