

Lewiston  
History  
Mysteries

# Niagara Falls Daredevils: Most Were Successful

There have been about 100 attempts to conquer the falls or the Lower River rapids over the past couple of centuries. The vast majority of daredevils in the 1800s

focused on the rapids. Jean Francois Gavelot from France, aka “The Great Blondin” started the stunt craze in 1859 when he tightroped across the falls. His rope went from Prospect Park (near the American observation tower) directly to the Canadian side. He crossed in 20 minutes. He made several trips that year and next, entertaining thousands of spectators. There were many stunts who followed him. He died in 1897 at age 73. Nick Wallenda was the first person to walk directly over the falls in 2012.



The Great Blondin tightrope walking with his manager on his back in 1859.

Stunt	Number of Attempts	Survival Rate
Going over the falls in a barrel	12	83%
Tightrope over the falls or gorge	15	93%



## Annie Edson Taylor, 63, First Person to Go Over Falls in a Barrel

On Oct. 21, 1901, several thousand spectators saw Annie Taylor, from Auburn, NY, attempt something no one had ever tried before. The above photograph shows her triumphantly walking ashore after her daring plunge. She said she did it for the money, but died blind and penniless, 20 years later. She is buried in Oakwood Cemetery in Niagara Falls, NY.

## First Stunter to Survive Going Over Falls Wearing Only the Clothes on His Back

On Oct. 22, 2003, Kirk Jones from Michigan, plunged over the falls without any protective gear and lived to tell about his experience. This photo was taken after he swam to the Canadian shoreline. He was fined \$2300 and banned from entering Canada for life. Kirk and his friend had been imbibing before the stunt and his friend couldn't figure out how to work the camcorder. The entire stunt went unrecorded, though there were plenty of witnesses.



## Jet Skier Miscalculates

He was trying to promote awareness for the homeless. Robert Overcracker, from California, attempted to jet ski off the brink of the falls on Oct. 1, 1995. He had a rocket propelled parachute on his back, but it never opened. He didn't make it. An Egyptian tourist captured this amazing image.



## Kayaker Tries, But Fails

Jesse Sharp, 28, from Tennessee, tried kayaking over the Horseshoe Falls on June 5, 1990. He was so confident about making the trip, he parked his car at Artpark and made dinner reservations in Lewiston. He had planned the stunt for years. The kayak survived, but his body was never recovered.



## Seven Year Old Boy Survives Tragic Accident in 1960

They called him the “Miracle Boy.” On July 9, 1960, Roger Woodward, age 7, became the first person to survive a plunge over the Falls without a barrel. He and his 17 year old sister, Deanne, were Niagara Falls residents and were boating with a family friend, James Honeycutt, from North Carolina who was in town. The boat lost power and got caught up in the swift current above the falls. Deanne fell overboard and when she surfaced near the shoreline, she was grabbed by a tourist on Goat Island, just feet before going over the falls. Roger and Honeycutt were swept over the falls. A few minutes later, the Maid of the Mist II came to rescue Roger who only sustained a few bruises. Honeycutt didn't survive. Since then, Roger Woodward has led a low-profile life. He was interviewed in 2010 by the Associated Press, on the 50th Anniversary of the dramatic event. He admits that while he hasn't talked about it much, his three sons enjoyed telling the story for show-and-tell at school.



Roger Woodward, 7, is being rescued and pulled aboard the Maid of the Mist boat after going over the falls with just a life jacket.



Roger gives Captain Clifford Keech of the Maid of the Mist boat a kiss of appreciation for helping to save his life. Today, Roger is 62 and works as a real estate agent in Hampton Grove, Alabama.



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