



I have not been back to the old man’s fishing hole since he passed, but I bet he stops in once in a while to see how his brown trout are doing. (Submitted/Mark Rackay)

# The old man’s favorite fishing hole

Every kid should have an old man mentor, not just a father. Fathers are all right, but from a kid’s point of view they spend entirely too much time at a place called work. What a kid needs, is someone who can take him out hunting and fishing, or just padding around in the woods, whenever you wanted. That’s where an old man comes in.

An old man will teach you all there is to know, and some things your mother would rather you did not know, about life, death, whiskey, women, sex, hunting, fishing, camping, women, smoking, cussing, women, and everything in between.

My old man was Mr. Caster. He came to me as a longtime friend of our family. He was tall, lanky, had a stubbly white beard, wrinkled hide, chewed tobacco, smoked Chesterfield Kings, drank medicine from a flask for his arthritis, knew and used all the swear words, had the temperament of a leopard with a case of the shingles, fished and hunted all the time, and knew everything about the woods. In other words, a perfect mentor. He was not my father but he had a big hand in helping me become the man I am.

Mr. Caster went fishing just about every day in the summer and hunting just about every day when the season was open. He carried me into the mountains just about anytime school did not get in the way, and sometimes we played hooky from school, especially when the fish-



## Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

ing or hunting was good, or he wanted an early start for a weekend trip.

We had a favorite fishing hole. It was a place where the North Fork of the North Platte River came out of a canyon and entered some large hayfields. The river flowed fast in this area and wound around through thick brush and trees. People never stopped and fished here because it was private property, and everyone assumed the water was too fast to hold any fish.

Mr. Caster knew the rancher who owned the stretch of water and we had permission to fish whenever we wanted. We would park the old Jeep Wagoneer next to a bridge that crossed the river. From this jumping off point, we would walk a half-mile downstream, until the river made an abrupt 90-degree turn, creating a 100-foot-long pool, with a deep hole in the center that had to go down 15 feet during the spring runoff. The hole was always full of brown trout, and there were a few that were enormous.

We loved this particular fishing hole because it was a secret place nobody else knew about. Together we fished this hole a half-do-

zen times a year. In this spot, Mr. Caster taught me about his own version of conservation, never keeping more than you can use.

He taught me that there was no sense in keeping more fish than what you were going to eat for dinner. “Once you put fish in the icebox, you will never eat them again. They just don’t taste as good as when they are fresh. You could give them away to people, but most folks don’t want them either. It does not take a person long to realize that a fish that has been lugged around in a creel all day is a lousy excuse for a pork chop,” he lectured.

We would keep a couple fish for lunch or dinner back at camp. Mr. Caster kept only the middle-sized ones, not the big fish. He reasoned, “A big female brown trout will lay 500 eggs every year, and one that might be 6 or 7 will lay a thousand. That’s a lot of fish for me and you to miss out on if we was to kill her for supper. It’s best to let the babies go and keep a couple middle sized ones to eat.”

And keep a couple we did. Come lunchtime, Mr. Caster would make a few magical movements with his hands and there would be a bare spot on the ground with a pile of sticks on it. He would strike the head of kitchen match, and before I knew it, there was a roaring fire going.

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# The go-to trails of the Grand Mesa

It did not take long for the summer heat to make its presence known — mid-90s by the second week of June!

The weather gods seem to have skipped the usual gradual warm-up. The heat just makes riding Buzzard Gulch, Electric Hills and even the RAT in the mid-day sun a non-starter. An early morning or an evening ride makes more sense.

Of course, an attractive option is to head for the high country. Usually by this time of the year the Uncompahgre Plateau has shed its winter coat. The trails along the spine of the plateau on the Uncompahgre National Forest have dried out enough to allow passage on a bike. The singletrack trails on the Plateau closest to Montrose are certainly an option.

For my money, the non-motorized single-track trails on the Grand Mesa are my go-to rides. Depending on the snowpack those trails open up in late June. The current riding options on the Mesa got their start in 2004. One notable exception is the West Bench Trail that connects the Mesa Lakes area to the Powderhorn ski slopes. I cross-country skied that trail back in 1976.

In 2004 the Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Association (COPMOBA) embarked on a multi-year project with the U.S. Forest Service to build the Flowing Park and Mesa Top trails.

Flowing Park snakes out to the visually stunning southwest rim of the Grand Mesa and connects with the Indian Point Trail to create a 14-mile cherry-stemmed



## Outdoors

By Bill Harris

loop. The wildflowers along the trail in July create a cacophony of color. On a clear day the La Sal Mountains in Utah are visible. The ride is relatively flat, but rocky closer to the rim.

By 2015 the Mesa Top Trail that connects the Flowing Park Trail with Highway 65 was completed. Mesa Top is more technically challenging than Flowing Park and spends a lot of time in the dark timber. Point-to-point the trail is 7 miles long, so you can either shuttle a vehicle or ride the upper end of the Palisade Plunge and Forest Service Road 109 back to the start.

In 2016 COPMOBA started working on additional singletrack projects that added another 10 miles of trail. The 3-mile Crane Lake Trail and the 7-mile County Line Trail are the result of that effort. The Crane Lake Trail adds a singletrack option to Flowing Park Trailhead from a popular camping area along Forest Service Road 109.

The County Line Trail follows much of the popular cross-country ski trail. Several reroutes were built to avoid marshy and boggy stretches. The west side of the trail winds through a dense spruce forest that

witnessed a major blow down on June 6, 2020. More than 100 trees had to be cleared to make the trail passable. An additional connector was built to link the Mesa Top Trail and County Line.

A long-time cycling buddy, Dan Antonelli, just reported that the West Bench Trail near Powderhorn and Flowing Park/Indian Point are rideable. Dan and a few other dedicated mountain bikers spend trail time each year hauling in a chainsaw to clear the trails of deadfall. I imagine Mesa Top Trail will open soon.

It has been nearly 18 years since these trails got their start. The trails were designed and built, in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service, by volunteers, mostly mountain bikers. That seems like a long time to get them built but consider that there is a very short window in the summer and early fall to access the high country. There were few close access points to the new trails, so a lot of time was spent just hiking to the new construction. In addition, they were built without a high-dollar grant.

These trails along with the developed bike trails at the Powderhorn Mountain Resort make a nice summer compliment to the well-known Grand Valley mountain bike trails.

**If you go:** All the trails mentioned are on MTB Project, as well as a few that aren’t listed above. The upper 9 miles of the Palisade Plunge, before it drops off into oblivion, is accessible from the Mesa Top Trailhead along Highway 65.



Rick Corbin riding the Mesa Top Trail. (Submitted/Bill Harris)



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Apply now for CPW sportsperson’s roundtable

SPECIAL TO THE MONTROSE DAILY PRESS

Colorado Parks and Wildlife is accepting applications for a two-year membership to the statewide Colorado Sportsperson’s Roundtable. The application period is open through Wednesday, June 29.

CPW aims to maintain a geographically diverse membership on the Roundtable. Currently, we are looking to fill approximately 6 positions with a preference for residents in the northeast, northwest, and southwest regions of the state.

- Responsibilities of members include:**
1. Participating in a half- to full-day meeting twice a year.
  2. Meetings may be in-person or virtual. Travel to meetings is at the member’s expense.
  3. Participating in occasional conference calls.
  4. Sharing information and ideas with Roundtable members and senior CPW staff on pressing issues.
  5. Sharing your contact

information on the CPW Roundtable webpage and being available to sportspersons around the state to share and discuss information pertinent to the Roundtable.

The two-year term runs from August 2022 through July 2024.

Volunteering for the Sportsperson’s Roundtable is a great opportunity to share information with Colorado Parks and Wildlife on recreation and management issues that are relevant to hunters, anglers, and trappers.

How to apply  
Fill out the application available online and linked from the CPW Sportsperson’s Roundtable webpage ([cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/Roundtable.aspx](http://cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/Roundtable.aspx)) by the deadline of Wednesday, June 29. (A printed version is available upon request). CPW staff will make selections and notify you about whether or not you are selected.

For more information about the process, please email Jonathan

Boydston at [jonathan.boydston@state.co.us](mailto:jonathan.boydston@state.co.us).

Hunters and anglers are vitally important to Colorado Parks and Wildlife and to the successful management of Colorado’s wildlife. Sportspersons are directly affected by the agency’s fish and wildlife management decisions and provide much of the funding for wildlife conservation in the state. Colorado Parks and Wildlife encourages effective channels for consulting with the state’s hunters and anglers through the Sportsperson’s Roundtable and Regional Sportsperson’s Caucuses.

The Sportsperson’s Roundtable is a statewide panel comprised of 16 or more statewide members appointed by CPW and at least two delegates from each of four Sportsperson’s Regional Caucuses.

The statewide Roundtable meets in person twice a year to help the agency by sharing information, discussing important topics and identifying emerging issues.

Four Regional Sportsperson’s Caucuses also hold meetings twice a year. Caucus meetings are open to all local hunters and anglers to discuss regional issues. Caucus delegates then share this information with the statewide Roundtable. Caucus delegates are selected through a separate process determined by sportspersons who participate in the Regional Caucus meetings.

The Colorado Sportsperson’s Roundtable is made up of individual members who represent a broad range of interests related to hunting, fishing and trapping in Colorado.

These interests include, but are not limited to, small and big game hunting, sport fishing, outfitting and other sportsperson-dependent businesses. For more information about the Sportsperson’s Roundtable, Regional Sportsperson’s Caucuses and the members of both groups, visit [cpw.state.co.us](http://cpw.state.co.us).

FISH

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We would then bring out a cast iron skillet, heat up some lard, roll the fish in salt, pepper and flour, and send them to fry. We would heat up a can of beans and open a jar of canned peaches for desert and settle down to the best meal a kid ever had, all the while talking of fish in the creek, conservation, and the woods in general.

Mr. Caster deserves a lot of the credit for the kind of hunter and fisher I grew up to be. He had a surly way of teaching, but it got through this teenage boy’s thick skull. I never intentionally violated a game law and never kept more than I would eat. I padded around with Mr. Caster for about seven or eight years before life got in the way.

I was married and lived in another state when I got word that Mr. Caster passed on. New job, college, and a lack of funds prevented me from coming home. By the time I got home, the funeral was over, and the relatives had come and gone, paying their last respects and dividing up his meager belongings. My grandmother said, “It would have been nice if they could have left you something to remember him by. I know he would have wanted you to have something. Just keep him in your heart and memories anyway.”

I decided to go up to our secret fishing spot to get away from people in general, and maybe see what the brown trout had to say about the passing of Mr. Caster. I parked my old truck in our usual jump off spot and plodded downstream to our favorite fishing hole. I caught a very small brown on the first cast, which I promptly returned to the water, just as Mr. Caster would have done.

Not much else went on for another half hour, and I wondered if the fish were sulking because of the passing of our friend. Then, my line went tight, as if I was snagged on something. I kept the pressure on, and it slowly started to move off. After a few minutes, I had a huge brown trout at my feet. She was one of those 6- or 7-year old’s Mr. Caster spoke of that laid a thousand eggs.

I thought about that fish, as she was easily 6 or 7 inches longer than any brown I had ever caught. Suddenly I realized, she was probably one of the small fish Mr. Caster caught and released some years back. I gently set her back in the water where she slowly swam back into the deep hole she came out of. I realized we had both lost a friend and we would have to go on without him from here on. I never went back to that fishing spot, but I think Mr. Caster makes an appearance there once in a while. I know he pops up in my heart whenever I am afield, probably to make sure I don’t keep more fish than I can eat. Thanks Mr. Caster for helping out a young kid and teaching him some things about the woods.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for several saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of adventure and serves as a director and public Information officer for the Montrose County Sheriff’s Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email [info@mcspi.org](mailto:info@mcspi.org)



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