

# The Cats Are Amongst Us

Enclosed are some photos taken on the Staircase trail in the Olympic National Park on Friday May 18, 2007. These were taken on a stretch of trail about 3 miles long. In addition, dozens of scat piles (cougar poop) which was directly next to the trail, there were also a lot of pug marks (cougar tracks) and scratched out spray puddles used to mark their territory. This area was a very busy trail until a forest fire in Olympia National Forest closed it down for approximately nine months in 2006 and 2007. Recently opened, we are now bumping into an area the cougars have re-claimed for there own. The dozens of deep scratch marks on the trees indicate that there is a female and at least one cub. Mom will scratch high while the cub scratches below her. Anyone traveling in this area should be ever vigilant. Note: the cub has been seen on the trail, apparently alone, but mom may not be far away.



Firearms are forbidden in all National Parks. To my knowledge pepper spray (bear spray) is not. According to some internet information on the subject, some national parks and the Sierra Club are trying to get it required that all

hikers carry it with them in all parks and all national forests. An encounter with pepper spray may not only save the life of the human and his/her stock, but may train the attacking animal that humans are not fun to eat and best be left alone.

Even if you are not riding in this area of the national park, it is a good idea that you become familiar with signs of an active cougar presence.

In my opinion, when it is legal to carry a firearm it is a wise move to have one on your person. From now on we will be carrying pepper spray with us when we may not legally carry a firearm. The carrying of pepper spray may not be a bad idea for any rider in the backcountry, even in addition to a firearm. It is very easy to miss with a gun if the animal is running at you. But with pepper spray a single blast may cover the whole area in front to you. Hopefully the wind is at your back.



Note: A deer antler rub will be somewhat smooth with some tares, but a cougar scratches the tree very deeply with its claws. Once seen never forgotten!



Thanks to Lynn Bo Gunther, Olympic National Park Trail Crew for taking these photos for us.

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