

Of waterfalls and brook trout

You've heard it, probably even said it. "I wish I knew then what I know now."

Fishing the Colorado high country is that way. Compared to the oft described and readily available information of the larger rivers and lakes in western Colorado, or anywhere in the mountain west for that matter, the high country has hidden gems.

Not secrets necessarily – somebody, maybe even many people, know about it, just not you.

I've been a lot of places, fishing low and high, but there are still those wow places that I wish I had encountered years ago. Well, now I know.

Except that reality is that I will never get to all of them, so really I only know what I know. The magic of the exploration is the unknown and expecting there will always be one more discovery of the undiscovered.

Add to your list South Mineral Creek, north of Silverton.

South Mineral is one of those high country places that the fishing alone does not make it exceptional, but combined with the scenery and topography, it graduates to great.

A small creek, a respectable population of brook trout, easy to get to, but non-typical with some outstanding canyon-like crevices with spectacular small waterfalls. What fun!

More so than to fishermen, the South Mineral Creek area is better known to hikers. Here is the trailhead to Ice Lake, a very popular high altitude basin lake.

South Mineral Creek campground and the Ice Lake



Outdoors

By Joel L. Evans

trailhead are accessed at a westerly turnoff from U.S. 550 just a few miles north of Silverton. It is well marked.

A good and easy dirt road takes about 5 miles to get to the campground.

As one comes down off the south side of Red Mountain Pass, U.S. 550 follows North Mineral creek. At the highway turnoff, North Mineral is joined by South Mineral and eventually joins the Animas.

North Mineral is of no interest to the fisherman – maybe there are fish but doubtful due to the heavy mineral concentration. South Mineral is different.

From the highway turnoff to the campground, the river habitat and water quality is decent and is fishable. Access is very easy along the dirt road.

But the "what I know now" part is the upper end, above the campground. Two years ago I fished this for the first time.

The brook trout fishing is good, better than most brookie creeks. Most places they overpopulate, so there are a lot of them, but few of any size. South Mineral seemed to have the opposite.



In the confines of a small canyon, South Mineral Creek near Silverton cascades in steps of intermittent flats and waterfalls. Marshall Pendergrass tracks a floating dry fly in hopes of a trout. (Submitted photo)

Not every good hole showed a fish, but when it did, they were of respectable size, six to 10 inches.

This section above the campground is never far from the road, but the road lessens from a good dirt road to a rough, gradual climb, not quite but almost four-wheel drive road. So far no different

than many other such high country creeks.

But park along the road, get out and walk the 50 to 100 yards to the creek, and the difference is sudden.

From the road, hidden by the creekside brush, what one would assume is a typical gentle creek is a mini-canyon. Roaring in some place, but

gentle in others.

The roar to gentle to roar transition is a step-like series of waterfalls. In some places the canyon is 20- to 30-foot deep and the waterfalls almost as tall.

This makes for interesting fishing. The creek itself is wide enough and clear of brush that casting is relatively easy.

Fishing along the flats between waterfalls is productive, then about every 100 yards or so a cascade creates a deep hole that often holds a fish. At this point, one has to climb up the rocky face or sidewalls of the waterfall to get to the next fishable flat above.

Or not. Some are impassable due to sheer cliffs.

One must climb out of the canyon through some steep and brushy areas, then exit to cut around the waterfall itself. It is beautiful, one is likely all alone, the fishing is good.

I wish I had known about this years ago.

So I returned this summer. For the fishing, yes, but as much if not more so for the experience of the topographical uniqueness of the creek.

And I saw a brace of bull moose. They sauntered out of the timberline some distance from the creek and came to feed in some beaver ponds a stone's throw from me.

An amazing day.

Will I go back? Someday.

South Mineral is a grand experience, but different from the Gunnison, which I visit every year several times a year. I am always looking for the next high country discovery.

What will I know tomorrow that I wish I knew today?

Rabies in Colorado

Not all that many years ago, rabies was talked about and feared much more than it is now.

I remember trying to feed a squirrel a peanut and my grandmother warning me that I could get rabies if he bit me. Then I would have to undergo many very painful shots over the course of many weeks in the hospital, so I better get away from that wild animal right now. My grandmother was a worrier.

The truth is, rabies is still a concern.

During the year 2014, Colorado saw 130 confirmed cases of rabies in wildlife. Ninety-three cases were in bats and 32 cases were in skunks. Of these confirmed cases in wildlife, 76 were known or highly suspected of, exposing 101 domestic animals and 57 humans.

In 2013 there were 70 cases discovered in bats and 102 in skunks. These went on to expose 53 humans and 214 domestic animals. Clearly, the danger from rabies still exists.

Rabies is a potentially deadly disease caused by a virus that attacks the nervous system. It is transmitted by contact with the saliva of the infected animal, usually through a bite wound.

Blood or the spray of an infected skunk does not transmit the disease. The disease can infect all mammals.

In our state, rabies mostly occurs in wild bats and skunks. It has appeared in



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

raccoons, foxes, bobcats and other mammals but is not very often. Most rodents, including rats, mice, squirrels, chipmunks and voles are not likely to be infected with the disease.

Any infected animal that comes in contact with a domestic animal has the potential to spread the disease. The best prevention for this is to have your dogs and cats vaccinated through their veterinarian.

It is not always easy to determine if an animal in the wild has rabies.

An infected animal can behave strangely. An animal that is usually nocturnal, such as a raccoon, may come out during the daytime. Rabid animals may also approach or attack people or domestic animals, rather than run away. They may have trouble walking, standing or flying, eating and drinking as the disease affects their nervous system.

The only sure way to determine if an animal is infected

is to have it tested by a professional. One of the most important symptoms of a rabid animal is that they lose their fear of humans. An animal that might usually run away could approach you, showing no fear.

When a person is infected with rabies, the illness usually begins with flu-like symptoms. There will be fever, headache and a general weakness. It is possible that there may be pain, itching or numbness at the site of the bite.

These symptoms may take four to eight weeks to appear, but in some cases it can be longer than that.

As the disease infects the nervous system, difficulty breathing and swallowing will begin to appear. Some people become paralyzed while others may become hyperactive and suffer a heart attack.

Rabies is almost always fatal. Unfortunately, there are no good treatments for rabies in people or animals.

The good news is that rabies can be prevented. Have all your dogs and cats vaccinated. Horses, cattle and livestock can also be vaccinated. This is very important, as it can be very difficult to determine if a pastured animal has been exposed to the disease.

Any animal that has been properly vaccinated will not get rabies. There are vaccines for people also but most of these are administered after an infected animal bites a person. Unlike people, animals

cannot be vaccinated for rabies after they have been exposed to the disease.

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment states that if an animal bites you, immediately wash the wound with soap and water for at least 15 minutes. This will help wash out some of the virus.

Try to make note of what animal bit you and how it was behaving or was it acting strangely. Try and keep track of where it went. If it was a wild animal, it can possibly be captured and tested. A domestic animal can be quarantined and monitored to see if it has the disease.

Immediately contact your doctor, animal control or a wildlife officer. Rabies is a very serious disease and you should consult with a professional to see if they recommend a rabies post exposure treatment for you.

Animals bite many folks in Colorado each year, but very few are from rabies-infected animals. As always, prevention is the best medicine.

Avoid physical contact with animals in the wild, especially those acting strangely, and have your domestic animals vaccinated. 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.

Outdoor bief

Astronomy society hosts astrogeologist

The Black Canyon Astronomical Society's Sept. 22 meeting will feature Kenneth Edmundson of the U.S. Geological Survey Astrogeology Science Center in Flagstaff, Ariz.

From 1963, the USGS Astrogeology Science Center in Flagstaff has played a key role in processing and analyzing data from many missions to the planets and satellites of the solar system, conducting research to better understand the origins, evolution, and geologic processes operating on these bodies.

The ASC produces geologic and topographic maps for the scientific community and the general public in support of terrestrial and planetary studies; has assisted in the location of potential landing sites for exploration vehicles and continues to work with NASA and other space agencies to establish and maintain scientific and technical expertise in planetary science and remote sensing.

The meeting is from 7 - 8 p.m. Sept. 22, at the Centennial Room, 24 S. Uncompahgre Ave., Montrose.

For more information, visit BlackCanyonAstronomy.com or phone 970-856-7716 or 970-589-0993

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