

Close Call

By Suzy Hopkins

It was a hot but dry day of patrolling on horseback as a park ranger at Folsom Lake State Park in California. I rode the shady trails where people hike and mountain bikes are banned.

Unfortunately a biker who was breaking the rules had collided with a hiker and that person was badly scraped up and feeling shaky. I dismounted and ground-tied my horse. The horses are trained to stay in place when the ends of the reins are dropped to the ground. My horse grazed the grass at the edge of the trail. I helped the hiker by bandaging the wounds with my first aid kit.

Suddenly I noticed a strange sound coming from my horse. He jerked his head up. That's when I heard the rattlesnake. It had bitten the nose of my unsuspecting horse. Since horses breathe only through their noses the snakebite would cause the tissues to swell and suffocate this 900 pound animal. Luckily I knew of this possibility and always carried a nine inch length of garden hose in my pack. I jammed it deep in one nostril to prevent it from swelling and waited to see what happened next. The horse survived but acted groggy so I walked beside him to the ranger station and we went off duty.

Luckily for my horse I had the wherewithal needed for this particular purpose and my trusty partner survived.