

## Our very own opening day

You've seen the pictures. Other states close the fishing season for the winter, then have a spring opening day when multitudes of fishermen line up shoulder to shoulder to get in that first cast of the new season.

I have yet to figure out how everybody casts without getting lines tangled up. I suppose someone says one-two-three-cast.

Thankfully Colorado is different – the fishing season is open year-round. But locally, we do have a day with a circus-like atmosphere. The day the road to the East Portal opens.

Although the fishing season is not closed in the winter, the access road to the river is. Yes, there are other access points to the Gunnison River, and yes, there are other places to go fishing, but it is our nature to want what we do not have.

So come March, we start working up our excitement and make a buzz, wondering when the road will be open. Over more than three decades, I've made many an opening day or at least opening week. This holiday-like event varies annually, but consistently occurs late April to early May.

In some years, high muddy water has made for lousy fishing conditions, so there was really no reason to go. This year seemed enticing because of the lower than normal flows, meaning clear water. So off I went.

Awaiting you is a hole in the ground. A big hole. The Black Canyon is a very deep and spectacular abyss. Most Colorado mountain vistas raise your chin – this one lowers it. Looking down from the rim, distance fools the eye into thinking that the Gunnison River is a mere trickle

and that the house-sized boulders are but stepping stones.

Walking to the bottom via trails is an option reserved for the serious hiker. Driving to the bottom via the East Portal road is an easier option, although the road is an adventure in itself - a real brake smoker.

Very steep and twisty, the road was built during construction of the Gunnison water tunnel, and later for Crystal Dam. Not for the faint of heart or those in drivers education!

Exactly where the road down joins the river, a diversion dam for the water tunnel divides the fishing into two distinct sections. Upstream the road winds for about one mile before dead-ending at Crystal Dam. Here the river is more like a narrow, moving lake.

Downstream, the real river reappears. Except for a caretakers house and a small tent campground, the canyon from here on is as it has been since time.

The upstream boundary of the Black Canyon National Park begins below the campground, noted for being gold medal water with one of the highest biomasses of any river in the state.

Regulations are designed to protect the quality fishery, so fishing is by flies and lures only. All rainbows must be released. Standard regulations apply to brown trout.

In the early season cold and clear water, concentrate on the mid-depth runs with mid-volume current. Fish underwater smalls on a dead drift throughout the water column with a strike indicator. Maybe small dries in the afternoon. For murky water, go darker and larger.

You'll find the East Portal road by driving east from Montrose about ten miles on U.S. 50, then turn north on CO 347. At the park pay booth, turn right for the portal road. Keep an eye on the road, gear down, and be easy on the brakes. Enjoy our local season opener.

*Joel Evans is an avid fisherman, and outdoor writer and photographer, having explored western Colorado for decades.*



Spring fishing on the Gunnison River can be as good if not better than summer. Brad Oberto had opening weekend success at the East Portal, fooling this rainbow trout with a Root Beer midge. (Courtesy photo)



### Outdoors

By Joel Evans

## ATV: Safety should come first

As the muddy trails begin to dry out from all the winter snow, it's time to fire up the ATV. Colorado is a great place to ride, as there are thousands of miles of trail available to us. There are quite a few riding areas within several miles of Montrose.

Every year, the posse responds to several ATV or dirt bike accidents. We had a callout involving an ATV already this spring.

Many of the injuries the riders suffered could have been prevented by the use of safety equipment. Colorado Parks and Wildlife records indicate that during the years 2008 through 2011, Colorado saw 32 ATV related deaths and an estimated 700 injuries. More than half of the accidents were with riders under the age of 16. Nearly 75 percent of ATV crashes result in debilitating brain and spinal cord injuries.

Wearing a helmet while riding is the single most important piece of safety equipment you can use. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway safety, the use of a helmet reduces the risk of fatality by 37 percent. Further, using a helmet reduces the risk of serious brain injuries by 67 percent.

Any DOT compliant motorcycle helmet will work. I recommend full coverage as it protects the face as well. A helmet will also help protect you from windblast, cold, noise, low hanging branches and flying objects.

Next consideration would be eye protection. Many helmets use a face shield and they work very well, especially if you wear prescription glasses.

Goggles are another option and may be worn outside the helmet.



Helmets are among a number of safety precautions users of ATVs should observe. (Courtesy photo)

Sunglasses are a poor form of eye protection as you may find yourself out after dark. Protecting your eyes from flying debris, insects, rocks and dust is very important.

Most of our Colorado trails are fairly narrow. There are many overhanging branches and limbs that you will brush up against while riding. These cause a hazard to your eyes as well as other parts of your body that is exposed.

I usually wear a long sleeve shirt. It helps protect my arms from low branches, sunburn, windburn and abrasions from small rocks kicked up by other riders. Cotton sweatshirts are very comfortable to wear when riding. I usually opt for a bright color as it increases my visibility on the trail to

other riders.

Along with the sweatshirt, wear a pair of long pants. There are specially made riding pants but a good pair of denim jeans will work fine. The pants will help protect your legs from abrasions as well as give you some warmth.

A good pair of gloves should go without saying. Your hands are very vulnerable to injury from branches, sticks and anything else you may brush against on a narrow trail. Gloves will also help reduce the fatigue in your hands as you work the handlebars and controls.

Finally, everyone should have a good pair of boots. Over the ankle boots made of a heavy leather work best. Boots will protect you from foot and ankle injuries as you ride. Good boots

are also nice when you take a break from riding and go for a hike.

There are many excuses we hear for not using helmets and other safety equipment. "I'm only going to ride slow," or "It's too hot," seem to top the list. It is a safe bet that the minor discomforts experienced by wearing good safety equipment are far better than the injuries you could suffer without it.

Ride safe and enjoy the off road trails in our mountains. 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.*



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

10 SOUTH SELIG AVE

MONTROSE, COLORADO 81401

970-249-4226

