

# How Safe is Safe?

## Pack Goats

by Larry Robinson

In what is more or less a parallel article to December's 'Safety' commentary, Kevin asked me to comment on taking our animals into the wilderness, and the potential for interaction with the permanent residents (wildlife).

The bottom line here is always the same no matter whether or not you are delving into the wilderness by yourself, or accompanied by your animals. And that is, that there are a number of large predators that make their home in the wilderness, and when you enter their space, you have some degree of risk. However, like everything else in life, management of risk is the issue, not the elimination of it. So is there a chance that you could have a negative encounter with wildlife that could result in injury to you or your animals? Definitely. However, that having been said, if one is to consider how many folks inhabit the wilderness during a given summer, and how few aggressive encounters that are reported, it can easily be deduced that the actual risk is small indeed. *That does not mean by any stretch of the imagination that one should not take prudent measures to minimize the potential for predator contact.*

First and foremost of these is hanging of food. To **not** hang food out of the reach of bears and others is tantamount to **inviting** an encounter with an unpleasant visitor. There are a number of ways to accomplish this, some much more creative than others, but for most of us, and the places we hike, a rope over a high branch will normally be enough. In areas where the bears have become educated/habituated to humans, that simple approach will not be enough. And in some areas, especially where grizzly contact is a potential, bear-proof canisters are necessary. In the Yosemite area of the lower-48, they are required by the U.S. Forest Service for backcountry camping.

However, if attractions to bears are eliminated, there doesn't seem to be much danger to you or your animals. Carolyn Eddy, our Pacific Coast goatpacking guru, indicates that blacks have wandered through the campground, looked at the goats, and kept on moving. I will say, and this is just my opinion, that I believe that high-lining is a requirement to keep track of where your animals are

during the night, and to enable you to hear their alarm if there is a predator lurking about. There have been a number of high-profile cases in the Pacific Northwest where non-highlined goats disappeared during the night, and were never found. That is bad for the goat owner, and for packgoating in general, as the regulatory agencies are extremely wary of feral goats coming in contact with the wild variety.

Some folks carry weapons, and that is their choice. If you had to put an animal down in the woods, a gun would be an effective means to accomplish that. However as a defense against an agitated predator, they are minimally effective and success with a weapon depends solely on your ability to remain cool, and to be able to place a shot where it will be effective. The ability to place such a shot at 2 am, woken out of a sound sleep, in the dark of night, that is a *very long stretch* of the imagination at best.

My preference is for bear-strength pepper spray. Accuracy is not near as important, and it is proven to be effective in most cases. I can tell you from personal experience that after just the tiniest little spray of this

stuff getting loose in my car, it is nasty stuff. A snootful of it should send most predators packing.

Finally, there are electric fence-type devices beginning to appear on the market that could be carried and posted around your campsite that are another line of defense against some predators. Overkill? Maybe. But electricity definitely does work on your goats... and bears, and could add to your peace of mind in the woods.

Want absolute security? Stay home. Otherwise, prudent management of the risk of your outdoors ventures should keep you safe and sound, and returning again and again to the wilderness.

### NAPgA

**Mission Statement: The NAPgA Inc. is an organization established specifically for promoting packing with Pack Goats**

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