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Mountain Bike Riders Attacked by Mountain Lion

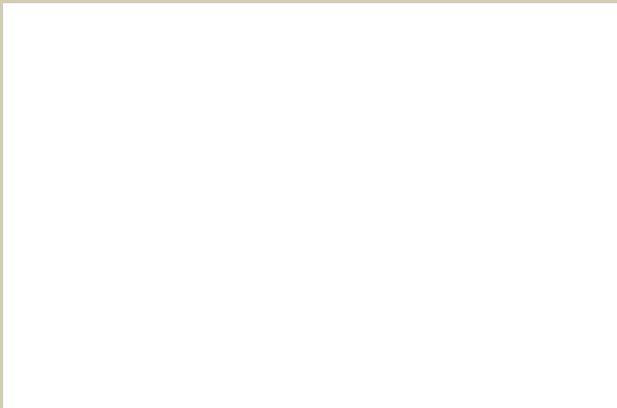
by Jim Fitzgerald  
posted Jan. 9, 2004

One mountain bike rider is dead and another is in serious condition after two separate mountain lion attacks Thursday, January 8, in Lake Forest, California. The attacks occurred in close proximity to one another near Cactus Hill trail in Whiting Ranch Wilderness Park, a popular off-road riding area surrounded by housing tracts and commercial buildings.

Mark Jeffrey Reynolds, 35, an account executive from Foothill Ranch, California is the deceased victim and Anne Hjelle, 30, of Santa Ana, California is in serious condition at nearby Mission Hospital.

"The woman in the hospital owes her life to her friend who did exactly the right thing," said Captain Jerry Spansail of the Department of Fish and Game. "She fought it off. It sounds like a horrendous fight."

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The mountain lion seized Hjelle by the head at around 4:00 p.m. and dragged her down a slope with her riding partner, Debi Nicholls, allegedly holding on to Hjelle's legs and striking the animal. With the assistance of passing mountain bike riders, the lion released Hjelle and they were able to escape.

Officials speculate that the mountain lion attacked Hjelle in an effort to guard the body of Reynolds, which was found nearby. It is believed that he had been dead for two to 12 hours before the second attack. Reynolds was riding alone and had apparently stopped to fix a broken chain when he was attacked.

Within hours of the second attack, Orange County Sheriffs killed a mountain lion that experts believe is responsible for both attacks. The mountain lion was spotted from a Sheriff's helicopter as it stalked three officers, two of whom fired their weapons and killed the lion. It was a male, approximately two years old,



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and weighed 110 pounds.

"It's very abnormal behavior for mountain lions," said Doug Updike, a senior wildlife biologist with the Department of Fish and Game. "Mountain lions are innately afraid of humans."

Updike stated that mountain lions prey mainly on deer and that the act of riding a mountain bike does not include inherent risks that would put them in greater danger than other outdoor enthusiasts.

"Mountain bike riders pose an image to a lion that is very different from a deer," he said. "I would think there would be much less likelihood that a mountain biker would be perceived as prey than a jogger. The easier that prey is to obtain or kill, the more likely [a mountain lion] is to take it."

Updike said the best thing to do if you encounter a mountain lion on the trail "is act like a noisy human. Some of the best advice is not to run, that could initiate a chase instinct in the lion. Back away very slowly and talk to it, make human sounds. If the cat knows you are a human there is greater likelihood that it will

not attack. If you are attacked by a lion, the best advice is to fight back. If your only option is to kick [the mountain lion], kick it. You don't want it to think you are a defenseless deer."

Mountain lions caused five fatalities in California in the last 110 years, this incident marks the first known fatality to an adult male in the state.

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