

Dead-end into the Colorado Trail

Are you wanting to get some quiet, some outdoor beauty and relative solitude?

Find a sign that says "Dead End Ahead," park your vehicle, and then keep on going.

That is what I was fortunate enough to do this past weekend. The famous Colorado Trail (CT) allows one to hike a few miles on a single overnight outing, or even to hike almost five hundred unbroken miles.

Connecting Waterton Canyon in west Denver with the northern end of Durango, the CT is a precious link through and across the Rocky Mountains. It shares some of its route with the CDT (Continental Divide Trail). The CDT, for comparison, is a series of connected routes and trails which begins in Canada and ends in Mexico.

Are you wanting to join up with friends or family from the Front Range for some self-propelled time in the forests and high-altitude tundra? What is designated as Segment 15 of the CT is just about midway between Montrose and Denver. Better yet, you do not need to fight the traffic on Interstate 70 to get there.

Thirteen miles west of Salida, a county road takes off to the south. This I learned from the Colorado Trail Data Book. One of my grown daughters has a copy, having completed the entire trail herself in one fell swoop two years ago. I also have a copy myself, purchased locally at Steve Omernik's Great Outdoors Store after I had joined that daughter for 33 miles of another segment of the CT.

This tiny, pocket-sized book makes it easy to select a hiking and backcountry camping area that is no more than three hours drive from either Denver or Montrose. What is the number of that county road, I wondered? I like knowing ahead of time to be sure all the group members can rendezvous without difficulty, but even last year's book does not list the county road by number.

Fortunately, from the Montrose Library District used book sale, I have a twenty-seven year old book that describes this Segment 15 of the Colorado Trail in greater detail. Appropriately titled "The Colorado



Outdoors

By John T. Unger

Trail," it was published just a few short years after the trail itself was fully established. It gives historical perspective and geologic and landform details that cannot become outdated.

Forest Service numberings as well as county-based numberings of roads often have changed through the years. I therefore knew to not necessarily trust the numberings from my San Isabel National Forest map since it was purchased some time before 2016.

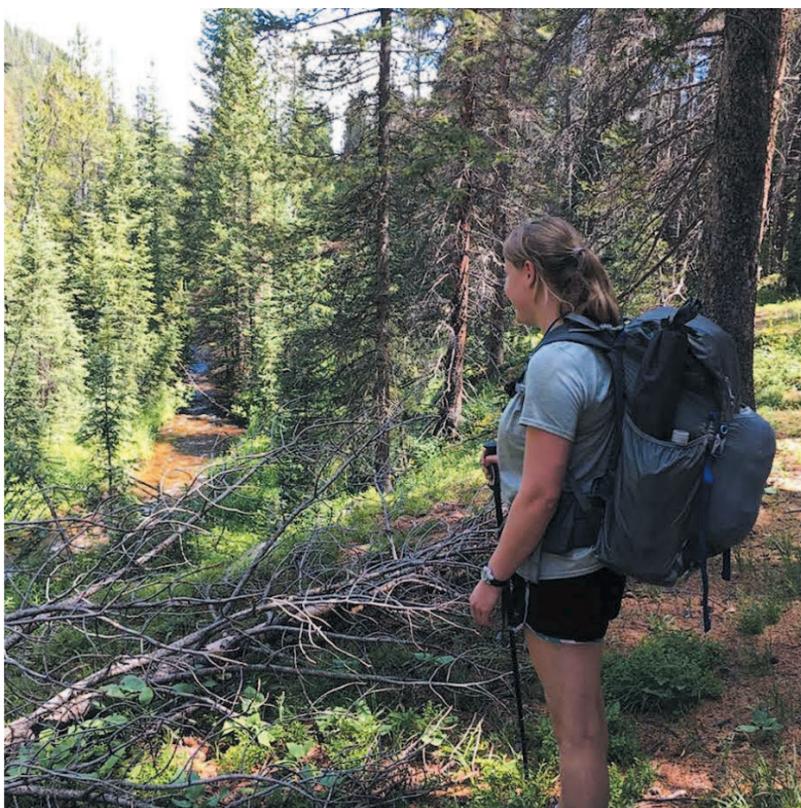
Also, Google maps are frequently in error when it comes to non-paved roads beyond a city or town, and should not be relied on completely. Some paper maps do show this area, known as South Fooses Creek, while some do not. This creek's water eventually ends up in the Arkansas River drainage.

Is there cell phone service in that area of Highway 50? Is that county road passable after rain, or only by high-clearance vehicles, or only by 4WD? Along its three mile length between Highway 50 and the dead-end of the trailhead, are there many places for backpackers, fishermen, and hikers to park?

Are there few or many parking spaces at the trailhead itself? Is there a campfire ban currently, as in several of Colorado's national forests? What is the name of the road along South Fooses Creek, and is it visibly signed?

These questions were mostly unanswered by the website coloradotrail.org and the databook, although each did have an enormous amount of useful information about all parts of this 482-mile trail.

I found that some carriers' cell phone coverage became available about three



Carrying her full backpack, Elise Unger takes in the sight and sound of South Fooses Creek as its cold waters flow down from the Continental Divide. (Submitted photo/John Unger)

miles east of what ended up being named County Road 225. This is useful when part of one's group is arriving from elsewhere.

As the databook indicated, some of this road is best accessed by high-clearance vehicles, especially the upper mile. As it happens, there are about a half of a dozen areas to park a vehicle along this three mile road. About ten cars can park in a small lot where County Road 225 leaves U.S. Highway 50. A similar number of vehicles can park at the trailhead itself.

Regarding the potential for a fire ban, a call to the Salida Ranger District of the San Isabel National Forest revealed that there is no current fire ban, although caution is very much needed, and no new fire pits

should be made. The phone numbers for the Ranger District offices of each of the national forests are listed on the website, and each county's sheriff's office phone number is in the databook, to find out about any current fire bans.

A very satisfying feeling is to finally leave all of the websites, books, and reading behind and to finally enjoy hiking a trail past a dead-end sign, in the company of one's friends or family.

John T. Unger is a Diplomate of the American Chiropractic Board of Sports Physicians, with over twenty-five years of practice in Montrose. Continuing to complete the Colorado Trail in stages appeals to him. Ideas for future columns are welcomed at sportsdocunger.com.

The highest level of your training



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

I have spent a lifetime taking part in outdoor activities of all variations. From offshore fishing excursions in the islands to high-mountain hunts, I have padded around outdoors for decades. I have also spent many days and hours searching for missing people, assisting injured folks and all the recoveries a person will ever need to be part of.

Because of these experiences, I understand any activity can turn out not as planned. It only takes a brief visit from Mr. Murphy to wreak havoc on a fun time. He is the reason I, like so many of you, take precautions. We carry survival packs, tote first aid kits, bring tools and spare parts, and pack extra food and clothes.

Let's take a look at our survival pack. I would bet that it has one of those cute little survival blankets, as every commercial kit has contained for the last several decades.

Have you ever taken it out and tried to stay warm with it? You would soon learn that the blanket you are relying on is akin to drying off after your shower with a wet washcloth.

You probably have a pack of windproof matches and a magnesium fire starter in that kit. When was the last time you tried to make a fire in the woods, without the assistance of a quart of gasoline and an abundant supply of firewood you cut up with your Stihl?

If you have one of those store-bought first aid kits, when was the last time you took a look at what is inside? Does it have what you really need in an emergency? We don't want to find out that essential life-saving items, such as a tourniquet, are missing when someone is on the ground bleeding. When was the last time you practiced any kind of first aid or CPR skills?

When we are faced with a full-blown 3-alarm emergency, a number of things happen simultaneously. Depending on the severity of the incident, your pulse can jump to 145 beats a minute as a protective chemical cocktail is dumped into your system; one of the main ingredients being adrenaline.

As your mind reacts to the emergency, the mental processes speeds up. In this type of emergency, we will react



Posse members train in transporting an injured person. (Submitted photo/Pete Kowalski)

as we have been trained. Instructors teach us that we are only as good as our highest level of training.

Training is a way of life for posse members. Everyone trains at least monthly, with special weekend sessions throughout the year. Ask any firefighter or police officer about training. It is in their job description to train throughout their career.

Everyone can benefit in training for emergencies, and there is no such thing as too much training. Never miss an opportunity to practice and hone your outdoor skills.

Earlier this summer, as I was preparing the ATV for

the upcoming season, I went through the equipment I carry. I noticed I have a flat tire repair kit with a compressor that attaches to the ATV battery. I bought this kit new in 2009 and have never opened it. I have carried this kit for eight seasons, relying on it for a flat, and never checked to see if the compressor even works.

When I bought my new truck, some four years ago, I transferred the equipment from the old truck. Emptying one toolbox and all the supplies under the rear seat into the new rig was a big job. This spring, while looking for something else, I found my spare light bulb box. It contained headlights for the old truck that will not work in the new one.

I am encouraging everyone to consider how much training he or she has taken part in. Look back to when your last first aid/CPR course was and I bet it needs updating. Those courses are a great place to practice skills for an emergency.

Spend some time going through your first aid kit. Make sure the adhesive on the tape and bandages is still good, medicines have not expired, and that the needed life-saving equipment, such as a tourniquet, is there and you know how to use it.

Take a close look at your

survival pack, including the extra supplies in your vehicles and ATV. I checked my pack and found that some of those candy bars were pretty disgusting. It would be better to find out now rather than a blizzard in November when you are stuck in the woods and have to share your dinner with Mr. Murphy.

Next time you are up camping or fishing for the day, and want a campfire, seize the opportunity to hone your skills. Build that fire the hard way, looking for wood and lighting it with the survival magnesium fire starter.

In order to properly prepare for any excursion, we must mentally visualize what we are going to do when something goes wrong. Practice the skills you will need in the event things do not go as planned.

Being in the woods recreating can double as an opportunity to further your training and have some fun with it on the way. I hope you never need those emergency skills but I am certain, one day you will. Until next time, 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.

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