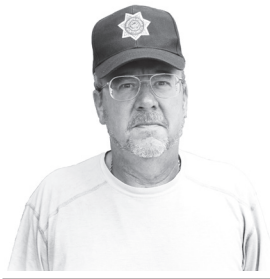


Overcoming outdoor phobias



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

My wife and I take our Jack Russell terrorist pups for a walk, every day, regardless of the weather. The hot, cold, windy, snow, rain changes between days and seasons is good training for them as well as us.

We generally hike the same beaten path, up the hill and cross over along an overgrown ditch bank for a mile or so, circling back to home, covering some 2 miles total. It is usually a pleasant walk, and the dogs enjoy it as much as we do, but lately, something has been bothering me.

As I near the ditch bank, I have the strange sensation that I am being watched. After many years in law enforcement, investigations, and executive protection, I am always alert to my surroundings, but this is different. Something is there, every time I walk along the ditch.

The ditch is overgrown with cattails and weeds, well over 7 feet tall, reaching out some 10 feet away from the ditch, so you cannot see the water in the ditch, but you can hear it flowing past. My wife says it is just some senile phobia I am developing in my latent years and laughs it off. She can laugh it off all she wants, but the creepy feeling is real.

The term phobia goes all the way back to ancient Greece. The Greeks used the word phobia with a Latin or Greek prefix to convey different kinds of fear. Before you laugh it off,

consider the fact that everyone is born with two separate phobias.

We are all born with two innate fears, the fear of falling and the fear of loud sounds. A study dating back to 1960 evaluated depth perception among 6- to 14-month-old infants, as well as young animals to come to these conclusions. As adults, the most common phobia, thanatophobia, is the fear of death.

Most phobias develop as a result of having a negative experience or panic attack related to a specific object or situation. Genetics and environment also play a role in phobia development. There may be a link between your own specific phobia and the phobia or anxiety of your parents. This could be a learned behavior or due to genetics.

As outdoor people, we all have experienced fear. As kids, we took off on camping trips in the woods, without a care or fear in the world, tackling the woods with a great exuberance, all the way up until that evil darkness set upon camp. Being outdoors, deep in back of beyond, in the darkness, can lead to all kinds of fears.

In the dark, sounds become more distinct. You can imagine that every twig that snaps is from an axe murderer sneaking into your camp, looking for more victims. Having an adult tell you there is nothing out there in the dark that isn't there in the light brings on no comfort. Axe murderers don't move around in the daylight.

As an adult, I have walked many predawn hours in the woods, heading to a hunting stand or a fishing spot. While I have no serious fear of that darkness in the woods anymore, I am still aware of large nocturnal animals pressing a heavy clawed foot into the dried leaves on the ground. Having a 2 million

lumen headlamp and a flashlight, along with a sidearm, help alleviate some of the stress.

It's OK to be, call it uneasy, in the woods all alone, especially in the cover of darkness. All by yourself, not another human being for miles, just you and the large axe murderer following you, and whatever else you cannot see out there, even if most of it is imaginary. It is a natural feeling.

Personally, I embrace that feeling, rather than be afraid of it. Perhaps it is because of my past but use the fear to your advantage. You are never going to be more alert to your surroundings, using all of your senses at the same time, than you are in that dark situation.

Moving along in the dark means you must be more alert to the hidden dangers you cannot see, such as hidden holes to drop in, tangles to cause a fall, or overhanging branches to swat your face. You also must be extra vigilant as to your location because you have no visual references to help keep you from becoming lost.

It is when your personal phobias begin to interfere with your enjoyment of the great outdoors. Imagine how difficult it would be for you filet a fish or process a game animal, and you are afflicted with aichmophobia, the fear of sharp instruments and the fear of cutting yourself.

How about if you were a fisherperson, and suffered from uncontrollable bouts of ichtyophobia, an extreme and overwhelming fear of fish. That one could have a severe impact on your life whenever you actually caught a fish. "Wow Fred, that is a monster bass," your buddy would holler to you as you ran over the next hill in full throttle panic.

My wife would never ride with me in our old offshore race boats, and even shied away from



Good thing I don't suffer from 'coyotophobia,' because this fella was just a few feet from me while I was on a deer hunt in Kansas. (Mark Rackay/Special to the MDP)

our very fast flats boats because she suffered from tachophobia, the fear of speed. She said, "the only fear I have is phrenophobia, and that comes from living with you." (I looked it up and it is the fear of "going crazy.")

Harness your outdoor fears and use them to your advantage. Never let a fear keep you from enjoying the outdoor world. On the other hand, a fear that arises deep from your gut can be a warning. Your old "fight or flight" mechanism kicking in. It is always a good idea to listen to it and be extra cautious or just plain stop, go the other way.

Last week, I had finally decided to take my own

advice, and get to the bottom of this phobia I was feeling every time I walked along the ditch bank. My dog had alerted to something, staring into the tall tangle of cattails, warning me that yes, something is truly there watching me.

I charged through the tall growth, finally breaking into the clear enough to see the small flowing ditch. On the far side of the ditch was a small sand bank. Standing on the bank, staring at me was the basis of all those fears. It was a duck, staring intently, yet angrily, at me. All this time, it had been a duck watching me. Great. I suffer from anatidaephobia,

the irrational fear that somewhere, a duck is watching me.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for several 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

Owl Creek Pass closed for maintenance

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests announce the temporary closure of a portion of County Road 8 (National Forest System Road

#858) – Owl Creek Pass road for road maintenance operations. The reconstruction, conducted by Ouray County Road and Bridge, will last through June 21.

Operations include rebuilding the road with

gravel crushed from the Owl Creek gravel pit and improving drainage along a five-mile stretch beginning at the gravel pit and ending at the Sleeping Indian Lodge.

This section of Owl Creek Pass road will be

closed for the duration of the project, with a brief weekend opening planned for June 14-16. The gravel pit and the Owl Creek Vista Overlook/Trailhead area will also be closed during construction and will

not open for the weekend. Flaggers will be stationed at each end of the closure to redirect traffic.

"We appreciate the public's patience during this relatively short closure," said Ouray District

Ranger Dana Gardunio. "This work will help ensure the long-term viability of this road."

For more information on this project, please contact Ouray County Road and Bridge at 970-626-5391.

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