

The Cat on your Back!

How would you like to be out for a midnight run and get knocked on your keaster from a rear assault by a mountain lion?

Just going for a midnight run sounds spooky enough to me, but getting nose-to-muzzle with a mountain lion...? YIPES!!! That'd make a guy crack open a carton of catnip!

But that's apparently what happened to 17-year-old Wayne Flerlage a couple of weeks ago just outside of Alma (see story elsewhere in this issue). A cross country runner, the youngster was out for a midnight run on a country road when something attacked from behind, knocking him down, and sending him sprawling for about 10 feet.

FLERLAGE SAID he turned to see the big cat staring at him, and he had the wherewithall to give it a forearm cross-check and a kick in the chops, apparently convincing the beast to turn tail in pursuit of prey with a little less panache.

WHEW! I believe that's about the time I'd be searching for a rosary, a priest and an all-night laundromat and not necessarily in that order.

Of course, we have only Flerlage's word that he was attacked by a mountain lion, but the uniform scratches on his arm and torso

Mrs. Beam's son, Jim; perhaps not.

Some years ago I saw what appeared to be a large cat sitting on its haunches next to a bridge along a highway west of Manhattan. The thing appeared to be tan and spotted (mountain lion cubs often have spots which disappear as they mature). I can vouch for my condition at the time and what I saw looked like a mountain lion. But it was also about 9 p.m., and I was going 60 miles per hour, so who knows?

DESPITE THE hundreds of sightings, the Kansas Department of Wildlife & Parks won't declare definitively that there are wild mountain lions in Kansas, although I suspect the KDWP suspects there are. Wildlife biologists—like any good scientists—aren't going to make a public declaration of fact without indisputable evidence.

KDWP's reluctance to admit the existence of mountain lions in Kansas has led to a number of conspiracy theories—that KDWP has stocked mountain lions to control the state's deer population; that there have been road kills "covered up" by the agency; and that KDWP has even brought in mountain lions, embedded tiny cameras in their ears, and trained them to spy on deer poachers.

HA! I knew it! Big Brother Cougar is watching!

Seriously, I don't buy into conspiracy theories much, although there's substantial evidence to suggest there was a mountain lion lurking around the "grassy knoll" November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas. Hmm....that could explain all the hysteria in Dealy Plaza that fateful day. The CIA planted the mountain lion to distract the crowd along the motorcade route so the Mafia hitmen could...oh, never mind!

On its website blog (kdwp.blogspot.com/2006_04_01_archive.html), the KDWP recently conducted a public forum on the issue.

"THE TRUTH IS that in modern times there has not been indisputable evidence of a wild Kansas mountain lion—a photo, a track or a carcass from a road kill," the KDWP stated.

Dozens of Kansans chimed in on the issue, many of them with stories of mountain lion sightings and a few with some even stranger tales.

"I saw Bigfoot chasing a mountain lion in Bourbon County just outside Ft. Scott. Was the coolest thing I ever saw," said one anonymous blogger.

"Well, I do know we have mountain oysters here in Kansas. If we have those, we might have mountain lions," said another.

Ooooooaaaaay!

So the debate continues. Are there wild mountain lions in Kansas? Can't say for sure, but I'm not planning a midnight run along a country road any time soon.

Off the Mark

by Mark Portell

seem to confirm he was attacked by something, and there's no reason to believe he'd concoct such a tale. It certainly wasn't Felix the Cat who knocked the 5-11, 160-pounder to the ground.

Frankly, I believe the teenager, although I've never met him nor talked with him. Let's say I want to believe him because I've long been fascinated by the notion that mountain lions have returned to Kansas, although, to date, there's been no definitive proof of it.

THERE HAVE been hundreds of alleged sightings of the large felines in virtually every county in Kansas. Not long ago, Wabaunsee County led the state in the number of sightings, with Pottawatomie County not far behind.

I've talked to a number of folks who claim to have seen them in this neck-o'-the-woods. Some time back, a rural Wamegoan told me matter-of-factly he routinely sat on his back porch in the evenings and watched as a mountain lion followed a tree line along a creek northeast of his house.

The guy seemed credible enough, although I can't vouch for his condition during those evening back porch sessions. Perhaps he'd been swilling too much stuff distilled by