

Wolf chases Alaska-bound cyclist

Growing up in the Yukon, Melanie Klassen had seen numerous bicycle tourists pedaling the Alaska Highway, but never one with a canine companion running behind him.

"I thought it was odd until I saw the panicked look on the biker's face — as though he was about to be eaten," she said in a telephone interview.

"That wasn't a dog; it was a wolf."

The cyclist, William "Mac" Hollan, 35, of Sandpoint, Idaho, verified Klassen's observation of Saturday's incident: "At this point I realized I might not be going home, and I began to panic at the thought of how much it was going to hurt."

The Grand Prairie, Alberta, woman was among the heroes who rescued the North Idaho elementary school student-teacher halfway through his 2,750-mile pedal to Prudhoe Bay as a fundraiser (www.pointtobay.com) for a Sandpoint school lunch program.

Hollan's account was posted Monday on his Point to Bay Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/PointToBay>) from Whitehorse. He departed Sandpoint on June 17 for the six-week tour, loaded with bike camping gear and accompanied by Gabe Dawson, of Ashland, Ore., and Jordan Achilli, of New York.

As Hollan rode a half-mile ahead of his buddies, his nightmare began with a gray wolf sprinting out of the woods 60 miles west of Watson Lake and surprising the passing cyclist with an initial chomp that just missed his pedal.

At first, Hollan tried to out-race the wolf, but the predator reeled him in with the ease of a peloton erasing the lead of a dope-free breakaway rider.

The wolf nipped at the bike's rear packs the way it would bite the hamstrings of a fleeing moose in the drawn-out ordeal of subduing large prey.

Hollan, who was prepared for grizzly encounters, blasted the wolf with bursts of bear spray on several occasions. He said the wolf would fade back 20 feet or so and then move up again.

He heard his tent poles clank to the pavement as the chase continued.

"I saw an 18-wheeler round the corner and began to wave, shout, and point to the wolf frantically," Hollan wrote. "After taking a good look at the scene, the driver resumed his speed and drove on."

The panicked cyclist had his hopes dashed four separate times as vehicles passed. The wolf would back off and close in again between each rig.

"As I came around the corner, to my horror, I saw a quick incline, and knew that I would not be able to stay in front of this wolf for much longer. ... It was a surreal moment to realize that I was (the) prey, and this hill was (the) moment."

Klassen came onto the scene as Hollan was preparing to stop, use his bike as a shield and try to deter the wolf's advances with the last of his bear spray.

"We were towing a trailer behind my orange Hummer, and we couldn't stop fast enough," Klassen said.

"We made a U-turn and zipped back around the bend. A motor home had stopped in the road, and I could see the wolf lunging in behind it."

Hollan describes the moment:

"An RV came around the corner, and I knew this was it. I placed myself squarely in the center of the road and began screaming at the top of my lungs ... while waving frantically.

"The driver quickly passed me and stopped on a dime right in front of my bike. I don't know how I got unclipped or off my bike, but I swear I hurdled the handlebars without missing a beat or letting go of my can of bear spray.

"When I got to the backdoor of the RV still screaming, the door was locked. In an absolute panic I began to climb in the passenger window, but the driver reached across and threw the door open.

"By the time I shut the door the wolf was already on my bike pulling at the shredded remains of my tent bag."

Hollan said he began to shake — and cuss — uncontrollably.

Klassen was relieved Hollan was safe, but the wolf continued to attack the bike "as though it were prey."

"I said somebody has to do something, and my boyfriend was yelling, 'No! No!' as I jumped out the passenger door," she said. "My dad was a Yukon conservation officer and I remember him telling us to stand tall if confronted by a wolf and make it think you're bigger and tougher, or the wolf will take over."

But even with her standing in the doorway of a Hummer and yelling tough words at a distance of about 8 feet while other vehicles honked, the wolf wouldn't back off.

"The only weapon I had was a water bottle," she said. "I winged it and beaned him right in the head. That got him to retreat to the ditch. But he didn't go away until other cars stopped and people started throwing rocks.

"The biker in the RV was really rattled."

Nancy Campbell, Environment Yukon spokeswoman in Whitehorse, called the incident "a new one for us."

"We don't want people to think there's a row of wolves licking their chops waiting for people to come into the Yukon. We don't know if it was a young, desperate wolf or an old, sick wolf, one that had come to associate people as a source of food or what."

A similar incident (<http://www.spokesman.com/blogs/outdoors/2013/jun/16/photos-wolf-chases-bc-motorcyclist/>) occurred June 8 in British Columbia as a wolf gave chase to a motorcyclist who photographed the incident on Highway 93 in Kootenay National Park. Officials said that was unheard of, too.

Hollan's continuing his tour, noting that "I do look over my shoulder more, and I'm a bit jumpy. While other things have happened since the last update, this is all I can really remember."

Read more: http://billingsgazette.com/lifestyles/recreation/wolf-chases-alaska-bound-cyclist/article_66d19edc-2b47-558a-98fe-4268eb4bcacb.html#ixzz2ab91dLPV

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