

Old pinyons and the climate of hope

There are 14 numbered posts on Black Canyon's Warner Point Nature Trail. They are keyed to pages in a booklet that visitors pick up at the trailhead which describes the trees of the woodland along the trail. Rotted with age, we gradually replaced them this fall with new ones; anchoring them in the rocky, shallow soil.

The work takes time, except for post number 13 at one of the aged pinyon pines near the end of the trail. The marker was fairly worn, but we pulled it out with little trouble. It was the last one for that day, so we could sit under the shade of the tree's spreading branches for a short break.

We don't exactly know the age of this tree, but studies in the 1940s and 1950s of tree rings from some nearby specimens, revealed ages that today approach 900 years. It started me to wonder about longevity in pinyon pines compared to that of people.

Modern medicine, in the human world, suggests that longevity might be realized by genetics, as DNA is gathered to study age-related diseases. Research related to the sequence of genes in the DNA



Outdoors

By Paul Zaenger

could unlock the secrets of illnesses like Alzheimer's or Lou Gehrig's Disease (ALS).

Species, perhaps all species, have DNA (a sequence of traits) that could mean healthier or less healthy individuals. In the drought of 2002 – 2004, large stands of pinyon pines in New Mexico and Arizona succumbed to lack of moisture. Their weakened condition opened the door to ips beetle attack. Beetles took advantage of weakened trees, and large quantities of the trees kicked the bucket.

Back in the shade of our old pinyon, I wonder if there are traits in pinyon trees that better equip them to tolerate temperatures as they warm and conditions as they dry out. Might the gene make-up of some individual trees help them to fend off a beetle attack? It's a grand specimen; sometimes called by colleagues as the grandparent tree or the grand-pinyon tree. Over the years we have bonded with this denizen of time.

Studies have uncovered various conditions which can affect an individual pinyon's chances when conditions go downhill. Soil, nutrients, rain and snow, competition from other trees, and temperature all play a part in survival

success. Location is also critical. Pinyons on south facing slopes, like many on this ridge, face greater challenges than on north facing sides of hills and canyons.

A recent study of tree rings on pinyons showed that trees which have lived through wetter and drier periods, meaning they have abided through good and bad years, are more successful in getting through a warming period. On top of that, those which have survived to age 70 are more likely to live to a ripe old age than others.

An increase in heat has set the stage to a great deal of beetle kill for Douglas fir and mortality among aspen groves on the south side of Black Canyon. Overlooks and trails expose the die-off that has come about in only the past few years. Yet, after 26 years of hiking the Warner Trail, it's hard not to have a concern for this grandparent pinyon that I have come to know.

I have sat with the tree as it helped me with the loss of my dad in 2006. It's fun greeting the tree at the end of an arduous hike back from Warner Point to the river. Touching its bark, smelling the "piney" aroma on a hot summer day, knowing that the tree is part of a community of living things similar to our own human community, and sharing the glory of old age with visitors have all been



Rangers stand by the grandparent pinyon tree after replacing a numbered post. Note the sprawling branches under the needles. The South Rim Road at Black Canyon is still open, so hiking the Warner Trail is available until the next winter storm. (Photo courtesy of National Park Service)

part of my relationship.

The tree sits on the north facing slope of the canyon. It appears to have the usual advantages to survive. It's hard not knowing if it might have a genetic advantage to live through increasing heat and lower moisture in the years ahead.

People who look to the future with promise often find additional years added to their life, whether it's in their genes or not. It seems that other factors can contribute to longevity in both humans and plants.

Still, pinyon trees, like the grand

pinyon inspire hope. Not an uninformed, ingenuous hope. This is a hope that gives flight to love of trees and woodlands. And in that regard the longevity question is less important than the pull given by that great old tree to have a heart open to the land.

Paul Zaenger has been a supervisory park ranger at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park since 1993. Other park assignments include Mount Rushmore National Memorial and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.

Gardening challenges for November



Gardening A to Z

By Linda Corwine McIntosh

Wow! Can you believe the early snow and cold that we had? I've seen several trees and shrubs that weren't quite ready for it and they still had green leaves when it hit. I think it surprised some gardeners too. If it came a little earlier than you would have preferred, and if you didn't get everything done in your landscape before it hit, it may not be too late for some of those tasks.

If you still have some spring flowering bulbs that you didn't get around to planting it's still worth a try. Granted, it would have been better for the root development of the bulbs to plant them a month or two ago, but it beats throwing them out. Just be sure to apply about three inches of mulch over

them after planting and watering them. This holds true for garlic too.

If you want to "force" a few bulbs so you'll have tulips, daffodils or hibiscus blooming indoors during the winter months it's a great time to do so. Most spring bulbs need about 12 weeks of temperatures of about 40 degrees to bloom. A refrigerator or unheated garage makes ideal cooling conditions. Just don't place them near apples or they won't bloom.

Paperwhites and narcissus are the exception and don't need cooling to produce flowers. Paper whites should be planted in a shallow container with a couple inches of pebbles, the bulb, and a few more pebbles to cover the bulb about half way up. Then mix a couple ounces of hard liquor such as tequila or vodka with a quart of water, and add water to cover the pebbles. Continue to water them with this mixture as needed. I'm serious about that. The alcohol will help keep the paper whites shorter and more attractive. Just place them in a bright location and watch them get happy. (Keep out of reach of children and pets.)

If you have young trees,

especially those with dark-colored bark or thin bark such as Locust, Mountain ash, or Maples, it's not too late to wrap the trunks to protect the bark from the intense winter sun. Sun scald, also known as southwest disease, can kill a tree! Trees that are three years old or younger should be wrapped with commercial crepe tree wrap, which is available at some garden centers.

This is the time of year when roving herds of deer move closer to town and show up in larger numbers in area yards. Deer fencing is the best method of keeping them from munching on and rubbing their antlers on your trees and shrubs. Deer are especially fond of rubbing their antlers, or "rutting" on young pliable trees and shrubs, so be warned. Products such as Deer Stop will help keep browsing deer from nibbling on your plants but it needs to be reapplied.

You can still plant cold hardy spring vegetables such as lettuce and spinach. The seeds will lay dormant in the soil. When spring temperatures allow, they should germinate and grow. It's kind of like planting an early salad

surprise. Just avoid working the soil when it's wet!

You may not think about it, but houseplants should be kept out of cold drafts such as doorways. They should also be moved away from heat sources like heat ducts and fireplaces.

Did you know that it's not good to walk on frozen grass? It will cause the grass blades to break making the grass turn white. So when we have freezing temperatures it's a good thing to keep in mind.

If you want to have amaryllis blooming during the holidays count back about seven weeks from the time that you want them to bloom. Then simply plant them in a pot about two inches larger than the bulb. Add a layer of soil to the bottom of the pot and position the bulb so the top sticks up above the rim of the pot. Firm the soil around the edge, leaving the top third of the bulb exposed. Water sparingly at first, allowing the soil to dry out between watering. Rotating the pot a quarter turn each time you water will help keep the spike growing straight. Once your amaryllis is blooming, you can move it to a cooler

location out of direct sunlight to make the blossoms last longer.

Native trees and shrubs probably fared better after the recent cold than non-natives. Most should be OK but trees such as Austrian pines may develop dead tops next summer if they didn't shut down before winter. Deciduous trees, especially fruit trees may have been weakened. They could experience branch dieback, frost cracks in the trunk, or even canker disease. I guess we should pray for the best and hope most trees were ready for winter.

Remember when I told you about the 11th Annual How-Big-Is-Your-Cat Face Spider Contest? I thought you'd like to know that the winner was "Princess Raya" entered by Raya Davis Thompson, a 9-year-old fourth-grader from Lamar. The spider weighed a whopping 3.75 grams. This beat the 2013 record holder, "Arach Obama" which weighed 2.96 grams. That's a big spider! Way to go Raya.

Linda Corwine McIntosh is an ISA Certified Arborist, Commercial Pesticide Applicator, and Advanced Master Gardener.

Spending a day in the adobes



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

The other day, I stopped by the newspaper and had a visit with Justin Tubbs, the managing editor. We discussed several items about upcoming columns, and the conversation turned as to what I was going to do Saturday.

It was a reasonably warm and pleasant day, so I explained I was going to try out a new AR-15 rifle, and just do a little plinking. Justin explained that he had never fired an AR-style rifle before, or much of anything else for that matter, and would love to see what all the hype was about. We quickly set a time to meet up.

The term "AR" comes from the name originally

associated with the first manufacturer. The letters stand for ArmaLite Rifle, and not assault rifle or automatic rifle. ArmaLite first developed the AR-15 in the late 1950s as a military rifle.

ArmaLite had very little success selling the rifle they developed, and in 1959 they sold the design to Colt. Colt continued development of the automatic rifle and eventually was selected by the U.S. Military to manufacture the rifle in 1963.

That rifle eventually became the standard issue for U.S. troops in the Vietnam War. The rifle was known as the M16. Colt later developed a version of the rifle in a semi automatic model.

The semi automatic version was marketed to law enforcement and civilians alike, under the name AR-15. When Colt's patents expired in the mid-1970s, other manufacturers began making similar models.

Because AR-15 style

rifles are semi automatic, the person firing must pull the trigger to fire each shot from the magazine, one pull, one shot. In contrast, a military M16 style rifle is fully automatic. There is a selector switch on the rifle that can make the weapon fire fully automatic; pull and hold the trigger back and the weapon will keep firing until the ammunition supply from the magazine is exhausted.

Fully automatic weapons have been tightly restricted in the United States since the 1934 National Firearms Act, which was directed against machine guns at the time. Citizens can own a machine gun, but must pay taxes and fees, and go through an extensive registration and licensing process that includes fingerprints, background checks, pictures and the signing off of the sheriff. The government closely monitors ownership of fully automatic weapons.

Today, there are many styles, calibers and sizes to

fit just about any budget or purpose. A complete AR-15 rifle can be purchased for less than \$500 dollars, and the premium

versions can run into the thousands. There is no limit to the amount of accessories, upgrades and customizations available

today.

AR-15 style rifles and the newer design AR-15

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Katharhynn Heidelberg gets set up behind the pistol format AR-15. (Justin Tubbs/ Montrose Daily Press)

ADOBES

FROM PAGE A9

pistols are primarily used for recreational shooting, and hunting purposes. The AR-15 platform seems to be a perfect match for folks who hunt predators. There are quite a few competitive matches available for AR owners, to include 3-gun and long range shooting competitions.

I have been shooting firearms for over 50 years for competition, law enforcement, hunting and for fun. Being an armorer for many types of handguns and rifles, to include the AR-15, I have had the opportunity to handle and fire most makes of firearms available.

Before heading out for our shooting trip, I stopped by Area Best Pawn at 2014 S. Townsend, in Montrose. There I visited with the store manager, Tim Wise, to get his take on AR-15 sales and availability. Tim manages the store that is the largest AR-15 dealer in the Montrose area.

Inside the store, you can find many types of AR-15 rifles, and pistols in dozens of configurations and many caliber choices. “ARs can be tough to get at times. The demand has steadily increased over recent years, but so have the different options and accessories. New items are coming out almost every day. We pride ourselves on carrying a huge selection of parts and accessories,” said Tim.

“We have a lot of law enforcement customers shopping here. Most departments provide rifles for their officers, but at least 50 percent of our accessories are sold to those officers,” Tim continued. Tim explained that 75 percent of his sales of AR-15 style rifles and pistols are sold for recreational purposes and hunting, with only 15 percent for defensive purposes. The remaining sales are divided between competition shooters and law enforcement, mainly for their personal use.

When Justin showed up at my house, he brought Katharhynn Heidelberg, the assistant editor from the Montrose Daily Press. She said firing an AR-15 was something she would like to experience as well. I made sure both had eye and hearing protection. With the team set, we headed to the adobes.

The first AR I let the newbies try was one built in a pistol format. Justin was first up and quickly went through the first magazine, firing at a target 100 yards away. His accuracy grew with each shot, and so did the smile on his face. Katharhynn was next up with the pistol. The pistol format was a natural fit for her and she quickly began working on a target at the 200-yard line. For a first time shooters with AR-style rifles, I was really impressed with how well they both shot.

After the break-in period with a pistol, it was time to get serious. I wanted them to experience how accurate an AR rifle

Montrose Daily Press Managing Editor Justin Tubbs giving an AR-15 pistol a workout. Justin preferred the rifle format because the Texas boy was a natural for long distance shooting. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/ Mark Rackay)

can be, when outfitted with some optical accessories.

I set up a Christensen Arms model CA-15 Recon, which has a carbon fiber wrapped barrel, and topped with a 6 to 18 power Leupold scope. This rifle is too heavy to effectively shoot long distance free hand, so I set up a portable bench.

Poor Katharhynn had a difficult time seeing through the scope and offered a few excuses about the sun being in her eyes. She suffered a merciless ridicule from Justin and me, which was all in fun. Clearly, she preferred the pistol set up to the heavier and much larger version. Considering she was hitting targets at 200 yards with a pistol, I could not find fault with her decision.

Justin then assumed the position behind the long-range rifle. I happily report that Justin hit the 300-yard target with monotonous regularity. If we had the availability of targets out further, I am sure he would have done well, but 300 yards was our limit here.

Both Justin and Katharhynn enjoyed shooting the ARs. They both admitted that the rifle and pistol were lots of fun and had no recoil at all. We went through a couple hundred rounds of ammunition in the couple hours we were up there. I think I made two new shooters join the ranks as both want to do it again. We will definitely make that happen.

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

For outdoors or survival related questions or comments, feel free to contact him directly at his email elkhunter77@bresnan.net.

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