

Do you know this plant?

It is Giant Hogweed and it can hurt you badly, so can its native cousin Cow Parsnip. To quote Wikipedia, “*The sap of giant hogweed causes phytophotodermatitis in humans, resulting in blisters, long-lasting scars, and if it comes in contact with eyes, blindness....*”

Think poison ivy, but many times worse. The sap of these plants create a toxic reaction that responds in sunlight. Unfortunately, that means that a person may not know if the sap is on them until hours, or days later when they are exposed to the sun. Once in sunlight, it reacts causing skin to burn and blister until it looks like a second degree burn. Speaking from personal experience, it feels that way too. The experience is not over once the blisters heal. I have found that the area of exposure is still reactive to sunlight twelve months later.



Giant Hogweed, Heracleum mantegazzianum

Source: Wikipedia Commons Fritz Geller-Grimm

I first saw it in New York, but have not seen it on my local rides until this past weekend. It was common along the roadsides in Greencastle, PA. Most people in the BBC group did not know the plant or realize the danger.

The good news is that both these plants Hogweed and Cow Parsnip look a lot alike, and it is only the sap that is a problem. The bad news is that everyone gets it, and roadside mowing exposes the sap.

Be careful when you ride. Watch for any plant that resembles those in the picture above, most of the plants that look similar also have strong toxins. If you stop on the side of the road chose carefully. For more information, try this website:

http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/lands_forests_pdf/ghfactnyseagrant.pdf



Photo of giant hogweed burn Photo credit: Bob Kleinberg