

## Bears need no toothpaste

Not only do bears need no toothpaste, they also need no chocolate, walnuts, energy bars, dried fruit, sunscreen, soap or mosquito repellent.

Try telling that to a bear. Actually, DON'T try telling that to a bear. But even the non-food items in this list have a scent and therefore are known to attract bears to your campsite.

Another odd twist is that the camp food and scented items mentioned here can end up getting a bear killed. Not because the bear has eaten the items, but instead because it will begin to associate campsites and humans with calories and a full belly.

When a bear has obtained human food, even if it was just once, he or she can be drawn to developed areas and become aggressive towards people. A habituated bear like this then runs a bigger risk of getting killed by a car or having to be killed/ethanized by wildlife managers, to protect people like you and me.

Hiking and camping in the Rockies and the Sierra Nevada would not be nearly so appealing without the wild creatures with whom humans have shared these beautiful places for centuries. That means that we now must take different steps to avoid playing the role of the dinner bell for the animals that live in the forests and canyons that we enjoy visiting.

Here is where the "bear-resistant food canister" comes into play. The Needles District of Canyonlands National Park, along with Bryce Canyon, Kings Canyon, and Sequoia National Parks and others all require the use of such a container for overnight camping in many areas. (Alternatively, they have built "bear-resistant food lockers" at some trailheads to act as communal food storage units for campers who are



### Outdoors

By John T. Unger

camping near their vehicles.)

These and other National Parks sometimes have bear-resistant canisters available to loan out or rent out while supplies last. But rather than risk missing out on overnight camping in certain spectacular parts of a National Park, this may be the year to ask jolly old St. Nick to bring the family a bear-resistant canister.

Not only all of the group's food and toiletries, but also all empty food wrappers and food waste have to fit into the container each and every night of the trip. Large ones are cylinders about big enough to fit a football lengthwise, much the same proportions as a giant soda pop can would be. These accommodate the needs of three people for three days, or nine person-days, and can be strapped onto the top outside of a backpack.

Smaller versions of the bear-proof canister accommodate three people for just two days. The canister should be left on the ground, at least fifty feet from your sleeping area. I elect to go one step further and place it downwind of my tent or bivy sack, so I'm not in the path of any animal following the food canister's scent on the night wind.

What about the old technique of hanging the group's food from a tree? That method has been shown to keep the food safe only from raccoons and



Having removed the extra food from the car at the trailhead and stored it in the group bear-resistant locker as required, Elise Unger retrieves it from the locker at the end of the trip. (Submitted photo)

rodents, but not bears, who actually are learning how to access such hung foods. Bryce Canyon National Park's information site puts it more bluntly: "Hanging food is insufficient!"

Using a canister (preferably a see-through model) takes some preparation, which is another reason to not wait and hope that the Park permit office will still have a loaner waiting on the day you arrive. It does take some time to consolidate the foods, toiletries, and sunscreens into smaller containers. Then strategically nesting them into the canister is more easily done at home than sitting on the curb outside the Visitor Center.

These concepts apply only to the "black bears" (which actually can be brown, blonde, cinnamon, or black colored). The black bears' larger and more aggressive cousins are Grizzly bears, which have been gone from Colorado for 40 years, and from Utah and California for about a hundred years.

Now that it is almost winter, aren't we free from concern about bears until after hibernation is over? I was surprised to learn from park rangers that, in some regions of the western U.S. due to our recent warmer winters, some bears are now remaining active all winter.

There are more reasons to use a canister. There is more

freedom to camp above timberline, less chance of scrapping a trip because bears tore up your pack and ate your food, and more time to enjoy hanging out in camp instead of engineering ways to protect and store your food and toothpaste.

Because bears need no toothpaste.

John T. Unger is a Diplomate of the American Chiropractic Board of Sports Physicians, with over twenty-five years of practice in Montrose. He hopes the bear canister will keep him from the wrong kinds of close encounters. Ideas for future columns are welcomed at [sportsdocunger.com](mailto:sportsdocunger.com).

## The Year In Review Part 2

In the previous column, we discussed several of the incidents the posse responded to in the past year. By studying these incidents and what went wrong, we can learn and hopefully prevent something similar in the future.

We had a man on a hike by himself in the National Forest, just off Dave Wood Road. The man had taken a nasty fall and hurt himself. He was in a place that had very weak cell service but managed to get a call out for help. Problem was, he called his wife.

The wife was at the Delta Wal-Mart shopping and made a call to 9-1-1. The call was routed to the dispatch center that services Delta, which is where the call originated. The wife did not ask the right questions of the husband about his location when she spoke with him. 9-1-1 pinged the location of the wife's phone there at Wal-Mart, where she made the call.

All of this resulted in the call going to the wrong dispatch center and the call had to be transferred to the correct one. When dispatch tried to contact the injured hiker, poor cell service prevented the call



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

from going through. All of this was eventually sorted out, but it was several hours before the man received help from emergency services.

The moral of this story is for you to make the call to 9-1-1 in the event of an emergency rather than calling someone else and having him or her report it. By making the call yourself, the dispatcher can not only ask the right questions of you, he or she will be able to pinpoint your location by pinging the cell phone and you will be with the right dispatch center to assist you.

If you do not have service, try texting to 9-1-1. Texting requires less of a signal than a regular phone call. The phone will send the text whenever it receives enough service to patch



it through. Dispatch will then be able to text back to you, but dispatch cannot originate the text. The rule is call when you can, text when you can't.

In a similar incident, two men were involved in an accident when their off road vehicle rolled over in a remote area of Peach Valley. The driver was seriously injured and sent his uninjured partner to hike to a place where he had cell service and could make a

call to 9-1-1.

The uninjured man walked a good mile until he found service and made the call for help. The man could not provide a great deal of information as to the location of the accident. After placing the call, the man returned to the scene of the crash, where he had no cell service.

Emergency services responded to the GPS location provided by the

man's cell phone, which put them a good mile from the accident. The responders were unable to call the man back because he was back in the area of no service.

Responders then commenced with a search and eventually found the accident scene and the injured party, but it was a number of hours later. In a situation like this, where you must go and seek service in another area, stay put. Emergency personnel will find you much quicker than if you move. You can then escort the responders to the place where the injured person is, thereby saving precious time.

During the muzzle-loader season we had a call to look for a missing lone hunter near Moore Mesa. The hunter had done a good job with his preparations at home. He told his teenage daughter exactly where he would camp and that he would drive to Windy Point (where he had cell service) and call home each night.

The daughter had called 9-1-1 when two nights had passed and she had not heard from her father. The daughter was able to provide us

with a camp location and vehicle description. We responded directly to the man's camp where we found him taking a mid-day nap in his tent.

Turns out that the man did call the daughter's cell phone each evening as he said he would do. The daughter did not answer her phone either evening and the man was forced to leave a voice mail message. The daughter never checked her voice mail.

Perhaps the lesson here, other than checking your voice mail, is to have a second contact person, in the event your primary contact is unavailable. We could also suggest something about not using a teenager, as a contact but many are very responsible. You as a parent will have to make that decision.

I hope that you gain something from these incidents and that you and yours have a safe New Year. Until next time, see you on the trail.

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



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