

The ants go marching

One of my favorite activities is to allow several flies to enter the house, and watch the exterminators go after them. The exterminators in this case, is a pair of Jack Russel terriers, who will relentlessly chase the intruders throughout the house, leaving a path of destruction in their wake.

My wife of many years does not approve of this activity, and in the interest of marital bliss, I only conduct these exercises when she is not home. There have been times where my wife has returned home to view a swath of destruction of furniture and furnishings, forcing her to question the usual suspect. I will remain silent, hoping the blame falls to the furry participants, but usually I stand convicted without a trial.

You see, my wife does not approve of insects in the house at any time. This is evidenced by the fact I am often called upon to execute an insect, usually a spider, that has haphazardly stumbled into the wrong house, usually after a night of debauchery, only to discover this lady wants him executed immediately. I follow orders and quickly dispatch the poor soul.

Recently, my wife discovered a line of ants marching over a portion of the kitchen counter. She was thoroughly convinced they had established a colony in a nearby cabi-



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

net and were establishing a permanent residency. I tried to explain to her they were merely foragers, seeking food or water in our house but soon returning to a colony they have established somewhere outdoors.

My plea for the ants did no good as she quickly crop-dusted the area with an aerial assault of chemicals, so thick no insect could survive. Talk about chemical warfare. She did say, “These look like fire ants. That is all I need, fire ants in my house.” Not so fast, my dear.

Ask any self-respecting southerner, and they will go on and on for hours about their experiences with the treacherous fire ants. Solenopsis is the name fire ants go by on the streets. They will attack anything that disturbs their mound or nest.

Fire ants resemble ordinary ants, 1/8 to ¼ inch long, reddish brown

in color, and display an unbelievable amount of aggression for anything that disturbs their mound. Just standing near a nest is enough for you to become a victim.

They firmly grasp your skin with their jaws, and then sting and inject venom. Fire ants pivot at their head and inflict more stings in a circular pattern. It is possible to get hundreds of bites in a minute because they swarm on you so quickly.

The sting of a fire ant develops into a pustule, a small and firm blister-like sore, in 24 to 48 hours. These pustules can become a site of secondary infection. The venom can cause a severe reaction in people who are hypersensitive, causing nausea, shock, chest pains and in rare cases, a coma.

In recent years, there have been reports of fire ants in the Denver area. Homeowners have been contacting pest control companies for assistance in ridding their property of these biting demons. They are an invasive insect that has been spreading across the country and causing significant anxiety. Rest easy folks, they are not fire ants.

Fire ants come from the tropical regions of South America. They are well adapted to warmer climates with plenty of moisture, which is why they do well in the South-



These ants may bite but they are not fire ants. Fire ants have not found their way to Colorado and I hope they never do. (Courtesy photo/USFWS)

east United States. There have been some confirmed infestations in extreme southern New Mexico, and a couple in eastern Oklahoma, but Colorado gets too cold and does not have enough moisture to support them.

Of the 200 species of ants that make Colorado home, the fire ant will probably never be one of them. That does not mean we are out of the woods though. What these people are probably experiencing is an encounter with a very common Colorado ant, called the red harvester ant, or Pogonomyrmex barbatus, just to make your day.

The red harvester ant looks like a fire ant, as he is a quarter inch long and a reddish color. They have large heads and very prominent mandibles. Their mounds are large and flat,

standing an inch high and several feet across. Usually there is no vegetation around the mound.

Although they are not as aggressive as fire ants, their bite does pack a punch. On the Schmidt scale of painful insect bites, fire ants rate a 1.2, while the red harvester ant rates a 3.0. Although not fatal, attacks by a swarm of red harvester ants, typically in defense of their nest, may leave scars and will be traumatic.

I told my wife to be glad they weren't driver ants, sometimes called African safari ants. These ferocious ant colonies, when in the nomadic stage, move to a new spot every day. Using their powerful cutting jaws, driver ants will attack everything in their path, including snakes, birds, mammals, and even hu-

man beings. She said she did not care what kind of ants they were, they are not welcome in her home, and she used chemical warfare to dispatch the interlopers. Oh well, at least the dogs and I will still have the house flies to play with.

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Will these trees shade future kids?

Outdoors

By John T. Unger

Up ahead, an open wooden boat was caught in a tangle of trees on river right.

Jacked up on its side, there was not much time to get a good look at it, because the current of the Uncompahgre River through Montrose was swiftly pushing each of our several boats toward it.

Only a rather narrow passageway remained between the recently fallen rocks on river left, and that ghost boat on the right.

To avoid the risk of getting my boat caught in the strainer of fallen trees, I could only afford a three-second glimpse of that discolored, rapidly aging boat. No chance to grab the phone from its waterproof case and shoot a picture.

It could have been a flat-bottomed rowboat, or less likely a drift boat. It had newly appeared this season.

This river simultaneously gives the satisfaction of making necessarily prompt decisions on piloting through the narrow and twisting channels, along with the

sobering sight of that abandoned, ruined boat.

Though both of my daughters spent their entire childhoods growing up in Montrose, neither had yet been on a boat on the Uncompahgre through Montrose, until Elise did that day with myself and four other very experienced boaters.

Her broad smile confirmed her joy at discovering “the Unc” in this way. With great surprise, she remarked upon the startling difference of how the world looks from that six miles of being on the river, rather than being on the riverbank above.

And she is so right.

More and more locals and others are discovering the many ways that this small but appealing river can be enjoyed. Of course, the wave park's six significant wave features offer a hundred yards of river surfing, in addition to fly-fishing and walking the riverbank.

As for floating and paddling from the Chipeta Lake put-in site to the Taviwach take-out site, it is best to be first experienced as part of a group, led by others who have paddled it more than a few times. Neither

cheap inflatable department store thin-walled rafts, nor truck inner-tubes that defy steering, but rather actual inflatable kayaks should be used. And a PFD (personal flotation device) should be worn, even by adults.

The same relentless current acts on anyone who has “swum” (tipped into) the Unc, as it still also acts on that trashed boat that is constantly being pressed into the fallen tree for weeks now.

Instead of a tree in the river acting as a strainer and a hazard, how very much more appealing is a cottonwood, well rooted up on the riverbank, shading the water and thus preventing the river's undue increase in temperature.

Such a tree benefits the boy, girl, man, and woman who choose to fish in the river. It's shade benefits the types of wildlife that have lived along the river for centuries. And it's shade on the bank secondarily keeps an inflatable kayak and its paddlers cool while they are waiting for their shuttle crew to return from driving the group's vehicles to the take-out site.

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Late September on the Uncompahgre River in Montrose, Melanie Rees and Elise Unger pilot a sturdy tandem inflatable kayak. (John Unger/Special to the MDP)



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