



5-31-08

This is our last photo of Bea, our exuberant, young American Brittany, on a float trip of the White River in northern Utah, May of 2008. She is resting on the gear pile of our raft after a hike up Southam Canyon on public land. Unknown to us, the sheep carcass she inspected an hour earlier was apparently laced with a poison presumably intended to kill coyotes. A sniff, a single lick, and a tiny nibble was all it took for the poison to absorb into her 35-pound body.

Later at camp further downstream, we were totally mystified as Bea went from a dog calmly lying around camp through a progression of ever more bewildering symptoms. After seeing her heaving and trying to vomit, she suddenly jumped into Brooke's lap with a scream of pure terror. She then charged around camp, jumping in and out of the raft, crying and yelping in a frenzy of fright and pain. Our efforts to calm her had no effect. She ran a high speed circuit around camp, accidentally slamming into our friend sitting in a chair, then launched off the raft into the river and started swimming for the opposite shore (totally uncharacteristic for this dog). Our frantic calls were ignored as the current carried her downstream. She finally turned back towards our side of the river, but when she reached shore, she raced away from us. We found her collapsed under a bush in violent convulsions with a frightening stare, pounding heart, gagging and gulping for air. After 15 more minutes of this agony, Bea died and her body immediately became very rigid. We carried her stiff, lifeless body back to camp and buried it under a cottonwood tree. Bea was a very valuable dog in the prime of her life and her sudden death was totally devastating and heartbreaking for us.

After researching the effects of various poisons on dogs, we have concluded that her symptoms were classic for sodium fluoroacetate poisoning (Compound 1080), a pesticide used in predator control for livestock. This was a truly horrifying experience that no dog or dog owner should ever have to experience. We contacted the BLM office in Vernal, Utah to report the poisoning as they manage public recreation on the White River. This river receives heavy recreational use in late May and early June and other floaters could also have dogs with them. BLM rangers said that they would investigate our case.

Compound 1080 is a colorless, odorless, tasteless, water soluble poison with no antidote. It was banned in 1972, only to be legalized again in 1982. Research of records indicates a vast stockpile of unused Compound 1080 still exists. The EPA approved Compound 1080 for special "livestock protection" collars in 1985. Poison from these collars can also be (illegally) extracted to lace bait carcasses placed out on the range to kill coyotes before livestock enters the grazing range. The drainage where Bea found the sheep carcass (lying conveniently next to the road access) did not have any grazing sheep or their accompanying guard and herd dogs like we saw on nearby Asphalt Wash, animals which would have also been at risk for poisoning by the baited carcass.

Our research on the internet has yielded frightening stories about other pets and people being poisoned and/or killed by toxic pesticides used for predator control of livestock. Our federal tax dollars help pay for this poisoning through the Animal Damage Control section of the United States Dept. of Agriculture, now given the more benign name of Wildlife Services. The traditional means of assistance has included indiscriminant predator control using Compound 1080 and M-44 ejectors containing sodium cyanide. M-44's are baited stakes placed in the ground which spew sodium cyanide when lightly pulled and can kill within 2 minutes. M-44's have killed hundreds of dogs and injured dozens of people. A curious child picking up an M-44 could easily be killed. Non-lethal methods such as guard animals can be very effective in reducing livestock loss, but with our tax dollars providing lethal predator control through Wildlife Services, there is little incentive for livestock owners to use non-lethal methods. Statistics show that improved animal husbandry would do much more to reduce livestock losses than the indiscriminate predator control provided by Wildlife Services.

Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-OR) has introduced legislation to prohibit the federal government's use of M-44 cyanide ejector devices for the control of predators. His bill also prohibits the manufacture, processing, or distribution of Compound 1080 with requirements to inventory, transfer, and destroy all existing stocks of Compound 1080 after providing adequate compensation. The tasteless, water-soluble properties of Compound 1080 make it a formidable weapon for acts of terrorism. With the current focus on terrorist threats to America, it is imperative that HR 4775 become law. Please help by supporting Rep. De Fazio's bill, HR 4775, also known as The Compound 1080 and M-44 Elimination Act.

We are heartbroken when we think of how our innocent dog lost her life. Losing Bea was like losing a child to us. We can't ever have Bea back again and we are not going to let her death go unnoticed. Please help make our recreational lands safer. We were totally unaware that our pets could be so easily poisoned by the insidious use of these pesticides. Please contact your congressional representatives and urge them to support HR 4775 and help stop these tragic injuries and deaths.

Sincerely,



Brooke and Cliff Everest
Bozeman, MT