

Traveling Safely in Mountain Lion Country

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Mount San Jacinto State Park

If you see a cougar close up count yourself lucky! Really? Yep! Cats are ambush predators. You have likely been stalked on several occasions without knowing. They don't let you see them until it is too late. OR they present themselves to you to gauge your reaction. Run=Prey.

- Travel in groups, NEVER ALONE. Minimum 2 but 3 or more is best. A mountain lion won't take you all on, bad math. Fetching water or toilet breaks should always be done in pairs! You should be able to observe your partner from at least the shoulder up while they do their business. Seems odd I know, but imagine that curious cat is waiting for such a prime opportunity like catching you with your pants down. Don't be shy, you may live longer.
- Leave dogs at home. A dog probably won't hear or smell the cat coming unless trained to hunt cougar. Even the largest most aggressive dogs are a nice snack for a lion.
- Stand your ground. Don't run, don't scream or squeal; that goes for children as well. Have you ever heard a wounded rabbit or other small game? Crying sounds like lunch to a cat.
- Place small children on your shoulders. Make noise, shout and clap. Fight back? If a lion attacks, it has decided that the gain of a meal outweighs the risk of injury to itself. Therefore, it intends to eat you. Other reasons for attack may also be territorial, especially if you stumble upon a lion and its kill. It may attack to protect its meal.



- If you have to fight, NEVER GO DOWN! It may be the teeth and fore claws that scare us but cougars kill most often by tackling prey to the ground and disemboweling with very powerful hind legs/claws. Stay on your feet and you may have a chance of surviving.
- A rifle is useless, unless you carry military style (cocked locked and ready in hand). You won't have enough time in most attack cases. Same thing for hand guns.
- If you bleed or vomit, clean it up and take it with you. To a cat, blood equals injured prey while vomit means sickly prey. If you limp, try to hide it. Researchers claim mountain lions are keen to that, too.
- Don't park your tent on a tree line. Campers do this for wind/sun shelters, convenience of firewood or privacy for when nature calls. But if you are in cougar territory keep in mind cats keep to tree and boulder cover. If you are sleeping 20 feet from where they have been patiently waiting an attack can happen. Camp in open areas with good lines of sight.
- Situational awareness is your best defense. Are the birds chirping or squirrels chattering? Why or why not? Have you found fresh cougar tracks cross your path? Chances are the cat has been following and is watching your reaction to his tracks at that very moment.

Want to know more? Just watch a farm cat hunting. Now imagine that he is 20 times the size and 3 times as smart.
Stay Alert To Stay Safe.