



Anyone who hunts in Colorado, born on or after Jan. 1, 1949, must have a valid hunter safety class certificate, but the class teaches much more than just safety. (Photo by Mark Rackay)

Hunter safety classes are about more than hunting

The first hunter safety classes in the United States were conducted in 1955. The early classes concentrated mostly on game laws, hunter conduct and ethical hunting. During the first two years, more than 13,000 hunters completed the class.

In 1970, Colorado adopted a hunter safety law, requiring anyone who has not reached the age of 21 (anyone born after Jan. 1, 1949) would be required to successfully complete the class before taking to the field in pursuit of wild game.

Hunter safety classes usually take between four and eight hours. There will be plenty of hands-on training, class time, and followed by a written test. Each student will demonstrate the safe handling of a firearm and complete a live-fire test.

The face of hunter safety classes has changed some over the years. I took my class in 1971, from the legendary survival expert Bob Whitmore. In later years, I took some specific survival classes with Bob,



Tips from the Posse
By Mark Rackay

and his teachings have served me well over the years.

He made a statement to the class that I remember to this day: "As you take to the field, remember in an emergency that anything that walks, runs, crawls, swims, hops, or flies, is a potential survival food."

My instructor briefly touched on the necessity for shelter and fire in the event you are lost. Waterproof matches, a tarp, knife and compass were about the limit of the survival equipment discussed. Whitmore did a fine job of instilling into our young minds that the woods were no place to take lightly.

A good friend of mine, Bobby Morgan, is a

Colorado certified hunter safety instructor. Bobby is very passionate about teaching young people how to hunt safely and ethically, and just as important, not becoming a statistic in the woods.

Morgan explained to me that he spends a great deal of time teaching the basics of survival to his students and encourages them to seek further training after his classes.

"For all of my students, I stress the basics of survival, fire, shelter and water. For fire there are no tennis shoelaces and a bow, trying to make a friction fire. It is probably dark, snowing, and you are exhausted. A road flare is magical when you are in trouble. Everyone should carry at least three forms of starting a fire," said Morgan.

Morgan continued, "I have everyone carry cordage, good old 550 Para cord. That stuff can be used for splints, hanging a tarp for shelter, and just about anything in between. Another necessity is

two knives, just in case you lose or break one, and a small hand-held sharpening device. Face it, a dull knife is not only useless, but dangerous."

"For water, I like the small LifeStraw filtration system. You can drink out of a puddle with one of them if you have to and it is much easier than boiling water or dealing with chemicals," continued Morgan.

One of the things we discussed, and something I preach relentlessly here, is having someone back in town know your game plan. You must have a person, in town or at home who will summon help if you miss the prearranged call-in time.

This person should provide your description along with the location of your camp or vehicle, which should be the starting point of searchers who will look for you.

Write a note, telling everyone where you are hunting, what canyon etc., what your direction of travel is, and who is in

your party.

Place this note on the windshield of your vehicle, tent flap at camp, or attached to your ATV. This note gives search and rescue people a starting point to come find you, saving countless hours, and possibly lives.

Morgan also stressed the importance of all hunters to take responsibility for the other people with them on the hunt: "Make sure everyone knows each other's limitations and that any required medicines are along. Remind them to take those meds. Remember that safety is everyone's responsibility."

Hunting season is a busy time for search and rescue teams all across the country, as almost 12 million hunters will take to the woods. Our local team, the sheriff's posse averages half dozen missions each season between the East and West Ends. Most hunters were not prepared with even the basics for survival.

You can fool Mother Nature from time to time,

but you can never pull one over Mr. Murphy of Murphy's Law fame. Beware of my close associate and ever-present friend, Murph, for his law knows no religion, race, creed or politics. We all know that he doesn't really exist, and yet, somehow he is always there.

Take some advice from Bobby Morgan and learn to be a safe and ethical hunter. Be competent in the handling of your weapon and taking care of game. Most importantly, be prepared for the unexpected, and make certain everyone in your party is prepared as well.

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