

Fall riding in Western Colorado

The weather mavens said it was coming, but I'm never quite ready for the first snow of the season. Five inches of the white stuff graced my yard with leaves still on the trees. Yard work would have to wait. I had just finished painting the exterior of my house, so I just got under the wire in that regard. I wondered if the storm was signaling the end of our great fall weather. Last October was rainy and cold and put an end to my mountain bike season.

Fortunately, I had done a ride up the Dry Fork of Escalante Creek two days earlier with Alan Reed, Paul Wiesner and Dave Batten. It was an idyllic, Colorado fall day – sunny, calm and not too warm. The perfect scenario for mountain biking. For many of my cycling friends, fall is their favorite time of the year for mountain biking. I concur.

The Dry Fork Trail cuts through some rugged, wild country. The trail isn't buffed. It is definitely a throwback trail to the early days of mountain biking – no cell service, no one else on the trail and dozens of miles from the nearest town. All the more reason to go prepared. Carrying first aid supplies, a spare tube, tire pump and a few bike tools could go a long way when self-rescue is the only realistic option.

Once the snow melted and the cold snap faded, my thoughts turned to hitting the trail again. Glenn Webb and I loaded up the bikes and headed for the Grand Valley. We met Rick Walker, Rick Corbin and Yuelin Willet at the Hawkeye Trailhead. Our plan was to do a loop connecting the Hawkeye, Mack Ridge and Troybuilt trails. It wasn't my first time on those trails, but I had never tied them together.

The initial climb on Hawkeye is over 2 miles long. It weaves its way up slopes, along ridge lines and across small benches before topping out on the north side of Mack Ridge. It incorporates many of the rocky features on the landscape. The climb is relentless and keeps you focused on the tread ahead.

We then rode the Mack Ridge Trail west. The trail provides the grandest view of the Kokopelli's Trail system. Miles and miles of Lions Loop and Steve's Loop (aka Handcuffs) are easily noted from the ridge. A great place to check out the fall colors along the Colorado River. Eventually the trail leaves the ridge and drops down to the Lions Loop Trail. A good chunk of that section is rocky and technical, much like the Moore Fun



Outdoors

By Bill Harris



Rick Walker and Rick Corbin with Mabel and Nellie on Troybuilt. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/Bill Harris)

Trail a mile away – hike-a-bike fare.

After a brief pit stop, our crew took on the Troybuilt Trail. Back in the early days the initial section of Troybuilt was steep and barely rideable. Today there's a rocky singletrack that follows the contours of the slope before connecting with the original trail. For the next half mile or so the trail rolls along a smooth, flowing path that Rick Corbin calls his "happy place". Too bad it had to end.

The trail then heads up Salt Creek. Below I could see the bridge that was built across Salt Creek. When Kokopelli's Trail was built in 1989 travelers had to ford Salt Creek. Cold water up to your waist. I did it, once. Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell shepherded an appropriation through Congress to fund the bridge.

A stiff climb on Troybuilt brought us to a frontage road that took us back to our vehicles. We sat around our vehicles sipping on cold beverages and snacking on

trail mix. Corbin broke out a bag of dog treats for his 2 pooches, Mabel and Nellie. With a smirk on his face, he offered me one. I politely declined.

As Glenn and I drove off, Rick Walker thanked me for organizing the ride. I responded, "the pleasure was all mine." I could think of no better way to spend a bluebird, fall day in Colorado.

If you go: Online go to Colorado Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area Travel Map. Download PDF map. Dry Fork Trail is located on the lower right side of map, labeled 056. For the Kokopelli's Trail system map go to copmoba.org, select Grand Valley Canyons chapter, scroll down and click on Kokopelli Loops.

Bill Harris has traveled the back country of the Colorado Plateau since 1976 and is author of "Bicycling the Uncompahgre Plateau."

Learning about the outdoors

Most people who recreate outdoors, be it hunting, fishing, camping, backpacking or hiking, learned about it through experience. The old "college of hard knocks" has been my biggest education tool, and still is for that matter.

When I was a kid, I wanted to learn everything I good about the outdoors and survival. I figured when I knew enough, I would move into the mountains and live off the land and never be bothered by school or work.

My grandparents no longer hunted or camped by the time I came around. In order to stop my constant complaining about wanting to learn woodcraft, they pawned me off on an old man who was a friend of the family. Mr. Caster was the perfect instructor for my 12-year-old brain.

Mr. Caster hunted, fished and camped whenever he felt like it. He was retired so work never got in the way of his outdoor pursuits. Mr. Caster cussed like a sailor on shore leave, smoked Chesterfield Kings and drank whiskey from a bottle, in other words, a perfect role model.

I eventually learned how to build a fire using a few pieces of kindling, a small pile of tinder, and half a box of strike anywhere kitchen matches. He taught me how to cook over a fire, and eventually eat the stuff I cooked. Mr. Caster taught me about wild animals and tracking. I learned that when you see fresh bear tracks, close by there is probably a fresh bear.

With Mr. Caster, whining was not an option, as he had little tolerance for complainers. If I became injured (which was a regular occurrence Mr. Caster taught me how to mop up the blood and "tough it out.")

Seriously, there is very little, if any, formal training for people who want to learn basic survival and woodcraft skills. People asking for guidance, and learning opportunities ask me regularly where they should turn.

Most of us have turned to outdoor magazines and books. There are literally hundreds of books available on the subject, but reading a book does not carry the same power of live teaching. The computer is a good place to research these skills, and there are a number of

classes you can take on-line, but I still prefer live teachers.

Recently I was asked to help out several teachers at Olathe Middle School with an annual program for all middle school kids, called Problem Based Learning or PBL.

PBL places a problem at the feet of the students who work as a group of three.

The group of students then gets to research the subject, both in books and on-line. Then a panel of experts comes to meet with each group and agrees to be interviewed and questioned on the assigned subject, thereby providing insight to the young minds.

There were seven teachers involved in this year's exercise, including Judy Hauger, Michelle Tracy, Tyler Shaw, Judy Jacobs, Mark Liebenthal, Marc Alton and Paige Ready. The subject for this PBL was survival and it was given to about 40 kids.

Each group of kids was assigned a location where they are stranded and in need of rescue, but must survive. They would need to decide what items they would need to survive, what items they could bring, Each group was given a machete and a pan to hold water. The group was allowed to select one "mystery item" of their choice to bring along.

For several weeks, the kids researched the area they were stranded in. Some were in the rainforest, Rocky Mountain National Park, African Desert and the Tundra near the Arctic Circle. The kids must learn the climate; extreme weather conditions possible, edible plants, poisonous plants, and animals for food source and dangerous animals.

The students were also given a session with local experts in search and rescue. Paul Gottlieb of the posse and David Hardman, hunter-safety instructor, were the panel the kids got to interview. They asked about what equipment was necessary, first aid skills, and how to signal for help, among other things.

Once the kids completed the projects, each group had to make a presentation to a panel of experts and teachers. The panel for the presentations consisted of Hardman, Jim Neigherbauer and me from the posse. When the presentation was complete, the panel asked questions



Holly Hutson and Kiera Iverson make their presentation to the panel and teachers. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/Mark Rackay)

of the kids.

Each group started with a computer screen presentation of their location where they were stranded. The kids described in detail the climate and weather hazards faced. Shelters were to be built and the kids gave detailed accounts of the material to be used and the matter in which it would be water and weather proofed.

Food sources, including plants and animals were also discussed, and the methods they would use to harvest them. Most kids had a different idea on how they would build a fire and find, purify and store water.

After the video presentation, the kids showed off a diorama made by them. The diorama displayed a model of their shelter, water source, fire, and the plants and animals indigenous to their area. The presentation lasted around 10 minutes and the panel asked several questions of each group and made comments.

These kids were absolutely amazing. They had a good answer for every question thrown at them. The presentations made by them were delivered well and thoroughly researched. I congratulate the students and teachers for a job well done.

I doubt these kids are ready to dive into a survival situation of the magnitude presented to them, but they are on

a course for success. The concept is to get them thinking and solving problems as they are thrown at them. and they responded well. Each of their scenarios included one of them getting hurt or sick, and they had a plan to deal with it; yes, learning about my old pal Murphy and dealing with him.

I wish more teachers would use a survival-based situation for the PBL program like this bunch from Olathe Middle School. Kids get stranded in the woods just like adults and it is never too early to teach these necessary skills.

Not everyone has a Mr. Caster to teach them about the woods and survival. He passed away when I was around 20 and I have thought about him often. Sometimes I go up in the woods and can still feel his presence, and realize how much I miss him and his surly way of teaching.

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