

SURVIVAL TIPS

FROM THE MONTROSE COUNTY SHERIFF'S POSSE

LOWER YOUR RISK FOR ALTITUDE SICKNESS

BY MARK RACKAY

HUNTING SEASON

is my favorite time to be in Western Colorado. The summer heat is fading, bringing cooler days and nights. The color change is kicking in making the leaves a beautiful golden color against the silver skies. If you have friends and relatives who hunt, no doubt you will hear from them at this time of year. Many of the visitors we get come from much lower altitudes and altitude sickness is something to consider.

The way it usually works is that we race over to the airport and pick up our hunting buddies. These folks flew in from someplace with an altitude sometimes in the 100s. We pile them up in a truck and drive straight to a camp with an altitude of around 8,000 feet. That night, the gang will enjoy more than a few toddies, stay up late and eat too much. The next morning at 4 a.m., they will head up even higher to begin their hunt. Here is where the trouble begins. These folks can begin to develop symptoms that can include nausea, vomiting, headache and

shortness of breath, weakness, mental confusion, coughing, rapid pulse, coma and even death. Any one of these symptoms should make you suspect. If not acted upon quickly, the person can develop one of two forms of a much more serious altitude sickness. The first form is high-altitude pulmonary edema, which can cause breathlessness, fatigue, dry cough and blue lips and nails. The second form is called high-altitude cerebral edema, which usually comes with a severe headache, loss of coordination and confusion. Both of the forms will onset quickly and are potentially deadly.

The cure is usually quite simple, descend in altitude, and do it quickly. Bring the party down several thousand feet in altitude. From there, it is a great idea to get them to a medical facility and have them checked out even though they might be feeling better. Many times, the symptoms disappear just as quickly as they appear. If you head back up, they can reappear just as suddenly. It would also be wise to get fluids in them and watch their salt

intake. If you have oxygen available, that will help ease the symptoms. I certainly am not trying to spoil anyone's fun or scare him or her out of a trip. This malady can affect healthy people just as easily. In most of these cases, it can all be prevented and that is much easier than trying to cure it once it has onset. When these folks arrive from the lower altitudes, the most important thing to do is give the body some time to acclimate to our altitude. Montrose is about 5,500 feet and that is a great place to start. Spend a few days here resting. Take a few walks each day, nothing vigorous, and drink plenty of water. The water will also help with the dry climate we have. Sports drinks with electrolytes are good as well, especially if you are perspiring. Try and avoid alcohol and drinks containing caffeine. After a couple days here in town, it is a safer bet to move up in altitude to your camp or lodge. Once there, it is once again a good idea to give the body a little time to acclimate. A good 24 hours of avoiding



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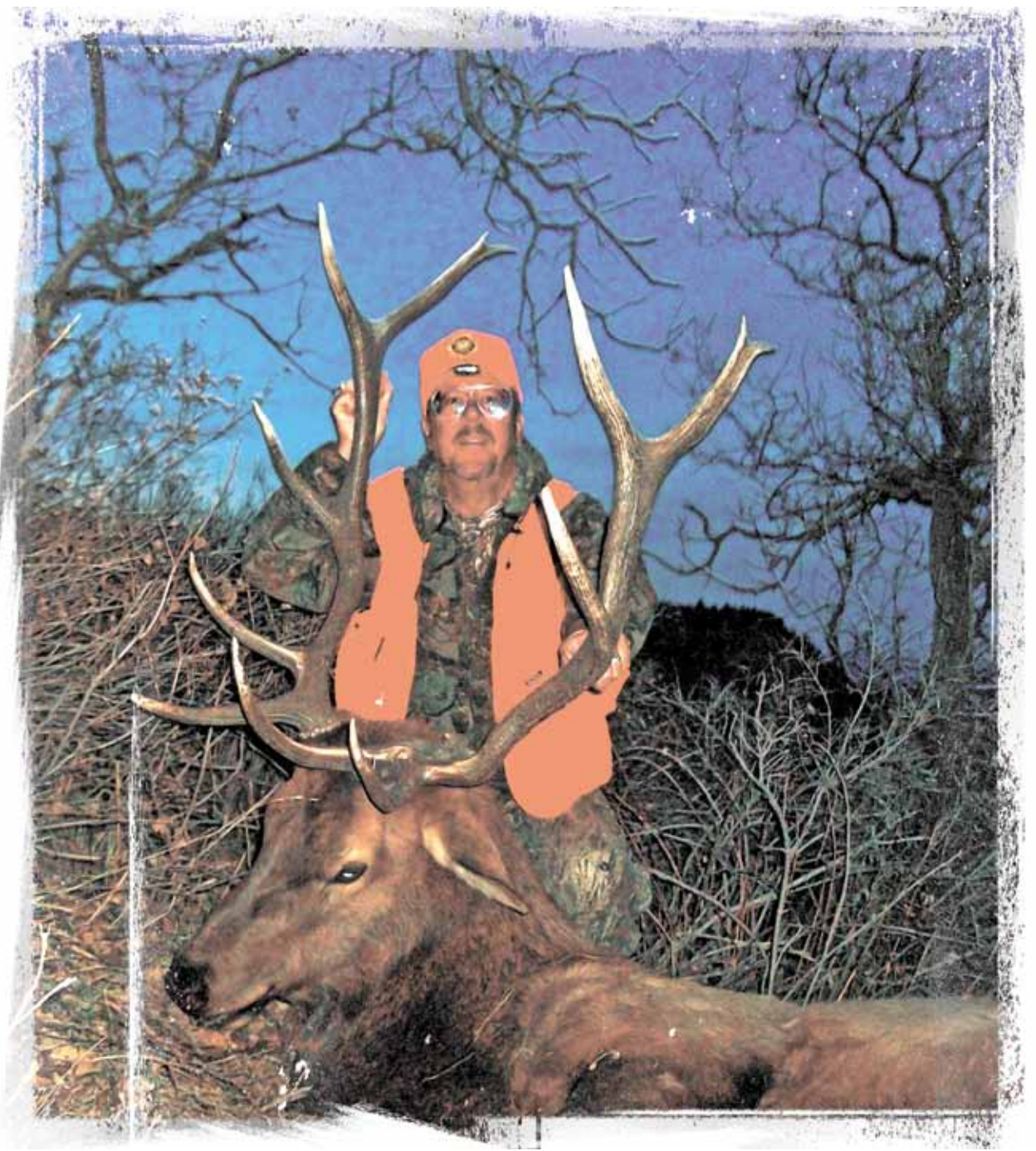
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strenuous activity and the same rules of avoiding the caffeine and booze still apply. Continue drinking plenty of water throughout your hunt, even if you do not feel thirsty. All of this being done, it is wise to keep an eye open for the symptoms of altitude sickness as it can become serious in a short time. Just look at the bright side. You will get to spend a few extra days with your hunting friends and family here in town before the hunt. It is a great time to take in some of the sights in Montrose and perhaps put in some range time. It is nice to get to camp knowing that your rifles are sighted in as well. Here is to having a great hunt.

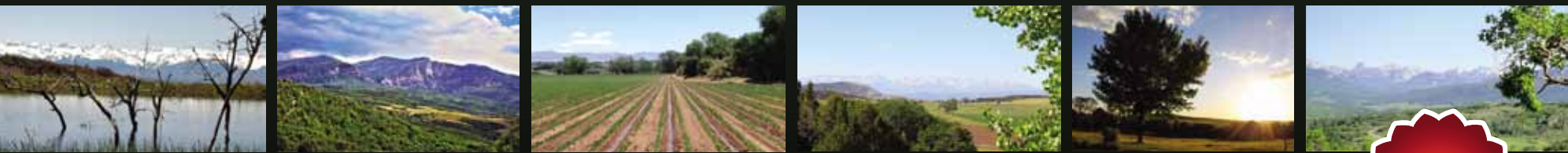
Mark Rackay is a freelance writer who serves as a director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse, call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

HAVING A SUCCESSFUL HUNT REQUIRES PLENTY OF PLANNING AND PREPARATION. BE SURE TO ALLOW YOUR BODY THE TIME NEEDED TO GET READY FOR THE HIGH COUNTRY AS WELL.

(PHOTO COURTESY OF MARK RACKAY)



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