



The moon means many different things to people, but it can be used as a navigational tool when in the woods at night. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

Using the moon as a navigation tool



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Anyone who writes will tell you that you must also read. I am not one who reads the "novel of the month" or the never-ending political books that litter the bookstore shelves.

I am a reader of the classics, especially Hemingway, Ruark, and Capstick.

As I pondered the recent full moon in old literature, I came across a bit of folklore regarding a classic written by Robert Louis Stevenson, "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde."

Apparently, Charles Hyde was accused of murder in the 1880s. He pleaded innocence based on the grounds that the new and full moons drove him mad, on a regular basis.

Hyde supposedly lost the case, but achieved immortality because Robert Louis Stevenson used him

as a model for Dr. Jekyll's murderous alter ego. You may recall that all the murders in the book were committed under a full moon.

Ask any school principal or police officer about full moons and their ability to bring out poor behavior and the crazies.

From my own experience, full moon days were good nights to call in sick. A recent study looked at five years of data from police records in Florida, which showed an increase in cases of homicide and aggravated assault around full moons.

The moon causes ocean tides. The water in the ocean is pulled toward both sides of the planet by the moon's gravitational force, resulting in four tides a day generally.

Since our bodies are more than 75% water, it seems logical that the moon would have some effect on us. A study published by Elsevier Ltd. in 2013 showed that the moon phases definitely affect our sleep.

More restless nights seem to occur around the full moon. I can attest that I have had restless and sleepless nights, only to find out later that there was a full moon.

In days of old, nighttime travel was planned around the brightest phases of the moon. Roads and paths were set out in such a way as to maximize the moonlight for travel. The moon was man's first streetlight.

Many a night, I navigated the backcountry waters of the Florida Keys by moonlight.

Using spotlights on a boat at sea actually makes it harder to see because of the disruption of your night vision. Best to allow your eyes to adjust to the moonlight and you will be surprised at how well you can see on a clear night.

The moon also serves as an excellent navigation tool for the outdoor person.

While I would not want to circumnavigate the earth using the moon alone, it can help keep you on course. Remember that the secret to not getting lost is to stay found. Using the moon as a guide can serve that purpose, especially during night travel.

Modern tools, like GPS, have made navigation easier and more accurate than ever before in history. Still, the basic concept remains the same.

The moon, like the sun, rises in the east and sets

in the west. Knowing how late it is in the evening and which side of the sky the moon is on will give you an idea where the cardinal directions are.

There are a few things to understand about moonrise and moonset before you go to the bank with this knowledge.

For example, full moon will behave in the opposite way to the sun.

In northern zones, like the United States, it rises close to southeast in midsummer and northeast in midwinter. Setting southwest in midsummer and northwest in midwinter.

One technique to learn is quite simple and quick to use. Although not perfectly accurate, it can be an excellent guide for getting your general bearings. It is called the "crescent method."

If you are looking at a crescent moon, you can use its pointed ends (or the horns) to help you find south. From the tip of its horn on the top, draw an imaginary line to its second horn in the bottom.

Continue extending this line until it touches the horizon. The point where it meets the horizon is where south is, from your position. This method

won't provide you with the most accurate result, but for most situations, it should be helpful enough.

The reason this works is because the moon reflects light from the sun. Like the sun, the moon travels east to west (generally) as it moves across the sky.

The shape of the moon and the reflected light changes as it orbits around the earth in its circuit.

You don't have to wait until dark to use the moon as a navigational tool. You may notice the moonrise in the sky before the sun has set.

In this case, look at the illuminated side of the evening moon. The lighted moon side will point to the west.

Simple enough, but not many people think of this when outdoors.

There may be some flaws into the story of Mr. Hyde. Apparently, there was a Charles Hyde who lived in Newquay, Cornwall, and charged with breaking into a house and stealing liquor in 1954.

The 30-year-old man claimed he suffered from a kind of "moon madness" and seemed to go off his rails whenever the moon was full.

The London court, feeling sympathetic, gave Mr.

Hyde probation. A year later, he suddenly went to Paris and joined the Foreign Legion, went to North Africa and marched across the burning sands of Algeria.

The calendar showed there was a full moon three days before Mr. Hyde vanished, so the court was again sympathetic and extended Mr. Hyde's probation.

I don't know which, if either, story about Mr. Hyde is true, but I prefer the first one and him being Dr. Jekyll at times.

When I am high in the mountains, on a moonlit night, I sometimes wonder if he is still prowling around. I will never know, but at least I know where south is.

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