

## Ghosts, supernatural and other things to blame

TIPS FROM THE POSSE  
By MARK RACKAY

As Halloween is rapidly approaching, I thought it would be appropriate to investigate whether the supernatural can, or does, come into play in our outdoor activities. Out of an abundance of caution, Oct. 31 might be a day you want to stay home — or not.

Halloween dates back to 1745 and is of Christian origin. As a boy being raised Catholic, we observed the day as All Saints Day. It actually translates to “Saints’ evening” from the Scottish term for All Hallows Eve. For a kid, it meant free candy and pranking the neighbors.

Haunted houses, costumes, trick-or-treating, and candy are all associated with Halloween, but it is also linked to an increased number of pedestrian fatalities, theft and vandalism. Halloween might just be one of the most dangerous evenings of the year for your children, home, car and health.

Physicians researched data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and found that there were increased pedestrian fatalities between 5 p.m. and 11:59 p.m. on Halloween compared to one week before and after the holiday.

Halloween also brings 17% more crime related home insurance claims than any other day of the year. Most of these claims revolve around theft, vandalism, fire and someone getting hurt on another’s property during trick-or-treating.

All of this supernatural stuff has a tendency to trickle down into our outdoor activities, as a catch-all cause for everything that goes wrong, “must be gremlins.” I have found that the more extreme your outdoor sport, the more open you are to things going wrong, and the risk of rearranging your personal landscape when they do.

Take fishing for example. Trolling for blue marlin, 50 miles offshore of the Florida Keys is probably more dangerous than soaking a salmon egg in a creek in Colorado. When you have 500 pounds of angry marlin on a tether, things can go south in a hurry. More than a few crew members and anglers have paid the full price trying



We all like to blame gremlins and the supernatural when things go wrong, but maybe there is another reason. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

to land “big blue.” Personally, I have a few scars that serve as a testament to “close calls.”

The same can be said for hunting. A person walking a field for pheasants does not have the same risks as someone hunting brown bears on the Russian coast. The more extreme your sport, the higher the chances of something going wrong, and the increased probability you might board the last train west.

When something does go wrong, resulting in a broken piece of equipment, or worse, a broken piece of a person, everyone blames gremlins, supernatural intervention, or just plain kismet. From my own personal experience, I have found there are usually two reasons something did not go right.

The first reason is a visit from my old pal Murphy of Murphy’s Law fame. Murph, as I call him through long association, is a master at making things go wrong. You can kind of relate a Murphy visit as kismet, or just plain bad luck, but that is understating his abilities.

Many times, Murph does not arrive on scene until the bad has already begun, and his presence makes a bad thing worse. That is his contribution to us outdoor folks, making us wish we took up bowling instead. My old man mentor once said of Murphy, “We all know that Murphy is not real, and does not exist. We also know that he is always there, lurking in the shadows.”

The other reason I have found that things go wrong it is usually of my own making.

Because I suffer from either diminished capacity or garden variety stupidity, I am the guy who will try and jump across a stream rather than just wade through it. These decisions usually result in my having to walk around for a month in one of those specially padded moon boots.

When asked, “Why did you try and climb that cliff?” I have no real answer except that the way around looked like it would take too long. Extreme sports or extremely stupid? Doctors report a 20% increase for traumatic injuries caused specifically by dumb mistakes in the wilds.

Extreme sports, such as ski jumping, street racing, base jumping, cage fighting, and many others that demonstrate stupidity, together with the

ability to video the act and place it on social media, are taxing the medical and rescue resources. A “Tough Mudder” contest in Pennsylvania overwhelmed the local hospital by sending 38 patients to the ER.

At a recent meeting of the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons, a study was presented that showed 447,000 people treated in emergency rooms in 2009 for head injuries, representing an increase of 95,000 from the year before. These numbers continue to climb.

I guess the moral of the story is when you are looking for someone to blame for your outdoor mishap, you might just start with a glance in the mirror. We can be our worst enemy in the wilds, from taking unnecessary chances to not properly maintaining our equipment, resulting in a failure when you least expected it.

Let’s save the stories of the ghosts and supernatural powers for sitting around the campfire. I remember one such story that took place 50 years ago that my old man mentor Mr. Caster, told me about. It had to do with a family of four being murdered in their tents by a crazy man with an ax. Mr. Caster was enjoying some of his medicine from the tin flask when he told me the story, so the validity and exact details could be questioned.

The family was camping on Chicago creek, enjoying a week-end getaway. Late at night, as the four of them were sound asleep, the killer attacked, leaving no survivors, as he hacked each one to death in their sleeping bags. As the story goes, the killer was never identified nor captured, and still roams the hills of the Chicago Creek area. You might keep that in mind, next time you decide to camp at the Chicago Creek campground. Who knows, maybe it was a true story.

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The builders hold up their finished product to be installed at their school grounds. (Courtesy photo/U.S. Forest Service)

## Beware of the silent killers of the night

By ANNE JANIK  
FRIENDS OF YOUTH AND NATURE

That is, if you happen to be an insect! These night stalkers have been known to eat upwards of 1,200 insects per hour, and that includes mosquitoes.

These warm blooded, nocturnal creatures are often associated with the spookiest of holidays. Any guesses as to the animal in question? Why, bats of course!

So how did bats become the creepy representatives of Halloween? Let’s start with a couple of myths:

**Bats drink blood, right?** Well, not exactly. There are only three species of bat that feed primarily on blood (the “vampire” bats), while the remaining approximate 1,400 species feed on things like insects, rodents and nectar.

Vampire bats are where the group as a whole

got their connection to Halloween.

When these bats were first observed lapping up the blood of cattle in Central and South America, they were quickly given the label, “vampires.” This idea was made concrete when Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1897) depicted vampires’ shapeshifting into bats.

See **BATS** page A13

## Creepy, crawly spiders

By LINDA CORWINE

Once again it’s that time of year when we like to think of scary things and creepy, crawly things in the night. But for most, this is only fun when these are make believe.

Real spiders in our homes with a mass of spider webs suddenly cease to be entertaining.

While you may not like spiders, and perhaps you’re even one of the many people with a bit of arachnophobia, knowing a little about them and being able to distinguish the “good guys” from the “bad guys” may help you sleep a little better at night.

In fact, the more you know about spiders, the easier it is to cope with them.

The first thing you need to know about spiders is that they are not out to bite people! The truth is, there are very few harmful spiders in Colorado.

Every year the CSU Extension office receives numerous samples of brown spiders from people fearing they have

just discovered a dreaded **Brown Recluse**.

Fortunately, the dry climate and cold winters of Colorado make it almost impossible for Brown Recluse spiders to survive the Colorado winters. Recluse spiders are more commonly found along the southern Mississippi Valley and are only occasionally brought into our area.

A Brown Recluse spider can be distinguished from similar looking spiders by a number of characteristics. First, they live in a loose, messy-appearing web in dark corners of buildings.

They also have a very distinguishing violin-shaped, dark marking on their back behind the head.

These spiders only have three pair of eyes instead of four like most other spiders.

I’m sure you don’t want to get close enough to one to see how many little eyes the spider has, or if it has a little violin shaped mark on its back, but if you were to be bitten by a spider and could capture it, that would

help you identify the culprit by these features.

A lesser known spider, the **Hobo Spider** or **European House Spider**, was found in Colorado a few years ago.

Some people report the bite of this spider produces a wound similar to that of the Brown Recluse, causing a virtually unnoticed wound to form blisters within a few hours as pain develops.

This spider is still in very low numbers and the likelihood of encountering one is very slim.

On the other hand, **Black Widow Spiders** (the Halloween spider) are very common in Colorado.

This black colored spider with the notorious red or orange hourglass pattern on its underside can often be found in undisturbed sites such as a window well, the entrance to a crawl space, the corner of a garage, or under a pile of boards that have been in the area for some time.

See **SPIDERS** page A13