

## River can be journey or jungle-gym

The popular Montrose Water Sports Park is a fine example of a “river as jungle-gym.”

In contrast, the same water, after flowing downstream twenty miles, joins with the Gunnison River and then represents a “river as journey.”

Each of these two types, of course, has great value (even beyond their critical value as water for crops, and for human and animal residents, and so forth). Ranging from fun to unrunnable, from peaceful to pounding, from meditative to maddening, different benefits and appeals occur in one setting versus the other.

Examples of rewarding flat water areas near Montrose are Chipeta Lake and Ridgway Reservoir. Once full summer, even though their waters are not quite warm, they can be safe enough to let responsible children take the pilot's seat and get used to the feel and the delight of controlling a boat with a paddle.

At Ridgway State Park and on the Colorado River, a personal flotation device (aka PFD aka life jacket) must be worn at least by children 13 and younger. Of course, each boater of any age must have one handy in the boat if not actually wearing it all of the time.

Flat water allows introspection, wildlife observation, contemplation, and the increasingly rare luxury of unhurried, friendly conversation, much like that of a near-mythical summer afternoon conversation on a front porch with a friend. On the Gunnison River and the Colorado River in extreme western Colorado after the main snowmelt run-off has occurred, the experience can be much like a journey.

Take this background knowledge self-quiz: do you know a J-stroke from a C-stroke? A roller from a sleeper? If not, flat water again is your outing of



### Outdoors

By John T. Unger

choice. Gain the skills needed, incrementally, to later possibly venture onto more challenging (and thereby perhaps more exciting) water.

Here is an experience self-quiz: Have you ever been in a raft as it does a highside onto a rock? Have you felt a mini-whirlpool grab the bow of your two-person canoe?

In addition to background knowledge and experience, the physical skills, judgment, and timely decision-making are elements necessary for taking on more challenging waters. If flat water eventually feels too tame, one can find many other levels of flowing water, up to life-threatening, wear-your-helmet types of whitewater.

The Ruby and Horsethief canyons of the Colorado River just over an hour north of Montrose require a permit for overnight use. During spring run-off both the excitement and danger increase to the point that advanced skills are required.

Mid-summer flows, on the other hand, intermingle smooth floating with episodes necessitating route selection and boat control skills, creating a very rewarding contrast of experiences. The Escalante and Dominguez canyons on the Gunnison just north of Delta display spring colors that fill the senses and do not require packing overnight gear.

If you are new to the area or to river sports, consider riding with a commercial river outfitter or a Montrose Recreation District guided outing to get the sense of one or of several area rivers.

Rather than a journey, some of us may prefer the jungle-gym type of river use. A kayak designed for playing in a standing wave is a common tool for this type of water, as is seen at our Montrose Water Sports area in Baldrige Park.

Similarly, a rented, borrowed, or purchased stand-up paddleboard (known also by its initials as a SUP) can be seen most summer afternoons there at the water park. Far from being anything like a journey, these craft are typically used for brief bursts of playing in the waves, taking turns one at a time.

Even for those readers with absolutely no interest in getting in the Uncompahgre itself, it is quite entertaining to watch those who do. It even creates



Bryce Howe enters the Colorado River from Mee Canyon in an inflatable kayak in late May, continuing on his group's multi-day journey. (Submitted photo/ John T. Unger)

something of a festive atmosphere as various passersby watch the kayaker or boarder take his or her turn in the wave features, until getting dumped and dunked, and the next person then takes a shot at it.

A paddle blade dipped into a moving river is a two-edged sword. While it is one sure way to open a door to outdoor travel, it can also quickly reveal the limits of a person's skill and luck.

Going one-on-one with the force of water has its own rewards, as in so many physical and mental challenges which can bring out the best in us. An element of artistry can be seen in the actions of a single paddle in the hands of a knowledgeable athlete working in and playing with the river.

John T. Unger is a Diplomate of the American Chiropractic Board of Sports Physicians. He prefers doing river sports that involve the journey rather than the playground. Your feedback and ideas for future columns are welcomed at [www.sportsdocunger.com](http://www.sportsdocunger.com).

## Hiking with shin splits



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Shin splits are definitely no fun. I had them in my youth when I played baseball. Whenever I jumped, and landed on my feet, I discovered a

new level of pain that would escalate from unbearable to unbelievable. I don't remember when or how they went away but know that I never wanted that again.

Fast-forward 40 years, and they are back again. I thought I would do some research and perhaps help some of you that may be suffering with them. We will also look at several ways you can make sure you don't get shin splits, which is a much better idea.

Shin splits are a common problem for anyone who runs, jogs, power walks, hikes or backpacks. That sort of includes most of us here in

Colorado. It is a repetitive strain injury caused by high impact on your legs. Carrying a load, such as a backpack, can accelerate it.

The term shin splits is used generically to describe any exercise-induced pain below the knee and above the ankle. The pain is usually along the shinbone or along the muscle in the lower leg. In my case, the shinbone itself will get so inflamed it is sore to the touch.

The experts do not agree upon the exact cause of shin splits. That news was very disheartening to me. If they don't know what causes it,

how am I going to get rid of it? They do, however, agree that the pain can occur in the leg bone itself (tibia) or in the soft tissue attached to that bone. The shin split can affect either the inside of the leg or it can affect the outer part of the leg.

If you have a specific area of pain that you can point to with a finger, the condition is probably caused by repetitive trauma of the tibia resulting in an inflammation. This is called osteocytosis. If no precautions are taken, it can lead to a stress fracture, so don't ignore the pain.

When the pain extends several inches down the leg and not along the shinbone, you most likely have a micro tear of the muscle attachments to the tibia or a tear of the fascia tissue that covers the muscle. A more serious condition can occur if the muscles in the lower leg start swelling and the calf becomes increasingly more painful. This is known as compartment syndrome and requires immediate medical attention. Fortunately, this is a rare occurrence.

Whether the pain you suffer from is in the bone or the muscle, the treatments are similar. The first step is to immediately stop the activity until the pain subsides. This is not something that you can hike or run through. Usually it means three to four weeks of rest.

You are safe to take part in other activities such as swimming or rowing. Limit your workouts to upper body exercises and give the legs a rest. That would also mean no hiking trips or backpacking for a while.

Icing the affected area helps, as does taking anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen.

I get relief by wearing a compression sleeve over my lower leg. If you have never had shin splits before, it is a good idea to visit your doctor.

Preventing shin splits is much better than having to treat them. Check your shoes or hiking boots. If the sole is worn down on one side or the other, replace them. Worn out boots are probably what caused me to get shin splits back. So much for my favorite pair of worn out Danners. If you suffer from a high arch or a flat foot, consider an arch support in all your shoes and boots.

Shorten your stride when hiking or running, especially when under heavy load, such as a backpack. Taking shorter but more frequent steps lowers the impact on your legs.

If you run, jog or power walk, vary your running surface. Try to hit the dirt and grass trails instead of pavement. It will lessen the impact on your legs as well.

Incorporate a daily regime of calf stretching and strengthening exercises into your daily workout. This will help decrease the stress on your feet and legs when you run or hike. And above all, don't forget to stretch out very well before you begin your activity. Your doctor or trainer can give you specific exercises, or do a search on-line.

Take steps to prevent shin splits and if you are a sufferer, let them heal properly. Until next time, enjoy the outdoors and see you on the trail.

Mark Rackay is a freelance writer who serves as a director and public information officer 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)



Carol Rackay, left, Dave Hibl, Linda Neigherbauer and Jim Neigherbauer on a hike near Duckett Draw. Hiking is one way a person can develop shin splits if precautions are not taken. (Submitted photo/ Mark Rackay)

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