



Every outdoors person should have a chainsaw in the ‘possibles’ bag. (Mark Rackay/Special to the MDP)

## Chainsaws come in handy

I was out in the shop, trying to fire up the old chainsaw, and had my little granddaughter along to help. And a big help she was, asking thousands of questions, like “Why is there air?”

I finally convinced her to go in the house because her Granny was making fresh chocolate chip cookies. After several minutes of aggravation from an obstinate chainsaw, I also retreated to the house for cookies. Upon entering the kitchen, I heard the little informant tattle to her Granny, “And Pa said a really bad word while he was trying to start the chainsaw.”

Granny shot me one of those looks, you married guys know the one, *the look*, and she asked accusingly, “You didn’t say that word in front of your sweet and innocent little granddaughter, did you?”

“Yeah,” I said, “but the chainsaw won’t start unless it hears that word a few times.”

Convinced that she had ruined my self-worth sufficiently, Granny took the plate of cookies and left the room. The little informant, with a cookie in each hand, followed her out of the room, but not before she stuck her tongue out at me. I never did get a cookie.

One thing that has saved my bacon on numerous occasions in the great outdoors is a chainsaw. In the past several years alone, there have been times when the good old saw had to be fired up and clear a path.

Couple years ago, we had a rough windstorm in town. These windy days are all too common in the spring, especially when folks are trying to burn ditches and fields, the wind gods let loose. Anyway, we went up Divide Road, only to find many areas completely impassable because of trees that had been blown down by the high winds the night before. We found a few campers that were up there during the storm and could not get home until the roads were cleared. The chainsaw in the back of the truck saved the day.

Going camping, whether you are tenting it, sleeping under the stars, or bringing a luxury motorhome, should be



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

easy, stressless, and relaxing. That after all, is why you go camping. That’s why a chainsaw should be part of your kit.

Obviously, a backpacker can’t carry along a 20-inch gas powered chainsaw into the woods, lest he bring along a pack horse to carry it. He can, however, bring along a small hand operated Sportsman Pocket Saw, which instead of gas, uses you as the power.

When space allows, a gas-powered chainsaw is the best. I keep one in the box of my truck most times when we head up in the hills. If we are camping in an area where it is permissible to have a fire and collect your own firewood, you’ll need the right tools for the job.

Smaller wood is okay for starting a fire, but if you want real heat and good coals for cooking, you are going to need some solid pieces of wood. That means you are going to want a chainsaw and a sharp axe to split some of that wood up.

I prefer the gas-powered chainsaws over the battery-operated ones. Seems whenever I need a saw, the batteries would be dead, and I don’t carry a generator or a long enough extension cord to reach all the way back home to charge it.

I have found that for a camping saw, the 16-inch size is just about right. If you really know what you are doing with a saw, the 20-inch size is better, but that is more saw than most recreationists can handle. I prefer the Stihl or the Husqvarna over the cheaper brands.

Many of the cheaper brands are the throwaway types, where it costs more to fix them than to repair. If you invest in a quality saw, it will take care of your outdoors

needs for many years, provided you maintain it regularly.

“Maintain” means emptying the fuel from the tank and carb when not in use. Gas goes bad and clogs up the whole works, often preventing the saw from starting when needed. You can also prevent much of these problems by using the canned gasoline with the additives for keeping the fuel fresh and having just the right amount of two-stroke oil premixed. Some of these prepared fuel cans have a 10-year shelf life if unopened. A couple cans of them and a jug of chain and bar oil, and you are set.

Chainsaws can be very dangerous, especially from saw kickback. Several of the saws come with an anti-kickback chain. Before you use your new saw, make sure you get some proper instruction in the use of the saw. Safety in operation is key as you don’t need to get cut by a saw, especially in the backcountry.

You will want some safety equipment as well. Always wear goggles to protect your eyes from the flying chips. A good pair of leather gloves will keep your hands safe. For serious cutting, consider a pair of chaps to protect your legs from the blade and kickback.

Like anything else, keep the saw properly maintained. That should include a sharpening of the blades and an annual tune-up of the motor. You don’t want to have the saw not start when you really need it.

I better get back to working on my saw. I probably have to use the word a few more times because this old saw just likes to hear it before starting. I just better make sure the little informant is not around.

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## The waterfalls and brook trout of Montrose

Fishing the Colorado high country is always an adventure. Compared to the oft-described and readily available information of the larger rivers and lakes in western Colorado, or anywhere in the Mountain West for that matter, the high country has hidden gems. Not secrets necessarily — somebody, maybe even many people, know about it.

Maybe I personally do, but maybe I don’t. I’ve been to a lot of places, fishing low and high, but reality is that I will never get to all of them, so really I only know what I know. The magic of the exploration is the unknown and expecting there will always be one more discovery of the undiscovered.

Add to your list South Mineral Creek, north of Silverton. South Mineral is one of those high country places that the fishing alone does not make it exceptional, but combined with the scenery and topography, it graduates to great. A small creek, a respectable population of brook trout, easy to get to, but non-typical with some outstanding canyon-like crevices with spectacular small waterfalls. What fun!

More so than to fishermen, the South Mineral Creek area is better known to hikers. Here is the trailhead to Ice Lake, a very popular high altitude basin lake. South Mineral Creek campground and the Ice Lake trailhead are accessed at a westerly turnoff from U.S. 550 just a few miles north of Silverton. It is well-marked. A good and easy dirt road takes about 5 miles to get to the campground.

As one comes down off the south side of Red Mountain Pass, U.S. 550 follows North Mineral Creek. At the highway turnoff, North Mineral is joined by South Mineral and continues south to Silverton and eventually joins the Animas. North Mineral is of no interest to the fisherman — maybe there are fish but doubtful due to the heavy mineral concentration. South Mineral is different. From the highway turnoff to the campground, the lower river habitat and water quality is decent and is fishable. Access is very easy along the dirt road.

But the fisherman will want to move on upstream to the upper end, above the campground. The brook trout fishing is good, better than most brookie creeks. Most places they overpopulate, so there are a lot of them, but few of any size. South Mineral seemed to have the opposite. Not every good hole shows a fish, but when that dark water makes a hole, fish were of respectable size, 6-10 inches.

This section above the campground is never far from the road,



### Outdoors

By Joel L. Evans

but the road lessens from a good dirt road to a rough, gradual climbing, not quite but almost 4-wheel drive road. So far no different than many other such high country creeks. But park along the road, get out and walk the 100 yards to the creek, and the difference is sudden.

Gazing from the road, the creek is hidden by the brush and one would assume therein lies a typical gentle creek. Not so — more like a mini-canyon. Roaring in some places, but gentle in others. The roar, to gentle, to roar transition emanates from a step-like series of waterfalls. In some places the canyon is 20-30 feet deep and the waterfalls almost as tall.

This makes for interesting fishing. The creek itself is wide enough and clear of brush that casting is relatively easy. Fishing along the flats between waterfalls is productive, then about every 100 yards or so a cascade creates a deep hole that often holds a fish. At this point, one has to climb up the rocky face or sidewalls of the waterfall to get to the next fishable flat above.

Or not. Some are impassable due to sheer cliffs. One must climb out of the canyon through some steep and brushy exit to cut around the waterfall itself. It is beautiful, one is likely all alone, the fishing is good.

Having fished about a mile up through the canyon, paralleling the road and never far from the road but never at the road, I exited the canyon to a flat with some beaver ponds. In the distance two large forms showed movement in the pond. Moose! A pair of adult bull moose were feeding in the shallows of the ponds, every so often ducking their head underwater and coming up with a mouthful of vegetation. I always carry a full-size camera with a lens in a waterproof bag. (I am known for falling in so everything gets wet!)

An amazing day. Storybook Colorado – off road adventure, looming high peaks, a hidden creek full of bespeckled brook trout, and wildlife. All under a big blue sky. I am always looking for the next high country discovery.



Wow! After a day of fishing the Colorado high country, what a bonus to encounter moose feeding in a beaver pond. Scenery, wildlife, fish, sunshine – all a part of a great day in western Colorado. (Joel L. Evans/Special to the MDP)



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