

Rattlesnake Encounter on Forest Trail

Location: Horn Creek (near Keremeos, BC)

Date of Incident: June 7, 2018

Details of Incident: A worker unexpectedly happened upon a rattlesnake on a trail at the end of the day. The snake was well blended in so they both startled each other. The snake lunged at the worker but did not strike. The worker backed up and the snake slithered off.

From the WildSafeBC website: <https://wildsafebc.com/rattlesnake/>

The Northern Pacific Rattlesnake: Habitat

Found in our province's dry south-central interior valleys. They live in a variety of habitats, from open forests to riparian areas. Often you will find them among sage brush and antelope brush in shrub-steppe habitat. They overwinter in communal dens (often with other snake species) found in talus slopes and rock slides, which usually face south-west. They spend all winter in these dens, from approximately October to April.

Rattlesnake Safety: Bites

Rattlesnake bites are very rare in British Columbia and are almost never fatal. Most snake bites are due to people deliberately trying to handle or harm rattlesnakes. The most important thing to remember is to get the victim to the hospital.

If you are bitten:

1. Stay calm and remove yourself from the area. Move slowly or be carried.
2. Remove any constrictive clothing or jewelry, which otherwise would act as a tourniquet and concentrate the venom and prevent fresh blood from entering the area (which is not desirable).
3. Go to the nearest hospital. Phone ahead if possible, or phone 911. Preferably, have someone else drive you.
4. Mark swelling with lines and times every 10 minutes or so. This will help doctors assess the severity of the bite.
5. If necessary, you may clean the bite area to prevent further infection.
6. Do not:
 - Apply a tourniquet
 - Make an incision
 - Attempt to suck out the venom
 - Ice the wound
 - Kill the snake
 - Bring the snake to the hospital. Snakes are protected by law and doctors do not need to identify a snake to treat snakebites in BC.

Working safely in rattlesnake habitat:

If you know you are working in known rattlesnake habitat, be observant and follow these rules for safety:

Clothing

- Wear long loose pants
- Use high leather or rubber boots while working in tall grass or shrubs.

Actions

- Don't put your hands and feet where you cannot see them
- Use a stick to turn over an object under which you think a snake could be hidden
- Be careful stepping over large logs and rocks- step around and not over
- Familiarize yourself with rattlesnake ecology and timing of behaviours. (ie: are snakes in hibernation? Are you likely to be working near potential den sites or rookeries?)

Encounters

If you hear a rattlesnake:

- Stop immediately
- Locate the snake
- If you are close to the snake, remain still and allow the snake to calm down and back away
- Once you are one snake body length away, step back and go around the snake.

Remember, all snakes including rattlesnakes are protected under BC's Wildlife Act. It is illegal to kill or harm snakes, or to remove them from the wild.

If you encounter a dead rattlesnake, don't touch it! The biting reflex remains intact even after death.

Do not expect all rattlesnakes to rattle at you. Their first response to disturbance is to stay camouflaged and hide. Their second response is to escape. They usually will only rattle when cornered, surprised or when they feel very threatened. Striking is usually a last resort. Warning signs of a strike include a body in a coil, head slightly raised with the neck in an 's' shaped curve, and rattling.

Pets

If you are concerned about your pet's safety while out playing or hiking, keep it on a leash while walking in rattlesnake habitat. Snakebite can be serious for small animals, but larger animals often recover with treatment for pain, swelling, and infection. If you believe your pet has been bitten by a rattlesnake, seek veterinary care immediately.



(Alert submitted by Doug Campbell, Gorman Bros. Lumber Ltd. 250-768-5131)