

Tread with care during rattlesnake season



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

The town of Golden will always hold a warm spot in my heart.

I graduated high school there back in the 1970s in the same school I met my wife. We were married in the courthouse in town a year after we met.

Golden is a perfect elevation and terrain for rattlesnakes. Places like Green Mountain, Red Rocks, Watertown Canyon, and Mt. Galbraith were likely places to run into the rattlers. Many people have.

A 31-year-old hiker by the name of Daniel Hohns was enjoying a trail in Mt. Galbraith, just a short mile from downtown Golden. Daniel stepped over a large rock in the trail.

When his foot hit the ground on the other side of the rock, Daniel felt a tremendous stinging



If you or a member of your group should happen be bitten, don't panic. Look for swelling and bloody colored blisters beginning to form in the bite area. These symptoms would mean it was a venomous snakebite.

About 50% of the time, the bites are dry, where the snake does not release any venom. The pain and a burning sensation around the bite area could be present.

Immediately contact 911.

Time is of the essence in venomous snakebites. Most deaths occur because people delayed in getting help. If you are unsure of it being a venomous bite, it is better to seek help than to wait.

Do not waste time trying to catch or kill the snake, lest you become a victim also.

Keep the patient calm and try to immobilize the bitten area.

Make a splint if possible but do not tie it tight. You do not want to reduce the blood flow.

Never use a tourniquet or apply ice to the area. Avoid cutting and sucking out the venom. Those old kits with the razor blade and suction cups are no

of the rock, Daniel felt a tremendous stinging sensation in his leg. Daniel had startled a resting snake on the other side of the rock.

Daniel survived long enough to make it to St. Anthony Hospital. The amount of venom injected by the serpent was too great for his system to overcome. Four hours later, Daniel Hohn was a neat, italicized statistic in the books.

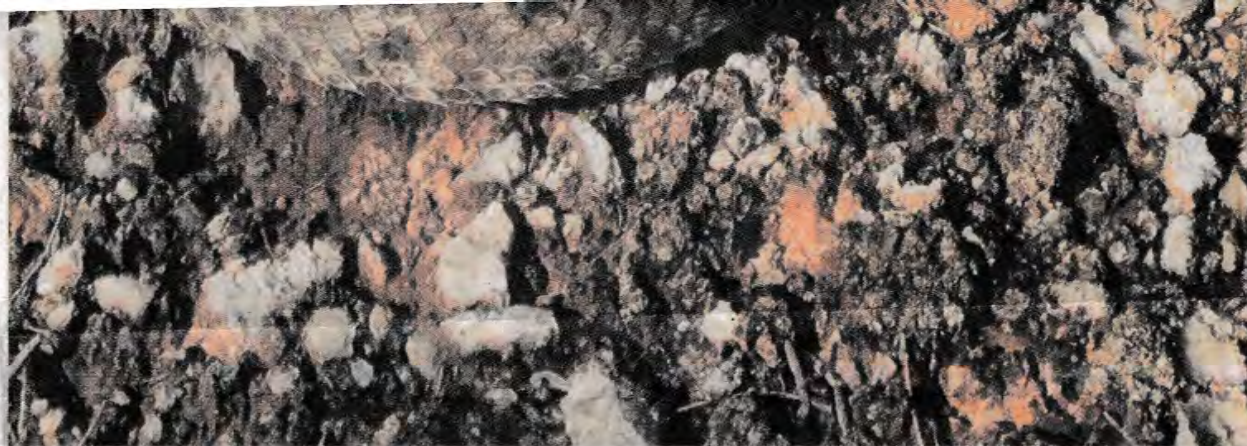
According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, venomous snakes bite 7,000 to 8,000 people every year in the United States. On average, about 10 people die annually from a venomous snakebite.

Most people have never seen a rattlesnake in the wild.

I run into the naysayer quite often and I offer it is because they have never looked for one. Rattlesnakes are very shy by nature and non-aggressive. Most of the time they just want to be left alone.

The majority of bites occur when someone surprises the snake. Stepping over rocks or logs, without looking on the other side is a good way to surprise a sleeping rattler.

I have run into dozens of rattlesnakes on the trails and hillsides and found them to be shy and not wanting anything to do with me. Just remain still and he usually scurries off.



A sight guaranteed to strike fear in your heart is a coiled rattlesnake, but they are not aggressive; if you leave them alone, most likely they will head the other way. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

Here in Colorado, there are around 30 species of snakes, but only three pose a danger to people. They are the prairie rattlesnake, Western rattlesnake and the Massasauga rattlesnake.

The prairie and Western are found in our area of Western Colorado, usually at elevations below 9,000 feet.

Near Montrose, we have several places like Golden that are perfect habitat for rattlesnakes.

I have run into snakes at the Black Canyon and Escalante a number of times. Usually I have seen them resting or sunning themselves around rocky outcroppings.

Territorial in nature, rattlers will usually hang around certain areas.

As spring turns into summer and the temperatures rise, snakes will come out of hibernation. On a warm day, it is not unusual to see a rattle-

snake sunning himself on a rock. Snakes such as the bull snake, rat snake and corn snake are often mistaken for rattlers, so proper identification is essential.

Rattlesnakes have a thick body, whereas most non-venomous snakes have slender bodies. A common garter snake is usually 3 feet long and as big around as your index finger.

In contrast, a 3-foot-long rattler would be as big around as your wrist.

The rattle on the end of the snake's tail is the most distinctive characteristic. The rattle is incorrectly used to judge a snake's age, each ring representing a year. The snake adds a ring every time he sheds a skin, which can be several times during the year.

Rattles are quite fragile and easily lost. Often times, you will see a snake with some of the rattles broken or missing. Young

snakes may not have developed a rattle yet.

Even if the rattle is missing or not developed, a rattlesnake's tail will end abruptly in a blunt point. If the snake you are looking at has a sharply pointed tail, he is not a Colorado rattlesnake.

Seeing an aggravated rattler in the wild is an event you will never forget. A coiled rattler "looks" scary and will give a shiver to anyone other than a congenital idiot.

He will elevate themselves into an "S" shaped coil and inflate his body to look as large as possible. He will make hissing sounds and rattle his tail, raising his head off the ground.

The rattle is employed as a warning, one you best heed. The sound emitted is often described as a dry, high-pitched buzzing. I am hard of hearing from many years of blower motors on race boats, so

a rattler would have to be launching flash-bangs and playing a bass drum for me to hear him. For those of you with good hearing, remember that a young snake, or one without a rattle, will not make any warning noise.

Most bites occur on the hands, feet and lower legs. Be careful where you reach, step or sit. Snakes love to hide and you don't want to reach into the brush for something without looking carefully first. If you have to walk in tall grass or thick brush, use a walking stick to prod along with in front of you.

If you find yourself in thick snake country, it might be a good idea to wear snake boots or chaps, especially if you are going to be looking around and not at the ground all the time. Again, looking first, before you move, is the best advice someone can get.

kits with the razor blade and suction cups are no longer recommended.

People would actually cut arteries in their excitement.

Remove any tight clothing, watches or jewelry around the bite area in advance of the inevitable swelling.

Try to call ahead to the medical facility and let people there know the situation. This will enable the staff to get ready the antivenin that will be used to combat the bite.

Antivenin is not always used because people are allergic to the serum. More people die from the cure than from the bite itself.

Seeing a rattler in the wild is a fantastic experience and one you will never forget.

Just give him his space and he will usually go the other way. I know that I have no problem going the other way.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and 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. For outdoors or survival related questions or comments, feel free to contact him directly at his email elkhunter77@icloud.com.