



If the setting sun catches you off guard outdoors, and night is moving in, no need to panic. Here are a few ideas for your consideration if you get 'caught' after dark without a flashlight. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/ Mark Rackay)

Night walking

I remember as a kid, my Grandmother telling me to be back in the house by "dark." Dark was a relative term to a kid, directly related to just how much fun we were having at the time. For example, if we were in the middle of a ball game, dark would probably occur way after sunset.

As I grew older, and my interests in the outdoors changed, darkness took on a new meaning. Darkness became a hindrance on my activities because it meant that fishing or hunting for the day was over. In the hunting world, dark is 30 minutes after sunset, and that meant I better have a flashlight with me or it was going to be a long walk back to camp.

Night has never particularly been a friend of man. Ancient man knew way back then that he was not at the top of the food chain. There were lots of animals around that could chew a man up to the consistency of a plug of second hand tobacco.

Many people believe that night is the time when the ghosts and goblins would run free and wreak havoc on your nighttime festivities. I don't believe that the dead walk at night, but why take chances; carry a flashlight to ward the evil spirits away.

There is a good reason why man naturally has a fear of the darkness. Aside from walking off a cliff or tripping over a log, there are plenty of things that can hurt you at night. Lots of critters become active at night, and most see better than

we do. In some parts of the world, man is still not on top of the food chain.

The eyes of mammals have two different nerve cells called rods and cones. Rods are highly sensitive to light and essential for night vision. Cones, on the other hand, detect colors and allow the eye to focus.

Most mammals are nocturnal, such as the deer, and their eyes contain lots of rods, allowing good night vision. They lack in cones, and are usually color blind. Most mammals do not have 20/20 focused vision like humans. Humans have more cones; see well in color but lack night vision. Humans do have some night vision, in the corners of their eyes.

If you spend enough time outdoors, eventually you are going to get caught in the woods after dark. The easy solution is a flashlight, but sometimes, it does not work out that way.

It has happened to me several times, getting caught after dark without a flashlight. I sat out a rain storm one afternoon and it was long past dark 30 before it cleared enough to head back to camp. Another time, I spent several hours looking for a fishing buddy who took a wrong turn and again, it was late when I found him. I did not have an electric torch in



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

either of those situations, because I had planned on being in camp long before dark. When I prepared for those trips, I neglected to consider Murphy taking a part in the proceedings.

First thing to do is assess your situation calmly. If you are lost, injured or if the weather is bad, you should probably stay put until light enough to see. Attempting to move under any of those

conditions would probably result in you getting a nasty overdose of the Colorado mountains. Find some shelter; tend to your injuries and hole up until morning.

Assuming you are fine physically and know your area well, you can consider moving on. If you are on a marked trail, it is much safer and easier than going cross-country through the woods. Use a compass and any visible landmarks to coincide with your travel to avoid walking in circles. Landmarks may be visible depending on the clarity of the night.

The ambient moon and starlight will help you. Allow some time for total darkness to settle in so your eyes have a chance to adjust to the low light. Obviously, the walk would be much easier on a full moon cycle.

If possible, walk along open parks and meadows. These landscapes will reflect

light better than a tree-covered area. Stay away from swift rivers and any exposed rock formations.

Having another person with you would make the journey easier. A second set of eyes to watch for obstacles and help keep you on track reduces your chance of getting lost.

The most important tip would be to move very slowly; keeping an extra eye out for obstacles that can cause a fall. Stop periodically and reassess your situation. If ever in doubt about where you are, it is better to stop and stay put, rather than to keep moving in an unknown direction.

If you spend enough time outdoors, eventually you are going to get stuck outside at night. It does not mean the end of the world, but does require some calm and clear thinking. Assess your situation carefully and don't be afraid to stay put. Sometimes, even with a flashlight, staying where you are is the right decision.

Next time I will listen to Grandma, and be inside by dark, if at all possible. If not, beware of that glowing set of eyes behind you.

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