

The Importance of Staying Put



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Around 10 p.m., my cell phone went off. You know the ring, the one you really don't want to answer. And I was right because it was a call for a lost hunter. A deputy from the Sheriff's Office said we have a Garmin InReach message from a hunter, 70 years old, no survival gear, and lost.

The Garmin InReach is a terrific survival tool. It sends a message to a designated person when an emergency arises and provides a GPS location of your position. This gentleman was about 150 yards from a trail that was easily accessible with ATVs.

Sounds simple enough, be back home in a few hours after a successful mission. Not so fast bucko. This man refused to sit still and wait for us. His updated coordinates showed he was on the move, the wrong way (further from any vehicle access point) and the temps were falling into the single digits. With the risk of hypothermia, we now had a full blown, three alarm emergency.

If you have no idea where you are, or how to navigate yourself to safety, what is the sense of continuing walking? I understand climbing a nearby hill to get a view or cell service, but some people will cover miles and miles.

Traveling at night is risky. Even with a flashlight, you can still stumble or trip, adding injury to insult, and make a bad situation much worse. Another thought, if



When you are lost, and have no idea where to go, stay put. Build a fire, make yourself visible to rescuers, and wait it out. (Courtesy photo)

you travel at night, you are probably going to want to sleep in the daytime, when the rescuers are out looking for you.

Unless you know the area like "the back of your hand," stay put. Your ability to see much of anything, a trail marker, creek, a fork in the trail, is just about nil. If that is not enough to keep you in place, think about the wildlife. Predators move about and feed in the dark, and you just might look like a blue plate special to a hungry animal.

If you have a vehicle, and you are broken down or lost, it is a good idea to stay with the vehicle, as it offers shelter from the weather and the hairy footed predators. More importantly, it is much easier for search and rescue folks to spot a vehicle on a trail than it is to see a person wandering around aimlessly in the thick brush.

We had a married couple who were on a jeep road

near 25 Mesa Road, broke down, and decided to walk out for help. Problem is, they went the wrong way, and when they realized they were lost, they kept plodding on. They walked all afternoon, all the following night, and well into the next day, covering some 17 miles.

The couple had one water bottle each, and no food. Fortunately for them, it was summertime, so exposure was not a concern. What was a concern was the summer mosquitoes, which ate them up pretty good.

We found them but, what would have been an easy rescue, turned into a 14-hour ordeal. We found their broken-down vehicle about an hour into the search. They would not have been bit up so bad, dehydrated as bad, and found much sooner, had they stayed put.

The only exception to nighttime travel is when the daytime temperatures are soaring. The desert is one

example, where daytime temperatures might be too high to allow safe travel. Again, if you have no idea which direction to head, it might be best to find a nice shady spot and wait it out.

Consider short-term weather conditions and climate, and how it may affect you. If a violent thunderstorm is brewing off in the distance, you want to find shelter immediately. Most of those summertime storms pass through in a couple hours, but they can dump a bunch of cold rain on you in a matter of minutes, leaving you with hypothermia to add to the fun. Seek shelter and stay put.

Anytime you head into the backcountry, the same survival rules apply. Bring your survival pack, with the essentials to build a fire, first aid, a bit of food and water, and some extra clothes to keep warm when the temperatures drop. I have written here many times

about the importance of a survival pack and what to put in it.

If you do have to move, because of climate conditions, visibility to rescuers, or to seek shelter, remember that survival travel is much different than recreational travel. Your rate of travel should be considerably slower and more deliberate. Walk carefully, looking closely at your surroundings, and be alert for any possibility that may make your rescue easier and faster.

Our gentleman from the beginning of this column was finally found, near daybreak. He was very cold and disoriented, and in the beginning stages of hypothermia. Had he stayed put, we would have found him before midnight. He could have built a nice campfire, stayed warm, and waited for us. He knew we were coming by the text messages from his wife on his Garmin.

I wish I could tell you it is a rare occurrence when a lost person just keeps walking, but it isn't. I would guess half of the missions we go on the party keeps moving. Again, I ask, if you have no idea where you are, which direction you need to travel, why keep walking?

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CDOT urges Leaf Peepers to plan ahead for heavy traffic on mountain corridors this weekend

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

Statewide — The Colorado Department of Transportation is warning motorists to expect another busy weekend of travel along the Interstate 70 Mountain Corridor, with heavy leaf-peeping traffic likely both eastbound and westbound. Similarly, motorists should expect extreme congestion along US Highway 285, especially between South Park and Denver, as

folks head to Kenosha Pass.

Based on data from the same weekend in 2024, traffic volumes were among the highest of the fall season. At the Eisenhower Johnson Memorial Tunnels, CDOT had to meter traffic for 11 and a half hours, from 11 a.m. until 10:30 p.m., to keep vehicles moving safely. Peak volumes at the tunnels hit nearly 3,000 vehicles per hour at noon. The long return home for mountain travelers head-

ed eastbound extended well past 10 p.m.

Adding to congestion, westbound motorists saw significant delays during the mornings, generally starting at 9 a.m. through 5 p.m., between Evergreen and Georgetown, an unusual pattern for this time of year. These delays were largely driven by large numbers of day-trippers wanting to see the leaves change in the high country.

Travelers also experienced extreme backups

on Guanella Pass between Georgetown and Grant. Traffic queues stretched for miles through Georgetown and up the interstate.

Last weekend, Sept. 19 through Sept. 21, traffic peaked at 6 p.m. on Friday, although speeds at Floyd Hill were in the single digits from noon until 7 p.m. Peak traffic on Saturday occurred between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Sunday traffic was slow most of the day, with the peak at 11 a.m.

What drivers should

know for the weekend:

Expect heavy traffic heading westbound late morning through early afternoon and eastbound from late morning well into the evening. Leave early or late in the day to avoid the worst congestion. Be cautious when seeking alternate routes, as local roads such as Guanella Pass cannot accommodate interstate-level traffic. Pack patience and allow extra travel time — delays are inevitable. Check COtrip.org or download the

COtrip Planner app to stay up to date on travel conditions. Visit GoI70.com to check the traffic forecast for this weekend.

Leaf Peeping Safety Tips:

Be aware of vehicles traveling at lower speeds. Watch for vehicles pulling off the roadway or parked along the road. Find safe, designated areas to park. Drivers, be aware of pedestrians out of their vehicles taking photos. Pedestrians, watch out for passing vehicles.



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