



Much of what we believe about lightning isn't true. (Courtesy photo/Mark Rackay)

Illuminating Lightning Myths



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

If you were a Vegas gambler, lightning might be the thing to place your bets on. The odds are incredibly high. For example, the odds of a single individual getting struck by lightning in a given year in the U.S., is around 1 in 800,000. That would be a pretty good payout.

In the United States, there are around 25 million bolts hitting the ground annually, striking some 300 people. Of those 300 people, less than 30 will pay the full price plus tax. Worldwide, lightning kills 250,000 people a year, which does not seem like a lot when you consider there are 100 lightning strikes to the earth every second.

Humans hit by lightning may have their eardrums blown out by the incoming pressure wave,

their respiratory system paralyzed, or suffer secondary burns as their hair and clothing catches fire. A direct strike to the head generally causes cardiac arrest, probably because of nervous system complications. In any event, a direct strike is a religious experience, because you are going to meet your maker.

Fortunately, less than 5% of folks bit by the bolt suffer a direct strike. Most people are hurt from ground lightning. When lightning strikes the ground or an object on the ground, the discharge occurs in and along the ground surface. Ground current is responsible for killing many farm animals on a yearly basis. This is the lightning strike you hear about when there are multiple victims on a golf course or a baseball diamond.

A single bolt of lightning can cover an entire state. In 2021, researchers recorded one that was 477 miles in length, and stretched across parts of Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Bolts are routinely measured by satellites that measure hundreds of miles in length.

Lightning can be generated by a forest fire, as if the fire was

not bad enough. The pyrocumulus cloud that often forms over the top of a large wildfire smoke cloud, can produce lightning, and is a fairly common occurrence.

A great deal of the things we have been taught over the years about lightning safety, are basically bogus. One such myth is centered around the lightning position, crouching close to the ground to make yourself a smaller target. While this might work in a gunfight, it is useless in a lightning storm.

The National Weather Service, NWS, recommends running. And run you should, to a substantial building or hard topped vehicle. If you are too far to run to one of those options, you really have no other good alternative. Basically, you are not safe anywhere outdoors when the daggers are coming down.

You have probably heard the myth that lightning does not strike the same place twice. Probably should not take that bet. There was a man by the name of Roy Sullivan. Roy has the distinction of being struck by lightning 7 times between 1942 and 1977, and somehow

lived to tell the story, over and over. Roy was nicknamed "Human Lightning Conductor" and "Human Lightning Rod," by his friends. I bet his friends did not stand too close to him outdoors when the clouds began to rumble.

Sullivan was a Park Ranger at the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia during all of his lightning episodes. He was deeply saddened because people began to avoid him, for fear they would be struck also. For instance, he was walking one day with the Chief Ranger when lightning struck in the distance. The Chief said, "I'll see you later."

On the morning of September 28, 1983, Sullivan died at the age of 71 from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. I guess Murphy will get you one way or another, Murphy semper vincet. Murphy always wins. So much for the myth lightning can't strike the same place twice. Remember, some things are made to be struck repeatedly by lightning, like a lightning rod.

If you are in a house, you are 100 percent safe from lightning. Well, not so fast friend. A house is a safe place as long as you don't touch

anything that conducts electricity. That means staying off a corded phone, and don't touch the TV, appliances, lights, anything plugged in. While you are at it, stay out of the shower, bathtub, and don't touch the faucets.

Have you heard that it is better to stand under a tree instead of standing out in the open? Better think that one through. Lightning tends to strike the tallest object on a landscape. If you are on a hilltop or ridge, that is you. Standing under a 100-foot-tall tree raises your odds of getting hit, versus your 6-foot-tall frame by itself. Better to find a large patch of very short trees of uniform height to stand under.

Lightning being attracted to metal is something to reconsider. Lightning travels through metal, but it is not attracted to it. Lightning is only attracted to tall structures, isolated structures, and pointed structures, and it matters not what those structures are made of. If you are standing in a flat field, you are the structure.

Perhaps you have heard to get in your tent during a lightning storm while you are camping.

More people have died from lightning strikes while camping in tents than while hiking by themselves. It can be a catastrophe when lightning strikes a tent full of campers.

I am not a gambling man, and I stay away from the card tables. How can I win at blackjack when my lucky number is 23? Besides, I take enough chances hunting dangerous game. I must be lucky at that since my name is still on the tax rolls, however, I still take a powder when the daggers start to fly.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for The Nautical Mile, and several other saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of adventure and serves as a Director and Public Information Officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. Personal email is elkhunter77@icloud.com For information about the Posse call 970-765-7033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

FOOD

FROM PAGE B1

Alteri promised the tour will end with a sweet treat at the final stop, and each producer will give guests a taste of their fare as well.

Alteri said the event will wrap up and return just in time for the fair's Community Night, where guests can also enjoy free hamburgers and hot dogs.

While it's open to everyone, she noted it is a walking tour, and participants should be prepared to walk on working farms which may not always have paved paths. In addition, they should dress for the weather and bring sun protection.

The event is open to around 50 participants, and Alteri encouraged everyone to RSVP on the VFP's website to secure

their spot.

She said the goal of the event is to be fun and educational, and connect local people with local agriculture.

Though each farm on the tour is different, she said, "They're all very involved in the community and in the ag community."

The Partnership is active in promoting local agriculture year-round, perhaps most

visibility through the Montrose Farmers Market, which Alteri said locals should check out each Saturday.

"If you want to support local farmers, go visit and get some fresh produce," she said, before adding the year-round market also offers plenty more, such as meats, eggs and baked goods.

Educational events are also on the horizon, including cooking classes where participants

can learn how to make healthy meals with in-season products. Finally, the organization has a few beginning farmer/rancher courses coming up where those interested in agriculture can learn more about the field and local resources.

"It's a great educational opportunity," Alteri said.

More information: valleyfoodpartnership.org/upcoming-events

Free! Join us
Saturday July 26th
at The Association
for the Kühl Music
Tour 4PM-7P
Great Music, Great
Drinks, Great Food,
Great Product

KÜHL MULE
LIVE MUSIC FROM
NEON SKY

FOR INDEPENDENT
 FREE THINKING
 REBELS RENEGADES
 AND OUTLAWS

PARKING LOT PARTY | LIVE MUSIC | NO COVER CHARGE

Neon Sky Band

10 SOUTH SELIG AVE MONTROSE, COLORADO 81401 970-249-4226