Survival Gear Fatality File

Man dies taking survival test under guides’ care.

A man died of thirst during a wilderness-survival exercise in the Utah desert designed to test his physical and mental toughness, even though guides had water. They didn’t offer him any because they did not want to spoil the character-building experience.

By Day 2 in the blazing Utah desert, Dave Buschow was in bad shape. Pale, wracked by cramps, his speech slurred, the 29-year-old New Jersey man was desperate for water and hallucinating so badly he mistook a tree for a person.

After going roughly 10 hours without a drink in the 100-degree heat, he finally dropped dead of thirst, face down in the dirt, less than 100 yards from the goal: a cave with a pool of water.

But Buschow was no solitary soul, lost and alone in the desert. He and 11 other hikers from various walks of life were being led by expert guides on a wilderness-survival adventure designed to test their physical and mental toughness.

And the guides, it turned out, were carrying emergency water on that torrid summer day.

Buschow wasn’t told that, and he wasn’t offered any. The guides did not want him to fail the $3,175 course. They wanted him to dig deep, push himself beyond his known limits, and make it to the cave on his own.