

Always Be Prepared (To Engage In Trade)

Today my friends and I hiked through mud and rocks and falling ice to get to the top of Blood Mountain. It was at the same time a lovely hike and a hairy one.

We expected to get to the top and eat our bagged lunches. What we didn't expect to find at the top was an economy.

For the low price of three oranges, I managed (at the top of a mountain without any electricity or plumbing) to get a cup of hot chocolate from a resourceful boy scout with a portable water boiler.

Luxury.

There was something beautiful about this trade, perhaps because neither of us probably expected to be bartering that day. The simple beauty of trade was clear: I was delighted and surprised to be getting a hot chocolate, and he was delighted and surprised to be getting three mandarin oranges.

We met and parted on great terms – and on this mountain we traded as free men, without any park rangers taking a cut or interposing barter rules. In this unusual environment, we may also have learned to bring the trading mindset to more areas of our life. If I hadn't thought to propose barter, we might both have left poorer, both in terms of food and in terms of human connection.

By trading, we performed one of the most profound acts of civilization in an uncivilized place. And in the act of trading my bit of civilization (oranges) for his (hot chocolate), we both gained civilization.

The moral of the story? Always be prepared to trade. You don't just get hot chocolate out of it. You create value for your trading partner, pleasant human interactions for yourself, and all kinds of potential for how you and he/she might use your traded resources better.

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