

Finding north

I have often said that the secret to not getting lost is to stay found.

It sounds like a cliché, but it should be on your mind any-time you head outdoors. It is so easy to get lost. All you need is a small distraction, and to keep moving while distracted, and presto, you're lost. Add to this a bit of bad weather or an injury and you had better make sure the catastrophe insurance is all paid up, because you have got yourself a problem.

The best ways to stay found include some type of navigational device, such as a GPS or a compass. Both of these require a basic knowledge of how a compass works and the four directions: north, south, east and west. For the purpose of our discussion here, I will assume everyone knows how to read a compass.

I might point out, from past experience, that bringing a compass into play once you are lost is useless. Once you have been directionally misguided, it probably does no good to know which direction is north. An instrument that will tell me where I parked the truck would be more useful, but it has yet to be invented.

Whenever you head out, keep in mind that the stream you crossed, or the road you left from, is a hard boundary. No matter where you wander off, that road or stream is behind you. Make note of the direction you head, and generally, that hard boundary will be behind you.

There may come a time when you find yourself in the great outback without any type of navigational aid. For these times, let me offer a few ways to find north. From that north, you can generally find your way back to that road, stream or whatever your hard boundary was.

The easiest way is to keep in mind the sun's path. Generally, the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. It may vary, depending on the season. During the summer months, the sun passes on a more northerly arc, and more southerly during the winter months.

At sunrise, while the sun is basically in the east, face the sun. North will be a quarter-turn, or 90 degrees, counter-clockwise. West will be another 90 degrees further moving counter-clockwise. This method will only work close to sunrise or sunset. At sunset, you will face west and turn clockwise 90 degrees to find north. Don't keep spinning around or you may screw yourself into the ground.

The next method requires an analogue wristwatch that is set accurately. I use this method often, as it is my favorite and easiest to use. If you have a digital Casio, it won't work. Simply hold the watch in your



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay



(Above) This compass lives on my pack strap, where I can check it often. Staying found is the key to not getting lost. (Right) An analogue wristwatch works very well for finding north. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/ Mark Rackay)

hand, horizontally with the ground. Point the hour hand at the sun. Bisect the angle between the hour hand and 12 o'clock. Halfway between the hour and 12 o'clock is south. Directly behind you, or 180 degrees, is north. Try this outside and you will see how well this method works.

Nighttime navigation requires a certain amount of knowledge of the stars. The secret is to find Polaris, or the North Star. Polaris lies directly above the North Pole. The North Star is the last star in the Little Dipper constellation.

You will locate Polaris straight out from the tip of the Big Dipper's bowl, almost as if it were being poured from the giant ladle. The two lowest stars in the bowl (the outermost stars of the cup of the dipper) form a straight line that points to the North Star.

Mentally draw a straight line from the North Star to the ground. Where your line meets the ground, is True North. A tip is that the North Star should be the number of degrees of your current latitude above the horizon. Montrose is roughly the latitude of 38.5 degrees, and that many degrees up is where you should find the North Star.

If it is a clear night, and the moon is a crescent shape high in the sky, you can try another method. Simply connect the tips of the crescents with an imaginary line. Follow that imaginary line to the horizon, and that is south. Again, turn 180 degrees



and you will be facing north. The moon method is only mentioned for fun. Try it some evening in your backyard. This method is not very accurate compared to using the North Star, which is a very accurate method. Ancient mariners used the North Star and a compass to find the New World, so it should help me find where I parked the truck. If you are using one of the nighttime methods to determine a direction of travel, but waiting until daylight to move, draw an arrow in the dirt. You can also use rocks or sticks to point out where north is. In the morning, find a landmark in that direction and begin your hike out. Just as a side note, I keep a small compass clipped to one of my pack straps. It is

always out, and I notice it often, which reminds me to take a quick look and orient myself. Looking at it regularly, throughout the day, helps keep me "found." These methods are fun to practice while you are in the outdoors. And who knows, one of these skills may save your bacon some day, especially if Murphy hid your compass and killed the batteries in your GPS. I will be the guy spinning around counter-clockwise on the trail, trying to find north. Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and an avid hunter who serves as a director and PIO for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcsapi.org.

USFS proposes campground changes

SPECIAL TO THE MONTROSE DAILY PRESS

The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison National Forests' Norwood Ranger District is seeking comments on a proposal to make changes to dispersed camping at the Mary E and Priest Lake recreation sites.

These proposals would be implemented during this upcoming summer.

The Mary E recreation site is located about five miles west of Telluride. This area is currently open for day use activities only. Under the proposal, dispersed camping would be allowed at designated campsites that

would be marked with a site post and picnic table. Approximately 15 – 25 campsites would be designated within the area. All sites would be offered without fee. The Forest Service would also provide portable toilets and a Dumpster at the Mary E site.

The Forest Service plans to have an onsite campground host to ensure rules and regulations are followed.

Additionally, campfires would be strictly prohibited; all dogs would be required to be on leash; quiet hours would be set from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., and the maximum stay limit would be seven days in a 30-day period.

The Priest Lake recreation site

is located about 11 miles south of Telluride. The site currently offers dispersed camping and a restroom.

The Forest Service proposes to change management of the area by allowing camping only in designated campsites. These designated sites would be marked with a site post and a metal fire ring. About eight-15 campsites would be designated in the area.

All sites would be offered for free, with a stay limit of seven days in a 30-day period. Visitors would continue to be required to pack out their trash.

Written comments must be submitted via mail to: Kathy Peckham,

Project Leader, P.O. Box 388, Norwood, CO 81423; in person (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays) to Peckham at 1150 Forest St., Norwood; faxed to (970) 327-4854; or sent electronically to comments-rocky-mountain-gmug-norwood@fs.fed.us.

The name and mailing address of the person submitting electronic comments must be included.

Comments will be accepted until Friday, May 18. Maps for these proposals are available for review online at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/gmug>. Information from news release.

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