



Flashlights have come a long way since the “electric torch” of long ago. (Submitted photo/Mark Rackay)

The flashlight

As I get older, it seems the world is getting darker. Even though I am near deaf, I think the music is still too loud. At least for the darkness, I have a flashlight.

An old Englishman named David Misell invented the very first flashlight in 1899.

It used 3 D cell batteries in a tube and powered a small incandescent light bulb. They were called “flashlights” because they did not give a long and steady stream of light. It is interesting to note that the first battery, capable of being mass-produced, was created in 1802.

I got my first light to use outdoors when I was about 9. It was a war surplus model that used a pair of D cells. This light could shoot a beam about 10 feet and was only visible on the darkest of moonless nights.

I am not sure which war this electric torch was surplus from, but I did spend a great deal of time looking for more batteries for the thing.

The old incandescent bulb has been around for a long time but is not, and never has been, particularly well-suited to our outdoors purposes. It is fragile, not very bright, and has a short life expectancy.

The next serious breakthrough in light technology came



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

with the creation of halogen lamps in 1959 by General Electric.

A halogen bulb has halogen gas added to it. This gas increases the light output and extends the life of the bulb.

My biggest complaint about halogen lights is the amount of heat put out by them. After several minutes, you can burn badly just by touching them.

A cop buddy of mine from Denver had one of the early rechargeable halogen police lights, designed to replace the 5 D cell size light. In an effort to determine just how long the light would last between charges, he left it running. Better to find out at home how long a light will last, rather than be surprised in a dark alley while on duty.

Apparently, he was interrupted by a phone call, and forgot the light was on the coffee table.

Later, after Denver Fire Department extinguished the flames, my friend had a good idea of the problems associated with halogen lights. Unfortunately, my friend’s wife forbids any further testing of flashlights, and we still do not know just what the runtime of that model was.

With the creation of LED bulbs, (light emitting diode) about all other types are just about obsolete. An LED bulb will outlast anything else in comparison, gives off very little heat, and uses far less battery power to operate.

When choosing a flashlight for outdoor purposes, there are a few terms you should be aware of so that you make the right choice. In 2009, ANSI FL 1 standards were adopted, insuring that all flashlights are tested and rated the same way. Generally, better flashlights will have these test results printed on the packaging for easy comparison between brands.

The unit of measurement of the intensity of the light coming from the flashlight, on the highest setting and with fresh batteries, is called a lumen.

Lumen is a great place to start but it does not tell you everything.

Beam intensity and distance will also determine if your choice is effective for the

intended purpose. Generally, a 20-lumen light is for a reading lamp while lights with over 2000 lumens make great searchlights.

Beam distance is measured in meters.

This simply states how far the light will shine before the brightness diminishes to the equivalent of the light from a full moon. Full moonlight is considered adequate for safe foot travel outdoors.

Run time is the next area you should look into.

It simply tells you just how long the light will last on a set of batteries. Most of my lights eat batteries. I should have invested in stock options with a battery company.

Impact resistance is measured in meters.

The test lights are dropped onto a concrete floor six times to determine if the light will remain functional after occasional drops. Our outdoor lights should be able to handle a great deal of punishment if we are going to depend on them.

There are also water resistance ratings which are important to us, especially in wet weather or when used around lakes and streams.

I look for the kind of light that uses O-rings to keep the bulb and battery compartments sealed.

LED lights have come a long way in just the past few years. Lights now have longer runtimes and higher outputs than ever before.

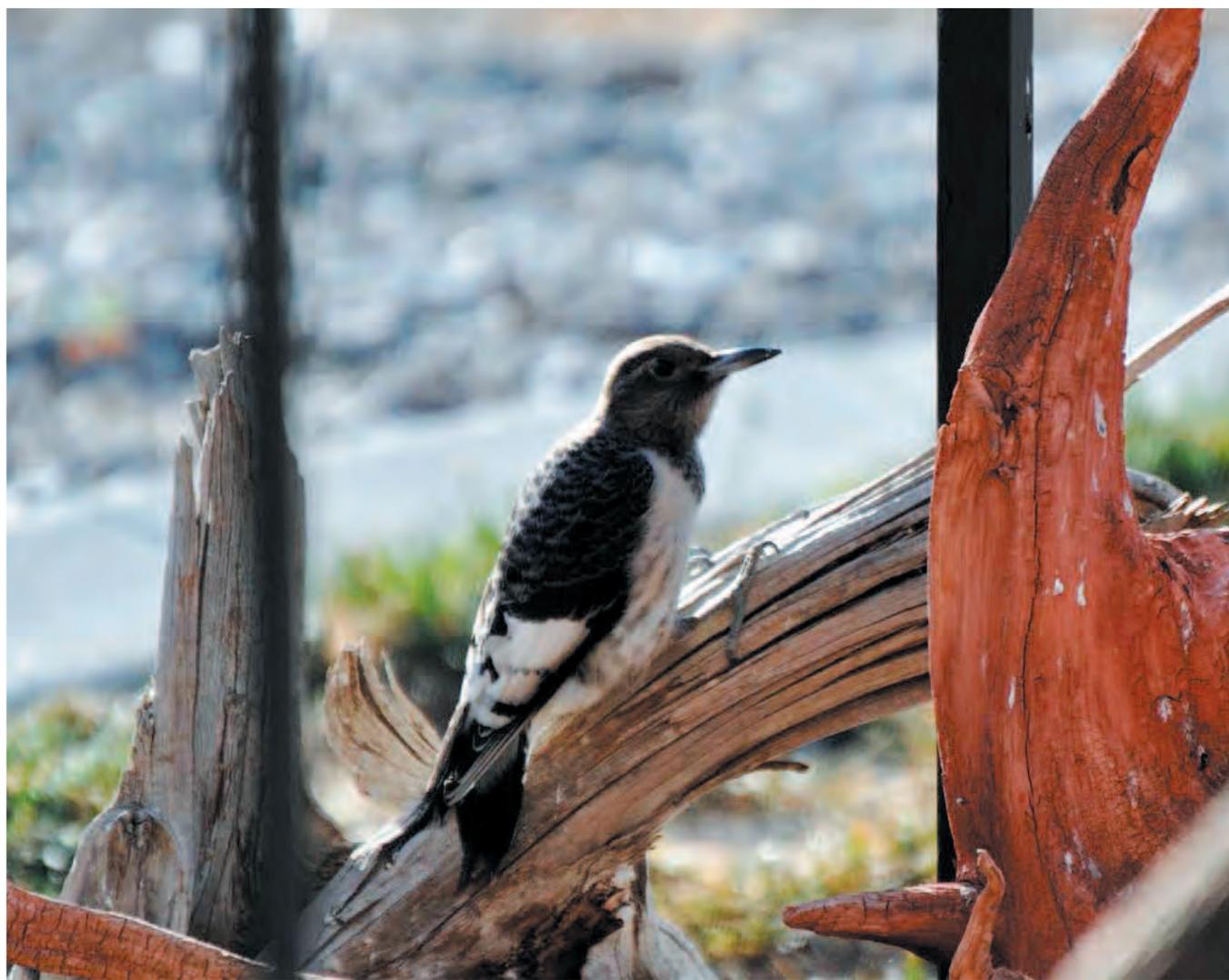
Look for lights with multiple brightness settings. The lower settings will usually last many hours and you would be surprised just how well the low lumen output works. In pure darkness, such as during a survival situation, a low output is more than enough to illuminate whatever activity you are undertaking.

Personally, I use the higher end brands of lights, such as Surefire, Streamlight, Innova and Pelican.

These companies charge more but their lights are better made, withstand more abuse, and are usually backed by a good warranty.

Remember that several lights in your pack is always a good idea. Besides, you can join me on the eternal search for more batteries. In a future column we will explore the different types of flashlights available to you.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press 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



A rare bird

Avid birder Sue Hirshman got the visitor of a lifetime recently, when a juvenile red-headed woodpecker came to her feeding spot on Underwoods Lane.

The woodpecker is an Eastern species and fed in Hirshman’s yard between Nov. 11 and 13. Hirshman’s visitor was witnessed by other people, including birders and a member of the local Audubon Society chapter, she reports. Additionally, she said she consulted with birding expert Coen Dexter, who keeps records in Montrose, Ouray, Delta and Mesa counties.

There have been no other red-headed woodpecker sightings in Montrose County, said Hirshman, who regularly writes about birds. (Submitted photo/Sue Hirshman)