



The first overlook on Black Canyon’s South Rim Drive is Tomichi Point. Built almost as an afterthought in the early 1960s when the road was realigned and paved, the scene provides a chance to see a broader picture of our world. (Photo courtesy of National Park Service)

The unthinkable becomes the unsinkable

Nothing was recorded of the first impressions Black Canyon of the Gunnison made on Hollywood actors Debbie Reynolds and Harve Presnell when they arrived for filming scenes of “The Unsinkable Molly Brown” in September, 1963. If the canyon’s power to move people was as intense then as it is today, perhaps it knocked them on their backsides.

It would be interesting to hear their perspective as they stood at Tomichi Point; the first overlook on the South Rim Drive. The movie musical presents a very upbeat story about a couple (Margaret and James Brown) who struggled in their relationship of the late 1800s between living a simple life in the wilds of Colorado and the high life of wealthy society in Denver. The 1950s and ‘60s were a time when Hollywood actively made western films and scouts discovered the hidden gems of southwest Colorado, which provided spectacular backdrops for the big screen. You might know that the movie peaks near the end when Mrs. Brown is on the steamship Titanic. Led by river rats Ed Nelson and Bill Musgrave, the film crew spent four days in July at East Portal for the opening scenes of the movie. Nelson was a community leader, but also shared a long-term relationship with the gorge. He fished, floated, hiked, and explored much of the canyon, from one end to the other. Over those years, I imagine the canyon furnished him with exhilarating moments as well as solace during struggles in life that we all end up having to face. There is an interesting mix of attitudes from visitors who have been coming to the canyon in the days since the rim roads reopened from the COVID-19 closure.



Outdoors

By Paul Zaenger

Some people are just looking for that exhilaration. Climbers, hikers, and anglers seem to want to primarily cut loose. But equally important are folks who are looking for something deeper. They want a retreat from the unthinkable. They want to feel that life will be okay, and that sometime down the road the relationships that they have built through their lives will be restored as they were before the virus set in; or the economy tanked; or the world went crazy. I talked with a young man from New Jersey whose grandparents fought wildfires in the west. He intended to see the glory of the land and natural processes through their eyes. His grandad died of COVID-19 six weeks ago. A woman from New Mexico spent time in the quiet of the canyon sitting and reading during her hike on Oak Flat Trail. Tears were in her eyes from the insight she said she had gained. A young Montana family visited the valley and canyon to see their heritage. He grew up in the area. Their young children met their great-grandparents; saw the fields and farm, the large scale of the land. Relationships endure. Hollywood’s “The Unsinkable Molly Brown” got most of Brown’s life wrong. But the tension between the glitz and glamour, owning lots of stuff, a simpler way of living and

seeing our lives in relationships between each other and the land is a viewpoint that reflects on us today. When the Browns separate, the conflict seems to climax. Late in the film, Harve Presnell is at Tomichi Point and he sings a reprise of a song presented earlier in the show. He wrestles with changes in his world, but resolves to be unsinkable. I walk to the canyon’s edge near Tomichi Point. There is a rock to sit on in the early morning. The air is still — the sky is soft. The sun gradually illuminates the canyon, reaching deeper into the crevices. There is silence; a sovereign silence that comes only from the land. The view strikes out dozens of miles distant to far-away mountains in the San Juans. The quiet is deafening; no planes, no traffic, no engineered hum of our industrial world. The silence is all-encompassing and all-soothing; like balm for troubled souls. Here is the strength of the unsinkable. The canyon, the mountains, the rivers, and the clear blue sky all have the capacity to move our hearts from the trappings of a material culture. There is might here that can restore our fractured spirits and heal the separations created by a virus we perhaps struggle to understand. Tomichi Point is one of hundreds of places where we can find this power. You can seek this out, beyond the high energy activities of recreation, because this natural world can renovate your world. In this sense, you too can be unsinkable. *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.*

Beware of the porcupine



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

My wife and I were taking a drive the other day, an errand of some type for sure. While out, she noticed some geese lounging around on a golf course. She pointed them out and commented on the large numbers in the “flock.” I pointed out to her that a “flock” is a term generally used when referring to a group of domestic geese on the ground. Wild geese in a group, such as on the water, are correctly called a gaggle. When the geese are flying in their formation, the group is referred to as a skein or a wedge. When the formation is flying close together, or in a disorganized formation, they are called a plump.

“If you are going to be an outdoor person who enjoys watching game animals, you should learn to use the correct terminology when seeing the animals in groups,” I tried explaining to her. She blasted me with, “Most of those terms were made up by writers, trying to be creative and entertaining to their readers. People of science pay little to no attention to those terms, but I can see why you are fascinated by them.”

Her tone was so sarcastic, that the sarcasm flittered around the cab of the truck, not unlike sheet lightning, for ten minutes afterwards. Many years of marital bliss have taught me when to keep quiet, and now was one of them. A mammal I have always been fascinated with, from a distance of course, is the porcupine. The most common nickname for them is the quill pig, but they are sometimes just called porkies. When there is a group of porcupines, the proper term is...get this...a prickle. No, I did not make that up.

The North American porcupine is the second largest rodent on our continent, second to the beaver. There are seven recognized subspecies, 29 subspecies worldwide, and are subdivided by their ranges across North America. The porcupines in North America are usually called New World Porcupines, and those in Africa and Asia are referred to as Old World Porcupines. Porkies are usually dark brown in color, sometimes almost black, with white highlights. They have a stocky body, short legs and a short and thick tail. They can reach 3-feet-long, not counting another foot for their tail. A full-grown adult male can reach 40 pounds, but most weigh in around 25 pounds. As most of you know, the most identifying characteristic of a porcupine would be his quills. An adult porkie will have 30,000 quills that cover the entire body except the underbelly, face and feet. The quills are actually modified hairs formed into hollow, barbed and very sharp spines. The quills are used primarily for self defense but also serve as insulation for the winter months. There is an old wives tale that claims a porkie can actually throw their quills when attacked, but that is completely false. A porcupine will contract the muscles near their skin which causes the quills to stand up and out from their bodies. In this position, the quills can easily become detached from their body. The tip of each quill has a small barb on it, allowing the quill to become lodged in the skin of his attacker. If you have ever been stuck by one, you know that those quills are very painful and difficult to remove. I have had to remove them from dogs a few times. The porcupine actually has an antibiotic in its skin. Sometimes a porkie falls out of a tree because their general body shape can make them clumsy. Upon hitting the ground, the porkie can be stuck with his own quills. The natural antibiotic prevents him from becoming infected by his own stickers. Western Colorado is the perfect habitat for the porcupine. They love dense forests with green vegetation, but also do well in the pinions and juniper habitat. They den up in tree branches mostly, but sometimes in a tangle of roots or a rock crevice. Active during the night, porkies usually sleep the day away. During the night, they forage for food, usually in trees where they spend most of their time. Being nocturnal is why we seldom see them.

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Understanding pesticide labels



Gardening

A to Z

By Linda Corwine McIntosh

When it comes to buying and using insecticides and herbicides, consumers should know what they’re buying. I think there are a lot of misconceptions about the use and even the term pesticides, so I want to help clear up some of the confusion. I’m not trying to convince you that pesticides are good or bad. I simply want you to be informed.

The first thing you should know is, the term pesticide is inclusive. It refers to insecticides used to control insects, herbicides for controlling weeds, miticides for mites, and fungicides for fungal problems. Pesticides can be organic or inorganic. Organic pesticides are made from naturally occurring elements. Inorganic is made from synthetic materials.

The next thing you should be aware of is, organic doesn’t always mean that it’s a “safer” product than an inorganic product. For example, the product All Down Concentrate is an herbicide that’s made from acetic and citric acids. It sounds safe because it’s organic, right? This is not necessarily true because if you think about it, it’s acid. I know, so is vinegar or lemon juice, so you have to look at the percent of acid that it contains. This is where things get tricky and confusing. Vinegar contains 5 to 8% acetic acid. Some products sold for weed control contain 28% or more acid. This can burn your skin and cause irreversible eye damage.

I guess I’m a pesticide nerd because when I have time to kill I browse the pesticide aisles in the store. If you haven’t tried it, you really should. It’s interesting and eye opening. I don’t expect you to know what all the chemical names are, and you don’t really have to. The thing you should look at is the signal word on the front label of the product. That’s the really small print that’s



Don't assume a product is safer just because it may be organic. This product says “danger” on the label. (Linda McIntosh/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

almost impossible for most of us seasoned people to even see. This will tell you how safe or dangerous the product is, as well as what it contains.

The signal word will say one of the following things; caution, warning, danger or danger-poison. Caution means it is slightly toxic orally, dermally, through inhalation, or can cause a slight eye or skin irritation. Warning means the product is moderately toxic orally, dermally, or through inhalation and could cause moderate eye or skin irritation. Danger is used when the product is corrosive or causes severe eye and skin burning, but not highly toxic orally or through inhalation. Danger-Poison means the product is highly toxic orally, dermally or through inhalation! When the label says danger-poison it also must be accompanied by a skull and crossbones and written in red. I personally don’t see any reason you would ever need to use a product with a danger-poison label. With that said, there is a category of pesticides that contain organic derivatives that don’t have these signal words. Just for fun, take a look under your kitchen or bathroom cabinet and read the signal words on some of the cleaners. It might surprise you.

Did you know that glyphosate (the product most people think of as Round Up) actually has a caution label? The product 2,4 D sold for broadleaf control has a danger signal word. I think most people mistakenly assume 2,4 D is the safer choice. The brand name Round Up now includes several products that are used for many different problems, so be sure to read the label to make sure you’re buying one that is listed for your particular problem.

There will also be a registration number on the

label. This number identifies the product. If for some reason your child or pet should ingest the product and you need to call the poison control hotline, knowing this number will speed things up.

You may also see the word OMRI certified on the label. This means the product has been approved by the Organic Materials Review Institute and can be used by organic growers. Once again, don’t assume that it’s a safer product just because it’s OMRI certified. Read the label and understand any precautions that may be noted.

I recommend you use “safer” products first. Then, if they don’t work for some reason, you can take further action. I for one try to avoid “danger” labeled products as much as possible. Which reminds me, the label that you rip off the back when using the product will tell you what precautions you need to take when using the product. It will advise proper clothing to wear when applying the product as well as how to wash your clothes, any dangers to animals, and how long it is advised before you can safely enter an area that was treated.

Do you know that the label of the product is a legal document? As a commercial pesticide applicator, we are repeatedly told, “the label is the law!” Read the label, read the label, read the label!” That means the little foldout attached to the product. I think the bottom line is, use your head when dealing with any product, and if you’re going to err, err on the side of caution.

Linda Corwine McIntosh, Licensed Commercial Pesticide Applicator, ISA Certified Arborist, Advanced Master Gardener.

PORCUPINE

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Porcupines are herbivores, eating wood, tree bark, stems, nuts, seeds, grass and leaves. They do not eat meat, but will occasionally chew on bones to keep their teeth sharp and clean. The eating of tree bark has caused them to become quite a nuisance in some places. Telluride often has a problem with porkies destroying trees in resident’s yards.

If those quills are not enough of a deterrent, porcupines also have a strong odor to help ward off predators. This odor is often compared to a strong human body odor, and gets stronger as the animal becomes agitated.

Wolverines, coyotes, wolves, bears, fishers, and mountain lions are all considered predators of the porcupine. The fisher is probably the only one to have much success attacking a quill pig because they are also great tree climbers and very quick and agile. In most cases, the predator becomes injured and dies because of the quills imbedding them during the attack. Sounds like a “last supper” for a predator to me.

Porkies spend most of their life in solitude. Whenever you see two together, they are probably a mated pair. They will breed in November and December and the gestation period is seven months. The female will have a single baby, called a porcupette. The quills on a newborn are very soft, generally

hardening after a few days.

In the wild, most porcupines live to be 10 years old, but some have been known to reach 30. Believe it or not, porcupines are edible but rarely hunted for meat. Porcupines were an important food source for North Americans Indians, especially during the winter months. Ernest Hemingway wrote about having to eat one once. He said his father made him eat it after he killed one, to teach him a lesson that you do not waste an animal.

The quills of a porcupine are considered good luck charms in Africa. Sometimes they are used as a musical instrument. At one time, the hollow quill was used to carry gold dust. Today, fly tiers use quills for custom fishing flies and lures.

I explained to my wife that a porcupine is generally a solitary animal and rarely seen in the company of another porcupine, and she may never see a prickly in the wild. She did not answer back. Apparently, I am on the “pay no mind list” today.

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



He may look soft and cuddly, but do not touch him. (Michael Seraphin/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

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