Is it time to lose those old hiking boots? Science seems to think it is. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/Mark Rackay)

It is time to lose the hiking boots?

Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

I have never had much faith in science, probably because I was never much good at it. It is true science has cured many diseases, brought us space travel, and invented many substances that are geared to make our life easier. Ask any science freak and they will drone on for hours about all the successes of modern science.

Being the eternal pessimist and part-time denier, I spend most of my science time pointing out all the things science has been wrong about. Back in the 60s, science was telling us another ice age was just around the corner. Medical scientists have not been able to make up their mind whether salt is truly bad for you. Ever since I found out what the scientific word "hypothesis" meant, I have been leery of any "new findings" because something I like to eat, or drink is going to get taken away.

Well, brace yourself, but science has taken up the question about hiking boots. Ever since I could walk without falling, I have been wearing lace up hiking boots in the great outdoors. All I have ever thought about was the ankle support, rigid soles, toughness, and water protection. Apparently, such is not the case.

Serious hikers, called through-hikers, cover thousands of trail miles every year. They carry packs, loaded with supplies that may need to last several weeks at a time. These serious hikers have ditched the boots and now wear running shoes.

It has been drilled into our heads that ankle support is the most important thing in footwear. Most research suggests that if you are a healthy, and reasonably active person without a pre-existing ankle condition, you don't need any extra ankle support while hiking. You should focus on strengthening and stretching your ankles if you want to prevent injuries.

It comes down to weight. A good pair of boots weigh in just north of 3 pounds a pair, while trail shoes may go 1 pound a pair. Weight is not your friend in any outdoor activity, so any reduction you can make could only serve to improve the outcome. There is an old saying that "a pound of weight on your feet is equal to 5 pounds on your back."

A study conducted by the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine found that even tiny increases in the weight of footwear could add up to significantly higher energy expenditures in people when walking or running. The consensus of the studies concluded that carrying an amount of weight on the feet required between 4.7 and 6.4 times as much energy as carrying that same weight on one's back.

According to that science, swapping out the 3-pound hiking boots for a 1-pound pair of trail shoes would be the equivalent of losing 4 to 12 pounds of weight from your pack. Furthermore, those lace up heavy hiking boots will tire your legs quicker and make your feet clumsier as they tire, leading to a fall or risk of ankle injury.

See **HIKING** page A11

Air ambulance and rescue dogs

Outdoors

By John T. Unger

Seeing, feeling, and hearing the helicopter land a hundred feet away last week, I was suddenly and viscerally reminded of the previous four times I had experienced that happening so close by.

Those previous four landings had all occurred in the space of two hours, in a desert canyon. The final of those involved the helicopter landing with my friend and myself as passengers, the last two searchers being returned to the rescue staging area. Having just carried back our friends who had been lost in the desert for five days, its last task had been to bring back him and me, who had been searching deep in the canyon on foot.

Many emotions are triggered from the primitive reflex center of just about anyone's brain when the thumping, smallish object in the sky descends quickly and joins you there in an unmarked spot on the ground just ahead. The fact that it brings its own deafening roar and envelops everything around you in a whirlwind adds to the gut feeling that "Something important is happening here."

Last week's helicopter landing was part of a teaching opportunity with continuing education credit hours for medical professionals. It was a workshop titled "Air Ambulance Field Demonstration," occurring as part of the Wilderness Medical Society's Summer Conference, held this year in Snowmass.

This conference involved nearly 500 in-person and virtual attendees of civilian and military medical professionals, of which I was fortunate to be one. From six continents, 15 countries, and 48 U.S. states, attendees and presenters included treating physicians, researchers, and international leaders in the burgeoning field of wilderness medicine.

See **AMBULANCE** page A11

CPW opens grant cycles for trails, LWCF

Special to the Montrose Daily Press

Colorado Parks and Wildlife announces the opening of the 2023 Non-Motorized Trail and Land and Water Conservation Fund Grant Cycles. These grant cycles are open now through Tuesday, Oct. 4.

Non-Motorized Trail Grants

To continue CPW's goal to improve trail recreation opportunities while protecting wildlife, habitat, and cultural resources, it's offering three categories for this year's Non-Motorized Trails Cycle:

1. Construction: Maximum award of $250,000

• New Trail or Trailhead Construction – New trail or trailhead construction, including the installation or creation of new facilities where none currently exist.

2. Maintenance: Maximum award of $250,000

• Maintenance, Re-route or Reconstruction of Existing Trails – Enhancement or improvement of a current trail to address resource damage or visitor safety concerns.

• Enhancements or Upgrades to Existing Trailheads – Improvement of current trailhead facilities

3. Planning/Support: Maximum award of $45,000

• Planning – Trail layout, design, engineering, feasibility studies, inventory, use studies, and analysis of existing and proposed trails.

• Support – Building and enhancement of volunteer organizations, increasing volunteer capacity, and implementing trail training and education.

While funding is available for all four categories, the program is placing an emphasis on maintenance projects for the 2023 cycle to address the increased need to repair and improve existing trails in the state.

Applicants may submit two applications for a grant: one can be in either the Construction or Maintenance category and another in the Planning or Support category.

See **CPW** page A11

"Storm" the avalanche dog enjoys the attention of the flight nurse it often works along with, in the company of and with permission of its handler Jimmy Newman of Snowmass Ski Patrol. Behind is the Flight for Life air ambulance which is just large enough to hold a pilot, two other human staff, an avalanche dog, and a rescued human on a stretcher. (Special to the Montrose Daily Press/John Unger)

AMBULANCE

FROM PAGE A10

The president of the Air Rescue Commission of the International Commission for Air Rescue is Charley Shimanski, who was the faculty member teaching the Air Ambulance workshop. In his role as Mountain Rescue Program Coordinator for Flight for Life Colorado, he began by directing their helicopter into the makeshift landing zone.

The next day he presented another class, "Advances in Helicopter Rescues in Austere Environments," in which he used rescuer videos from his recent work with Swiss Alps teams to teach attendees about the most advanced techniques now existing for snow, crevasse, and avalanche searches and rescues.

Part of the workshop included teachings from two members of the Snowmass Ski Patrol who were each accompanied by their avalanche search dogs. This Flight for Life helicopter is how a trained handler and his or her dog get delivered to an avalanche burial site when needed. Obviously, advanced training and monthly recertification is needed for handler and dog to be ready to be flown to such a site, when seconds are critical to finding and saving a buried skier, snowmobiler, snowshoer, or hiker.

Among these professionals attending the workshop, the topic of recent avalanche deaths arose. Particularly in the 2021/2022 season, this relatively high number of deaths included many advanced to expert skiers.

The question was raised about the extent to which current recreationalists in the winter backcountry are or are not wearing and practicing with their transceivers. I was encouraged to hear Shimanski's professional opinion based on his extensive experience. He stated that most backcountry skiers have transceivers, are practicing with them regularly, and are highly skilled in their use in searching.

He further commented on the issue of it being a personal choice whether a backcountry skier chooses to wear or to not wear a transceiver. "(But) if we decide to go skiing, and you show up without a transceiver, I won't go into the backcountry with you, because you are the one who is going to (have to save me if a burial occurs)."

Shimanski continued: "So, if there is any message I would like to get out there it's that, when you go solo in backcountry skiing, you might think 'why should I wear a transceiver if I am not skiing with anyone who can rescue me?' But the reality is, if there is a missing party, or if there is a witnessed avalanche, or when we (search and rescue) come in the next day, we would want everybody who is in that backcountry to be wearing a transceiver."

Jimmy Newman, one of the Snowmass ski patrollers and avalanche dog handlers, was asked for his personal opinion, as a self-described avid backcountry skier with several decades of experience. He concurred that, while he himself would not ski with a group member who wore no transceiver, he recognizes that it is a personal choice for individuals to wear one.

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 would hope to be well prepared if Fate requires that he direct a helicopter into a desert makeshift landing zone or that he make way for an avalanche rescue dog and its handler. Your feedback and ideas for future columns are welcomed at www.sportsdocunger.com.

The Colorado State Recreational Trails Grant Program funds projects to continue to improve outdoor recreation opportunities, including trail construction, maintenance, planning, and support while protecting wildlife, habitat, and cultural resources. (Courtesy photo/CPW)

CPW

FROM PAGE A10

Land and Water Conservation Fund Grants

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant cycle has a separate grant application for projects to acquire, develop, and maintain public lands for outdoor recreation to improve quality of life and the health and vitality of present and future generations.

LWCF requires 100% matching funds and can only be awarded to local, state, or tribal governments. The maximum request for this year's cycle is $1,250,000 and the minimum request is $100,000. Visit https://cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/TrailsLWCF.aspx to learn more about the LWCF program.

Wildlife Review Process

To help address potential wildlife impacts in their applications, all potential Non-Motorized or LWCF applicants must contact the corresponding Colorado Parks and Wildlife Area Wildlife Manager by Tuesday, Sept. 6 to discuss their project.

Please email a basic project scope and site map to both the appropriate Area Wildlife Manager (AWM Contact Map) and trails@state.co.us by that date to be eligible for full application submission. Guidance on addressing wildlife impacts for trail projects can be found https://cpw.state.co.us/aboutus/Pages/Planning-Trails-for-Wildlife.aspx

HIKING

FROM PAGE A10

Waterproof boots, such as treated leather or Gore-Tex, also come into play. I have always insisted on waterproof footwear because I don't want to run around trails with wet feet. They are great for the quick creek crossing, but on a rainy day, with longtime hiking, the boots will eventually become waterlogged. When boots become waterlogged, they get heavy, very heavy.

Also consider just how much your feet perspire in those lace-up boots. Generally, lace-up boots do not breathe very well, and on a hot day, the boots can get waterlogged from perspiration. Trail shoes are not waterproof, but most breathe very well, so the perspiration is not a problem. After the quick creek crossing, the trail shoes will dry on their own much faster than the boots, but wet feet are going to be a problem. No easy answer there.

One argument I threw out there was the protection to my shins from thorns, lamb's tongue, and various blood-letting vegetation that inhabits the country I hike in. The answer to that is a pair of lightweight gaiters. Not only will gaiters keep the biting vegetation off your shins, but they will also keep your feet dry by repelling the rain and dew from the brush as you walk through it.

One thing the trail shoes will not do is keep your feet warm. For the late season or winter type outings, you are still going to need those insulated lace-up hiking boots. I have boots with varying amounts of insulation depending on the activity and how cold it will be outside.

Boots take a long time to properly break in. Until they are just right for your feet, boots can be a blister nightmare. Most trail shoes do not require the extensive break-in compared to boots. Overall, the lighter shoe will be kinder to your feet as far as blisters go.

If you are not convinced, like anything else, give it a test run. Pack up a full pack load and take to the hills for a solid day hike. Change nothing except your footwear. At the end of the day, make the decision for yourself. I bet you will find your feet feel better in the trail shoes.

I still don't buy into all this science stuff. Maybe I am skeptical because I am still waiting for the big glaciers to come to town, ushered in by the new ice age. Perhaps the reason I am still fighting the whole lighter footwear thing is that I just bought a new pair of hiking boots for the upcoming hunting season. At least the new boots are lighter than the last pair, by a pound. Every little bit helps.

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