

Headed in the Wrong Direction

By Reg P. Wydeven
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Dumb and Dumber is one of the funniest movies I have ever seen. While it certainly wasn't up for any Academy Awards, the goofy antics of Jim Carrey and Jeff Daniels made it a fun, entertaining film. The movie documents the dim-witted duo's journey from Providence, Rhode Island, to Aspen, Colorado, and one of its funnier scenes involved Jim Carrey's character, Lloyd Christmas, driving a sixth of the way across the country in the wrong direction.

Like Lloyd, my sense of direction isn't so hot either. On one of our first dates, my wife and I went to a Packer game. We paid \$5 to park in someone's front yard, and as we strolled into Lambeau Field, I tried to wow her with my vast knowledge of football. Of course, after the game I had absolutely no clue where we parked, so we wandered the streets for 45 minutes before finding my car (and several unhappy fans who I had parked in).

That's why I was very thrilled when Global Positioning Systems were invented. Thanks to GPS technology, I can drive anywhere in the world, and Darth Vader's voice will tell me where to turn. As an evil Lord of the Sith, Darth Vader could try to use Jedi mind tricks to get me to turn onto roads that don't exist, but hopefully my mind would be strong enough to not be fooled and I wouldn't listen.

Lauren Rosenberg, however, wasn't quite so lucky.

Rosenberg, from Los Angeles, California, was visiting Park City, Utah. On January 19, 2010, Rosenberg decided to go for a walk. Not being familiar with the city, she used her Blackberry to consult Google Maps and find walking directions from 96 Daly Street to 1710 Prospector Avenue. Google Maps suggested a route that included a half-mile walk down "Deer Valley Drive," which is also known as "Utah State Route 224."

The rural highway had no sidewalk or pedestrian paths, so Rosenberg elected to walk down the middle of the highway. Surprisingly, she was struck by a car.

Accordingly, Rosenberg is suing Google for her medical expenses of \$100,000 and for punitive damages because Google Maps gave her faulty directions. She is also suing Patrick Harwood of Park City, the driver of the car that hit her.

Rosenberg's complaint states:

"As a direct and proximate cause of Defendant Google's careless, reckless and negligent providing of unsafe directions, Plaintiff Lauren Rosenberg was led onto a dangerous highway, and was thereby stricken by a motor vehicle, causing her to suffer severe permanent physical, emotional, and mental injuries, including pain and suffering."

If you access Google Maps from a computer, the company actually gives the following warning about its walking directions: "Walking directions are in beta. Use caution--This route may be missing sidewalks or pedestrian paths." However, the warning does not show up in PDAs like Blackberries or in cell phones.

Most states' laws include a concept called contributory negligence, meaning if someone's own negligence contributes to their injuries more than anyone else's, they cannot recover damages. In Utah, an injured party can only recover if it is determined that his or her fault in causing the injury is 49% or less.

Some legal experts believe Google will be very conservative and try to settle the case quickly. Others feel the company will defend the case aggressively and fight it all the way. I'm guessing Google will take a middle-of-the-road approach.

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