

## DEATH TO THE DISPROVED DEATH-IN-THE-GORGE THEORY

- The Chinese government and the current U.S. State Department maintain that David likely fell from the Tiger Leaping Gorge hiking trail and drowned in the Jinsha River below. However, no evidence has ever turned up to support this theory. David's body was never found (even in the river's low season) and no passport, small backpack or other personal effects washed onto riverbanks where locals and schoolkids walk daily. No eyewitness accounts ever emerged of a man falling on one of the top ten hiking trails in China frequented by local and international visitors – *absolutely nothing*. China even exposed as false a local rumor that David's passport had been found near the river.
- According to David's older brother Michael, who hiked the trail in September 2004 with his Dad and brother James, and returned again in 2005 to travel by vehicle along the lower paved road, "The topography of the area shows hikers cannot slip from the High Trail into the river. The river is too far away. If a hiker did somehow manage to slip and roll downhill onto the paved road below, the danger would be from oncoming traffic, not from drowning. David would have had to cross the road (ostensibly while wounded from falling) and go hop over the wall/railing in order to reach the river and fall into it."
- China has referred to the paved road as the "Low Trail," but hikers avoid this lower road due to danger from oncoming traffic. The scenic views and guesthouses are all on the High Trail, which is where trekkers and tourists like David go to hike. China mentioned a less-developed area where hikers have faced danger, but that is farther into the gorge where David did not go as he was seen multiple times on the road leaving to Shangri-La. China further noted a landslide had recently occurred on the Low Trail, but David did not hike the so-called Low Trail. The locations of the guesthouses where David stayed, the memories of witnesses, and the necessary travel times required to keep to his tight travel itinerary all prove that David hiked the High Trail, then moved on to Shangri-La.
- The gorge trail is not a true wilderness area. It is filled with farms, scattered small hamlets, larger villages and at least 15 guesthouses. Villagers, children, toll collectors, women walking to sell their wares, and hikers are seen frequently upon the trail, which David's Dad and brothers did not consider a difficult hike. David spent his youth backpacking the Wind River Mountains in Wyoming each summer – an area of deep wilderness where any help is a two-day hike away. He was an experienced trekker and backpacker with over sixteen years of knowledge and skill, as well as an Eagle Scout. David was physically fit when he went missing as he'd played hockey at night in Beijing when not studying Mandarin or preparing for his scheduled law school entrance exam.
- The U.S. State Department provided David's family and congressional aides with copies of a Lonely Planet article and travel blog as evidence of the difficulty of hiking Tiger Leaping Gorge, even highlighting the phrases "a few people – including a handful of foreign travelers – have died in the gorge," which is not referenced, and "the trail was

not well marked.” But a close reading shows the blog’s author admitting within the same blog post that “I was not there to hike so knew nothing about the trail,” and “the path is not considered to be difficult if the hiker is in reasonable shape. There are guesthouses and places to eat along the way.”

- The recent “double-back” theory that David could have disappeared while reverse-hiking the gorge faces the same lack of evidence and is easily disproved by David’s travel itinerary. He did not have time to hike the gorge a second time after returning from Shangri-La (about seventy miles away) because he would have missed his airline flight. He would have needed two additional days (another to hike back through the gorge and one for three separate bus rides) and he could not have toured Shangri-La (as multiple witnesses attested he did) and still made it to Kunming to catch his airline flight.
- David e-mailed his mother shortly before hiking Tiger Leaping Gorge that “I feel like I’m in Tibet... already,” foreshadowing his plans to next tour Shangri-La due to his interest in the local people and culture: “I’m certain it will be an adventure... just seeing the old houses and the way these people live.” David’s e-mail description of his plans fits Shangri-La (then named Zhongdian), which used to be part of Tibet and contains the famous Songzanlin Monastery, the largest Tibetan Buddhist Monastery in Yunnan Province, and local ethnic minorities (such as the Naxi, Yi and Tibetan people) who sow and harvest crops by hand, plow with a yak, and cook food over an open fire.
- An expert on David’s case has researched whether any other foreigners have died in the gorge and reported: “We know of only one other westerner who died while trekking in the gorge, an Israeli named Omri Kidron, whose death was witnessed by other trekkers,” in another area of the gorge where David did not hike. If a hiker were to be hurt or wounded, he would soon be found by the villagers or the many other hikers. Requests to name other known cases of a westerner disappearing or dying in the gorge have been met with silence by Chinese officials and the current U.S. State Department.
- David routinely sent frequent and detailed e-mails of his plans to his mother, such as this one directly before his hike: “I’m in Lijiang now in Western Yunnan Province. I will take a bus to hike Tiger Leaping Gorge in about half an hour.” The U.S. Embassy asked China to find the location from which David had sent the e-mail by using the IP address and internet bars. China, well-known for its heavy government monitoring of the Internet, told the U.S. Embassy: “We had no way of determining whether David Sneddon had ever sent e-mail from Lijiang, [of] finding the location of the internet bar from which the e-mail was sent, or finding the location of the IP address,” although there are only two main bus stations in Lijiang that head to the gorge and David likely e-mailed from an establishment near a station since his bus was leaving in thirty minutes.
- David’s family encourage the United States intelligence community to get David’s case out of the gorge and investigate the new, abundant, relevant and emerging information.