



Being stuck inside from too many days in a row with weather like this is enough to make me go insane. (Mark Rackay/Special to the MDP)

Fight cabin fever with activity, gear prep



Tips from the Posse
By Mark Rackay

Temporary insanity seems like a more fitting word to describe being stuck indoors during the long winter months. Most people know the affliction as “cabin fever.” I had my first dose of it during the winter of 1968.

I was living with my grandparents at the time. My grandmother’s sister and her husband, my aunt and uncle, were living with us as well, because of economic conditions. We were living in a hobble we laughingly called “the farm.” The place was heated by a large fireplace and the cookstove in the kitchen.

The forecast called for a series of snowstorms to come through, each producing blizzard like conditions at times because of the high winds. There was no school because of the storms and that was just fine with me.

We had plenty of wood, and my family entertained themselves playing pinochle and dice games, like bunko or Yahtzee. My grandmother decided to bake up a triple batch of chocolate chip cookies and the family would eat and play games while the storms blew themselves out.

After the third storm passed, a mere 11 days had elapsed although it seemed like six months. My grandfather was not on speaking terms with anyone in the

house. The pinochle cards were burned up in the fireplace, the dice scattered about the house, everyone was forbidden to mention the word Yahtzee, and if we ate anymore chocolate chip cookies, civil unrest would surely break out.

No matter what your chosen outdoor activity, hunting, fishing, camping, or hiking, cabin fever hits you at some time or another. Along about January, when the winds howl down the chimney and the coal is getting low in the bin, is when it seems to be the worst.

I consider “cabin fever” to be the same as “preseason fever. Preseason fever is far too familiar to require any comment whatsoever, but in the eyes of my editor, a blank page for a column does not sell many newspapers. And, unless you stole this paper from your neighbor’s driveway, you are a case in point.

Cabin fever is a type of hysteria or claustrophobic reaction caused from being stuck indoors, with the same people, for a prolonged period of time. The malady usually strikes during the winter months and the reactions can be quite severe. Watch the movie “The Shining” sometime and you can see just how bad it can get. Another week in our case and my grandfather could have given Jack Nicholson a run for his money.

If you have children at home, this cabin fever can get real in a hurry. Not only do you have your own condition to work through, but also kids will make it worse. Their endless fighting, yelling, running around and complaining will drive you crazy. My answer was to send them outside, but my wife would not let me do that in the winter.

The actual medical condition closely related

to cabin fever is called seasonal affective disorder or SAD for short. It is a condition that relates to mood and occurs at a certain time of year. For most folks, winter is the time it appears and some report the same symptoms year after year at the same time.

In a place like Alaska, where the winter months can really drag on, as much as 10% of the population suffers from SAD. Diagnosis and treatment for SAD is handled on an individual basis but usually involves light treatment, ionized air administration, counseling, the hormone melatonin and sometimes an anti-depressant medication.

There is a strong belief that a vitamin deficiency may also be a part of the root cause. We get vitamin D from sunlight and during the winter months can become deficient because of the time we spend indoors. Taking a vitamin D supplement may help and so would two weeks on a beach in the Turks and Caicos mid-winter.

There are things you can do to ward off the cabin fever blues and most of them involve staying busy. I don’t mean busy, as in housework or puzzles, rather something to help get ready for upcoming outdoor season.

For starters, consider getting into shape. We all put on a few extra pounds over the winter months while we are cooped up indoors. Hitting the exercise bike or treadmill, working the weights or even going for walks, will make it much easier for your mind and body to cope. You will also notice an increase in strength and stamina when you finally return to the woods again come spring.

I am not one to sit in front of the TV all winter either. Instead, consider learning a few new things over the winter. Take that

long overdue first aid and CPR course or catch up on some survival skills. There are lots of books and videos available on just about anything outdoors related.

This is a great time to go over your outdoor equipment and make any repairs needed. The duct tape you repaired the tent with last July could be replaced with something of a more permanent nature. Fishing gear can be gone over as can hunting equipment.

If nothing else, head outside. Don’t go outside just to go off to work or shovel the driveway. Leash up the dogs and go for a walk on one of the warmer afternoons. If you have the means and abilities, try one of the many winter activities we have access to here. There is always snowmobiling, snowshoeing or even cross-country skiing. Any of these will give you a better outlook after spending some time outdoors.

After the string of blizzards passed, another of my uncle’s stopped in to see how we weathered the storm. My grandfather met him at the end of the driveway. The look of utter shock on my uncle’s face is something I remember to this day. It was like my uncle had never seen my grandfather and four little gray haired elves shoveling snow before.

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Red Mountain and the Bachelor House



Outdoors
By Paul Zaenger

Years ago, I sat in a continuing education class concerning cultural resources, specifically museum and archival collections. Early on, one of the instructors summed up the trouble with conserving such materials when she stated, “Everything is on a one-way trip to oblivion.”

This quote comes to mind as I snowshoe Red Mountain Pass near the Idarado Mine on U.S. 550, and I encounter four dilapidated structures close to the overlook. Herculean efforts led by the Ouray County Historical Society are intended to keep them from falling further into disrepair.

There must be more to the buildings and people who lived here than the ramshackle buildings struggling to survive. A quick check offers some broad-brush information about mine employees who lived there in the decades following the late 1940s. Like us today, they were striving for a solid income for their families, and to perhaps find community in what was then high-country isolation.

There were originally 10 homes along a dirt street, but that number was whittled to four in the years after mining operations ceased. Various families lived in them

over the years, but I’m drawn to the Bachelor House, officially called House Number Three, in a 2003 report given to the historical society to determine structural stability and significance.

Mining jobs after the Second World War paid well, and offered a chance to get ahead. Still, the quest for a paycheck was balanced by deep snows, drafty houses, and a lonely lifestyle buried within a sea of mountains. Research shows that upgrades to water and sewer systems made the houses more livable.

Sometime in the late 1960s, bachelors moved in. Gabriel Archuleta, Ted Barry and Conrad Salazar, all from Durango, bunked in the building. Salazar, in fact, ended up working at Idarado for a number of years.

Born in Colorado, he worked in mining around the state. One of those jobs was as a zeolite miner near Antonito, digging for aluminum silicate minerals. Zeolites are commonly used for detergents and water softeners, but they are also important to neutralize radioactive contaminants.

As a sergeant in the army, he served in Korea, and married Phyllis Gallegos during this time. By the mid-1960s he worked at Idarado and had a solid track record. The mining industry is fraught with accidents, yet Salazar was awarded (along with others) for working three years without a lost-time accident. Salazar, along with Barry and Archuleta, lived in the house during the week and commuted south on weekends.

See **BACHELOR** page A11



The Bachelor House rests on the edge of Red Mountain Pass, revealing a quiet sentiment from decades ago. The Trust For Land Restoration and Ouray County lead the preservation of the structures. Learn more at <https://restorationtrust.org/>. Always check the avalanche danger when heading out for high country recreation. (Courtesy photo)

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