



Elk season is upon us and it is time to get all the final preparations wrapped up. (Mark Rackay/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

Elk season is upon us

For a hunting addict, such as yours truly, the hunting ordeal is not limited to a few weeks of the year in which you are allowed to hunt a certain species for the time allotted by the state. The average hunting trip ends 30 minutes after sunset on the last day of the hunting season and begins again the following morning. This gives the hunter almost 12 hours a year to give their spouse a kiss, introduce himself to any new members of the family who may have arrived in the meantime, drop in at the office and look over the mail, and get caught up on a little sleep before it is time to start getting the hunting gear ready for the next hunting season. Planning and preparing for next time is what gets a hunter through the off season.

Wait no longer, as the season is upon us. Preparations should be in their final stages, arrangements made, and the travel plans complete. It's elk season. What we refer to as an elk is also known as a wapiti. The word comes from historical roots in Canada, long before European settlers arrived. The Shawnee and Cree used the name wapiti. The English used the term elk to describe the animal we know as a moose. When the English arrived in Canada and saw the size of a wapiti being so much larger than European red deer, they used the term elk, assuming it was related to the moose. I have hunted red deer several times, and their similarity to elk is amazing, including their behavior during the rut. At one time, there were six subspecies of elk in North America. These include the Rocky Mountain, which are the ones that live in Colorado, having the largest antlers of all species. The Roosevelt elk live primarily in the Pacific Northwest and have the largest



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

body size of all species. In contrast is the Tule elk, which lives in California and has the smallest body size. Then there is the Manitoban elk that calls the Northern Great Plains home. The other two species, the Merriams of Mexico, and the Eastern from east of the Mississippi, are now extinct. It is a sad thing that so many of the species have become extinct before we ever had a chance to see them. The species of elk that calls Colorado home, and the one we will be climbing up and down mountains looking for, is the Rocky Mountain elk. At full size, a bull may exceed 700 pounds, while a cow could top the scale at over 500 pounds. Since they stand 5 feet tall at the shoulder, you can understand why just seeing one in the wild is such a tremendous experience. Only the bulls have antlers. The antlers, which may top 40 pounds, are shed each year in the spring. Antlers start out soft, and covered in velvet, but by late summer, become solid bone. Antlers are composed of a honey-

combed, bone-like tissue. Male members of the cervidae family, including moose, elk, caribou, and deer all have antlers. Antlers grow from the tip outward. The mounting point on the head, from which the antler grows, is called the pedicle. Antlers have always had a magical, almost spiritual effect on me, and apparently, I am not the only person. As European explorers began traversing the Northern Plains in the mid 19th century, they noted large piles of elk antlers stacked along the banks of rivers in what is now North and South Dakota, Wyoming and Montana. It was said that hunting and war parties of Blackfeet Indians built up the piles over the course of centuries, adding a layer of antlers each time they passed. The elk hide is a copper color, becoming a light tan during the fall and winter months. They have a very light beige rear end, which is very visible from distances. Elk are a grazing animal, generally feeding on grasses and flowering plants during the summer months. During the fall, elk become mainly browsers, feeding on sprouts and branches of shrubs and trees. A cow will consume up to 15 pounds of food a day, while a bull may top 20 pounds. The rut is the most interesting time to be around elk, as fall is the breeding time. The bulls will gather the cows and calves into small groups, called a harem. Bulls will wallow in mud and coat themselves with urine to attract cows. I don't advise any single men to try this in an effort to attract young ladies, as it only seems to work for elk. The elk's behavior reminds me of a bunch of boys showing off for the girls at the bus stop.

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Don't overlook the Cochetopa Hills



Outdoors
By Bill Harris

By For many, the 4th of July weekend is traditionally the beginning of summer camping in the high country. It isn't the best time to seek some backcountry peace and quiet. For that reason, Kathy and I jumped the gun, and headed out for a few days of camping in late June. Our destination: the Cochetopa Hills, southeast of Gunnison. Colorado 114 bisects the Cochetopa Hills providing good access to a part of Colorado that is overlooked by many Coloradans and visitors alike. The state highway leaves U.S. 50 east of Gunnison, snakes up scenic Cochetopa Creek before going over North Cochetopa Pass, crossing the Continental Divide. We have driven the route numerous times on our way to Taos and Santa Fe but had never stopped. It's incredibly scenic with open expanses surrounded by rolling mountains. The hills are unique in that they provide a break in the jagged, craggy mountain ranges along the Continental Divide through Colorado. The relatively mellow terrain provides an easier migratory path for wildlife. The word "Cochetopa" is a English derivation of the Ute word for bison. Early historic records report that bison would migrate from the east to the large parks west of the divide. The Utes also took advantage of the easier terrain moving from winter to summer camps. Early Spanish and American explorers also recognized the value of an easier passage over the rugged mountains. The North Branch of the Old Spanish Trail traveled over Cochetopa Pass, and explorers Fremont and Gunnison trekked through the hills on their way West. The Cochetopa Hills offer plenty of recreational opportunities. There's a mix of motorized and non-motorized trails. On one of the days during our visit we hiked trail 499. The trailhead is located about a mile off North Cochetopa Pass and initially follows Lujan Creek. The trail soon turned south along Pine Creek, following an abandoned logging road. The gentle grade of the trail allowed for a nice hiking pace. Our dog, Chaco, found the small creek irresistible, wading and lapping the cool water. We weren't the only hikers enjoying a sunny day on the trail. We encountered seven other hikers. As it turns out trail 499 is part of the Colorado Trail and the Continental Divide Trail. Two of the hikers we met were hiking the Colorado Trail between Denver and Durango. The other five backpackers were doing the Continental Divide Trail. They had started at the Mexican border, and on their way to Canada.

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If you're lucky, you may spot one of the cool insects of early fall, like this katydid. They resemble a leaf to keep predators from spotting and eating them. (Linda Corwine McIntosh/Special to the Montrose Daily Press)

End-of-summer gardening tips

Is it just me or did summer fly by? I can't believe summer is ending. But it's not time to quit gardening!

This is a great time to divide and transplant crowded spring and early summer blooming perennials or maybe just move a plant that may not be where you want it.

This is definitely the time to plant peonies. Just keep in mind, the top of the peonies should be planted about 1.5 to 2 inches above the soil line or they probably will never bloom. If you're dividing them, the newly planted clump should have at least three eyes. They don't like to sit around once they've been dug, so have your new home ready for them and put them back into the ground as soon as you can. Be sure to water and mulch your plants after they're planted.

Along these lines, it's also a fantastic time of year to plant trees, shrubs and most perennials. Some nurseries may even be having some smoking deals on closeout plants! Fall temperatures and warm soil actually help roots get off to a good start. And there's less competition from weeds.

The only drawback is that newly planted trees, shrubs, lawns, and perennials will need occasional supplemental watering during the winter months. So if watering during the winter isn't an option it would be best to wait until next spring to plant.

It's time to reduce the amount of water your Austrian pines, peach, and globe willows are receiving. Reducing the water signals the tree to start shutting down for winter. Oftentimes these trees show die-back in the spring if they didn't shut down properly in the fall.

You should stop pruning your roses and junipers. This is because pruning encourages new growth, and when you think about it, that's a



Gardening A to Z

By Linda Corwine McIntosh

big reason why we prune in the spring. The new growth is more susceptible to frost damage, and open wounds on tree branches will not heal well when pruned at this time of year.

You should also avoid fertilizing your perennials and roses. You want these guys to go dormant for winter, not encourage new growth.

Lawns are a bit of a different story. Proper lawn care at this time of year will help ensure a lush, green lawn next summer, so keep mowing on a regular basis.

A late-season application of nitrogen should be applied. It's still a little early, but this can be done any time from now until you shut off your irrigation for the winter. I know some garden centers carry winterizing fertilizers that contain nitrogen, phosphorus, and high amounts of potassium, but turf in our area will benefit from a simple application of quick release nitrogen. This can be applied at rates of one to 2 pounds of nitrogen to 1,000 square feet. Just be sure to water it in after applying it! This is also a good time to core aerate your lawn!

Whenever possible, pull annual weeds that are loaded with seed. The way I see it is, every weed seed that doesn't get a chance to drop is one less weed I'll have to deal with next year.

Perennial weeds, such as Canada thistle, Russian thistle, mallow, and bindweed could be sprayed rather than pulled. This is a great way to control

these hard-to-kill weeds because the herbicide will move into the root system as the plant prepares for winter and give great results. You should expect some new weeds next summer, but spraying the mature weeds now will pay off.

I love this time of year because this is when some of the more unusual insects show up. I've been seeing katydids (leaf bugs), praying mantids, and even a walking stick in local gardens. All of these are harmless to you and your plants. I think of these guys as the cool insects of the late season garden. Keep an eye out for them and hopefully you'll have a chance to enjoy them before they're gone for the winter.

You may even get to spot some of the larger garden spiders making webs in your landscape or the exterior of your house. I think some of these spiders and the webs that they make are really beautiful and unique. If you spot them, take time for a close look. You may discover how cool they really are.

I know you may not like spiders, but the only one that you really need to be cautious of is the black widow. Fortunately, these spiders prefer cool, dark, undisturbed locations and not your garden. There are stories of brown recluse spiders, but I wouldn't worry about them. We have very few, if any, in the Montrose area and these spiders are small and don't look anything like the cool garden spiders.

I like the idea of enjoying the last days of summer and early fall every moment that you can, even if it's right in your own backyard. So get out there and enjoy! And have a happy and safe Labor Day!

Linda Corwine McIntosh is an ISA-certified arborist, advanced master gardener and licensed commercial pesticide applicator.

ELK

FROM PAGE A10

Bulls will go to great lengths to protect their harems from other bulls. They will rub trees and scrape the ground with their horns to intimidate any other approaching bulls. If the approaching bull decides to fight, the encounter will be very violent and could be "to the death."

This is a dangerous time for people to be around elk, as the rut seems to mess with a bull's brain, making him aggressive to people. Every year we read stories of a bull that tries to gore a person who was in the wrong place. Sometimes, the behavior is provoked because of the garden variety stupidity of the person who is trying to get too close for a picture, ride the elk, or see if an elk will eat a marshmallow out of their hand. In short, give elk the safe distance they deserve, especially during the rut.

Elk communicate very well through vocalization. A bark is a warning

of danger, while chirps, meows and grunts are normal herd conversation, much like me at the early morning breakfast table. The signature call is that of a "bugle." The bugle starts out as a guttural bellow, climbing to a squealing whistle, and ending in a grunt or two.

Elk are one of the few remaining animals in the world to have ivory teeth. There is somewhere north of a dozen species worldwide that sport ivory with elephants being the most recognized. The walrus has tusks that extend well outside of its mouth. In an elk, the ivories are similar to teeth, located in the upper jaw, one on each side of the incisors.

Scientists believe that elk originally crossed the Bering land bridge into Alaska. At the time, these ivory teeth were actually tusks, and were 6 to 8 inches long. Through evolution, they are now just teeth. These teeth have been prized by hunters for centuries and used in jewelry.

At one time, there were an estimated 10 million

elk across North America. Today, that number hovers around 1 million head. We have the largest elk herd in North America, with an estimated 300,000 calling Colorado home.

Archery season opens today, Sept. 2, this year, running through the 30th of the month. First rifle season begins Oct. 15, running through the 19th. I have to let my wife know I will be gone for a while ... oh wait ... she said she was going hunting with me this year.

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

HILLS

FROM PAGE A0

One solo hiker named Cam stopped to talk to us for a few minutes. Cam is a confident, fit, young man from Utah. He said he started his trek on May 3 and except for the deep snow in the high San Juans hadn't encountered many obstacles. His next re-supply point was Monarch Pass, a few days away.

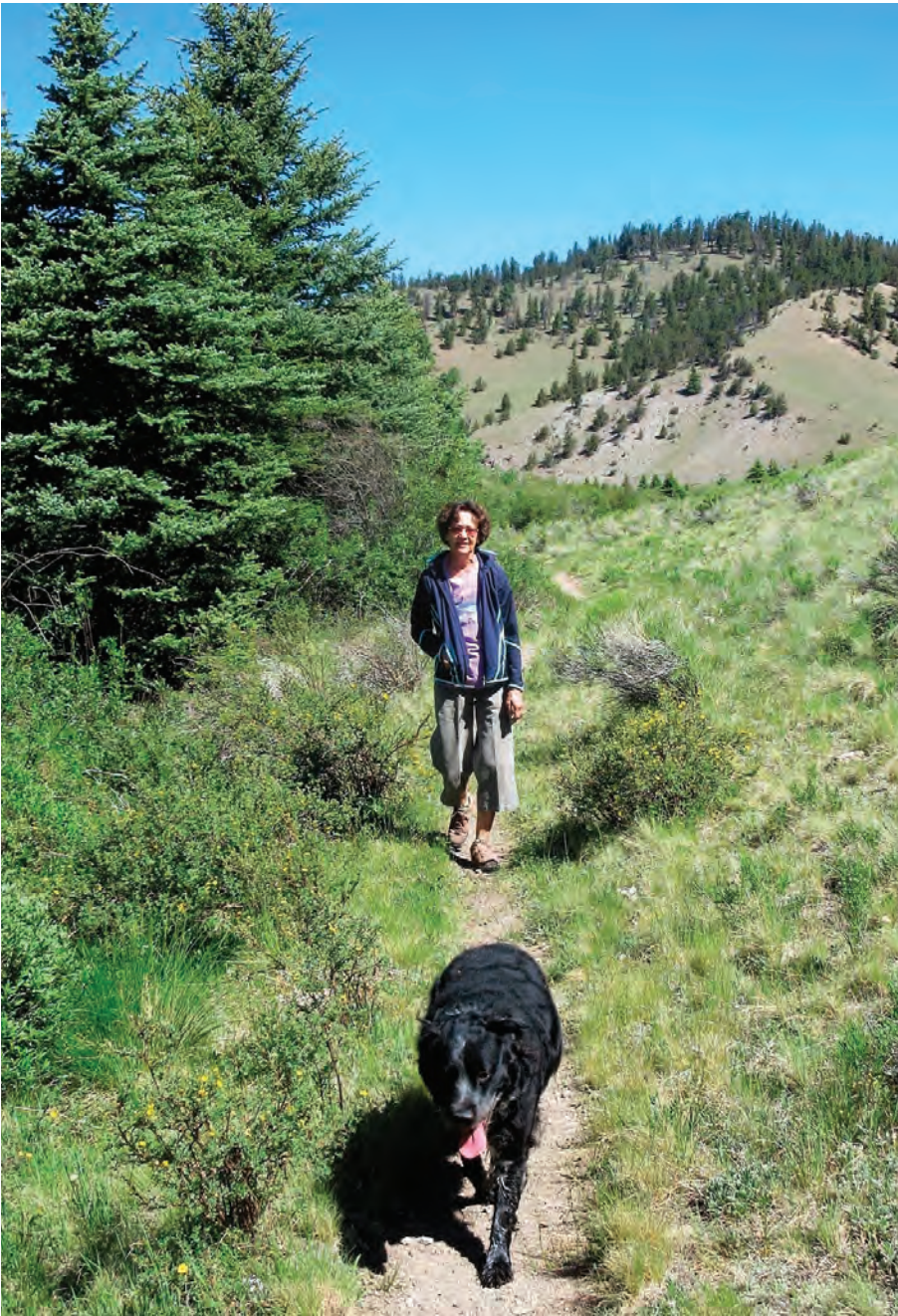
What impressed me most about the through-hikers is their

sense of commitment and physical stamina. To spend weeks and months focused on one goal; getting up each morning, putting one foot in front of the other, dealing with the challenges that Mother Nature throws at you, is truly admirable.

Trail 499 eventually reaches a road that goes over Cochetopa Pass and follows the Old Spanish Trail and the route of the Gunnison to Saguache toll road that was built in 1874. The trail passes by

many aspen groves, so a trip during fall colors would be spectacular. The trail is open to mountain bikes, so that is an attractive option.

If you go: National Geographic/Trails Illustrated produce a nice map, La Garita/Cochetopa Hills no. 139. The map shows access roads, campgrounds, and trailheads. The under-appreciated La Garita Mountains and wilderness are included on the map and worth a visit, as well.



Kathy Harris and Chaco hiking along the Pine Creek Trail. (Bill Harris /Special to the Montrose Daily Press)