

Water parks.

We know em, we love em, we never want to leave em.

There's always a thrill around visiting a waterpark. The thrill of the slides, the random turds floating in the pools, the seamless and relaxing experience of the lazy river. So of course, I have to ask this question, why do people go to waterparks? I googled it. I found this website - WATERPARKS.ORG, home of the World Waterpark Association. They have an entire FAQ page about water parks. Because apparently the idea of a waterpark needs explaining. According to WWA, "Waterparks appeal to families who want quality recreation time in an extremely safe environment. After all, waterparks are the safest place to have fun in the water compared to oceans, rivers, lakes and even swimming pools. Thus, parents can feel confident about going to a waterpark with their kids. [...] Many cities are seeing a drop-off in attendance because their flat-water pools simply don't hold the same appeal they once did."

So, waterparks are pretty safe in the year of our lord 2021 (besides ya know, COVID). Employees are rigorously trained on safety and follow the rules to a T. Because of new technology, there are a lot of failsafes and tests because families became the backbone demographic for a lot of waterparks. So a lot of rules have been made because of this.

Let's talk about the most batshit waterpark ever,

Action Park.

So, the idea for the park began in 1976. This guy named Eugene Mulvihill and his company, Great American Recreation, which I will now be calling GAR for short, wanted to find a way to generate revenue during the summer, because they owned a ski area named Vernon Valley/Great Gorge in New Jersey.

That year, they followed the trend of many other ski areas, and opened a 2,700 FOOT LONG alpine slide down one of the steep ski trails.

For the summer of 1978, Mulvihill added two water slides and a go-kart track, and named the collection of rides the "Vernon Valley Summer Park." The following year, 1979, more waterslides and a small deep-water swimming pool, as well as tennis courts and a softball field, were added to what became known as the Waterworld section of Action Park.

By 1980, Motorworld had been created in the swampy lands the ski area owned across Route 94. So across the street was basically Cars Land. So Waterworld and Motorworld combined to form one of North America's

earliest modern water parks. The price to get into Action Park? \$26 for adults and \$18 for juniors.

The Alpine Slide.

The Alpine Slide concept was simple enough; you sit on a sled and descend down concrete tracks using a hand brake to control your speed, either slowly or at a speed described by a former park employee as 'death awaits'. The alpine slide was called Action Park's most popular ride in a 1986 New Jersey Herald article - one that a park official declared 'the safest ride there is', noting that a 90-year old grandmother and mothers with babies on their laps had taken a ride on it. NO WAY. THAT'S A LIE. LIARS. This same article also said that the slide was responsible for 'more accidents, the majority of the lawsuits and 40 percent of the citations' against the park. If you were lucky, your injury would consist of some lost skin. Lose control of your cart on the slide, and it would simply crash through the hay bale barriers, your body subject to the laws of gravity and some lovely hillside rocks. Take the ride too slowly, and you are getting rammed by the person behind you. At least 14 fractures and 26 head injuries caused by the slides were reported between 1984 and 1985. This slide was also responsible for Action Park's first (and definitely not last) death. That of a 19-year old park employee in 1980. According to a website called rideaccidents.com, 'a malfunction caused a wheeled sled to derail from its cement track after it failed to properly negotiate a curve. The victim was thrown from the car down an embankment. He sustained a fatal head injury when his head struck a rock.'

The Kayak Ride.

This ride allowed people to paddle tiny boats through white water. It was never successful because it was short and the kayaks would get stuck in their own tracks. It was particularly unlucky for one 27-year old man from Long Island during the summer of 1982. He fell, or got out of, his kayak, and in the process of trying to get back in (have Colin guess). Nope. He stepped near and EXPOSED WIRE THAT WAS UNDER WATER. Two of his family members were also electrocuted, but lived. So of course, Action Park officials denied the coroner's report that said that he died from cardiac arrest due to electrical shock. They literally said, BuT HE DoEsNt hAve ANy BuRnS. And the coroner was like 'you don't have burns when you're in water like that... when you're wet, you're a dead ringer for electrical shock.' The ride was drained for the investigation and never opened again. So that's good.

The Tarzan Swing

The tarzan swing allowed you to swing over an icy-cold body of water and throw yourself into it. It was just a beam hanging from a twenty-foot wire above a pool or stagnant water. The wait for the ride was about three hours. Hundreds of people would wait their turn, giving the Tarzans an audience. It then turned into a contest of who would shout or do the most lewd thing (either foul language or exhibitionism) while people watched them fly through the air. It was known for scraped toe knuckles and also the shock of the icy cold water. The water was literally so cold that people would forget how to swim once they hit it. In 1984, a death was unofficially attributed to the victim not being able to take the shock of the cold, resulting in a heart attack. The employees also were not paying attention to how many people were in the cold water below, and would often let people swing out into the water with previous Tarzans still below them. So that's fun.

The Cannonball Loop Slide

This was a slide with a 360-degree loop. Supposedly, it dismembered test dummies and maybe even a few park employees in trial runs. It was only open for about a month in 1985 before being closed by the Advisory Board on Carnival Amusement Ride Safety. Employees who tested the ride reported that if you entered it going feet first, you'd come out of it head first, and vice versa. One person got stuck in the loop, stating a hatch at the top should be installed to extract others if it happens again. Apparently, some people have ridden the ride. After you climb several stories of wooden stairs, an attendant would weigh you in. Someone, in some office, must have decided that a certain weight profile was necessary in order to complete this literal human physics experiment. Then you would get sent to a station to get hosed down, so that you were slippery enough to make it around the loop. Once you get shot out of the loop, you end up on a wet mat instead of an actual pond or pool. According to one employee, 'there were too many bloody noses and back problems' that resulted from riding the Cannonball loop. It has long been dismantled.

CLIFF JUMPING

This attraction sounds like my personal nightmare. The cliff divers would jump into a pool that was used by EVERYONE. Not just those who had previously cliff-dived. So, imagine, you think you're just going swimming, and all of a sudden human bodies are flying at them from 30 feet high. There was

only ONE lifeguard, who was usually occupied with those that smashed into each other. They also had to paint the pool white so they could see bodies lying on the bottom, in case someone that jumped couldn't swim.

The Tidal Wave Pool

This pool was a huge freshwater pool - 100 by 250 feet long and eight feet deep - that could hold 500 to 1,000 people. Four large fans forced air into the pool and created waves, which could reach a height of 40 inches (that's a little over three feet). The waves were generated for 20 minutes at a time, with 10-minute breaks in between. One problem with the pool was that many of its users were not good swimmers. "Action Park attracts many people from urban areas who have few chances to swim and frequently must be rescued from the water." Even good swimmers would forget that the fresh water waves were not buoyant like waves in the ocean, so they would have to work harder to stay afloat. Crowded swimming conditions meant that people would bash into each other, the sides of the pool, or the ladders as they tried to get out of the water while the waves were on. Some people would simply sink to the bottom, somehow unaware that the pool's depth dropped down in level as you moved from one end to the other. Former employees claim that lifeguards at this nightmare pool could claim 30 'saves' a day, whereas your average lifeguard at a pool or lake might rescue one or two people in an entire summer.

Probably not that big of a deal, right?

No. three people died in this pool.

July 24th, 1982: 15-year-old boy drowned in the tidal wave pool.

August 27th, 1982: 20-year-old drowned in the tidal wave pool

July 19th, 1987: 18-year-old drowned in the tidal wave pool.

The Water Slides

"The biggest ride with accidents."

Off to a good start. You basically sit on a mat and go down the slide. Not that hard right? But when you're a stupid teenager, you want the thrill of no mat. Bare ass to plastic. You could get a wonderful 'freshwater enema' from the Super Speed Water Slide, or ride the 'back breaker', which was the name of Lane #7 of the Surf Hill water slide. Employees would hang out around Surf

Hill, because they could watch people seriously injure themselves, or watch a girl lose her bikini top. Classy.

Ride Design

Visitors often used rides that had not been tested through practical use for very long. Ride designers usually had insufficient training in physics or engineering. GAR was accused of cutting corners to maximize its profits. For example, it was accused of building rides cheaply, sporadically maintaining many of them, and failing to renovate rides to take advantage of later safety improvements to its ideas made by other facilities. The park even kept sections open even after being unable to obtain liability insurance for its last year of operation.

The Employees

It was hard to find an employee at Action Park over the age of 30. It was a teenage dream. Ride attendants would willfully rip the entrance wristbands from park attendees who misbehaved. Staff knew all of the places that someone could get stoned and/or drunk and hide from supervisors. Action park got into trouble at one point for letting underage employees run rides, so chances are that safety was left in the hands of a fifteen-year old tripping on acid. Height and weight restrictions for certain rides were often ignored. Because the staff didn't follow the rules set by the park, a lawless culture grew around the visitors, who generally liked the high level of control they had over their experience. Accidents were usually deemed by park employees to be the fault of the riders.

So I found an article from July 26, 1992, written by a guy named Bill Rice. "Action Park has 75 self-operated rides in the summer, 40 of them water-oriented. The park was one of the first in the country to install a wave pool and its new gladiator challenge is the first of its kind outdoors." Now I'm sure you're asking, what is the **gladiator challenge?**

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT.

The idea is a spin-off of the television show American Gladiators, though there is no connection with the actual show. Patrons can test their fitness and agility against each other on an obstacle course and measure their power against Action Park gladiators in jousting matches.

So first, they charge up a 16-foot platform with downward moving conveyors, swing across a 24-foot hand ladder, drop to a mat, sprint for 20 yards, and climb a 15 foot cargo net. Then they slide 100 feet on a zipline, climb a 10-foot wall on a rope and then somehow get around a 16-foot rotating cylinder. Then they jump into a container filled with plastic balls, and run under a low net to the finish line. There are also apparently 'gladiators' that are Action Park employees that patrons can challenge to a jousting match with large padded sticks on three-foot high podiums. How did they find these gladiators? Scouting out gyms in the area and held a tryout. The qualifications? 198lbs if you're a man, 125 if you're a lady and you had to have competed in a body-building competition in the last year. This is literally just American Ninja Warrior.

THE BOOZE

On the Motorworld side, there was a German brewery. So cars, and booze. One patron used to steal kegs, drink the beer, ride the Indy cars down Route 94, crash them, get the cars back into the park without anyone catching them, and then go swimming to sober up. There was never ANY night security at the park. Ever. Numerous bars and beer stands were placed strategically around the park, keeping all adults (and usually teenagers, as the drinking age wasn't strictly enforced) drunk as shit all day long!

The non-water rides

They had your typical carnival rides such as Space Shot, which was a tower drop ride, and Sling Shot, which was a bungee cord ride. They also had Super Go Karts, which topped out at 20MPH, Lola Cars, miniature open cockpit race cars, Battle Action Tanks, equipped with tennis ball cannons that you could shoot at other tanks, and Snapple Snap-Up Whipper Snapper, a 70-foot-tall two station bungee jumping tower near the alpine slide. Visitors could also operate cannons on the perimeter of the track. There was also a skatepark that closed after one season due to poor design.

The Issues

Despite literally EVERYTHING in this park, and multiple safety violations between 1979 and 1986, an investigation by the New Jersey Herald found that the park was only fined once. Some of the state's regulations failed to adequately address the situation. AFter the 1987 drowning, it was reported

that the Tidal Wave Pool was considered a pool by the state, not a ride. Under state regulations at the time, that meant that the company merely had to keep the water clean and make sure that certified lifeguards were on duty. The park's fortunes began to turn with two deaths in the summer of 1984, and the legal and financial problems that stemmed from the ensuing lawsuits. A state investigation of misconduct in the leasing of state land to Action Park led to a 110-count grand jury indictment against the nine related companies that ran the park and their executives for operating an unauthorized insurance company. Many took pretrial intervention to avoid prosecution; CEO Eugene Mulvihill pleaded guilty that November to five insurance fraud-related charges. Still, attendance remained high, and the park remained profitable—at least on paper.

The park entertained over one million visitors per year during the 1980s, with as many as 12,000 coming on some of the busiest weekends. Park officials said this made the injury and death rate statistically insignificant.

Nevertheless, the director of the emergency room at a nearby hospital said they treated from five to ten victims of park accidents on some of the busiest days, and the park eventually bought the township of Vernon extra ambulances to keep up with the volume. In September 1989, GAR negotiated a deal with International Broadcasting Corporation that would result in the sale of Vernon Valley/Great Gorge, and Action Park, for \$50 million. IBC, however, backed out of the deal, feeling the site was not suitable for their needs upon further inspections of the properties.

In September 1991, Great American Recreation attempted to petition the Vernon Township Committee to put a referendum on the November ballot that, if passed, would have legalized the operation of games of skill and chance at Action Park. On September 23, the petition was rejected by the committee, because only 643 of the 937 signatures on the petition came from registered voters. In early 1995, GAR operated Vernon Valley/Great Gorge and Action Park with no liability insurance. Super fun and safe. New Jersey did not require it, and GAR found it more economical to go to court than purchase liability insurance, since they relied on their own self-insurance. However, they ultimately purchased liability insurance from Evanston Insurance Company in May of that year to cover Action Park and the skiing facilities.

Where is it now?

In 2010, the whole Mountain Creek ski area and water park was sold to a group led by Eugene Mulvihill, the former owner of Great American Recreation and the owner of the adjacent Crystal Springs Resort; however, he died two years later. Under the new ownership the name of the water park was changed back to Action Park, starting with the 2014 season.[80] In 2016, the Mountain Creek Waterpark name was restored to the park, thus retiring the Action Park name again.