



A cooler keeps the drinks cold on a day trip. (Waldemar Paetz/Wikimedia Commons)

## Fish on the edge of wilderness



### Outdoors

By Joel L. Evans

Wilderness comes in many varieties. Sometimes your own back porch on a quiet evening is a wilderness compared to the chaos of some routine days. But for the outdoor person living in western Colorado, wilderness means public land that has been formally designated and protected for its large area in square miles that is mostly unchanged by human presence, and intended to remain so.

In my younger days, wilderness meant a backpacking trek and fishing adventure deep into the heart of the wilderness. Carrying a pack and hiking for miles lead to that one place, a creek or lake that maybe, just maybe, is brimming with wild and easy to catch trout.

Although I can still manage such a hike with a senior physique, just to a lesser degree, keep in mind that every wilderness has a geographic edge – that space where one can drive to the edge of the wilderness before hiking and penetrating the wilderness. Some even have what is referred to as a “cherry stem”, which is a long thin strip of land at the wilderness edge, but not included inside the wilderness boundary. An improved public road is a common example.

Such is the Flat Tops Wilderness and Trappers Lake. Flat Tops is a geologic oddity in that the mountain tops are not peaked, but flat, like a small mesa, cut off by some great earthly event of the past. And Trappers Lake, which is inside the wilderness boundary, is at the edge of the boundary and accessible by a cherry stem road.

A recent camping and fishing excursion of several days found me chasing cutthroat trout at Trappers Lake. Trappers Lake is remote, being 50 miles east of Meeker, at roads end and wilderness edge. Meeker itself is somewhat remote, being about halfway between Rifle and I-70 to the south and Craig and Steamboat Springs to the north. A lot of western Colorado space with minimal development.

See WILDERNESS page A11

# The right cooler matters

For most of us, coolers are considered outdoor gear, but even non-outdoor people have coolers. I took a brief inventory of the coolers around our little piece of Colorado and was astonished at the results.

We have four lunch-box-size coolers in the kitchen pantry, two medium-size soft-sided coolers in the storage room (formerly known as the guest bedroom), five hard-sided coolers of varying sizes stacked up in the barn, and five more assorted coolers in the garage. Before you call the Hoarders folks from television on me, you better take a look around your own home.

Coolers are something that basically never wears out. Sure, you may wreck a lid on one sometime because someone the size of a Volkswagen uses it as a seat, but generally they last forever. The cheap Styrofoam coolers usually break and get trashed, but hard sided and soft sided regulation coolers last forever.

You buy new coolers, forgetting the old ones on the shelf in the garage. People visit you and leave empty coolers behind. The lunch tote type coolers seem to appear everywhere. Any garage sale you stop at will have coolers for sale, and I bet you have bought a few yourself as I know I have.

A good cooler is an important piece of outdoor equipment and



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

everybody should have several of varying sizes to match the activity before them. Small, but durable and well insulated lunch sized coolers are necessary for those day jeep trips, hikes, fishing trips and day hunts. Trips of longer duration require larger and more substantial coolers. I used a Gott 200-quart cooler as a fish box on our charter boat in the Keys.

The invention and progression of the modern cooler as a history as mixed up as our own United States. In 1944, during World War II, Dow Chemical was searching for a cheap alternative to rubber. A research engineer at Dow by the name of Ray McIntire came up with Styrofoam, by pressurizing polystyrene.

His invention proved to be an excellent insulator because it was full of trapped air pockets, was lightweight, and reasonably cheap to produce. Styrofoam has many uses, from packing beans to inexpensive coolers.

The little Styrofoam coolers are well-suited to ship things that need

to stay cold, if you place the cooler inside a sturdy cardboard box. The same coolers are pretty much useless as camping and day use coolers because they are fragile, definitely not for sitting on.

You never want to leave an empty one around outside as the wind will quickly carry it away. As a side note, I have learned that insect repellent that contains DEET will completely dissolve a Styrofoam cooler in seconds. I learned that on a fishing trip.

Styrofoam became used as a cooler in 1953 when Richard C. Laramy filed his patent for a “Portable Ice Chest and the Like.” His ice chest used Styrofoam for insulation, surrounded by strong metal sides, and was called “Kampkold.” The marketing line used for his product was “your home refrigerator away from home.”

Coleman Company bought the patent from Laramy in 1957 because it wanted to expand its outdoor business. At the time, Coleman was well known for lanterns. Coleman immediately changed the name to simply “cooler.”

The old-time coolers were hard-sided with galvanized steel, which was quite heavy even when empty. I remember a big Coleman my grandfather had that weighed as much as our refrigerator, or so it seemed to this kid when he tried to load it in the back of the truck. Coleman soon switched

over to plastic for their coolers, and the cooler revolution began.

The cooler industry added other names, such as Igloo and Gott. These coolers were all plastic sided, but plastic has its drawbacks. The sun will eventually take a toll on plastic coolers, causing deterioration and weakening. Also, the plastic cooler just does not have the strength for people to stand on.

Then a company headed up by two brothers, Roy and Ryan Seiders, looked into a process used in boat building, called rotational molding to build a strong cooler. The process begins with heating a mold with powdered polyethylene added and rotating it continuously for uniform thickness.

Since Styrofoam has a negative impact on the environment, the brothers began injecting polyurethane foam into their coolers, finding that the insulation qualities were superior. With this, the Yeti corporation was born. Today, Yeti is a \$5 billion company traded on the NYSE. This started a revolution in the modern cooler, whereby many companies now offer a similar type cooler.

No outdoor cooler collection would be complete without several soft-sided coolers. The vinyl exterior weighs much less than the large, hard-sided coolers. Basically, they weigh only as much as what you pack them full of. When the

cooler is not in use, it is completely collapsible, and very easily stored.

The length of time a cooler will keep ice and the contents cold can be dependent on where you keep the cooler. Leaving it in a hot car, or outside in the sun, will greatly reduce the amount of time it will hold ice.

A soft-sided cooler will generally keep its chill for 24 hours if you keep it out of direct sunlight. A hard sided cooler will usually last two days with ice cubes but up to five days if you use block ice. Again, keep the cooler in the shade and in as cool a place as possible for the longest ice life.

One thing I have noticed in our “cooler collection” around the place, is that it keeps growing. I recently picked up a Yeti soft-sided lunch cooler at a garage sale. I brought it home, introduced it to the other coolers and told it “welcome to the family.”

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