

A lesson on rangefinders



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Guessing the distance of an object in the great outdoors has become a lost art form. The invention of the laser rangefinder has taken away all the guesswork of gauging distances. In a way, I miss the old art form.

The old men, who mentored me in all things outdoors from hunting, fishing, camping, and everything in between, were experts at guessing distance. We would be out in the mountains and one would spot a deer on a distant hillside.

“I would say he is 340 yards away,” the old man would say. Sure enough, if you paced it off, the deer would have been within 10 yards of his guess.

I never was able to master the art of guessing distances. The old folks would tell me to visualize a football field, representing a hundred yards. Three football fields lined up together meant 300 yards.

Problem was, I played baseball, not football. I knew what 60 feet and 90 feet were, (the distance between the bases and home plate to the pitcher’s mound). So when I looked at a distant elk, and started to guess the distance in 60-

foot increments ... I count five increments of 60 feet each, divided by 3 feet to get yardage ... all just gave me a headache. I was never good at math either, and when I finally figured it out, the elk was off spending his winters in Tahiti.

Knowing the exact distance to a particular object is important for many outdoor activities. Besides the obvious, like hunters knowing the distance to their game, long-range target shooters must know exact distance to calculate proper ballistic solutions.

Many golf tournaments allow the use of laser rangefinders, as long as you make sure you only use the feature to measure distance to your target. Anyone involved in real estate or construction has a need for rangefinders. Lot size, room size, length of beams and property boundaries can all be determined easily with a rangefinder. Gone are the days of having to use a rolling tape measure. If 3D modeling is your thing, the rangefinder can be integrated with 3D software to come up with a final design.

The original rangefinder was invented in 1964, using what was called a Ruby Laser. It was not until the early 1990s that the original device found its way into the market for outdoor people.

The original rangefinders were cumbersome, difficult to use, and very inaccurate. In short, they were junk and everyone went back to the old fashioned way;



Rangefinders have made great strides in the last decade, evident by the the small handheld unit by Leica on the left to the ranging binoculars on the right. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

guessing distances. Today, it is a completely different ballgame, all in favor of the outdoor person.

I will give a brief, and very non-scientific explanation of how a laser rangefinder works. These gadgets are far more complicated than I am not capable of either understanding, nor explaining, but here goes.

To start with, the rangefinder has an eyepiece you look through, and a reticle. There are various power magnifications available and you will need to decide how much power you want. Generally, for most outdoor use, five to 10 power is where you want to be. You have to see the object you want to range, and still hold the rangefinder steady. Seven power is a good compromise and is a popular size on many hand held units.

The target must be able to reflect the beam back to the unit. Certain things reflect better than others. Steel buildings, cars, and glass are

reflective, while animals, trees and rocks not so much. The better the reflective target, the farther away the rangefinder will read.

When buying a rangefinder, concentrate on the non-reflective distance because that is usually what you are going to be ranging. Manufacturers are pretty clear with what distance they market their units for.

The rangefinder emits a laser beam with the press of a button. The beam bounces off an object in the distance and the rangefinders “high speed clock” measures the total time it took from where the beam was emitted from the device itself to the time it returned to the device. In most cases, this is less than half a second.

The unit uses the time of traveling to calculate the distance and this distance is displayed as a number in the rangefinder for the user, usually in yards. The rangefinders of today are

accurate to within a yard at 500 yards, and some even more accurate.

The outdoor world is never a straight and level line. You will always find slopes, slants, up hills and down hills when you try to range an object. Have no fear, because many of the new rangefinders actually have a program that calculates and allows for angles, so you are looking at true ballistic distances, rather than just a straight line.

With most optics, darkness, or the coming of twilight, is not your friend. Not so with rangefinders. With rangefinders the opposite is true. The brighter the conditions, the worse your ranging abilities will be.

When there is a lot of moisture in the air, rangefinders can act a little poorly. Rain, snow and fog can all cause inaccurate readings. I have found that the devices made in the last five years are much less susceptible to poor weather.

You can now buy quality binoculars with a built-in rangefinder. These are giving the outdoor person the best of both worlds in one handy unit. You no longer need to lug both of them around with you.

Although, lugging around a rangefinder is much easier, because the units of the last 10 years are much smaller and lighter. The unit I carry fits easily in a front shirt pocket and weighs about 20 ounces. All are battery operated and the battery usually lasts a couple seasons. It is a good idea to remove the battery when not in use.

Now that I have been gauging distances for many years, I have actually become pretty accurate. I use a laser rangefinder and find I am usually pretty close. The only thing those “old man” mentors of mine had on me was 50 years of experience. I guess I finally caught up with them. Now, if I could figure out math, I would be getting somewhere.

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.

SPRING

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I know many of us have to plan our gardens around the appetite of hungry deer or rabbits. So, for the most part, I plant daffodils and allium and critters never seem to bother them.

But, let me clear up any confusion that you might have regarding the difference between Narcissus and jonquils. The official botanical name of the whole genus is Narcissus. Daffodil is the common name. Jonquil is a “species name” within the Narcissus genus. This means that certain daffodils are called Narcissus jonquilla. So when you’re using the common name, all colors, sizes and types are called daffodils. If you get into the botanical or Latin names, they all begin with Narcissus (the “genus”) and end with a different “species” name. I hope that helps.

Most bulbs aren’t too fussy and will do well in full sun or partial shade. The only thing bulbs ask is that they don’t stand in waterlogged areas, which is usually not a problem in our area.

The soil for your bulbs should be amended at least 6 inches deeper than the depth of the bulb’s root zone. As a general rule, bulbs should be planted three to four times the depth of the bulb. For example, a 2-inch tulip bulb should be planted at a depth of 6 inches (measured from the shoulder of the bulb.)

An exception to this rule would be crocus or other small bulbs. These should be planted only 2-3 inches deep. The point, or tip of the bulb, should be facing upward when you plant it. If you can’t figure out which end is up on your bulb, plant it on its side. This is better than planting it upside down.

All bulbs require high levels of phosphorus. Unfortunately, phosphorus does not trans-locate in our clay soils so it must be placed at the root zone during the time of planting in order to be effective.

If you’re planting bulbs individually, just add a small amount of fertilizer to the bottom of each hole and place a little soil over the fertilizer to keep the bulb from coming into direct contact with it, which could burn delicate roots. Oh, and don’t let your bulbs sit out in the sun before you plant them.

Planting the bulb deeper than recommended and applying a thick layer of mulch to the bed (after the ground has frozen) will delay blooming time. This could be beneficial when bulbs are planted next to foundations with southern exposures because soils in these areas warm early,

often causing an early emergence of the bulb that usually freezes the blooms.

Even though this is the ideal time to plant your bulbs, if you can’t get them planted for a while, don’t worry. Bulbs can be planted until the ground freezes. They just may flower later in the spring and the stems might be shorter than usual, but they should do fine.

Next spring, once the flowers have faded, the spent flowers should be cut off. The foliage, however, should be allowed to die back naturally to provide energy for next year’s flowers.

I think it’s fun to tuck a few bulbs into small spaces to brighten the area, or they can be planted in masses for a dramatic welcoming of spring. They can even be added to an established garden to bring some new excitement to the area. I’m thinking, why not plant your bulbs where they can be enjoyed by

passersby as well as from views inside the house into the garden? I always love to see my flowering bulbs when I look out my kitchen or living room window.

I know that putting a little effort into landscaping now is really going to

pay off in the spring. So, I’m off to plant some bulbs. I hope you will, too. Happy gardening!

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



When Kenzie Henderson married Drew Markley, on June 13, 2020, they became the fourth generation couple in the Sanburg family.

Pictured, left to right are Kenzie and Drew Markley; Kenzie’s parents, Amie (Sanburg) & Kirby Henderson; grandparents, Myrna and Randy Sanburg; great grandparents, Shirley and Monte Sanburg.

All four couples were married in Montrose.

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