

## Johnny Appleseed and his wilderness



### Outdoors

By Paul Zaenger

It's late summer and I'm sitting with my back against an aspen eating an apple. Looking out on a view of a couple of Fourteeners (one of the 14,000 foot mountain peaks in Colorado) with family is truly inspiring.

We are in the Collegiate Peaks Wilderness where the mountain names include

Harvard, Princeton and Oxford, and the apple provides a shot of sugar for an energy boost for a continued climb at elevation.

The local apple harvest is upon us, and it might be hard to imagine that apples and wilderness go together. Yet, in the early days of our nation apples carried settlement into new lands, and vice versa. Imagine this: the apple is an early day symbol of freedom and wilderness.

John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed) eased the transition of settlers to new wild lands by planting apple seeds and seedlings which bore fruit in openings in the wilderness of the new United States.

I wonder about Chapman hiking in the heavily wooded wilderness of the Great Lakes region, usually in bare feet. I'm glad I have solid boots on, as we're hiking to Hartenstein Lake.

The trail gains 1,500 feet from the road with a horizon punctuated by Mounts Yale and Antero.

Apples grown on trees which germinated from seed were usually not sweet. Thoreau, an admirer of Chapman, also preferred apples grown from seed.

He quoted an old farmer who said wild apples, "have a kind of bow-arrow tang," or were "spirited and racy when eaten in the field where [they] grow." We might find them unpalatable today.

Converting apples to hard cider brought out the sweetness for early settlers. In stepped Chapman.

Known as Johnny Appleseed even at that time, he spread apple trees, mostly reproduced from seed, from western New York to Indiana. He had a love for wild country, never one to stay near cities for too long.

By 1800, Chapman was in "the West" as U.S. civilization knew it then. He traded apple seedlings to settlers for cast-off clothes, trekking in the wilderness on game trails, and trails made by tribes living there.

Having a wanderlust for the wilds of Pennsylvania and Ohio, he came to know the rivers, the forests and the native people who lived there.

The Wyandot, Shawnee, and Delaware people respected him. When he roamed the wilds, spreading apple seeds, he was free like them. Chapman, who lived in the margins between culture and wild, said, "I could not enjoy myself better anywhere - I can lay



Mount Yale rises to the clouds above Hartenstein Lake. Mountains abound in the Collegiate Peaks Wilderness. (Courtesy National Park Service)

on my back, look up at the stars and it seems almost as though I can see the angels praising God, for he has made all things for good."

After a two-hour hike we reach the lake. The high, wide and lonesome light of the high country late in summer takes us back in time. We glimpse the land as it was when early explorers first saw it.

Although Chapman never made it west of Indiana, he was still immersed in the wilderness that he knew. The horizon holds Mount Yale and other nameless peaks to the north.

Mount Antero is to the southeast. The sky is lightly punctuated by puffy, cotton candy-like clouds floating lazily in the stark deep blue of summer. Light breezes kick up across the waters of the lake. This is big country. Big enough to feel as though civilization might not even exist.

I bite into my second apple. The crunch reminds me that apples are a means to truly experience this place.

I mean to really see the colors in the rock and sky, to catch a whiff coming off of the lake, to shake off the chill when the shadows of trees lay low with the waning sun. This feels like freedom; a freedom bequeathed to us from people like Chapman.

It sounds incongruous today, but maybe that is what drew Chapman westward. Perhaps he felt an ultimate freedom to be just who he was.

#### IF YOU GO:

**Collegiate Peaks Wilderness:** <http://www.coloradoswildareas.com/collegiate-peaks/>.

**Gunnison Gorge Wilderness:** <http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/nca/ggnc/gorge.html>.

**Black Canyon of the Gunnison Wilderness:** <https://www.nps.gov/blca/>.

Eccentric (said to wear a pot on his head), preaching a Swedenborg faith, and dining on whatever was available. He walked the lands of our new nation completely unfettered.

Many stories of Johnny Appleseed are now forgotten by our very busy, fast-paced world. The apple remains.

Get some, and go to the wilderness. There is still much of summer to embrace.

Paul Zaenger has been a supervisory park ranger at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park since 1993. Other park assignments include Mount Rushmore National Memorial and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.

## Rabbit Fever, aka Tularemia

The spring and early summer this year was much wetter than normal. The trees and ground vegetation is very lush, thick and green.

As I have been out enjoying the outdoors, I have noticed an extremely high population of rabbits, which got me thinking about rabbit fever.

Tularemia, or rabbit fever, is an infectious disease of humans and animals caused by the bacterium *Francisella tularensis*. Rabbits, hares and other rodents are especially susceptible to the disease and often die in large numbers during an outbreak.

Humans are most often infected through a bite from a tick or a deer fly that had contact with the infected rodent. You can also contract the disease from handling infected animal tissue.

Hunters should be especially careful about contact

with infected rabbits.

Inhaling dust infected with the bacterium can also infect people. This can occur during farming or gardening when using machinery. A tractor or mower can run over an infected animal or carcass.

This is rare but does result in the most severe form of the disease, called pneumonic tularemia.

The bacterium that causes tularemia can enter the body through the skin, eyes, mouth or lungs. Symptoms of the infection vary, depending on the route of entry.

All cases are accompanied by a high fever. Several forms of the disease are as follows:



A wet spring and summer has helped rabbit proliferation in Western Colorado. (Submitted photo)

- Ulceroglandular is the most common and usually follows a tick or deer fly bite after handling an infected animal. A skin ulcer will appear at the site of the bite, followed by swelling of the lymph nodes in the armpits and groin.
- Oculoglandular occurs when the bacterium enters through the eye. This happens when you touch your eye when butchering an infected animal. Symptoms include inflammation of the eye and swelling of the lymph nodes in front of the ear.
- Oropharyngeal results from eating or drinking contaminated food or water. Symptoms can include sore throat, mouth ulcers, tonsillitis, and swollen lymph nodes in the neck.
- Pneumonic comes from inhaling dust infected with the bacterium. These symptoms will include coughing, chest pain and difficulty breathing. This is the most serious form of the disease.

The Colorado Department of Health and Environment (CDPHE) reports a confirmed 96 reported cases in Colorado during the last 10 years in humans. For the same time period,

CDPHE reports 165 animals testing positive for the disease.

Tularemia can be difficult for a physician to diagnose as the symptoms can be mistaken for other, more common illnesses. It is important to share with your doctor any exposures with tick or deer fly bites, or contact with sick or dead animals.

Once diagnosed, there are antibiotics to treat the illness. Most people recover completely although the symptoms may last for several weeks.

Prevention, as always, is the best defense. Use an insect repellent containing DEET when outdoors.

Wearing long pants, long sleeves and socks will help keep the deer flies and ticks off your skin. If you find a tick, remove it promptly.

When farming or mowing, check the area for carcasses of dead animals, as to avoid mowing over them. Wearing a mask may reduce the risk of inhaling the bacteria.

Hunters and trappers should be especially careful. Wear protective gloves when handling animals, especially rabbits, hares, muskrats, prairie dogs and other rodents.

Any animals to be eaten should be cooked thoroughly. People who own cats, especially outdoors cats, should be especially careful. Cats are extremely susceptible to the disease and can transmit it to humans.

Like so many outdoor people, I hunted and ate many a rabbit in my childhood. With the rabbit population doing so well this year, it is likely we will see some cases of tularemia this year.

Taking a few precautions should keep you safe from this disease. Until next time, see you on the trail.

Mark Rackay is a freelance writer who serves as a director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email [info@mcspi.org](mailto:info@mcspi.org).

### Brief

#### Fourth-graders offered public lands access

The Obama Administration has launched the second year of the Every Kid in a Park program, which gives fourth-graders and their families free access to federal lands and waters nationwide for a full year.

Fourth-graders can visit the Every Kid in a Park website to obtain a free pass that provides access to federally managed lands and waters - including national parks, forests, wildlife refuges and marine sanctuaries. The pass - which features a new design for this year's students - is valid from Sept. 1, 2016 - August 31, 2017 and grants free entry for fourth-graders and up to three accompanying adults (or an entire non-commercial vehicle for drive-in parks) at more than 2,000 sites across the country.

Fourth-graders can log onto the Every Kid website at [www.everykidinapark.gov](http://www.everykidinapark.gov) and complete a fun educational activity in order to obtain and print their pass. Students can also trade in their paper pass for a more durable pass at participating federal sites nationwide.

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