

“The Pack Rat That Went to Boulder”

If you own a mountain cabin you have probably encountered a pack rat, also called the bushy-tailed woodrat. If you can get past your fear of small animals, they are rather attractive, some might even say cute. But their habit of collecting various objects from our cabins for their nests makes them the object of our desires to remove them from the premises. One of my encounters with removing a pack rat gave one of these little guys the ride of its life.

It normally happens sometime in the fall. We will be lying in bed at night when we will hear the sound of something climbing on the pipes in the crawl space. Clang, clang-clang. We have learned over the years that the pack rat is the only animal to get under the cabin and have the weight to clang the pipes. Then, things will start disappearing from the bathroom. And when the electric cord to my razor (there was a time when I shaved) gets cut by bites in two places, the pack rat has gone from cute to “out of here.”

So, it is time to get out the live-trap. Peanut butter works real well. No special brand. Normally it takes only a few hours to have it in the trap. This is when you take a good close-up look and think to yourself, yes, they are rather cute.

One early winter morning I had to catch the bus down to Boulder, but checked the trap before going to the car. Sure enough, the woodrat was inside. I quickly carried the trap to the car and drove to a place where it would be released, knowing that I was running out of time to catch the bus. Stepping out of the car, I carried the trap away from the car and then opened the trap and shook out the woodrat. It hit the ground, which was covered by fresh snow, and low and behold it headed straight for the car, WHERE THE DOOR WAS STILL OPEN, and hopped in. As I ran back to the car, I swore at myself, then opened up all the doors hoping it would hop out. But I never did see it, and thought maybe it had gotten out, and headed to catch the bus. While in Boulder I worried what might happen to the car, but when I returned in the afternoon, there was no sign of the pack rat.

Next morning I had to drive down to Boulder, as the car was going to be serviced. Much to my surprise, when I got in the car, there were several little animal droppings on the floor mat – it was still in the car! I drove down to Hoshi Motors in Boulder and told Hal, the owner, that his workers may find something while working on the car. But when I came back in the afternoon to pick it up, they had seen nothing. Surely, I thought, it had escaped the car.

Next morning as I got in the car, amazingly there they were again; the telltale calling cards, the small little droppings. It was still in the car! Upon returning home in the afternoon, I opened up all the car doors. And that night while we lay in bed, we heard it again: clang, clang-clang. It was back in the crawl space! So, next day I started all over again. Got out the trap and peanut butter, waited a few hours, and “poof” there it was. I drove very far away, then stopped and walked very far from the car, and remembered to CLOSE THE CAR DOOR, and dropped the little guy into the snow.

One returns almost every fall. I often wonder if it is the same one. My theory is that there is only one pack rat in town, and we all keep moving it around. Combined with a trip to Boulder, this is one well-traveled pack rat.

Dave Hallock