

“Floor it!” Mike screamed. Josh ran through the rest of the gears of the manual transmission in three seconds, then skidded around the corner and onto the highway, fishtailing on the patchy ice.

Comments from readers about the Mike Danford series:



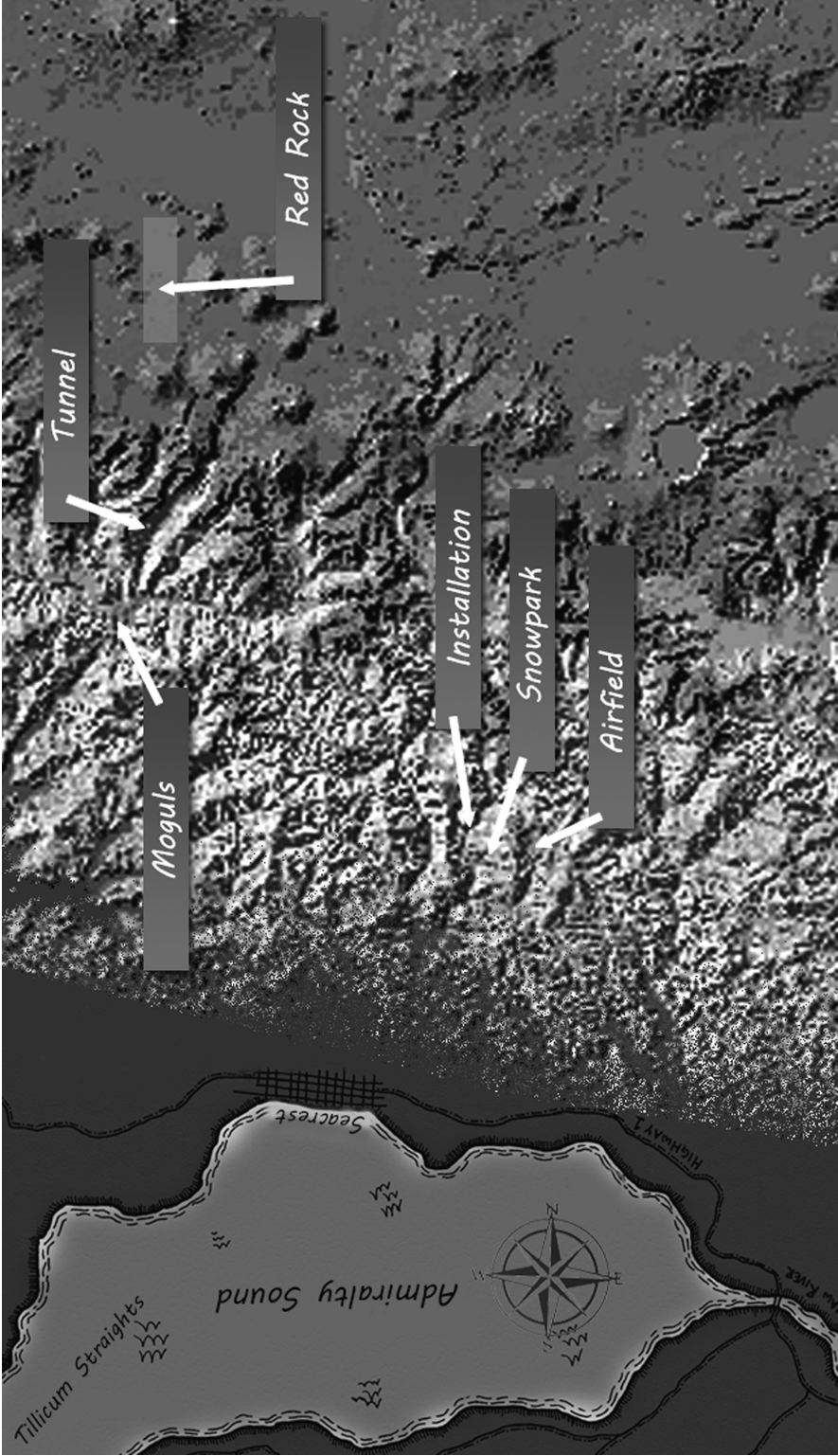
“Thank you so much. These books have been such a blessing - and will continue to be for many many years to come.” (Website review)



“So excited to find a book that my 6th grade son enjoys!! Up until now all I could get him to read on his own was (some secular books). This is challenging enough for an 11 year old, but holds his attention. So glad I ran across this series.” (Website review)



“Great read for middle schoolers. The content is invaluable for maturing young men.” (Amazon review)



Mike Danford Adventure Series #2

**TRACKING
BIGFOOT**

ARNOLD YTREEIDE

Jericho Quill Press

TRACKING BIGFOOT

by Arnold Ytreeide

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For Andy -
who never shied away from
having an adventure
with me!



Chapter One

Wildlife

“There he is!” cried seventeen-year-old Mike Danford.

“Shhhhh,” chided his best friend, Josh Roberts, lying next to him in the snow. “Aww, now look what you did,” Josh whispered. Mike saw the tail of the silver fox they’d been tracking slipping into the underbrush.

“Sorry,” Mike whispered back, his breath making clouds of steam in the freezing air. “But we’ve spent two days tracking this little guy. Guess I got excited.”

Mike was helping Josh track and photograph the silver fox as part of a school science project. They were high up in the mountains and had been trudging through waist-deep snow for two days. As they lay watching where the fox had entered the bushes, Mike could feel the cold through his thick layers of snow gear.

“Why don’t you slip around to the left and see if you can scare him back this way,” Josh suggested.

“Sure thing.” Mike stood up as quietly as he could. Feeling the crunch of the ice and snow under his thick boots, and falling through to his knees every third or fourth step, Mike worked his way up the side of the mountain to the left of where Josh still lay waiting.

A moment later, Mike heard a loud “Boom” as if a canon had gone off over the top of the ridge he was climbing. Curious, he looked up to see what it was. Then he heard Josh yelling, so he looked back down the hill from where he’d come. Josh was jumping up and down screaming something, but Mike couldn’t make out the words. Then he heard a rumble like a freight train barreling down the mountain, and in a flash Mike understood.

“Avalanche!” Josh continued to yell, and the rumble was a billion pounds of ice and snow rolling down the hill. The white wave screaming toward him seemed a hundred feet high, and Mike knew it

would wipe him off the mountain in mere seconds. He started to turn to run downhill, but knew it was no use.

In that same instant, at the top of the ridge and just to the side of the avalanche, Mike saw something that frightened him more than the wall of death about to wipe him out.

A fraction of a second later the avalanche slammed into Mike with the force of a hundred football players. It threw Mike into the air, then closed around him like a giant glove. Ice crystals sliced open the skin of his face. Snow plugged his nose and mouth so he couldn't breathe. The monstrous snowball punched and twisted and crushed him.

As Mike tumbled end-over-end deep inside the avalanche, all he could do was pray that he wouldn't be thrown head-first into a tree or rock, or be carried over the edge of the cliff he knew was below him on the mountain.

Finally, Mike felt himself slowing down. Amazed that he was even alive, he knew he wouldn't be for long if he didn't act quickly. As the snow and ice began to lose momentum and settle, Mike moved every part of his body he could move, swinging his arms, kicking his feet, wagging his head. At the last moment he sucked in as much air as his lungs would hold, expanding his chest as large as possible. When the avalanche at last came to a stop, the movement of Mike's body had created a small air space inside the snow. *At least I can breathe for a few minutes*, he thought, and silently thanked his father for making him take a mountain safety class two years before.

With the one hand he could move, Mike wiped the snow from his mouth, nose, and eyes. Now he could finally see, but what he saw terrified him. He was buried so deeply in the snow that hardly any light could reach him.

Even with the space Mike had formed by moving his body, the air soon became thick. His oxygen was running out, and Mike knew he had only a few minutes to live. Panic set in as he realized he couldn't move his legs or his right arm: they were locked in the ice.

With his free hand, Mike began clawing at the roof of his cave. Soon the air was so stale he began seeing stars flashing in front of his eyes. As the oxygen ran out, his arm dropped limply to his chest, and Mike began fading into the blackness of death.

Suddenly Mike felt a gush of cold air on his face, and a powerful

hand pulling at his coat. He sucked in a giant lung-full of air and didn't even care that it was below freezing. A moment later he looked up and saw Josh, framed by trees and blue sky.

"Mike! Are you okay?" Josh shouted.

Mike croaked out a "Yeah" which brought a grin to Josh's face.

"Then quit being lazy and get up."

A few minutes later Josh had dug Mike out of the snow and the friends stood looking in awe at his almost grave. "I can't believe I was buried that deep," Mike said, looking at the eight-foot hole.

"I never would have found you if it hadn't been for the GPS," Josh said, holding up his own unit. The small, yellow Global Positioning System unit was designed for skiers, and sent out two emergency homing signals to help rescuers find people buried in an avalanche. Mike's father had insisted the boys carry them at all times in the mountains. It was this that allowed Josh to find Mike so quickly.

"Yeah, remind me to thank Dad tonight." A moment later he added, "Let's get out of here before we both get creamed by another avalanche."

As they slogged through the deep powder, Mike realized how weak and shaky he was from his near-death experience. Usually he would lead the way on their hikes, but now it was Josh that often stopped and waited for Mike.

Finally the two friends made it back to the comfort of their snow camp. Josh quickly built a fire and made some hot chocolate.

"Now for the hard part," Josh said, reaching for his phone.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm calling your dad to tell him what happened."

Mike jumped up from his camp chair. "No! Wait! Don't call my dad. He'll freak out."

Josh gave his friend a look that said just how dumb he thought that statement was. "*Your* Dad? Freak out? Since when?"

Mike knew as well as Josh that Mr. Danford was about the most level-headed man in their hometown of Seacrest. "Yeah, well, I just don't think we need to worry him, okay?"

Josh looked to the sky and tapped his chin with his fingers as if playing the piano. "Let's see," he said, "What was the last thing your dad said?" A moment later he pretended like he hadn't known all

along. “Oh yeah.” He dropped his voice to mimic Mike’s dad. “Be sure to call me if there’s any trouble.” Back in his own voice he said, “I think this qualifies as trouble.”

Mike started to protest, but Josh held up his hand to stop him. “Mike, there’s nothing wrong with doing right.”

That silenced Mike, and after a few seconds he took a deep breath. “You’re right. Give him a call.”

As Josh punched the buttons on the phone, Mike thought back to the reason for their secret pact. Several years before, when they were young and trying to fit in with everyone else, Mike and Josh had done something they knew was wrong. They didn’t get caught, but both boys felt bad. Later they each decided they didn’t want to be that kind of person anymore, so they came up with a saying with which they could remind themselves to always do the right thing: “There’s nothing wrong with doing right.” That saying had kept them out of trouble many times since.

“Yeah, he’s okay,” Mike heard Josh saying into the phone when he finally came out of his trance. “Just kind of shaky. I had to practically carry him down the mountain.”

Josh listened for a moment, then laughed. “No, I think I can manage . . . Yes sir. We’ll pack up now and will be home in a few hours.”

Josh finished the call and hung up without Mike ever talking to his dad. Ever since Josh’s father had died when Josh was eight, he’d been a nearly permanent fixture at the Danford home. More than once the two boys had talked about being almost-brothers.

“You heard the man,” Josh said to Mike. “We need to pack up and hit the road.”

Suddenly, Mike passed out and fell out of the chair into a snowdrift. A moment later his eyes fluttered open and he groaned. “Ohhh,” he cried, “Where am I? I . . . I’m feeling very weak . . .”

Josh stood with his hands on his hips and frowned. “Not buyin’ it. You can roll up the sleeping bags, I’ll pack up the kitchen.”

Mike sat up on his elbows and said in a perfectly strong voice, “Some friend you are. Won’t even pack the camp so I can recover from almost getting avalanched to death.”

“A horrible ordeal I’ll grant you, but you can still do your share of

the packing.”

Mike jumped up and gladly helped pack, but before they'd finished, a thought struck him. He walked over to where he could look back up the mountain and stared, thinking.

“Hey,” Josh shouted. “What gives? You pullin’ your ‘too-weak-to-work’ act again?”

Mike didn't answer. He knew what he was looking for, but didn't dare say anything to Josh. The previous summer, while building and sailing a submarine, Mike and Josh had been attacked on several occasions. Mike had been sure he knew who was behind it, but no one would believe him, including Josh. Even though he was eventually proven right, he didn't want to repeat those feelings of rejection now. So he kept quiet, until he could be sure.

“No, just thinking,” Mike said. Then he turned back and kept packing. He was just finishing with the sleeping bags when a forest ranger came riding up on a snowmobile.

“You boys okay?” he asked. “That avalanche was close.”

“Yeah,” Mike answered casually. “I got buried for a minute, but my friend pulled me out.”

The ranger turned off his machine and pulled out his phone. “In that case,” he said, tapping the keys on the phone, “I need to take a report.”

After fifteen minutes of questions, the ranger got on his radio and reported the incident. He offered to give Mike a ride back to their car, but Mike assured him there was no need, so the ranger left.

It was an hour's hike back to the SnowPark parking lot and Josh's 1966 Mustang. The drive home was quiet except for the music playing. Even though he was uninjured, Mike was exhausted. He slept part of the way home, and was deep in thought the rest of the time, even when they stopped for hamburgers.

Back home in Seacrest, a small town on the edge of Admiralty Sound, Ben and Laura Danford hugged Mike tightly as they all stood by Josh's car. “You're never going up on that mountain again!” Mrs. Danford chided a moment later, her finger wagging in Mike's face. “Except on a groomed ski slope. And even then I want you to stay on the bunny hill.”

Everyone laughed at that, knowing she was just joking. “Yeah, I'll

even get him a pair of bunny ears,” Josh laughed. “I’m sure Jessica will think they’re cute.”

Mike blushed at the mention of Jessica, the girl he’d dated many times, but he fought right back. “And I’m sure she’ll think they’re *so* cute that she’ll insist Cindy make *you* wear a pair.”

Now it was Josh’s turn to blush at the mention of the girl *he’d* been dating.

“Maybe I’ll just leave it alone.”

“Seriously though, son,” Ben Danford said. “I thought we agreed you’d stay away from avalanche paths.”

At this Mike felt frustration building in his chest. “I *did*, Dad. There’s no way an avalanche should have started in that area. The grade, the terrain, the snow pack – everything said it should have been safe.”

“Well, it sounds like you were watching for all the right things,” Mr. Danford rubbed his son’s shoulder. “It must have been a fluke.”

Mike didn’t say anything, believing it was anything but a fluke but not wanting to explain to anyone yet why he thought that.

Mike’s mom headed toward the house. “Well, let’s go inside and have some ice cream.”

Mike groaned. “About the last thing I want is *ice* cream, Mom.”

“Okay, I’ll make some hot brownies.”

Mike was about to agree to that when a big white van pulled up with the letters “KXYN TV” painted on the side. In a flash, a reporter and photographer jumped out and, before he knew what was happening, a microphone was shoved into Mike’s face. A moment later a camera and light were pointed at him.

“Mike, we heard on the forest service radio that you were caught in an avalanche today. Can you tell us what happened up on the mountain?”

Mike was confused for a moment, but then regained his composure and gave a brief description of the avalanche. Ever since Mike and Josh had battled some undersea terrorists with their submarine, they’d become minor celebrities.

After a few more questions, the TV team left. Mike agreed to the brownies, and asked Josh if he was staying for the dessert.

“Naw, I haven’t seen my mom in three days. I’d better get home.”

With that, he drove off and the Danfords went inside.

Later that night, Mike began searching the internet for some information. He wasn't happy with what he found, and eventually gave up and went to bed, thinking he might have better luck when his head was clear.

The next day was Sunday, and Josh and his mother came home with the Danford's after church. Mike led him up to his bedroom and let him in on his secret. "I want to buy a snow cat."

Josh's jaw dropped opened and he stared at Mike for several seconds. Finally he got his mouth to work. "You *what?*"

"I wanna buy a snow cat. You know, a machine with tracks instead of wheels, used to groom ski runs and stuff."

"Yeah, I know what it is, and I guess I shouldn't be shocked after everything else we've done, but a *snow cat?*"

"Yeah, a snow cat."

"Aren't they, like, really big and expensive?"

"Well, expensive yes," Mike said, turning to his computer. "But so far I can't find one that's very big."

Josh's face looked like he was watching some weird movie where nothing made sense. "Wait, wait. Back up a minute. Why do you want a snow cat of *any* size?"

Mike kept his back to his friend and answered. "To go up into the mountains and track your silver fox, of course."

"You want to spend – how much do one of those things cost?"

Mike told him, and Josh choked. "You want to spend that much money on a big machine just so I can finish my science project? Come on, Mike, I know we're best friends, but not even you would throw money away like that."

Josh knew that Mike could easily afford the cost of a snow cat, since Mike had sold the plans for his submarine for a huge profit. But he also knew the money was put away for Mike's college, and that Mr. and Mrs. Danford would never let him waste it.

"So, you wanna look your best friend in the eye and tell him what's really going on?"

Slowly, Mike turned around and faced Josh. "Okay, but you have to promise not to laugh. Or get sarcastic. Or think I'm crazy."

"So noted," Josh said, like he'd heard on lawyer shows many

times.

“Okay, just remember that promise.”

Just then the doorbell rang downstairs. Mike’s dad called up from below, and Mike and Josh hurried down.

Standing in the doorway were two men in black suits. “These men are from the FBI,” Mr. Danford explained. Turning to the men, he asked, “Now, can you tell me what this is all about?”

The two agents ignored Ben Danford, and instead pulled out a pair of handcuffs. “Mike Danford,” one of them said, “you’re under arrest for destroying a government installation.”