

Outdoors health tips from the Posse

Find your happy place

The definition of bliss has changed somewhat over the years. It used to be somewhat of a safe space, or a place where you can escape reality for a short time. Today it goes so far as to mean perfect happiness, oblivious of all else. I may be oblivious of all else at times, but I doubt it is because I am in my "bliss."



Mark Rackay
Tips from the Posse

In my years in the Florida Keys, that bliss place was miles out in Florida Bay. This area is home to many species of backwater fish, such as tarpon, bonefish, redfish and snook. I would spend all my free time, in my flats boat, in the bay chasing those fish.

There were days when the water was so calm, that looking miles into the bay, it was impossible to tell where the water stopped and the sky started. I guess that is why ancient mariners feared running off the earth where the ocean stopped. The rest of the world, and all of its problems, ceased to exist for me, at least for a little bit.

It should come as no surprise to anyone that I still find my bliss, or my personal Valhalla, in the great outdoors. I head up to the hills (when not on a search and rescue call out) and it is just about a mile past where the pavement ends, heaven begins. Being in the woods becomes a spiritual experience and I think many of you know what I mean.

A book written by Florence Williams called "The Nature Fix" really puts a scientific spin on spending time outdoors. In this book, Williams demonstrates scientifically, why spending time amongst nature will increase happiness, healthiness and creativity.

Spending as little as five hours a month outdoors has been shown to reduce blood pressure and stress. Five hours a month would never do it for me. Five hours a day would be more like it, but alas, it is not meant to be. Perhaps in the next life.

Most of the benefits we receive from nature come from the sounds and scents we hear and smell while outdoors. Birdsong has been specifically shown to reduce stress and make a person feel more relaxed.

A lot of times for me, it is the view. I can stand on a high ridge and stare into a lush, tree filled valley below, for hours. That lonely view can erase all worry and problems from



For me, bliss is somewhere in those mountains, where the road ends. If your bliss is outdoors, here are a few tips to help you get the most out of it. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/Mark Rackay)

my thoughts. I can actually feel my mood improve and my blood pressure drop.

According to the last U.S. Census, most cities in the United States grew at a faster pace than their suburbs, for the first time in a hundred years.

Further, in 2008, the United Nations reported that for the first time more people throughout the world live in urban areas than rural ones. And amazingly, the planning in these urban areas does not begin to cover our basic human needs for that outdoor time.

Being president of this great nation has to be one of the most stressful jobs on earth. Having the top seat and being the most powerful person in the free world also carries a great deal of stress that must be relieved somehow. For the president, there is Camp David. A beautiful and blissful place, surrounded by nature and all its glory, where the president can relax and unwind is what Camp David is.

When you head up for some of that time

in bliss there are a few things you can do to maximize the enjoyment. The first, for me, is to turn off that cell phone.

I remember a time, before cell phones, when you could actually be away for a while. For me, the cell phone is a ball and chain, keeping me incarcerated with reality, and making it nearly impossible to find my bliss. Turn it off and check the messages when you return.

Try not to have a schedule. Making a schedule, what time to be here, what time to move to there, only seems to add stress to the time outdoors. It is all right to plan a hike to a lake, but do you have to be there by a set time? Enjoy the hike, maybe make a detour, and smell the roses along the way.

I have always loved the woods in the fall. The beautiful color change in the trees and shrubs and the changing skies of fall always cast a simple and quiet loneliness in me. Even the air smells different in the autumn.

As a kid, I would head into the woods

behind our house after school in the fall. The trees were barren of leaves, and the silence was deafening. In just a few minutes, all my worries of school, baseball, parents and every other kid worry seemed to disappear. After a couple hours I would return home, and more often than not, I don't even remember what it was I was so worried about earlier.

Make time for yourself. Your emotional and spiritual well-being is just as important as your physical health. Head up into the hills and have some outdoor time. I truly hope you can find your personal Valhalla. It is out there somewhere; you just have to take the time to go find it. ●

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and an avid hunter who travels all across North America in search of adventure and 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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