

Blaze a trail



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

We had a fairly large and dense piece of woods directly behind our house when I was growing up. Today, it is the site of a shopping mall, but back then, it was a place for adventure.

It was in that patch of woods I learned about wild animals, hunting, tracking, survival, traveling marauders and everything else the outdoors had to offer a boy. Needless to say, I spent every possible minute in those woods.

I decided that what those woods needed was a trail blazed, from the entrance behind our house, to the small pond, across to the edge of the swamp and then back to our house. Later, I could follow this trail and never get lost. It was an ingenious idea.

With my small hatchet in hand, I made marks on trees. At each tree, I would look forward to the next one, then the next one, all the time getting deeper into uncharted territory. I had no idea where I was but was not concerned because I would just follow the blazes back home.

It was then the problem became evident. I had only marked one side of the tree; the side you see going into the woods. The marks worked great if you were making a one-way trip. I wandered around in those woods for several hours before I heard my grandfather calling for me.

I tried to explain to my grandfather what I was trying to accomplish, but he just shook his head. When he delivered me back home to my grandmother, he made the proclamation that,

CONTINUE STRAIGHT 	START OF TRAIL 	RIGHT TURN 
SPUR LEADING TO A DIFFERENT TRAIL 	END OF TRAIL 	LEFT TURN 

Here is a few of the old blazing marks used to describe a trail. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

“as soon as we can afford it, we need to take this boy in somewhere and get his screws tightened.” Thus, ending my career as a trailblazer.

When padding around the mountains near Montrose, I come across trail markers everywhere. Some are just a marker to let other members in their party know the “jumping off” spot, or a rendezvous point for later. Other markers lead to secret fishing and hunting spots.

The trail marking I am referring to here is not the well marked U.S. Forest Service named trail where you follow signs and marker posts. These trails are well used and marked so even someone like me would be not likely to lose his way. Trailblazing is for more primitive areas where the footpath may not be evident.

In heavily wooded areas, blazes are usually marked on trees. The markings may vary by agency or trail, but are generally found at eye level and easily visible. Blazes were usually cut into a tree with a hatchet or knife. The U.S. Forest Service standard for a blaze was a blocked lowercase “l.” This practice of carving trees has fallen from favor because of environmental reasons.

The more common method of blazes used by agencies now are painted. The color of the blaze can sometimes identify the agency that made the blaze. There are some fairly common standards used to indicate direction.

For example, a single blaze

means straight ahead. Double blazes, one on top of the other, indicate a direction of travel. If the top blaze is to the right, turn right, and so on. One blaze directly above the other indicates danger ahead or the end of the trail.

In areas that are not wooded, or at the start of a trail, a cairn is sometimes used. A cairn is a large pile of rocks, typically over three feet high and several feet wide. These piles of rocks are placed in areas that are highly visible, even in the worst conditions, to help hikers find their way home.

It is said to be good luck if you add a rock to the cairn at the start of your journey, which may explain their enormous and growing size. I have come across dozens of cairns on the Uncompahgre Plateau.

Around here, I see a lot of trail ducks being used. A duck is a much smaller rock pile, usually stacked just high enough to show the next person it is not a natural formation. Three stacked rocks usually indicate a trail duck.

Trail ducks may also contain a pointer rock, or a couple rocks stacked, to indicate a direction of travel. Ducks are very easy to construct which can also be the downside of using them. Lost people seem to love to make them, sometimes without any knowledge of what it means. There are areas where trail ducks are so common that interpretation is impossible.

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April gardening tips



Gardening A to Z

By Linda Corwine McIntosh



Floating row covers can help protect crops from frost, birds, deer, and even some insects. (Linda McIntosh/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

With the stay at home order in effect, I wonder if you frequently ask yourself, “What day is this?” It may surprise you to learn that today is actually Arbor Day. But that doesn’t necessarily mean you have to spend the day planting a tree. I think just getting out and enjoying your backyard and maybe appreciating the trees that are around you is celebration enough.

There are plenty of things that you can be doing right in your own backyard. As of the time that I’m writing this article, we’re still under the stay at home order, so I don’t want to encourage anyone to get out and about to go shopping. However, some of the garden centers will deliver items right to your car if you give them a call and let them know what you’re wanting if you’re not comfortable with going shopping.

There’s definitely a surge in the number of people who have taken up gardening this spring. If you’re one of the newbies to gardening you should know that semi-hardy vegetables — potatoes, carrots, beets, parsley, and parsnips — can be planted a couple of weeks before the average last spring frost. This occurs around May 12 in the Montrose area.

With that said, frost has been known to occur well into June so be prepared to cover your crops with a floating row cover, an old blanket, or a sheet if heavy frost is predicted. For more information on vegetable gardening topics just do an internet search and type planttalk.colostate.edu. You’ll be amazed at the amount of information that you will find.

Don’t you find you always learn a bit more when you can relate to something? I’m thinking this might be the perfect time to teach your kids or grandkids about Victory Gardens and how people planted them during WWII. You might even want to plant a bit extra in your vegetable garden this year so can give to friends or those in need.

I’m sorry to say, but most of the fruit crops in the area froze with the cold that we recently experienced. I’ve lived in Montrose long enough to know that this is nothing new. Most of us simply say it’s sad but better luck next year. And sure enough, another bumper crop always occurs.

I know many people like to be the first to have the greenest lawn in town, but fertilizing it too early can result in weak, succulent growth that is prone to insects and disease. If you fertilized last fall, you probably don’t need to fertilize your lawn until late May or early June. Power raking your grass is not recommended! This can actually do more harm than good because it tears the roots of the plants. Core aerating with a plug-type aerator is a much wiser way to control thatch and improve water and air flow to the roots.

I know a lot of people are still waiting to get their irrigation systems turned on. Be sure to check your system before setting it and walking away. Make sure all of the heads and drips are working properly and the water is hitting the target area.

To avoid becoming too discouraged with weeds, here are a few weed tips. I try to “hoe” the weeds in my garden while they’re only an inch or so high. Actually, I don’t chop at them with the hoe. I use a stirrup shaped hoe and just drag it along the top of the soil. This is so much easier than chopping at taller weeds later in the season. It makes quick work of a garden job that no one, except maybe me, looks forward to.

I also use grass clippings as mulch. I add a thin layer of clippings every time I mow and in a few short weeks, I have a nice blanket of mulch around my vegetables. Just don’t use clippings that have recently been treated with broadleaf weed killer!

I also advise you not to put grass clippings over your lettuce and spinach. It’s too hard to separate the grass from the lettuce and spinach leaves and you’ll inevitably end up grazing on some of the grass blades in your salad.

Corn gluten is another great way to help you control weeds in your garden. This organic pre-emergent will help keep annual weeds from germinating. It will also add a little nitrogen to the garden so that definitely sounds like a win-win. It will keep any annual seeds from germinating, so don’t apply it where you’re sowing seeds.

Don’t you hate it when your peonies or tall spring flowering bulbs, such as Fritillaria, fall over just when their flowers are starting to bloom? To solve this problem, put one of those green, round, metal supports over them now while they’re still short enough to grow up through it.

If you want to partake in the Arbor Day holiday but already have all the trees that you desire in your landscape, you might want to celebrate this day by teaching your children or grandchildren the importance of trees. Take this opportunity to teach them to respect trees.

Arbor Day is a great time to take a stroll through your yard and evaluate the health of your trees. Check for insects, broken branches or trunk damage. Check the irrigation to the trees. If you planted new trees within the past few years, the irrigation should be changed as the tree matures.

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The Stone Age Question: Where to go fishing?

I checked Mother Nature’s social media page the other day to see if the virus had caused all the lakes to dry up or maybe if the rivers had stopped flowing. I was relieved to find out that no, things were pretty normal in the outdoor water world. I took that as a clue that I could still go fishing while practicing social distancing. Whew! What a relief!

But where to go? Well, admittedly I do know a few places after 40+ years of roaming western Colorado. But there is always one more blue line on a map I can find that I haven’t visited.

Some years ago, a marketing campaign by a computer company asked “Where do you want to go today?” Maybe there



Outdoors

By Joel L. Evans

are some among us who are independently wealthy and might ask that every day. But for the rest of us, particularly the outdoorsman, it is a question that a fisherman will ask his buddy when planning an outing this wonderful summer season.

It is a question that has existed since the beginning of time. Picture if you can a scene

from the stone age. Fred Flintstone and buddy Barney begin thinking about how to spend their weekend freedom. Fishing seems the way to go. Barney mentions that he really needs to exercise the lawnasaurus mower first, but Fred responds to Barney that he really has his priorities terribly mixed up, and that fishing is really more important. Fred of course prevails. Fred tells Wilma that he is going to help Barney “test some new equipment”, and Barney tells Betty the same. (Please realize the following is a true modern day story. The names have been changed to protect the innocent - namely myself and a friend).

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TRAIL

FROM PAGE A9

There is much debate as to what makes the best trail markers. When I was in Newfoundland on a moose hunt, all the trails across the bog were marked with orange surveyors tape. The next marker was visible from each marker along the way. It seemed to work well for that purpose.

In the sheriff's posse, we carry a special set of marking tapes. Both have a unique design on the tape so there is no doubt to other posse members they are on the right trail. One type of tape marks the trail and another type marks a point of interest, such as a piece of found clothing, spoor or a dangerous place.

Using a specially marked tape might not be a bad idea for you to consider. On the mountain, there are so many blazes of orange tape placed by so many different people that questions could easily arise about being on the right track. The orange surveyor tape has been well used by many for a long time.

For most people heading

up on a day hike, consider chalk. Chalk does not scar the trees, leaves no trash behind, and washes off in a day or two. Chalk is a great choice in the National Forest or private property because you do not "vandalize" anything or leave any permanent damage.

Obviously, chalk is not the answer in wet weather or if you are going to be gone overnight or longer. For those trips, consider using an environmental marker such as tree branches cut, inserted in the ground, or assembled in such a way to indicate travel direction and danger. Remember, when marking a trail this way, it is to help you find your way back, not necessarily let others follow your trail.

I would advise against painting trees unless you have permission of the landowner. For obvious reasons, a landowner may view trail markers as a form of graffiti and be less than enthralled to have his woods marked up in such a way. You should never use paint or permanent markings on government land either, lest you face charges.

Trailblazing is almost a lost art with the modern maps and GPS, but I still consider it an essential survival skill to use and follow. I use markings for tricky areas that I need to navigate or to keep me away from a bad spot on the trail. I try and use markings in conjunction with the GPS, map and compass to keep me on course.

My grandmother was convinced that I would grow up to be nothing more than a burden to society. I may be a burden but at least I don't get lost as much, or as easily, as I used to. At least I mark my blaze on all sides of the tree now.

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@icloud.com

GARDENING

FROM PAGE A9

Move the drips away from the trunk of trees that have been planted more than a couple of years. The drips should be placed at the outside of the drip zone, or pointed in a direction away from the trunk. Remove the ties and guys from trees that have been planted for two years or more if they've become established.

If you want a new tree, pick one that is suitable for your particular site. Take into consideration the type of soil that you have. Know the water needs of the tree before

you buy the tree and be sure that you will be able to meet these needs. If possible, examine the root system of the tree before you buy it. Don't buy a tree with roots tightly wrapped round and round the root ball in the pot.

One of the most common mistakes I see that people make when planting trees is planting it too deep. Be sure to look for the graft on the trunk and the root flare. Make sure the graft is above the soil line, with the roots near the soil surface. Dig the hole at least three times wider, yet no deeper than the root ball of the tree.

I like the idea of planting a tree to remember one of the strangest years of my life. I may plant a tree and name it corona (I always name my cars and trees) but don't limit yourself to planting a tree only on Arbor Day. Any day that you plant a tree is a day to celebrate. You, and future generations, will be glad you did.

Whatever you do this weekend, take time to enjoy your own backyard. And be thankful that we live in such a wonderful area.

Linda Corwine McIntosh is an ISA-certified arborist, commercial pesticide applicator and advanced master gardener

FISHING

FROM PAGE A9

Before the scam is discovered, they're off! But where? Did they already know where they were going? Know because they had been there before? Know because a friend told them about a river or lake over in the next valley? Know because they had read about it in some magazine? Know because they had studied a map?

Wait a minute. A map, did you say? Who would bother with such details? Well, Fred and Barney didn't have a fancy waterproof, full color, topographic map. But you and I do. Do you ever just sit and study a map? Sometimes I enjoy spreading out a forest service map on the kitchen table and just "reading". My dad was a map-aholic. We'd be telling stories, and he'd start reminiscing about some past adventure. Before the story was done, he would reach for a map to recall where he went and talk of going again.

Everywhere looks so interesting. Even intriguing. Even the places you've been to. Others you've heard about but just haven't had the chance to get there yet. Then there is that little blue line that catches your eye. Blue on a map means water. You never noticed this one before. Look a little closer. That blue line connects with a blue circle. A river and a lake that you've not heard anyone speak of. You begin following the lines. Seeing what the name is. Then you look at the red and black lines. Learning what roads or trails will get you there. Soon you are counting section squares to estimate how many miles it is and



Looking for ways to social distance outside? Mother Nature has not cancelled the river flows. Consult a map, find a new blue line, and go explore. Barney seems to have been successful with a day of fishing. (Submitted photo/ Joel Evans)

how long it would take you to drive or walk there.

Betty questions (again the name has been changed so I won't get quizzed at home) what you find so interesting about a map. And then there is Barney. He is so fanatical that he has a state map on his wall with pins stuck in it for every place he's been fishing over the years. He has a lot of years and a lot of pins.

So many questions. What other fishy spots are in the area? Is it a day trip, or would an overnigher be necessary? Can you drive nearby, or will you need to walk in? Is there a campground nearby? Do you suppose anybody else goes there much, or could it be that you've found a new secret spot? Maybe you have! Realize if you always depend on someone else to give you information about where to fish, then you probably will be the one who hears how great the fishing was there yesterday. Now if you only desire a day away from the lawn mowing chore, then go to the easy to get to, well known places. But if you are looking for something different, take a chance on an enticing blue line or circle you found on a map.

One reason you and I live in western Colorado is because there is still opportunity to explore a place where we will encounter few, if any other people. And sometimes that is just what the fisherman wants. My favorite maps are the U.S. Forest Service maps. Like an enthralling book that you just can't put down. And these days they are so colorful with the pink, yellow and green. Topographical maps are also available in several different scales. "Quads" are best for intimate detail, but are easy to lose perspective. Try starting with a large-scale map, then consult a quad for details.

Next time you are wondering where to go for fish, answer it with a little exploring on the kitchen table with a paper map. Then switch over to Google Earth for a visual perspective. You can't always depend on already knowing what you will find. Sometimes I don't want to know. The adventure can be half the fun. Sometimes you need to do a little exploring on your own.

And, sorry Barney, could it be that a map is really my best friend?

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