

Some (not too scary) Words of Caution:
by Cliff Courtney

There are a few things that should be mentioned about hiking that I hope do not deter you. One of the most asked questions is the availability of water, and if you should drink it if you find it. As a resident of the Stehekin valley all my life, I drink just about any water I stumble onto, but there have been some reports of giardia near the valley. The National Parks Service does not recommend drinking the water without first filtering, boiling, or treating it. It's your choice - for day hikes, if you are worried about it, you can always bring water with you from a potable source.

Other things that tend to concern people are our bears, snakes, bees, and ticks that a hiker will run into occasionally. Snakes (timber rattlers) are not a real problem with day-hikers as the trails are usually brushed and there is good visibility so you can see the snakes and the snakes can see you. The rattlesnake is not an offensive animal and will try to get away from you if it can. Confrontations only happen when one is stepped on or feels threatened.

Black bears that live in the valley have no history of human confrontation except when they are looking for food. That is, looking for the food that humans may possess, not looking for humans, as food. The most dangerous time is when mother bears have their cubs with them and they feel the safety of their offspring is being threatened. Bears have poor eyesight and a very sensitive nose. Many people think they are being aggressive when they raise up on their hind legs, but they are merely trying to figure out what you are. The only real problems I have heard about have been caused by dogs chasing bears, which leads to the bear chasing the dog. The dog then runs back to his master for safety and hides, cowering behind his master's legs. That is if he can catch him, for at this point the master is usually running at a fast clip also. Most of the trails in the valley have restrictions against taking a dog with you. There has been no human injury due to bears in our area. If you should meet one on the trail it will usually run when it sees you. If not, wait for it to get off the trail. If you suspect it is a female with cubs, don't rush it, it may become defensive.

Ticks are abundant on some trails in the spring and early summer. Our local ticks do not seem to be a carrier of any diseases, but they can be quite a nuisance all the same. It is a good idea to check for ticks after a hike. They are most commonly found on the scalp.

A bee sting to many people is only a slight annoyance. But if you are allergic it is a life threatening situation. If you are allergic carry your bee kit with you. If you are in doubt about anybody in your group, it is wise to carry one in case of a reaction. The kits are very light —and can be slipped into your pocket. The kit contains adrenalin and antihistamine tablets. This can't be over-emphasized as most people fail to understand the importance of the situation, and casually leave their life support system at home. I am not allergic, but if I were I would rather have a couple bears and forty or fifty rattlesnakes in my tent with me (just trying to make a point) than to have one bee and no kit!

Carnivorous insects, such as horseflies, deerflies, and mosquitoes, can often be viewed in the area and the amazing thing about them is they are very curious and like to afflict slight doses of pain to test your tolerance. Since many of you will be fortunate enough to see some of these native insects first hand, it is wise to bring some, repellent along. The repellent rarely works, but at least it takes your mind off the annoyance while you are putting it on.