



AAC Publications

Snakebite

Kentucky, Red River Gorge, Muir Valley, Bruise Brothers

On October 6, a 25-year-old female was climbing a route at Bruise Brothers wall in Muir Valley. Approximately 15 feet up the route, she was bitten by a copperhead snake after placing her hand within a crack. Venom was received from the bite, resulting in significant pain. The climber was assisted back to the parking area and transported via ambulance to a local hospital.

ANALYSIS

Dangerous wildlife encounters are not common in the Red River Gorge. Snakebites (primarily from the copperhead) are the most prevalent wildlife encounter that results in a visit to an emergency department. The Wolfe County Search and Rescue (SAR) team responds to only one or two snakebites per year, and most incidents are unrelated to climbing.

Wolfe County SAR recommends that climbers be mindful of snakes on cool mornings in the spring and fall. Snakes are cold-blooded and seek out locations to warm their bodies, taking advantage of rocky cliff lines and boulders that retain heat. Copperheads are not typically aggressive, but will strike without warning when threatened. Climbers should avoid throwing out food scraps that draw mice and other small animals to a crag, as snakes will follow their food source. Muir Valley posts signs in areas where copperheads are known to frequent or den.

If a climber is bitten by a venomous snake, Wolfe County SAR recommends seeking immediate medical attention. Stay calm and remove any tight-fitting clothing and jewelry near the bite. Irrigate the wound with clean water as soon as possible to remove any remaining venom at or near the surface of the skin. Apply a clean dressing and, if possible, take a photo of the snake and note coloring and pattern from a safe distance. (Do not attempt to capture or kill the snake.) Walk the injured person to a vehicle, keeping the affected limb at the level of the heart, if possible. If the skin begins to turn red and swell, take a photo or mark the outer edges with a pen and note the time. This will help medical providers better estimate the degree of envenomation. (Source: John May, Chief, Wolfe County Search and Rescue and the Editors.)

Images



Native to the Southeast, the copperhead's range extends north to Massachusetts and west to Texas.

Article Details

Author	Wolfe County Search and Rescue
Publication	ANAM
Volume	11
Issue	72
Page	60
Copyright Date	2019
Article Type	Accident reports