

## A race up Imogene Pass on foot



### Outdoors

By John T. Unger

A boy, 15 years old. A woman, 18 years old. A man, 72 years old. A man, 80 years old. These four runners, and 908 others, finished this year's Imogene Pass run.

From 46 U.S. states and two foreign countries, they set out on foot from downtown Ouray on Saturday, Sept. 11, and ran uphill 5,000 vertical feet to the summit of Imogene Pass on the rough and rocky mining roads. Then running downhill into Telluride they descended 4,000 vertical feet, led by the men's overall winner who clocked two hours, 18 minutes, and some change.

This year, in the 48th annual running of this iconic 17.1-mile mountain race, the first woman finisher did it in a time of 2:52:48. Almost two-thirds of this year's runners were not yet born when this annual race was first run.

Training for such a run is always a challenge, and especially this year. Weeks of wildfire smoke and unusually high air temperatures this summer impacted crop production, forest health, and also physical activity choices — for athletes and non-athletes alike.

Every Montrose Daily Press reader who looked toward Grand Mesa or Mt. Sneffels this summer knows how frequently the smoke from our Western states blew in and obscured the sight of those landmarks. The inhalation of the fine particulates in that smoke is especially hazardous to the lungs of both healthy and immuno-compromised citizens, leading to many canceled exercise and training outings, both in this valley and on our surrounding mountain trails and mining roads.

Record-setting high temperatures in the U.S. reduced aerobic training opportunities for many outdoor athletes this summer. When so often our temperatures stayed above 90 degrees Fahrenheit even approaching sunset, heat injury became a threat. Hyperthermia risk increased for intense athletic training among everyone from students to the elderly, forcing football teams to adjust their practice schedules to later in the day, and runners to cancel evening runs.

Despite these challenges, Montrose had 19 runners who showed up and finished the race. The fastest finisher was Ryan Wisler, who hit the finish line almost five minutes ahead of the coveted three-hour mark, and just 30 seconds out of third place in his highly competitive age group. Kaitlyn Nagel was the first woman from Montrose to make the finish line, putting



At the starting line, Heath Hibbard of Montrose and Glenn Steckler of Telluride are all smiles; each went on to win first place in their respective age groups in the 48th annual race. (Courtesy/John T. Unger)



A swarm of runners — 956 — await the starter's gun just 60 seconds before the Imogene Pass run. (Courtesy/John T. Unger)

her in the top 25% of all of the women runners.

The Imogene Pass Run sells out and fills up in the first 20 minutes of the opening of registration on June 1 each year. Though the COVID pandemic kept the 2020 race from occurring, there were 1,236 runners registering for 2021. More than 300 of those who registered were unable to make it here to the starting line this year, a proportion which is about average for recent years.

Masks were necessary and required and worn this year for all indoor elements of this event, which included on-site in person confirmation of registration, and also for the hundreds who rode the buses back from Telluride to Ouray after the race's completion. For the first time ever, no awards ceremony was held, so as to minimize any further chance for the coronavirus to spread. Instead, awards will be mailed to the top three finishers in both sexes' age brackets.

The second finisher from Montrose was Heath Hibbard, who won first place in his age group, ahead of three-quarters of all ages of men in the race.

Also from Montrose, the next local finishers were Chase Jones, Ryan Cushman, Josh Eastham and Evan Jones. Then Liba Kopeckova, Justin Green, John T. Unger (me) and Cindra London. More area runners fol-

lowed, including Laura Devor, Aimee Quadri, Dr. Jonathan Osorio and Dan Quigley.

Rounding out our valley's local runners who finished were Lori Lambeth (who crossed the finish line simultaneously with Jan Pearl), Laurie Williams, John Birge and Caryll Brown.

This year's race started in 55-degree temperatures, with very little wind and in good racing conditions. Four hours into the race, the heat of the day began taking its toll on many runners, combined with the loose rock on the road descending through the ghost town ruins of the Tomboy mine and on into the San Miguel valley. Perfectly ripe peaches from western Colorado, by the hundreds, made an impression on the runners and the 170 volunteers who worked the aid stations.

These volunteers spent more time on the mountain course that day than did most of the runners themselves and their efforts exemplify the high level of community spirit and camaraderie in our corner of the Rockies. When asked, they happily poured water into my bottle and water down my head and back.

John T. Unger is a Diplomate of the American Chiropractic Board of Sports Physicians, with an active practice in Montrose. He is grateful to have completed this as his 28th Imogene Pass Run. Ideas for future columns are welcomed at [sportsdocunger.com](mailto:sportsdocunger.com).

## Hybrid deer hard to spot



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Sometimes the best part of a hunting camp is the camaraderie between the hunters at day's end. Many a world or political problem have been solved in these camps; too bad the politicians weren't in camp to listen.

One particular camp that comes to mind was in Alabama, where we were in hot pursuit of whitetail deer in the heart of the southern rut. This particular evening, we were putting in overtime, led by several glasses of man's best friend. One of the participants was a biologist for the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources in his real life. In camp, he was just another hunter who had not seen any deer yet.

The good biologist made a statement that eventually there will be only one deer species (between mule deer and whitetails) as evolution continues. He stated a pretty good case for hybridization between the two species.

Shortly after returning from Alabama, I left for a five-day mule deer hunt on the Eastern Plains of our fair state. We were fairly close to a small town called Deer Trail. On the second morning of the hunt, we stumbled upon a buck that had a beautiful 8-point whitetail rack, complete with brow tines, attached to a mule deer head, complete with mule deer sized ears.

We studied this odd-looking buck for quite some time. As he walked off, his tail was clearly longer than normal. The general consensus was this was a hybrid deer. He was the first I had ever seen in a long life of being in the woods.

When I got home, I locked myself into what my wife and I laughingly call my office and began making phone calls and doing research into the matter of hybrid deer. The results were not what I expected.

John Audubon in 1846 described the mule deer as "having fur like an elk, but hooves like a whitetail." Other than those hooves, there are not many direct similarities between the two species. The scientific name for mule deer is *Odocoileus hemionus*, which means "deer that is half mule."

In nature, different species of animals, even those that are closely related, are naturally

kept from crossbreeding by being geographically isolated from each other. Those that live in the same habitat usually have much different breeding behaviors or rut at different times of the year to prevent hybridization.

Generally, this is true for mule deer and whitetails, but there are large areas where their ranges overlap. Eastern Colorado is one such place where the areas they roam are shared. Even the river bottom areas of Montrose and Delta see both species of deer cohabitating.

Identifying a hybrid in the field is a difficult task indeed. The difference between the two species is notably the tail, facial markings and ears. Each species has distinct characteristics and yet, regular genetic occurrences can cause an overlap of these appearances.

The only characteristic that can be accurately used in the field to identify a hybrid deer is the metatarsal gland, which is located on the lower portion of the rear legs. The metatarsal glands on a mule deer are 4 to 6 inches long and sit high lower leg, and always surrounded by dark brown fur.

The whitetail's metatarsals are below the midpoint of the lower leg, less than 1-inch long, and surrounded by white hair. The hybrid deer will have metatarsal glands that split the difference in location, appearance, and length (2 to 4 inches).

Hybrids have been reported in captivity, dating back to the Cincinnati Zoo in 1898. During the 1930s and again in the 1970s, Arizona produced hybrids that resulted in 19 hybrid fawns, of which only eight survived the first six months.

Research has revealed that hybridization occurs in both directions; mule deer bucks with whitetail does and vice-versa, but by far the most common is whitetail bucks and mule deer does. This is because a whitetail buck is far more aggressive than a mule deer buck. A buck whitetail will run off any mule deer bucks during the rut, thereby leaving the opportunity for hybridization. I personally have seen a lone whitetail buck run off a herd of cattle just out of apparent meanness.

Scientists have been looking into hybridization for several decades. In genetic studies done in Alberta and west Texas, they have found hybrids can make up to 14% of a given population where the two species overlap, but a 6% proportion seems to be closer to the norm.

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# Some plants are just meant to be shared with others

Some plants are just meant to be shared with others

If you have spring or summer blooming perennials that aren't blooming quite as well as they once did, are out-growing their area, or if you would like to move or share them, this is the time to do so. Perhaps you've never given much thought to moving or transplanting your plant, or even saving the seeds from a plant, but I'd like to share a couple stories about some very special plants. Maybe you'll be inspired.

I recently did some work for a remarkable lady, Beverly Clung. She was raised by her grandparents in Kansas and when she was six years old, she helped her grandmother plant the most gorgeous peonies. She has fond memories of her grandparents and her taking beautiful bouquets of peonies in canning jars to place on the graves of loved ones on Memorial Day.

She lived in Kansas until her husband graduated from college in 1962. From there she moved to Illinois where she lived for 25 years. While in Illinois her grandmother died at age 86 but the peonies continued to thrive. One day her grandfather dug up some of the peonies, placed them in a large cigar box, and boarded a plane. He carried those plants on his lap all the way to Matamoras, Illinois (you could do that in those days!), to surprise Beverly and give them to her. She planted those plants with her grandfather and according to Beverly, they grew into an outstanding display of color. She divided them over the years and shared



## Gardening A to Z

By Linda Corvine McIntosh

them with friends and neighbors.

She later moved to Indiana, and as you probably guessed, the beloved peonies once again moved with her. She lived there enjoying the peonies and sharing them with friends until 2020 when her husband retired and they moved to Ridgway where she once again planted her treasured plants. She was anxious to show me the plants and tell me the story of the cranberry-colored plants with gorgeous yellow centers and a hint of orange that were blooming in her flowerbed.

In the fall, about the first or second week of October, you can find her cutting off the summer growth. She will divide them again when it becomes necessary. (She says to make sure the peonies have been watered well before you attempt to transplant and separate them.)

The way Beverly puts it, she "spread her grandmother's plants all over the country, sharing them with people." I think of her as the Johnny Appleseed of peonies. Beverly will turn 83 in November and the plants have always been a part of her life. What a fantastic legacy for her and her grandmother!

My daughter also has some very special plants that her mother-in-law gave her.



Photo by author: These peonies have been a part of Beverly Clung's life since she was six years old. Everywhere she goes, they go. (Courtesy photo/Linda Corvine McIntosh)

Her mother-in-law's grandmother moved from Germany to Russia, and took what they refer to as "German berries" with her. In 1906, they fled Russia because of the revolution. When they left Russia they took along the berries and some marigold seeds.

It was a long, arduous journey to get into the U.S. before finally settling in the Delta area. They said those berries helped sustain them during that time. I'm told, to this day, many people in the Delta area know about the berries, and have some of those "German berries." I'm lucky enough to be a recipient of some of those

special marigold seeds.

I'm sure many of us have iris or canna lily plants that tell a story of moving from a home location to another and taking the plants with us. I'm even betting you might also have some interesting stories and memories of your special plants. Anyway, I hope so!

I think some of our plants become like old friends, or almost family over the years. But even if you don't have a special plant, this is a great time to divide your spring and summer blooming perennials or save some seeds from your favorite annual plants. Just be sure the plants you're moving

or the seeds that you're saving are not invasive species plants!

If you need information on how to divide your perennials, just do a web search and type in Colorado State University how to divide perennials. Or do the same with how to save seeds. I'm sure you'll find a lot of information to help you out.

This reminds me. The Tri-River Area Master Gardeners are having their annual plant sale Saturday, Oct. 9, from 9 a.m. — 1 p.m. at the Mesa County Extension Office. Some of the plants and trees are donated by garden centers,

but some are plants that master gardeners have dug from their own gardens and are just waiting for you to plant them in your garden.

So if you have perennial plants that are no longer producing great flowers, or ornamental grasses that are growing in a ring around a dead center, it's probably time to divide them. But don't throw away the portion you don't want! Share the plants with someone! Who knows, you may be starting your own legacy.

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## DEER

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When a hybrid does make it to adulthood, it typically is not as well-adapted to the environment as the parent species. The hybrid, for example, does not have its escape the right way. Whitetails wag their tail, like a flag, as they gallop away. In contrast, a mule deer have a spot when they run, carrying them over shrubs and brush.

Research conducted by Susan Lingle in Alberta on captive hybrids has shown that stotting is so specialized to mule deer that hybrids cannot do it. She found the hybrids' escape behavior was erratic because they approached the threat and jumped around in confusion. Such behavior is not likely to be passed on to the next generation since the first generation is unlikely to reach the age of maturity.

Occasionally, a hybrid will live long enough to breed, which further complicates identification. When a hybrid breeds with a mule deer or a whitetail, the offspring will even more closely resemble a full species, as the hybrid status becomes genetically diluted.

I did check in with Joe Lewandowski, formerly of Colorado Parks and Wildlife to get a take on Colorado hybrids and he had this to add, "Mule deer and whitetail hybrids in Colorado are rare in the areas the two species overlap. The rut



Whitetail deer live in Colorado but it is unlikely they will ever crossbreed with mule deer. (Courtesy photo/DJ Hammigan/via CPW)

behavior, timing of the rut and estrous cycles of the two species don't normally line up. They can cross breed and produce offspring, but seldom do."

Whitetail deer have made steady gains, both in territory and population growth, throughout much of the country over the last several decades. Mule deer populations, on the other

hand, seem to rise and fall from one decade to the next. Lately, chronic wasting disease is taking a toll on mule deer. As the distribution of these species change, it alters the dynamic relationship between the two. Whitetails in the Rocky Mountain regions are expanding to the point that agencies are changing their regulations to take advantage of the

abundance and allowing hunting/higher quotas for them.

Hybrids do occur and will probably continue to do so but I seriously doubt they will actually take over or merge to a single species. From being born in the first place, escaping the ever-present predator, and somehow reaching adulthood and breeding stage, will take a great

deal of luck to happen.

Looking back, I am sure the buck we saw that day near Deer Trail was not a hybrid. He had unusual face markings and antlers, more of a genetic difference. Someday, I hope to actually get to see a real hybrid in the wild. It would be a rare occurrence.

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