

# IT'S LIGHTNING SEASON



## Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Everyone has that one friend that seems like an advertisement for a soap opera. You know the one, nicknamed “doom and gloom” or “black cloud.”

The one who never sees any game, never catches any fish, has 23 for a lucky number and still plays blackjack. The person who Murphy, of Murphy’s Law fame, has taken up permanent residence with.

One such guy was Roy Sullivan. Roy has the distinction of being struck by lightning seven times between 1942 and 1977, and somehow lived to tell the story, over and over. Roy was nicknamed the “Human Lightning Conductor” and the “Human Lightning Rod” by his friends. I bet his friends did not stand too close to him outdoors when the clouds began to rumble.

Sullivan was a park ranger at the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia during all of his lightning episodes. He was deeply saddened because people began to avoid him, for fear they would be struck also. For instance, he was walking one day with the chief ranger when lightning struck in the distance. The chief said, “I’ll see you later.”

On the morning of Sept. 28, 1983, Sullivan died at the age of 71 from a self-inflicted gunshot

wound. I guess Murphy will get you one way or another, Murphy *semper vincet*. Murphy always wins. So much for the myth lightning can’t strike the same place twice.

Since we are entering our summer monsoon season, I felt it would be time to discuss lightning. We have previously discussed lightning safety here, and there is probably not much need to hash it out all over again. Instead, we can explore some strange facts about the power of lightning and hopefully you will remember to seek proper shelter when the daggers from the sky start to fly.

Thunder and lightning play a large role in Greek mythology, with the god of the sky, Zeus, able to harness the power to use as a weapon. He was the ruler of all the Olympian gods and the god of lightning, thunder, law, order and justice.

He overthrew his own father, Cronus, and then succeeded him to the throne to become the supreme ruler from his lofty seat on Mount Olympus, the home of the gods.

His most dangerous weapon was a lightning bolt, hurled at anyone who defied or displeased him, especially liars and those who broke oaths. As he grew angry, he became very destructive, hurling lightning bolts with such ferocity that they caused violent storms, wreaking havoc across the earth.

We have always been told it is perfectly safe to seek cover in a vehicle during a thunderstorm. Well, maybe not always.

May 15, 1994, found a man in Pleasant View, Tennessee parking his tractor/semi-trailer in front of his home, happy to have made it there before the brunt of



Lightning is nothing to fool around with, and some folks have very unlucky encounters with it. (Mark Rackay/Special to the MDP)

the rainstorm arrived.

Lightning struck the vehicle and killed the man. In fact, a study from NOAA, called Storm Data lists 212 events of lightning strikes near vehicles over a 20-year time frame, resulting in 42 deaths and 288 injuries.

The study from NOAA cannot be taken as a condemnation of safety in a vehicle because it does not define whether victims were actually inside an enclosed automobile, leaning on a vehicle, or near a vehicle, during the strike.

For my money, you are still pretty safe in an enclosed vehicle during a storm.

The Federal Aviation Administration states a plane is likely to be struck by lightning once every 1,000 flight hours. This equates to about once a year for an airplane in service. In fact, aircraft often trigger lightning when flying through a heavily charged region in a cloud. In these instances, the lightning flash originates at the airplane and extends away in opposite directions. You see, modern aircrafts are built to be

protected from lightning and completely safe. Well, maybe not if Murphy is one of the passengers.

There was that time Pan Am Flight 214 encountered lightning on Dec. 8, 1963.

The Boeing 707 was on its final leg of the flight, having left Baltimore, Maryland on the way to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, when they encountered a line of thunderstorms. The pilot decided to circle the airport, in a holding pattern until the storms passed. At 8:58 p.m., the aircraft was struck by lightning and burst into flames.

The aircraft spiraled down to the ground, killing all 81 passengers. It was later determined the lightning strike ignited fuel vapors in one of the aircrafts fuel tanks. The exact manner of ignition was never determined but the investigation yielded information about lightning strikes and aircraft, leading to new safety regulations.

An unmanned spacecraft, a \$78-million Atlas-Centaur rocket, launched in poor weather conditions in March of

1987, was struck by a lightning bolt 49 seconds after launch, causing its controls to fail and the rocket to start falling apart. The rocket’s debris landed in the ocean, near the shore. Fortunately, it was an unmanned space flight.

Lightning bolts carry up to 1 billion volts of electricity. That works out to the same amount of power as 79.4 million car batteries or 666 million AA batteries. The earth is struck 1.4 billion times a year. If each bolt killed a person, all humanity would be wiped out in five years flat. Statistics show that almost 90 percent of people who are struck by lightning survive, only killing 10 percent. These statistics also claim 81 percent of people struck by lightning are men. Try explaining that one away.

Lightning isn’t always a bad thing. Edwin Robinson, a resident of Falmouth, Massachusetts, was blinded by a car accident in 1971. Then, he was struck by lightning in June 1980, knocking him unconscious for 20 minutes. Upon awakening, Robinson discovered that

his sight had returned.

If we are going to recreate outdoors, eventually we are going to encounter lightning. I have been on a boat offshore the Florida Keys that was struck by lightning on two separate occasions. I am happy to report that while the damage to the vessel’s electronics was fatal, yours truly was uninjured, although I do have this strange twitch that appears anytime a storm is approaching, and other boats move away from me.

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# Day of Giving helps support Colorado’s outdoors

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

Colorado Parks and Wildlife is hosting a 24-hour fundraising campaign, CPW Day of Giving, on July 25, to raise funds for state park and wildlife programs and increase awareness of how donors can support CPW in a valuable way.

CPW’s mission is to perpetuate the state’s wildlife resources, provide a quality state parks system, and provide enjoyable and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities that educate and inspire current and future generations to serve as active stewards of Colorado’s natural resources.

Colorado is home to 43 world-class state parks, more than 960 species of

wildlife and 23 million acres of public lands, ranging from wetlands to forests, canyon landscapes to mountain lakes, and peaceful eastern plains. Join us in keeping Colorado, Colorado.

Donors make a big difference in CPW’s work. Every contribution goes a long way to help protect our wildlife and natural spaces, support our state parks and outdoor recreational opportunities, and introduce new people to the wonders of Colorado’s great outdoors.

All dollars raised through the CPW Day of Giving will sponsor CPW programs and projects. Below are programs donors help support:

- Ridgway State Park Overlook Color-

blind-Friendly Viewing Stations will install colorblind-friendly EnChroma technology-enhanced viewing stations at select popular overlooks within Ridgway State Park. They will provide inclusive opportunities for colorblind individuals to experience the vibrant beauty of the San Juan and Cimarron Mountain ranges.

• Agents of Discovery is an augmented reality gaming platform, inspired by Pokémon GO, that provides free self-guided experiences to learn about our state parks in fun and engaging ways. Agents of Discovery is available at 14 Colorado state parks and guests have played more than 17,700 missions.

See SUPPORT page B4



The Arkansas Headwaters Recreation Area’s River Safety in Schools Program aims to saturate the Arkansas Valley with basic river safety knowledge and equipment, starting with local children. (Courtesy photo/Colorado Parks and Wildlife)



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