

## Getting away in the wilderness

I was reviewing emails from readers the other day when one in particular struck a nerve. A middle aged lady, apparently with a very high stress and demanding job, was told by her physician to slow down. He told her that the stress in her job was causing high blood pressure and eventually will lead to a heart attack or stroke. She was seeking advice on how to perhaps relieve stress by going outdoors.

My wife of many years read the email and told me, "Obviously you have nothing to worry about, and with as little as you do, you should live forever."

She then exited the room hastily, all the while chortling evilly to herself. Rather than make a retort, and possibly upsetting marital bliss, I sought refuge with a long walk in the woods. Whenever I head out for a nice walk in the woods, I "accidentally" forget my phone at home. When I return, I will see that I had 6 missed calls, 4 voicemails, and 12 text messages. Imagine what my walk would have been like had I brought the infernal contraption with me.

The woods have always been my "hiding place" where all is right with the world. As a youngster, in single digit years, I would retreat to the 80-acre woods behind our house. The woods seemed so far removed from the world that it would not take long to recover.

I was probably retreating from my grandmother, who was endlessly hounding me about school, the usual subject. Almost every afternoon, the teacher would send a note home to com-



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

plain about my attention span, study habits or lack thereof, gum chewing in class, or some other offense I had committed. In my 2nd grade class, gum chewing was a capital offense. The woods called and I escaped.

This was a time before cell phones or pagers. Telephones were attached to the wall in the kitchen, and ours was a party line. There were no answering machines either. Yes, life was good for someone who wanted to escape, as you could really be left alone.

The method of summoning me back home consisted of a US Army Signal Corps hand operated air horn. This device was once used in WWI to signal troops in the trenches. The sound it made was similar to an air horn on a semi-truck, only much louder. It could be heard for miles.

When my grandfather blasted that horn, immediately shocking me back to reality, I would beat feet for home to face the music, the music usually being homework or some useless chore.

Everyone these days feels they have to stay in touch. Heaven forbid a day goes by without being able to talk to the office, kids, spouses or friends for the daily dose of drama. Every-

where you look, people have their face stuck in a computer, laptop or cell phone, even when they are supposed to be relaxing in the great outdoors.

I guess I am no different as I suddenly was thrust into adulthood, with multiple jobs, a wife, and children. Stress was a routine part of my everyday life. As a law enforcement investigator, I carried around a pager, or the ball and chain as I affectionately referred to it as.

A man named Al Gross in 1949 invented the pager. We called them beepers because that is all they did. When you got a page, the machines made an obnoxious beeping noise, signaling you to find a landline and call whatever prescribed number was arranged and get your message. Waking up in the middle of the night to that beeper was a treat I will long remember.

Later, pagers became digital and you could actually receive a text message telling you what important thing required immediate attention. The pager was, and still is, completely useless as a survival tool. All it will accomplish on your outing is force you to find a phone and call someone, thereby destroying your outdoor getaway.

As we continue down this slippery slope of communications progress, we come to the cellular phone, which was invented in 1973 by Martin Cooper. The handheld phone did not become available to the public until 1984, so at least we were eased into it.

The early phones came in a satchel that was very heavy, mostly because of the batteries needed to operate them. The reception on the early

phones was sketchy at best. If you stood behind a tree you probably dropped the call. The early phone was also useless as a survival tool because of the weight of the phone and the limited coverage.

We then progressed to the brick phone, created by Motorola. This phone, about the size and shape of a brick, was self-contained with a battery, and could be carried with you everywhere, thereby destroying your quiet time outdoors.

Nokia, in 1996, figured out how to use a cell phone to access the Internet and everything changed forever. Now people can read and send emails, watch television, text and talk on the phone, just about anywhere in the world. It is estimated there are 300 million cell phones in the United States.

Recently I spent some time in Argentina on a hunting trip. Once you get away from Buenos Aires, most of the country is very rural and poor. The houses, vehicles and villages all stand in support of their poor and struggling economy. What stands out is that everyone, and I mean everyone, has a cell phone and walks around with his or her face pressed into it.

In my investigator days, I carried a pager and 2 cell phones everywhere I went, even during my relaxation time. Perhaps you can see why I accidentally forget my phone so many times.

I will openly admit that the cell phone has a specific place in wilderness safety and survival. There are many lives saved each year because the phone was there, and the victim had service. The problem arises



I enjoy places like this, preferably without contact with the outside world. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

when you don't use the phone for just emergency situations while recreating.

I challenge folks to turn the phone off and put it safely in their pack. Go ahead and fire it up once a day, so the cell towers can get a ping on your location, in case an emergency arises, but then shut it off. Do not check it for texts, missed calls or voicemails until you return back to civilization. See if the absence of the outside world on your excursion leaves you feeling better about everything in general.

I am on a walk in the woods as you read this. This walk was thrown together out of scraps of time, longing for something already gone and never to return, from a finite and rapidly passing lifetime.

Suddenly I hear the loud

blast of an air horn, so loud in fact, it upsets the dogs on the walk with me. My wife must have realized I "forgot" my cell phone at home. My grandfather left that air horn to my wife in his will, with a side note to her that said, "married to him, you will need this." Seemed like a strange bequest to me.

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## Keeping your family connected with nature

There's a lot of uncertainty in the world right now. Your whole family may be feeling the stress caused by changes in your normal routine, not being able to see the people you care about, and the stress and uncertainty that comes with economic instability and social change.

Now, more than ever, it's important to stay connected with the calming influence of the natural world. But in these times of physical distancing, how can you and your family get out in nature while staying safe? Here are a few ideas for maintaining your mental and physical health in the outdoors turning adversity into opportunity during these strange times.

### Explore somewhere new

A lot of people are home from work right now and

### Outdoors

By Abram Herman

the usual standby trails and natural areas are often more crowded, even on usually quiet weekdays and off-times. This is a great opportunity to find a new, out-of-the-way place to explore the great outdoors. Is there some tucked away trail or park (near home) that you've been meaning to explore, but just never made the trip? Make that your destination for the day!

Remember, we shouldn't be traveling outside of our home areas at this time to avoid spreading COVID-19 to other places, but if there's a trail within an hour or so of your home base, that's a reasonable effort to make in order to

get away from the crowds and find somewhere new to explore. You can find some of these trailheads on Friends of Youth and Nature's website under map resources: (<https://www.friendsofyouthandnature.org/maps.html>)

### Find the hidden gems

Nature is everywhere, and even that overgrown open space near your home can hold a lot of interest and educational opportunity. Take the kids out for a grasshopper survey — how many different kinds can you find? What's the biggest one, or the smallest one, and why might they be different sizes? Which one is the most common? Why do you think that might be?

See NATURE page A10



It's no secret that a little sunshine can really turn around your mood. With a lot of stress in the world right now, make sure you take time to just simply get outside. (Anne Janik/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)






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