Animal Encounters

"In God's wilderness lies the hope of the world—the great fresh, unblighted, unredeemed wilderness."

—John Muir

The beauty and wonder of Mount Rainier National Park doesn't come just from the scenic grandeur of a single, towering mountain. The presence of wild creatures remains part of the experience of unblighted wilderness.

Being in the home of large creatures like bear and mountain lion can make Mount Rainier an exciting—and sometimes scary—place to visit. Though you are not likely to see them, if you do meet one of these larger mammals, learning more about them serves as your best defense.

Bears And Food

Much more commonly seen than mountain lions, black bears aren't nearly as shy. These large and curious opportunists are mostly vegetarian—about 90% of their food consists of grasses, flowering plants, roots, and berries. Only 10% of their diet comes from animals—usually insects and carrion. Bears have one of the most highly developed senses of smell, and like most wild animals, they are always looking for the easiest meal.

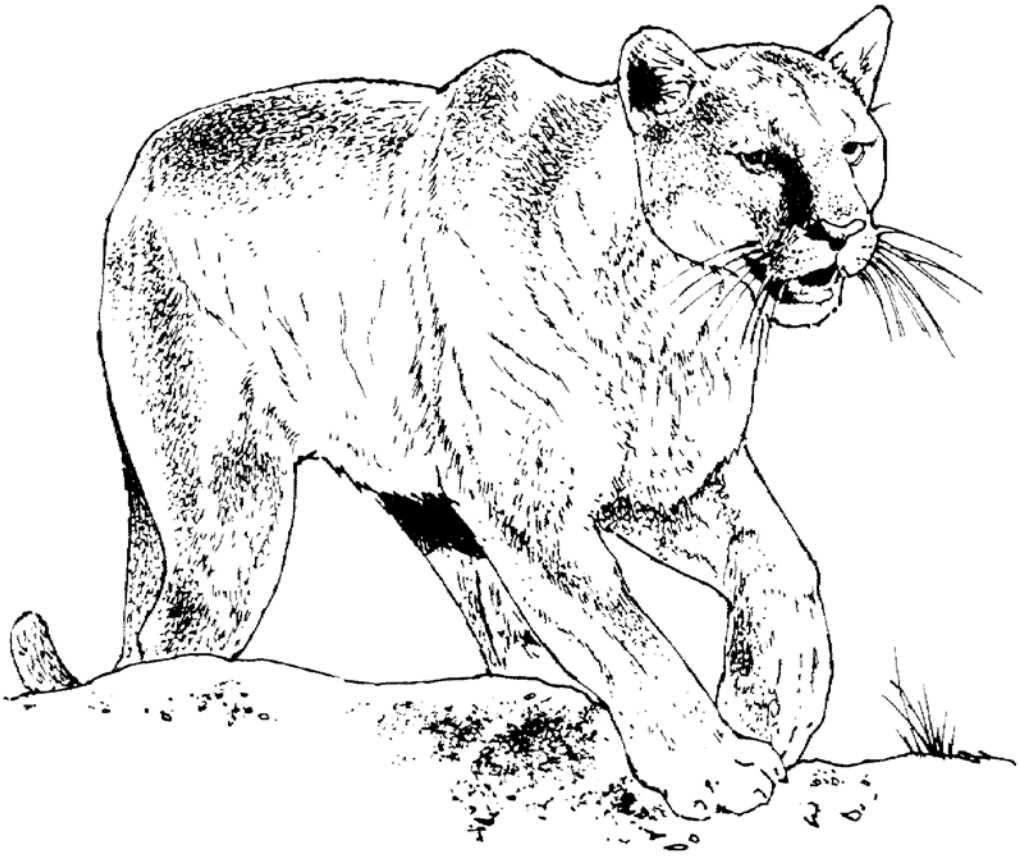
Storing your food properly is the best way to protect yourself and future campers from negative bear encounters—and ultimately protect the bear from being destroyed.

If a bear gets food from you, it will likely become more aggressive with the next campers it meets.

- Keep food and toiletries in your car; if you are backpacking, hang food, toiletries, and trash from a tree or bear pole at least 10 feet up and 4 feet out from the trunk, or use a bear-resistant food canister.
- Keep your tent, clothes, and sleeping bags free of food smells, and store the clothes you wore while cooking with your food.
- Put trash in bear-proof garbage cans, or pack it out with you.
- Never bury garbage or burn it in a campfire because bears can dig it out.

If You See a Bear

- Do NOT approach it.
- Stop, stand upright, and do NOT run.
- If a bear approaches you or your camp, try to scare it away by yelling, making noise, banging pots and pans, etc.
- Back away slowly.
- If you are attacked, fight back aggressively.
- Report all sightings to the nearest ranger station or call (360) 569-6600.



You Have Entered Cougar Country

Cougars, also called mountain lions or pumas, are common at Mount Rainier, but rarely seen. These large, grey to reddish-tan cats live solitary lives and shy away from people. In the twilight hours, they hunt deer and occasionally elk, as well as smaller animals. A hiker would be extremely lucky to glimpse one of their long, black tipped tails disappearing into the forest. Cougar encounters are very uncommon.

No one in Mount Rainier National Park has ever been injured by a cougar—you are much more at risk of having a car accident, getting stung by a bee, or being struck by lightning. However, encounters seem to be increasing nationwide. More cougar attacks have occurred in the last 20 years than in the previous 80. Human development and loss of habitat appear to be a primary cause.

Avoiding Cougar Encounters

- Hike in a group rather than alone.
- Avoid running—people running or moving rapidly act like prey and increase their risk.
- Keep children close to you—preferably in view just ahead of you.
- Be alert to your surroundings.
- Watch for tracks and signs—cougar scat looks like large dog scat with lots of hair in it.
- Avoid dead animals, especially partially-covered deer or elk carcasses.
- Never approach cougar kittens–leave the area immediately, as the mother is likely nearby.
- Keep a clean camp and properly store food.
- Follow the rules regarding pets in the park—don't take your pet on trails or in the backcountry.
- Keep your pet on a leash at all times and never leave it unattended at the campground—you could lose your pet.

If You See A Cougar

- DON'T RUN! Stand still and face the lion with your companions.
- Immediately pick up and hold small children.
- Stand upright, open your jacket, and try to make yourself appear larger.
- Shout and make noise.
- If attacked, fight back aggressively.
- Report all sightings to the nearest ranger station or call (360) 569-6600.