

Hiking alone has its challenges

Last column we talked about hiking. We also discussed safety concerns, preparations and an emergency kit to carry with you. Most of the hiking we take part in involves groups or at least one other person. But what if you choose to go it alone?

Each year the Posse rescues people who have chosen to go it alone in the outdoors. These people were hunting, hiking, and riding an ATV or snowmobiling.

Some of these people suffered injuries while others just got lost. While there are dangers with anything we do outdoors, that danger increases when we are alone.

I don't want to overly discourage anyone from being by him or herself outdoors. I have often done it myself when hunting companions cancelled last minute.

There is often a special enjoyment and a spiritual connection being alone in the woods.

Aside from the obvious spiritual health that comes from solitude, you have much more flexibility. You can set your own pace, rest when you want, explore the areas that interest you, and generally make up your own mind.

While I want to encourage the buddy system in all activities outdoors, if you chose to go it alone, here are a few



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

considerations.

Injuries are the biggest problem. No matter how careful you are, an injury is a real possibility when doing anything outdoors.

If you go it alone, you better have a plan to get help. You should also have some necessary first aid equipment to care for yourself until help arrives. I would recommend a class in advanced wilderness first aid for everyone.

Weather is always a concern, but more so when you are alone. You must have with you the extra clothes, supplies and skills to ride out any adverse weather conditions that may pop up.

Animal attacks are rare but the chance increases when you are alone. Animals will avoid groups of people far more than a lone hiker. You should be aware of human attacks also, especially if you



While there are dangers with anything we do outdoors, that danger increases when we are alone. (Submitted photo)

are a female hiking alone.

The closer you hike near populated areas, the more likely it is that you may meet someone who means you harm. In today's world, things like that are real possibilities.

When you run into someone on the trail, leave him or her with the impression that you are not alone. Let them think you have a partner who should be along any minute. Be polite to people you meet on the trail but don't be overly outgoing.

The number one problem solo hikers face is getting lost. You have no one to

double-check your map reading or navigation skills. Here is a time when a GPS and the skills to use it really come in handy.

As a back up to the GPS, keep yourself oriented with a compass and landmarks at all times. The secret to not getting lost is to stay found.

Carry a cell phone with you when you go. Even if you are in an area of no service, a text message may still go out. I carry a back up power supply with me. Keep the phone off when not needed to conserve power.

Try to hike only in areas

that you are very familiar with. Know all of the trails, water sources and bailout points. Always stay on the trail, don't go cross-country. Make a detailed plan before you go and stick to that plan.

I like to go through a series of "what if" scenarios in my mind before a trip. Mentally going through an adversity, such as a sudden storm, helps me to prepare and be certain I have the necessary supplies with me to survive.

As we have discussed here many times before, be sure you have someone back home who knows your plans and itinerary, including all the information about your vehicle and parking area.

This is the person who will call for help in the event you are overdue. Any change you make in your plans should be immediately relayed to this contact person.

Going it alone creates special concerns but it can be done safely. It is always better to use the buddy system and have someone else to share the day with. 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.

Confidence from old foundations at East Portal

"The camp [East Portal] is full of as fine a lot of fellows as walk the American soil and they can do anything they undertake," Montrose Press, 1906.

The editor at the Montrose Press (a weekly issue back then) was writing about the people who lived at the bottom of Black Canyon. As it turns out, though, there is limited understanding of the lives of these Herculean-type people who seemed to be able to do anything, including the construction of the Gunnison Tunnel.

Research that is ending today may help to shed new light on the community there. Dr. Judson Finley,



Outdoors

By Paul Zaenger

Utah State University, wraps up archeological mapping and site testing that started 10 days ago.

Students with the USU field school have a rare

chance to learn about residential life by studying the building foundations of cottages which were lived in 1904-1912.

Started as a crude mining camp in 1904, East Portal blossomed into a full-fledged community. The population of the town never peaked above 250, but it boasted a post office, "hospital," school, electric power plant, boarding houses, cottages, store, butcher shop and many other activities to keep tunnel construction going around the clock.

There is a solid photographic record of East Portal and work in the tunnel. Yet, little material exists of daily life in town. Looking back 100 years, it's easy to view the people who lived there as somewhat primitive.

No refrigeration, automobiles, TV, cell phones or computers. They did have access to a phone – one for the whole town. Electric lights were also available to all.

The Montrose Press shares some tantalizing details from the time period: The billiard hall has been completed



Dr. Judson Finley, second from right, shares information about Utah State University findings to participants on a field trip sponsored by the Montrose County Historical Society at East Portal at the bottom of Black Canyon. (Photo Courtesy National Park Service.)

... the first wedding [at East Portal] occurred over there and the inhabitants took advantage of the event to dress up in gala attire; the Palisade [baseball] team got revenge on the River Portal boys here yesterday scoring 29 runs to the latter's 3.

It seems that life was not as primitive for these workers as it first appears. Dr. Finley's team has been combing the slopes for whatever they can find: imprinted bottles, buttons, a butter knife (pretty ornate), a tin box that held pipe tobacco. And a bit of a surprise – there are quite a number of porcelain pieces.

One possibility for all the porcelain shards is that starting pay for laborers was \$2.50 per day; 50 cents higher than

most starting wages in the mining camps of western Colorado. The team has some tantalizing questions.

Did the extra pay make a difference? If so, is there evidence to suggest how? Rather than dining on tin plates and cups, the ceramics might represent a higher level of living for the residents of the cottages.

The photographic record shows the interior of the dining hall. Tables and benches are clean. Plates and cups are lined on the tables – clean, ceramic, and ready for the next shift.

Perhaps the single men living in the bunkhouses saw the prospects of better living, too. One question leads to another. The mystery is centered in the quest to learn.

IF YOU GO:

Always leave artifacts in place at any historic or prehistoric site you might visit.

Ranger guided walks at East Portal are conducted at 10:30 am every day except Monday through early August; intermittently through September.

Lasting 1.5 hours, the program covers about a half-mile of walking. More information is at www.nps.gov/blca/planyourvisit/calendar.htm.

East Portal residents were generous, as well. They raised \$222 for the San Francisco relief fund for survivors of the famous earthquake. That would be more than three months' wages for starting workers.

The town site has been picked over by visitors and local folks for quite some time. And erosion has taken its toll on some of the foundations. Much of the school house has washed away, though it has yielded a marble, the end of a pencil, and maybe a portion of a desk frame.

When they get back to the lab, students and professors will analyze their findings, develop ideas, and maybe raise new questions about residential ingenuity, and adapting to difficult conditions.

As a community, the people of East Portal represent a confidence that they could overcome the impossible. They used that attitude to act on their confidence.

This was the can-do outlook among the people who lived at the bottom of Black Canyon 100 years ago, which was recorded in the newspaper back then.

Their bravery to take on the seemingly unattainable is still evident for us today. Maybe Finley and his team will help us to see more clearly their lives, which might help us to overcome the challenges of our world today.

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.

CAMELBAK®

GREAT OUTDOORS Company

10 SOUTH SELIG AVE

GRAB ONE AND GO GOT YOUR BAK LIFETIME GUARANTEE

FULL-FEATURED DAYPACKS WITH BUILT-IN HYDRATION

SAVE 20% ON

CamelBak Hydration Packs
Men's • Women's • Kids

Excludes Clearance Merchandise. Valid Thru 7/10/16

970-249-4226

MONTROSE, COLORADO 81401