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SIDE SHOTS

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SURVEYORS ON DISPLAY AT REDEDICATION OF 40TH PARALLEL MONUMENT IN BOULDER

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The Snake

by Earl F. Henderson, PLS

Looking back on the whole experience, from the relative safety of the emergency room, I probably would have been better off if the snake had just bitten me. You know that startling feeling you get for an instant when you first spot a snake, no matter what kind it is? That instantaneous adrenaline rush? If you have your wits about you, and can identify what kind of snake it is quickly enough, you can either hop quickly to avoid being bitten, or act like you weren't startled at all, if the rest of your crew is around. Well I thought I was lucky that my crew wasn't right there because I jumped back rather abruptly and quite a ways too. I'm not sure why I was so startled by this snake. I've seen thousands. I guess I was so into the experience I was having I was just extraordinarily surprised when he broke my euphoria. I had almost stepped on him and he was pretty startled himself and reacted. I didn't just stop with one jump either. If my crew had been there at that moment they would have thought I had something up my pants because I took several hops to get clear and well down the slope from the snake.

Now I'm not sure if you feel the same way but once I spot a snake, I want to keep it in sight for a while to make sure that I don't have another similar encounter again in the very near future. I kept my eyes on that snake even through those leaps and once I stopped, my eyes were glued to him while I caught my breath. I was so intent on watching that snake I didn't even see the ground bees clouding up around me or feel them starting to crawl right on up my legs. I was so dumbfounded when they started stinging me, for a couple of seconds I couldn't seem to figure out what was happening. I guess the adrenaline hadn't quite gotten out of my system when it finally struck me and my legs just started carrying me as fast as they could go down the slope through the woods.

I haven't even told you that we were in the middle of a 120 acre boundary traverse through beautifully wooded rolling terrain. It was the kind of job we all got into surveying originally to do. I had left the crew to continue traversing while I scouted ahead for evidence, cut line, and flagged items for them to side shoot. I was probably about 800 feet ahead of the crew and up to this point, enjoying a transcendent surveying experience.

Anyway, right about the time that I was realizing that running from the bees was not such a good idea, I tripped over some small stump or log or something and began to stumble down the slope trying in vain to regain my balance. In actuality I was running at an even faster

pace and out of control. As you can possibly imagine, this didn't really do much for calming that adrenaline rush. I somehow managed to stumble straight into a mass of greenbriars.

I'm not talking about blackberry briars here. I'm talking about the greenbriars that grow bark on them and form those huge clumps and have large needles. I was freaking out by now and for the first time started to utter audible noises that I hadn't even heard on Wild Kingdom. It scares me even now to recall the sounds that came out of my own throat. The bees were happy though. They could quit chasing and get down to real business. I was thrashing at them and in doing so was tearing myself and my clothing to pieces on the briars thinking that it was more bees. My mind was completely confused by the apparent volume of stings I was receiving and the sensation of being wrapped up in barbed wire for no known reason. As I continued to thrash I became more and more entangled in the briars and my torn clothing and so could move about less and less. As my movements were forced into slow motion my mind began to slowly focus on my situation and I finally realized my best course of action was to stop moving all together and just let the bees finish what they started. It was truly a painful decision to have to make.

I had become a bloody ragged mess. The crew had heard my guttural cries and came running up in anticipation of finding me fighting off some bear or mountain lion. There is nothing quite so humiliating as finding yourself in a position where the people you have been trained to lead are so overwhelmed by the sight of you that they can no longer remain standing from doubling over in laughter and you can't even move let alone walk away. I might as well have been tied up.

By the time they were able to compose themselves and begin to think about lending some assistance, the bees had finished their dirty work. The only course of action was to use the brush axes to cut away the briars. Everyone was concentrating heavily at this point so as not to cause more injuries. I had made that point quite clear I can tell you that for certain. About the time that my upper body was free of it's trap, my instrument operator noticed that the briars were interlaced with poison ivy.

We agreed that at this point it really didn't make much of a difference, so the crew just kept on cutting away. By the time they were finished and I was freed from the pen, most of my cuts and scrapes had begun to clot and my

clothing looked like the remains from the transformation of the Incredible Hulk. I looked like Bill Bixby left in the rags created by Lou Ferrigno.

I've had plenty of time to reflect on those events while hiking back to the van, riding to the hospital, and being treated. I didn't have to wait at all when we got there. The nurses took one look at me and knew I needed immediate attention. Luckily, I haven't required too many stitches. It was mostly scratches, scrapes, and puncture wounds. Removing the broken briars from my

skin has been pretty painful. My ankle is only sprained and not broken. The doctor has put me on steroids for the bee stings and poison ivy, even though the ivy hasn't had time to show signs yet. A precautionary step he told me. On top of it all, while the nurse was cleaning me up, she managed to find and remove a few ticks. It's not too surprising with all the blood around.

Do you want to know the worst part of the whole ordeal? It was a black snake. ■