



It is hard to imagine something as small as a jumping mouse would push my grandmother over the edge. (Courtesy photo/Colorado Parks and Wildlife)

The jumping mouse is a rare breed

My grandmother was a tough old pioneer type woman, standing well under 5 feet tall. She outlived her seven siblings, husband and only child. The lady survived the Great Depression and seeing her husband, his brothers, and all her brothers fight in World War II, often saying she needed a scorecard to keep track of where they were all located during the fight.

This woman once caught two young men breaking into our basement. She went after them with a piece of wood that we used to prop open the window during warm afternoons, that stick being



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

the closest thing she could find. When she was done with the two burglars, she had them remembering the words to the Hail Mary and running as fast as they could to get away from the “crazy old short woman.”

Since I was thrust into her custody at a

very young age, she had little patience for “whiny, spoiled, back-talking little kids.” I always told her that I would tell any such kids that should I run into, that she had no patience for them. She answered me with a whack upside the head, her usual response. I offer this preamble so you might understand why the happenings I am about to describe, was such a shock to me.

I was outside in the woodlot on a quiet summer’s morning, when I heard my grandmother screaming at the top of her lungs, for someone to come to her assistance. I charged into the kitchen,

fully expecting to see the masked marauder, the cookie monster, and an African Boomsnake in full coil, as she was standing on a chair, tears running down her face. In the far corner of the kitchen floor, stood a small rodent, obviously scared of the crazy woman in hysterics, and her shouting about the “killer mouse.”

“That’s not a mouse, Gram,” I said, “it’s a vole. We don’t have mice.” She replied with a whack upside my head.

Colorado is home to eight species of voles, but also has mice and rats.

See MOUSE page A11

When to belly-flop into rapids



Outdoors

By John T. Unger

The frigid 42-degree water in the Pine River had just left the spillway at Vallecito Reservoir some minutes earlier. Even in a rented drysuit, that water was cold.

Now it was generating masses of churning, frothy whitewater rapids among the boulders, among an occasional flat pool of water the area of a large bedsheet.

Shouting to be heard above the roar, the instructor was giving us ten students directions on how to enter such a river for to effect a rescue, if the “Reach, Throw, or Row” options had first been considered and then ruled out. Only at that point, of course, should the “Go” option be considered.

Each of us would wait for his signal that the previous student was clear, while standing on the small flat boulder, its surface barely above the water. When he would raise that straight arm and fist overhead as the “Go” signal, we would first acknowledge his message by putting our own arm overhead.

Then, against years of training to not lead with one’s head into water whose depths are not visible, the next student would launch himself off the wet boulder, forearms bent and flattened to protect the face, and would bellyflop into that small flat pool.

Time to fight the rapids in a hurry to get head up and feet downstream.

This WRT (Whitewater Rescue Technician) certification class was expertly and effectively taught by Aaron Ball of Southwest Rescue, under the auspices of Rescue3 International.

It is critical to repeat that it is usually unwise to leave the shore in attempting to rescue a victim. Never should this be done by sudden impulse, or gut-level reflex reaction, or without a quick plan.

I recognize how difficult it can be to follow this advice. In years past I impulsively bolted into Molas Lake at high altitude when I witnessed a canoe overturning and

dumping two adults and two children into very cold water. All five of us came out of the experience with nothing more than a brush with hypothermia. But that instantaneous rescue impulse was almost irresistible.

“Reach, Throw, Row, Go” is the phrase taught for rescue, and in that order for good reason. Can the victim be “reached” with a paddle first? If not, there had better be a handy “throw” bag full of rope, and a bystander who has recently practiced throwing it. Instantly dumping out the contents of the ever-present drink cooler and throwing that to the victim counts, too.

If not, to “row” is next, although somebody on a kayak or SUP (Stand Up Paddleboard) may easily be dumped themselves into the too-cold water by a frantic, desperate victim.

That would immediately double the number of victims needing rescue from the river.

Recent studies published in professional peer-reviewed medical and scientific journals have shown that two out of three drownings in flatwater or whitewater are actually deaths of bystander rescuers.

This topic is far from being just an exercise in some unlikely “what-ifs”. The spate of news reports of drowning deaths from Colorado in just the past five weeks shows that our choices and skills regarding even flatwater recreation can mean life or death.

The Colorado River within Grand Junction city limits, the Roaring Fork River, the Arkansas River in the Royal Gorge, Lake Pueblo, Chatfield Reservoir, and Confluence Lake in Delta each had one or more drowning deaths, before the first day of Summer 2022.

Many of these tragic deaths were associated with victims who were not wearing a PFD (Personal Flotation Device), formerly known as a life jacket.

In addition to all of the valid and often repeated reasons to wear a PFD even when in calm flat water, I now realize another reason, which gets very little attention. In that cold Pine River in the WRT workshops, as we practiced rescuing victims (both compliant and combative ones), that reason suddenly became obvious on a gut-level.

See BELLY-FLOP page A11



GREAT OUTDOORS Company



KÜHL

Summer Values Underway!

10 SOUTH SELIG AVE MONTROSE, COLORADO 81401 970-249-4226

State parks pass available with car registration next year

SPECIAL TO THE MONTROSE DAILY PRESS

Governor Jared Polis and Colorado Parks and Wildlife announced that, starting on Jan. 1, 2023, Colorado residents can get a \$29 Keep Colorado Wild Pass during their annual vehicle registration through the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV). In March at the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission Meeting, the commission members passed a \$29 price point for the Keep Colorado Wild Pass (KCW Pass) which is less than half the price of the current annual parks pass. The Keep Colorado Wild Pass is an annual state park pass that:

- Provides entry to all Colorado state parks
- Protects wildlife, lands and water
- Supports search and rescue programs
- Funds trails and local community projects
- Helps make the outdoors safe and available to all

“Colorado is home to world-class state parks and cutting the price of a parks pass will save families money and ensure our treasured parks and public lands can be explored for generations to come. Cutting the cost of an annual parks pass by over fifty dollars will help Colorado families and individuals save money while helping expand access to our vast great outdoors,” said Polis. President Steve Fenberg, Reps. Kerry



The Keep Colorado Wild pass for state parks, like Ridgway State Park shown here, will be available for \$29 with motor vehicle registrations starting Jan. 1, 2023. (Courtesy photo/CPW)

Tipper and Perry Will and Sen. Kerry Donovan sponsored the landmark bipartisan law signed by Gov. Polis creating the Keep Colorado Wild Annual Pass. Under Polis, Colorado has worked to create new state parks, with Fishers Peak in Trinidad officially opening over a year ago and the administration launching a partnership in the Fall of 2021 to create Colorado’s 43rd state park at Sweetwater Lake in collaboration with local stakeholders. Colorado is home to more than 22 million acres of public lands, ranging from wetlands to forests, canyon landscapes to mountain lakes.

“Colorado’s great outdoors and wildlife are among our most treasured resources,” said CPW Acting Director Heather Dugan. “We know Coloradans value an outdoor lifestyle and take pride in our state’s natural beauty. Colorado Parks and Wildlife is excited to offer this new pass because it gives all Coloradans the opportunity to enjoy our state parks and protect the outdoor spaces and traditions we cherish.” Residents will be able to buy or decline the pass when registering a passenger vehicle, light truck, motorcycle and recreational vehicle starting in 2023. The pass is not transferable

between vehicles and is linked to a specific license plate and registration card. Residents will have the clear option to decline the pass when registering a vehicle with the DMV online, through a kiosk or by notifying a customer service representative. “Coloradans that buy the \$29 pass with their vehicle registration, show they care about our natural resources and are taking action to protect and enhance them for our current communities and future generations,” said Dan Gibbs, executive director of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources. The goal is to raise at least \$36 million annual-

ly. The first \$32.5 million will go to state park maintenance, the next \$2.5 million will go to supporting the Colorado Backcountry Search and Rescue system and \$1 million will support the Colorado Avalanche Information Center. Additional money raised from the pass will be used to protect wildlife habitats, conduct avalanche awareness education, invest in outdoor equity programs and more. CPW and DMV staff understand there will be an adjustment period in 2023 as residents wait for the Keep Colorado Wild Pass to be available to them during their annual vehicle registration. All regularly priced CPW

daily or annual park passes are still available to customers who may have a window between the expiration of their current pass and the next vehicle registration or renewal, but still want to enjoy state parks. CPW is also developing a refund policy that addresses any overlap of customers with park passes that are still valid when their vehicle registration with the lower-priced Keep Colorado Wild Pass is due. More information will be posted on the website when available. For more information and updates, visit cpw.info/keepcoloradowild or cpw.info/keepcoloradowildpassspanish.

MOUSE

FROM PAGE A10

Voles have fairly short tails and appear heavy in the body. Mice have long tails, about as long as their entire body. There are five distinct varieties, and 23 different species of mice that call Colorado home. One you have probably never heard of, let alone seen, is the Preble’s meadow jumping mouse. The Preble’s meadow jumping mouse (PMJM), Zapus hudsonius preble, in case you wondered, is a very rare mammal that lives in dense vegetation along shrub dominated, stream-side habitats. Their range starts along the foothills of southeastern Wyoming and runs south along the Colorado Front Range to around Colorado Springs. These little critters can reach 9 inches in length, but over half of that is tail. They are completely nocturnal and hibernate for 8 months out of the year, further limiting your chance to ever see one. The PMJM has a distinct dark stripe down the middle of its back, bordered on either side by gray to orange-brown fur. They enter hibernation as early as September, in a burrow underground usually facing north, and will not emerge until May. Their diet changes with the season, but usually consists of insects, seeds, fungus and fruits. These are not the mice you are going to encounter in your basement or in the barn. Most species of mice seldom live a full year in the wild. The PMJM is unique in the fact that they can live three years

and have two litters each year with an average size of five young. Pretty good for an animal that hibernates eight months a year. What makes the PMJM unique amongst all the other species of mice is their ability to jump. They have disproportionately long hind legs, very oversized compared to the rest of their body. What keeps them balanced is that very long tail, especially when they stand on their hind legs. Normally, jumping mice run along on all four legs, or sort of bounce along in a series of very short hops. When you frighten one, they can take off in a powerful jump, reaching out as much as 13 feet, using those powerful hind legs. The problem with their leap is that it lacks accuracy, and the flight can be very erratic. The Preble’s meadow jumping mouse was discovered in Colorado in 1899 by Edward A. Preble. In 1995, the PMJM was listed as a threatened species by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). On July 10, 2008, the USFWS removed them from the Endangered Species Act, and has listed them as a “threatened species.” Once the glaciers receded from the Front Range of Colorado and southeastern Wyoming, the climate became much drier. The area where the PMJM could thrive was confined to the riparian systems along streams and creeks, where moisture was plentiful. The eastern boundary for them is probably where the dry shortgrass of the prairie begins.

The problems facing the PMJM revolve around their small area in which they can survive. The glaciers took care of most of their habitat, and development is probably threatening the rest, with the dry conditions in recent years not helping much. Imagine if my grandmother had seen a Preble’s meadow jumping mouse, and where it would have landed when it freaked out by her screaming. That thing could have bounced around the kitchen like an oversized grasshopper, with a crazy old pioneer woman in hysterics. The fear of mice, called musophobia or murephobia, is a real thing. It can be caused by a frightening experience involving mice, maybe like seeing one jump 13 feet, or a general fear of germs and diseases. I never mentioned the meltdown or fear of mice to my grandmother ever again. Because of the way my grandmother raised me, I suffer from traumatophobia, which is the fear of getting whacked in the head. *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*



Three river runners get a real feel for the increased stability afforded by crossing a strong current in the Pine River as a group. (Submitted photo/John Unger)

BELLY-FLOP

FROM PAGE A10

That is the realization that, if the victim is wearing a PFD, both the victim and the bystander rescuer are much more likely to survive. In the rare event that the victim must be physically grabbed to get them to shore, the shoulder straps of their PFD allow that to happen with less risk of them drowning together. This column began with a question: when

to bellyflop into rapids? The short answer is “when you otherwise cannot help the victim via Reach, Throw, or Row; and when you have had training, have considered risks and have a plan.” An additional appropriate answer is “when you have agreed to participate in a rescue exercise, and you see the trusted instructor vertically raise their extended arm and fist to give you the GO signal.”

Remember to first return the signal. Then expect an intense, cold, physically exhilarating experience. *John T. Unger is a Diplomate of the American Chiropractic Board of Sports Physicians, and in 2022 achieved the credential of Fellow of the Academy of Wilderness Medicine. He wishes that more members of more river trips would experience WRT training and certification. Your feedback and ideas for future columns are welcomed at www.sportsdocunger.com.*