



We always associate turkey with Thanksgiving, but I doubt they were in attendance at the first Thanksgiving. (Mark Rackay/Special to the MDP)

## Rituals, Thanksgiving and the like

I have my own Thanksgiving Day ritual. My wife cooks up an incredible feast, with enough left over to feed a hungry battalion of foot soldiers for a month. I do my best to eat as much as possible, to the verge of a food coma, then nap on the sofa until the pumpkin pie dessert comes out.

My own research leads me to believe the Pilgrims never had turkey at the first Thanksgiving. Anyone who has ever hunted turkey in the springtime will go along with me on this. Imagine a person, dressed in those big hats and strange looking clothes, trying to sneak through the woods quietly with those big shoes with the buckle on them, carrying a blunderbuss rifle (shotguns had not been invented yet) trying to sneak up on a turkey.

Turkey have some of the best eyesight in the animal kingdom. They can see hand movement at 300 yards. We dress in head-to-toe camouflage, carry expensive shotguns with custom chokes, use decoys, and master the use of calls, and still have trouble bagging a turkey. I am calling bull feathers on there being a turkey on the table for the first Thanksgiving feast.

In 1621, some 90 native members of the Wampanoag tribe joined the 53 Pilgrims at Plymouth Plantation for a feast that lasted 3 days. The natives taught the immigrants how to catch eels and grow corn and squash. The pilgrims had shot a number of waterfowl for the feast.

The Chief of the Wampanoag was convinced the handful of ducks just weren't going to cut it and dispatched some of his own hunting party. They returned with 5 deer



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

to add to the feast. Note that there is no mention of turkey. I think the lone Pilgrim charged with bagging a turkey is still out there somewhere, trying to sneak up on a bird.

In Greece, where people depend on fish for protein, observe the Blessing of the Sea. At Epiphany, processions set off from local churches to the sea, where a priest blesses a gold cross before hurling it into the waters. Men leap in to retrieve it. The victor achieves grace and banishes old spirits from the new year. Fishing boats then arrive to receive their annual blessing.

In Argentina, the archbishop of Mendoza sprinkles the season's first grapes with holy water and offers the vintage to God. This kicks off a month-long celebration where folks line the streets to watch floats, beauty queens, musicians, dancers and other entertainers before a new Harvest Queen is chosen.

Early North American Plateau Indian religion was closely intertwined with the region's ecology. For example, the first salmon ceremony celebrated the arrival of the salmon run. The first fish caught was ritually sliced, small pieces of it were distributed among the people and eaten. The carcass was then returned

to the waters with prayers and thanks. This ritual ensured that the salmon would return and have a good run next year.

The Cree people, native hunters of northeastern Canada believe the reason the caribou is so easy to kill is because the animal offers itself up, intentionally and in the spirit of goodwill or even love to the hunter. The bodily substance of the caribou is not taken, it is received.

It is at the moment of the encounter when the animal stands its ground and look the hunter in the eye, that the offering is made. The Cree believe killing the caribou is not the termination of life but as an act that is critical to its regeneration.

An old teaching that came from the Ojibwa tribe was that everything was created for a purpose, and each living thing on earth had its place in the circle of life. They believe that the animals were created to feed the Anishinaabe people, to give us strength, and we should be thankful for that gift.

It was very important for the hunter to pray and give thanks when taking the life of an animal, as taking that life meant that he could feed his own family. It was also said that if we stopped hunting and fishing, that we were no longer grateful for the gifts the creator had given us. Therefore, it is an act of cultural tradition to not only hunt and fish, but to give thanks by placing sacred medicines when an animal life has been taken for the survival of the tribe.

The letzen bitten or letzter bitten, meaning the last bite, is practiced in Austria, Holland, Germany, and by some American hunters. The hunter will break, never cut, a twig

from one of five tree species in descending preference: oak, pine, spruce, fir and alder. The animal is placed on its right side and the broken twig is pulled through its mouth from one side to the other and left clamped in the jaws. Thanks, is then given and the animal is treated with respect and gratitude for the gift of food.

Long after the kill, hunters and fishers continue to honor their quarry by cherishing and consuming the meat. The skull, antlers, or a professional mount can be done by a taxidermist to honor the animal for all time. The mount must be hung in a place of honor and never desecrated by placing cigarettes in the mouth, sunglasses over the eyes, hats or caps on their heads. When taking pictures, you never sit on the animal's body after you've killed it, as that dishonors the creature.

Rituals of thanks are a good idea as they remind us of the seriousness of taking an animal's life, and honoring our quarry is largely a matter of the heart. I still don't buy the Pilgrims and turkey story. I will be taking part in my usual Thanksgiving ritual of overeating this year, and I hope you will also.

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](mailto:info@mcspi.org)

## The importance of funding outdoor activities for youth

The end-of-year giving season is in full swing, and you're probably hearing a lot of appeals from nonprofits to help fund their community impacts. There are so many crucial needs in our area, all of which are eminently deserving of your support; in a perfect world we would be able to help with all of the causes, but in the real world you'll need to make choices about where to contribute your year-end donations in a way that aligns with your ideals, priorities, and your hopes for the future.

I'd like to make a case for the importance of getting western slope kids into outdoor educational and recreational programs as a long-term solution for many of the issues facing our youth, and our community at large.

What impact does an early introduction to the outdoors have on who a child will become as an adult, and how are they affected physically, mentally, emotionally—and even morally as they grow up? As it turns out, we can directly connect childhood exposure to outdoor activities with positive long-term outcomes.

### Physical Fitness

It's no secret that children are frequently neglecting more physical, outdoor forms of play in favor of the digital world—reducing kids' screen time is often a major struggle for parents. Computers, mobile devices, and video games are passive forms of entertainment, and they don't call for physical coordination, strength, endurance, or any of the other attributes necessary for a healthy body. Outdoor play, on the other hand, promotes all of these things, and is a natural method of encouraging physical activity in young people.



### Friends of Youth and Nature

By Abram Herman

A 2015 meta-analysis of studies regarding the effects of time spent outdoors on children found, "outdoor time is positively related to physical activity and negatively related to sedentary behavior in children aged 3–12 years." The more outdoor time children have the more physical activity they take part in and, conversely, the less sedentary behavior they display.

### Resiliency

Many people spend time outdoors because it brings them a sense of happiness and well-being. If adults who have grown accustomed to the ways of the modern world still need to get away to nature every now and then to stay happy, surely children must benefit from these quieter natural spaces as well.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a 2018 study showed that the more time children spend in nature and the greater sense of connection they personally feel with nature, the less likely they are to experience psychosomatic symptoms such as irritability, anxiety, difficulty sleeping, headache, stomach ache, backache, and other physical afflictions. The benefits start with as little as 30 minutes of outdoor activity per week, according to a 2018 study by Caroline Piccininni.

See FUNDING page A12



Outdoor activities can play a crucial role in building resiliency and promoting mental well-being in our youth. A group of kids try a new outdoor endeavor at the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park. (Courtesy photo/Anne Janik)



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