

Castlewood Snake Park

By Marilyn Reeves

If you take Parker Road a little bit south of Franktown there is a wilderness area called Castlewood Canyon State Park. The rugged beauty of the place is rocky and desert-like, with an abundance of cactus, sagebrush and other features more reminiscent of Arizona or New Mexico than most parts of Colorado.

I recently had my second visit there as my grandniece Jackie and her new husband Cody had chosen it as the site to hold their wedding reception, and they rented one of their open-air pavilions that could accommodate a large number of people. It was one of those warm, summer-like days this past October, and we enjoyed visiting with friends and family of the bride and groom and the delicious food that had been brought in.

I was having a good time up to the point where one of the young men passed around his cellphone showing a picture he had just taken of a rattlesnake sunning itself just outside the public restrooms. Having already made a trip to that facility earlier, it gave me quite a chill and from that point on I began nervously looking around the floor of the pavilion to be sure that he (or she) or one of its cousins wasn't crawling around our feet!

It took me back to the first time I visited Castlewood Canyon. It must have been about ten years ago, and I had been invited to join the family on a hike there one hot summer day. Sounded like fun as I hadn't been on an outing for quite a while.

My daughter-in-law Mary pocketed a trail map and we headed down a path alongside a dry creek bed. I kept my eyes peeled for things like scorpions and tarantulas, even though we were probably too far north for those kinds of critters. My radar for creepy-crawlies went into maximum overdrive, however, when we saw a rattlesnake curled up on a nearby ledge. It seemed to be sleeping, so we pressed on. And on.

The original plan was to take the short circle of perhaps a mile, but we somehow missed the turnoff. So like the Energizer Bunny we just kept going and going, with no end in sight, the hot summer sun beating down on us, and considering my usual couch potato habits, I wasn't sure I was going to make it. I can't tell you how far we actually walked before the trail finally curved back toward the parking lot, but it was a good three-hour hike. I kept guzzling water along the way, keeping my eye out for more rattlesnakes and by the time we finally got back to the car my legs were shaky, my heart was beating in my head, and my face had turned an alarming shade of fuchsia.

Luckily we didn't encounter any more snakes that day, but if anyone invites me to return to Castlewood any time soon, I think I'll pass, and leave it to those who enjoy the heat and the cactus and don't mind dodging rattlesnakes. I'll just stick to the relative safety of my couch. Potato or no potato.