

Runner recalls desperate fight with thrashing mountain lion

February 16 2019, by P. Solomon Banda



Travis Kauffman responds to questions during a news conference Thursday, Feb. 14, 2019, in Fort Collins, Colo., about his encounter with a mountain lion while running a trail just west of Fort Collins last week. Kaufman's girlfriend, Annie Bierbower, looks on. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

Fear washed over Travis Kauffman as he wrestled with a thrashing mountain lion that attacked him on a Colorado mountain trail, but then his fighting instinct took over as he found its neck with his foot and

suffocated the young cat.

The 31-year-old trail runner recalled Thursday his encounter with the silent cat that lunged at him from behind, clamped its jaws down on his wrist and clawed at his neck, face and body. Striking the mountain lion on the head with a rock didn't get it to release its grip. Neither did his attempts to stab the animal in the neck with twigs.

"There was a point where I was concerned that I wasn't going to make it out," Kauffman told reporters. "I had that wave of fear roll over me and thought I could end up there."

It was the first time Kauffman publicly recounted the Feb. 4 ordeal that left him with 28 stitches and a reputation for toughness and bravery that overshadows his wiry frame.

"I will never be able to live up to the reputation," said Kauffman, who is 5-foot-10 (1.5 meters) and weighs about 155 pounds (70 kilograms).

"The story is bigger than my puny form."

Kauffman said he was running on a trail in the mountains west of Fort Collins when he heard pine needles rustle behind him. He turned to see the mountain lion about 10 feet (3 meters) away.



Travis Kauffman responds to questions during a news conference Thursday, Feb. 14, 2019, in Fort Collins, Colo., about his encounter with a mountain lion while running a trail just west of Fort Collins last week. Kaufman's girlfriend, Annie Bierbower, looks on at left. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

"One of my worst fears was confirmed," he said.

The cat lunged, and Kauffman raised his hands and screamed. The animal locked its teeth onto his wrist and they tumbled off the side of the trail.

Kauffman grabbed a rock with his free hand and beat the cat on the back of the head. He also tried stabbing it with twigs, but nothing worked.

"It really clicked after I hit it in the head with a rock and it still didn't release my wrist that at that point, more drastic measures were

necessary," he said. "I was able to kind of shift my weight and get a foot on its neck" until it succumbed.



Travis Kauffman responds to questions during a news conference Thursday, Feb. 14, 2019, in Fort Collins, Colo., about his encounter with a mountain lion while running a trail just west of Fort Collins last week. Kaufman's girlfriend, Annie Bierbower, looks on at left. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

Bleeding from his face and wrist, he jogged back down the trail, where he met other runners who got him to a hospital.

"I was just thankful that he had his eyes and his fingers and all his parts, and it didn't look as bad as I maybe would have thought that it could," said Kauffman's girlfriend, Annie Bierbower.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife officers retrieved the dead cat. They said their investigation and a necropsy confirmed Kauffman's account.

"Travis is a pretty amazing young man," said Ty Petersburg, a wildlife manager for the agency.



Mark Leslie, manager of the northeast region of Colorado Parks and Wildlife, responds to questions during a news conference Thursday, Feb. 14, 2019, in Fort Collins, Colo., about a runner's encounter with a mountain lion while running a trail just west of Fort Collins last week. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

Kauffman became the 22nd person attacked by a [mountain lion](#) in Colorado since 1990, Parks and Wildlife said. Three of the attacks were fatal.

A necropsy report said the cat that attacked Kauffman was male, 4 or 5 months old and weighed 35 to 40 pounds (16 to 18 kilograms). The cat had limited fat, indicating it was hungry but not starving.

It showed no sign of rabies or other diseases, the report said, but many of its organs had been scavenged by other animals before the body was recovered.

Adult male mountain lions average about 150 pounds, Parks and Wildlife said.



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Petersburg said officers set up cameras and traps in the area for several days after the attack. They saw no large [mountain](#) lions but captured two young ones in good health. He said both are in a rehabilitation center, and the agency hopes to release them back into the wild.

Kauffman, who is an environmental consultant, described himself as an avid runner, cyclist and skier who has a pet cat at home. He said he doesn't plan to retreat from the outdoors.

"I will go run those trails again," he said, but added, "I will go with a buddy there."

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