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## Roadshow: Hiking on a trail poses risks

By Gary Richards  
Mercury News

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Q Now that warm weather is upon us, there will be many more people using our parks and trails. I want to give you pointers about a close relative of your Road Hoggibus, and that is the Ambulator Oblivious.

Russ Atkinson

Los Altos

A The what?

Q The oblivious park or trail walker who is totally unaware of the hazards of these pathways or their rules of the road.

Russ Atkinson

A Today is RussShow. Tell us more.

Q We all know that when walking on streets or roads used by motor vehicles where there are no sidewalks, pedestrians should walk on the left, facing traffic. Once on the multiuse trails, though, things change. People should walk on the right and pass on the left just like driving a car, and always leave room for someone to get by, even if they are unaware that anyone else is around. Some trails, like the [Stevens Creek Trail](#), have signs to that effect, but it is the accepted rule everywhere, with or without a sign. Runners and mountain bikers can

come up fast and silently from behind, and A. Oblivious is usually gabbing or plugged into an iPod, unable to hear others approach, and totally oblivious to the fact they are blocking the path. I have seen three people walking abreast on a trail that could easily allow five across, spaced such that they block the entire path. Of course they get angry if a runner or faster hiker comes up from behind and squeezes through the small opening. Always leave room for someone to pass on the left of your group. If that means one person has to walk in front, then do that.

Russ Atkinson

A Keep going, my man.

Q The biggest hazard, however, is A. Oblivious minor, the offspring of this species, especially those ages 3 to 5, usually seen running completely uncontrolled. Parents need to control their young kids in the parks and on the trails. Just because there are no vehicles doesn't mean there are no dangers. There are sheriff's, fire and park ranger vehicles as well as horses, mountain bikers, mountain lions, rattlesnakes, bobcats, coyotes, deer (some with antlers), bees and wasps (including nests), wild turkeys, geese, skunks, possum, raccoons, poison oak, feral dogs and cats, thorns and thistles of various types, plus. There are also skateboarders, Segways and motorized scooters on some trails, sharp drop-offs, ponds, falling trees or rocks, and trail workers with large, sharp power tools and with restricted vision due to protective gear — all posing significant dangers to youngsters and adults. Even the mice and squirrels can be rabid and bite.

Russ Atkinson

A Rabid? The Roadshow retrievers and I are sticking to the safety of our local dog park.

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Q Then there's the creature most likely to attack you or your child: another A. Oblivious minor with a sharp stick. They love to thrust it at the face of your child, or at that part of your, um, adult anatomy that is at their eye level. I am not making this up.

Russ Atkinson

A I feel your pain.

Q I have been attacked by a bobcat and stalked by a pair of coyotes, and seen young children throwing rocks at a large rattlesnake. I've seen horses get spooked by people or snakes or bees or horseflies, and one kick can easily break a limb or a skull. Every year, several people nationwide get killed by deer. Those antlers are like swords.

Russ Atkinson

A Do you have any good news?

Q I'm not trying to discourage anyone from using our parks and open spaces. Everyone should use them. Just do so with courtesy and good judgment.

Russ Atkinson

A I may never go hiking again without thinking of RussShow — or young kids with probing sticks.

**On Friday: The good news along Interstate 205. Have a gripe, minor annoyance or major problem with transportation? Contact Gary Richards at [mrroadshow@mercurynews.com](mailto:mrroadshow@mercurynews.com) or 408-920-5335. The fax number is 408-288-8060.**

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