

# Snow snake season



## Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

My grandfather walked into the house after finishing his morning chores, and calmly told my grandmother, “Watch yourself when you’re outside because the snow snakes are out.”

He made the comment calmly and without expression. My grandmother, on the other hand, became very excited. Other than mice, snakes are at the top of my grandmother’s hit list. She always called them the “nope ropes.”

I, on the other hand, usually couldn’t care less about snakes, especially in those early years of my childhood. As a senior, I still am not bothered by rattlesnakes and similar nonaggressive reptiles. Leave them alone and they do likewise. As I traveled around the world hunting, I have seen what some of the aggressive snakes are about, and those bother me. Vipers like the black mamba will run you down if they don’t like



As the spring thaw hits the high country, keep an eye out for snow snakes. They are almost impossible to see until it’s too late. (Courtesy photo/Mark Rackay)

your haircut. Considering a mature mamba will reach 12 feet in length and contains enough deadly venom to kill an average sized cocktail party, he can have all the space his little heart and large teeth desire.

Snow snakes were new to me that cold spring morning and I needed to question my grandfather about these vipers. The interrogation must be done stealthily because my grandfather was a lifelong prankster, and I was his usual victim, and grandmother was the other. Around our house, April Fool’s Day was not limited to a day, it was a season.

I told my Pa, “What kind of baloney are you trying to pull here?”

Snakes hibernate during the winter because they can’t stand the cold.”

With a tone of disinterest, and a perfectly straight face, he explained snow snakes to me. “The snow snake is a fairly rare critter, especially around here, because they don’t like our warm springs. This year, spring has been extra cold, and they are out more,” he said.

Being ever alert to another one of his pranks, I asked, “If they are around, how come I never saw one before? What do they look like anyway?”

Pa explained, still with a look of casual disinterest, “Snow snakes are pure white colored,

so they blend in with the snow. They have little pinhead sized blue eyes. Because they are so white, they blend into the snow very well, especially after a fresh snowfall like we had last night. As far as you never seeing one, you’re the boy who couldn’t find the shovel in the barn when I needed it, and it was right there next to the door where it always is. No surprise you haven’t seen one.”

He continued, “You be careful if you do ever see one. They are very deadly, and their venom has no cure if you get bit. Besides that, they are very aggressive and cranky when they come out. Seems like they hate the new snow but come out anyway. You just keep an eye out when you are outside doing whatever it is you do all day in them woods.”

Usually, I can get a feel when my grandfather was jerking my chain, but this time, he seemed serious. I decided to go to a higher authority, one who was always brutally honest with me, and one who absolutely hated snakes. Grandma. She wouldn’t lie to her grandson. Grandma was in the

kitchen working on dinner. I pulled up a kitchen chair and asked her what all this was about snow snakes and was grandpa just jerking me around as usual. “Land sakes boy, them snow snakes are very dangerous, you stay far away from them. Last thing we need is for you to get bit and become very sick, so you linger a long time before you die. You just be looking around everywhere when you go outside,” was her response.

With grandma, you always got the worst-case scenario, like the whole linger and die thing. Still, she was no prankster, and besides me, was grandpa’s second favorite victim with his pranks. I decided to stay on the side of caution and observe for a bit, from the safety of our living room, of course. I wasn’t about to set foot outside while there was snow on the ground.

The next morning, my grandmother was making breakfast, as my grandfather sat at the kitchen table, drinking coffee and reading the newspaper. He told my grandmother, “Look here, three people in Ohio got bit by snow snakes last week. Two of them have died, and one is pretty sick. Guess that snowstorm we got brought snakes out in Ohio when it blew through there.”

My grandmother took the news with sort of an agitated state, saying, “When will people learn to look out for them anyway? You be really careful out there boy. We ain’t got the money for a funeral for you, so you just keep your eyes wide open for them snow snakes.”

Well, that did it for me. There was no way both of them were pranking me. My grandmother always used the “worst case stuff” when she was serious. There

was no way I was going to get bit by a snow snake. I was simply going to stay in the house anytime it snowed. Simple as that. One problem to that plan: school, that loathsome childhood affliction.

The next morning, I pleaded with my grandmother to let me stay home from school. There was still plenty of snow on the ground, and I had a two mile walk to the bus stop. On top of that, I was thoroughly convinced the snakes were out in force.

My grandma would have none of it, and out the door she shoved me, sack lunch in my hand. It took 45 minutes for me to make the bus stop as I kept my eyes glued to the ground the entire way.

It didn’t snow anymore that spring, and summer came to us in the mountains. With a three-month parole from school, fishing and padding around in the woods became my primary interest, as snow snakes became a distant memory. Today, I still keep an extra eye out anytime it snows. Even though snow snakes are rare on the Western Slope, you just never know. Besides, my grandparents wouldn’t lie to a kid, would they?

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# GMUG reminds visitors: stay off soft roads this spring

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

As temperatures rise and snow begins to melt across the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forests, the Forest Service is asking visitors to help protect forest roads and natural resources by avoiding travel on soft, wet surfaces and respecting seasonal road closures.

Each spring, melting snow produces runoff that naturally seeks the path of least resistance. When surrounding ditches remain snow-filled or frozen, that water often flows directly down Forest Service roads. Although these roads are designed to handle seasonal mois-

ture, saturated roadbeds become soft and vulnerable to damage.

“When vehicles drive on soft roads, they leave deep ruts that channel water and accelerate erosion,” said Chris Phelps, an engineer with the GMUG National Forests. “This creates both visible and hidden damage that can take significant time and funding to repair.”

Long-term damage from rutting and erosion can reduce access for visitors, impact wildlife habitat and create safety hazards. Protecting roads until conditions improve helps ensure the forest remains accessible and healthy for everyone.

Seasonal gate closures help prevent these impacts. Forest staff monitor road conditions regularly and reopen gates as soon as roads are dry enough to support travel without causing harm.

Visitors can help by: Staying off wet or muddy roads and trails.

Honoring all posted gate closures and signs.

Checking road conditions before heading out.

Turning around when roads are soft enough to leave ruts.

For current road conditions, closure information, and spring recreation updates, visit the GMUG’s official website or call your local district office.