

Dogs on the trail



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

The summer of 2025 was an incredibly busy time for Search and Rescue (SAR) teams around the state, including our Posse here in Montrose. With the wild-fires at the Black Canyon and several in West End, normal summer missions and duties, and the hunting seasons, teams did not get much time off.

Any first responder will tell you of the perils of anyone using the “Q” word, (quiet) when talking about their shifts or activities with their unit. I know of a detective that once mentioned the Q word, and was rewarded with a double homicide, single homicide, and two unattended deaths. This was in a town that saw perhaps a homicide every two years. Needless to say, he never mentioned that horrible word again.

Summer season brings rescues that are usually associated with heat related illnesses. Colorado is a place where heat related illnesses could be a real problem. When nighttime lows often dip into the 50s and daytime highs reach the upper 90s, coupled with

humidity so low that perspiration evaporates from the skin undetected, the outdoor person best watch their step.

During the summer months we often see a flow of monsoonal moisture that increases our humidity a great deal. This happens to be the same time of year we, as outdoor loving folks, are the most active outdoors. This would include all our activities that are physical in nature, like hiking, backpacking, kayaking, exercising and many others. This keeps the SAR crews up to their eyeballs with missions, but not all of them are for people.

According to The Vail Daily, SAR crews in Colorado responded to at least 4 missions during June of 2025 to save dogs. Each rescue had a distinct set of circumstances, from day hikers bringing the dog along, to multi-day backpacking trips in the high country. In every case, sheer exhaustion was the cause of distress in the dog.

One mission involved two hikers that were three days into a backpacking trip in the Lost Creek Wilderness area. They summoned help when their dog was lying down and refusing to go any further. The mission involved five team members, who hiked into the wilderness area with a litter, and hauled the dog out. The mission took over 10 hours to complete. The dog was just exhausted, and the paws were on the verge of blistering because of the rough terrain.

Every SAR team has their



Our two pups love the summer and playing outdoors, but we keep a close eye on them, especially when it is hot. (Photo/ Mark Rackay)

own policy regarding the rescue of pets, but generally, they don't respond to animal rescues. They just don't have the time or personnel for such missions, especially in volunteer organizations. Our own policy is to not respond for pets, but we will help take care of them if we are there on a mission to rescue the owner. On several occasions we have brought home dogs, along with their injured owner, assuring all are delivered to safety. The same is true for people stranded because their vehicle is stuck or broken down. We will rescue the people, but the vehicle stays, until the owner organizes a tow.

The crazy thing about all these dog rescues is they are very easily preventable.

As dog owners, you have the responsibility for the well-being of your pup. Keep in mind that the pup might not have the same physical conditioning or capabilities that you do. Dogs can usually run full throttle for short periods, but they just are not built for the long haul. A 10-hour day of hiking is just too much for a dog to endure.

The high summer heat can kill your pets that recreate with you with the same conditions that can kill us. If your dog's body temperature exceeds 104 degrees, it could kill them. With their fur coats, they cannot cool down in front of a fan the way humans do.

Dogs cool down by panting, which becomes less and less effective as the

temperatures and humidity rises. Panting evaporates moisture from the mouth and lungs. This evaporation normally cools their body, but if the humidity is high, evaporation cannot take place, and their body will overheat very quickly. Although dogs don't sweat like humans, they do have sweat glands in their paw pads. This sweating, along with the cool surface of the paw pads, helps dissipate heat. On hot surfaces, such as hot rock surfaces on the trail, there is no heat dissipation happening, so the dog overheats quickly.

Dogs don't wear hiking boots, and their feet are sensitive to sharp rocks and hot or cold surfaces. When the dog has had enough, he simply lies down, refusing to go any further. Keep your dog in the coolest place available when they are outdoors with you during hot times. Try and keep their activity at a minimum and give them plenty of cool water to drink. Remember, if you are hot, they are probably overheated.

I see people who let their dog run along unleashed while on the trail, and this really grinds my gears. While you walk along, the dog runs up ahead, then back to you, then off to explore something else. Dogs might cover twice the territory that you do, and don't stop until exhaustion takes over. May trails require dogs to be leashed, but some folks chose to ignore these laws. Even the best trained dog will run off after a rabbit or deer, so

please keep that in mind.

Dogs require lots of water, just like people, when being physically active, and more so at altitude and in the heat. Bring along plenty of extra water and snacks to keep them energized. A collapsible water bowl, harness and leash, and protection for their feet, such as dog booties for paw protection can go a long way in ensuring your best friend is well cared for.

As the summer heats up, we are going to see an increase of people and dogs on our trails, as it should be here in Colorado. It is finally the summer we have waited so long for. Please remember, SAR teams are here to help people in emergencies, not to carry out tired, dehydrated, or injured dogs, especially when these type of pup emergencies could be prevented by some preparation and common sense from the owner.

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 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

TRAIL

FROM PAGE B1

before Brachman-Goldstein's death, but noted there was no snow on the standard route where her team found his body.

“The most important thing is just leave a trip plan with somebody so that they can check on you,” Nergui said, recounting the mission to The Colorado Sun. “Leave the time that you will check in with others if you go and recreate solo.”

Traveling into Colorado's mountains always carries risk, and search and rescue teams recommend hikers tell someone not traveling with you where you plan to park, your intended route, when you expect to be back and what is a reasonable time to call 911 if you haven't returned.

Brachman-Goldstein was an experienced outdoorsman who had climbed Mount Sneffels several times, alone and with friends, his family said in an obituary. Sneffels was one of his favorite fourteeners.

“Bret found a home and a place where he was truly free among the peaks with a community of

wonderful friends that shared a boundless enthusiasm for wild places only the mountains could provide,” his family wrote.

He moved to Montrose from Denver about five years ago, his family said, and enjoyed hiking, climbing, running, mountain biking and backcountry skiing.

The recovery operation offered a glimpse into the challenges rescuers face in the rugged San Juan mountains.

The entire mission to locate and recover the body took about 5 hours, starting at 8:39 a.m. when dispatchers notified the Ouray Mountain Rescue team about the body, Nergui said. Because of the coordinates provided by dispatch showing the proximity of the body to the summit, Nergui coordinated with a helicopter in Montrose to be on standby.

From the Upper Yankee Boy Basin trailhead, two rescuers reached the body in about 45 minutes and confirmed the location, she said. Rescuers used a helicopter and a specialized team trained in long-line operations to recover the body. It took 10 minutes for the helicopter

to fly from the landing zone in Yankee Boy Basin, drop a line to the rescuers, and transport the body to the search and rescue vehicle at the trailhead, Nergui said.

As the mission was underway, a deputy with the Ouray County Sheriff's Office and alpine rangers were near the trailhead notifying hikers about the recovery effort.

Backcountry safety tips

Nergui and her team's rescues in the San Juan Mountains are often challenging because of the rugged, steep terrain. There's often spotty, or zero, cellphone coverage, so rescuers must rely on radios, but even then, calls get blocked by canyon walls.

“We usually have somebody at the trailhead and they basically act as a relay into town,” she said.

She recommends hikers bring a two-way satellite communication device. If planning to use the built-in emergency SOS via satellite function on an iPhone, familiarize yourself with the tool before hitting the trail.

Backcountry search and rescue teams in Colorado suggest

hikers follow the “three T's” to stay safe in the mountains: trip planning, training and taking the essentials.

“We know you want to go light and fast, but you can still carry a few survival essentials,” Anna DeBattiste, with the Colorado Search and Rescue Association, said. “You can definitely leave a trip plan with someone back home, and you can make sure you truly have the training for the type of terrain that you're going to be in.”

The group recommends the following tips:

Trip planning: Make sure to check the weather before heading out, including hourly predictions for where you're going, not just where you are coming from. On average, the temperature drops four degrees for every 1,000 feet of elevation gain. To reduce your risk of getting caught in a thunderstorm, which are notorious in Colorado's mountains, start hiking early to get off peaks and ridges and away from trees before noon.

Download a map to your phone while you still have ser-

vice, or better yet, bring a paper map.

Leave your plan with a responsible person who isn't going with you. Make sure this person knows where you plan to park, what your intended route is, who is with you, what you're carrying, what time you expect to be back and what time is reasonable to call 911 if you haven't returned.

Training: This is key to ensure you have the physical conditioning, knowledge and skill for whatever you're planning.

Taking the essentials: Deciding what you bring on a hike should be part of your trip planning process. In most cases, the Colorado Search and Rescue Association recommends bringing the “10 essentials” which includes more water than you think you'll need, food, sun protection, daily medications, travel first-aid kit, headlamp with extra batteries, multi-tool and duct tape, extra clothing layers, navigation tools, a power source, a whistle, emergency shelter like a bivy or blanket, and a lighter or waterproof matches.



10 SOUTH SELIG AVE

MONTROSE, COLORADO 81401

970-249-4226