



Imagine the work the pioneers could have accomplished if they had a chainsaw. (Mark Rackay/Special to the MDP)

Forgotten survival and living skills



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

People say that memory is the third thing to go in a person as they age. I am not sure I believe that. There are two kinds of memory, short-term and long-term. I can remember the details of a hunting trip from 50 years ago, all the way down to what I had for breakfast that morning. On the other hand, I can't remember why I walked into the garage and what I was supposed to look for. Anyway, if memory is the third thing to go, I have no idea what the first two are. I forgot. One thing you do not want to forget would be your outdoor skills. If you don't use them, they will slip from memory. If they slip from memory, you won't pass them down to those you teach. Let me get to the point before I forget what I was going to write about. There are many outdoor skills that our ancestors used, on a daily basis, that we have completely forgotten about. Our ancestors had a much simpler lifestyle, with basically a half dozen things to worry about. Those things included, be-

ing hot or cold, thirsty or hungry, and sick or hurt. Compare that to the worries of modern-day people. We can add in money worries, bills, school, grades, work, gas in the car, insurance payments, etc. It is no wonder we have the highest incidence of ulcers and strokes. Daily life back then was not just about survival. Those folks had fun too. They would gather around the campfire and sing, dance, and tell stories, all for entertainment. For entertainment today, people need video games, television, internet, and everything in between. The vast majority of people today would be utterly helpless if they were plunked down in the middle of the woods and forced to fend for themselves using only the resources at hand. How about making clothes from scratch? Archaeologists have discovered shoes dating back more than 5,000 years ago, made from animal hide and dried plant material woven together to form a method to keep it on their feet. Modern people don't learn to even tie their shoelaces until around age 5 or so. Our ancestors did their own blacksmithing. They would build a forge and treat metal with heat to harden it. Even further back, our ancestors would find the ore, turn it into iron and then to steel. They would then make whatever they needed to survive, from a knife to tools to use in the fields. My grandparents grew their own vegetables. Not

like I do now, with a hobby garden, they did it because it was necessary. They then can the harvest, or store some in the root cellar, so they would have food over the winter months. The old timers saved and stored seeds for future plantings. When I get an elk, deer, or other game animal, we butcher it and place the cuts of meat into the freezer for future consumption. I seriously doubt my great grandparents had a deep freeze therefore, they had to can, smoke or dry the game meat in order to preserve it. My wife and I love homemade bread. We run to the store and buy flour and yeast, make the dough and pop it in the oven at a preset temperature. In the days gone by, the people had to make their own flour and yeast. After that, they baked it in an oven heated by burning wood with no dial in which to set the temperature. Everyone has a washer and dryer, the two hardest working appliances in your home. Washing clothes without the help of these appliances is a long-forgotten skill. Nowadays, if you don't have a washer or dryer, you head over to the laundromat with a pocket full of quarters. I am very accurate with firearms, mainly because of years of training and practice. It would be near impossible to tell you how many rounds of ammunition I have sent down range for training purposes. Such was not the case in the old days.

See SURVIVAL page A11

The birds of winter



Outdoors

By Bill Harris

Winter brings with it a natural slowdown. The shorter, colder days lend themselves to finding a comfy recliner and a good book. My mountain bike gathers dust in the garage, trail-building tools get their annual tune up and some well-deserved down time. Winter mountain biking never appealed to me, just another expense for a fat bike. If I want to frolic in the snow, my old Kongsberg LT 100's will take me where I want to go. I venture out at a more laid-back pace. My days of clipping into a pair of Coyote Randonnee's atop Red Mountain Pass are in the past. I am more likely to be seen hiking with a pair of binoculars dangling from around my neck skulking around looking for birds. To the casual observer winter may seem like an unusual season to be looking for birds. The cacophony of singing birds is so obvious in the spring and summer is absence. Non-birders may assume that all the birds go south for winter. But many bird species do not take off for warmer climes during winter. Granted, the number of species that are around during the winter is fewer than summer, but many are still around. Birding in the winter is more of a challenge. An old birding adage that birds are not distributed equally across the landscape is especially true in the winter. Locating birds comes down to finding the places where they find food, water, and shelter.

The bounty of the spring and summer is gone. Most water sources are frozen. With the exception of evergreens, the protective foliage on trees and shrubs is on the ground. One birding "go-to" habitat I have found is along river and stream corridors. Those corridors have liquid water, dense vegetation and a smorgasbord of seeds, berries, and dried fruits – everything a bird needs to get through the winter. When birding, I walk with a slow, steady pace. I try to be as quiet as I can, so as not to spook the birds. I focus on my surroundings, looking and listening. I advance slowly, stopping every so often to listen for a faint call or catch some movement in the dense vegetation. I scan the trees in search of a bird-like silhouette. It is a wonderful exercise in being in the moment. My senses heightened, hyper-aware of my surroundings. Initially, the land seems to be devoid of birds. But, as I proceed, I notice movement or hear a call or song. What starts out as a bird or two turns into a mixed flock of birds foraging on the ground, in the thickets and trees. These mixed flocks are common during the winter. Why do birds gather together? Ornithologists posit that birds use grouping as a survival strategy to detect predators while focused on finding food. This past December a few days after Christmas I was birding along a favored section of the Uncompahgre River, a rather temperate day by winter standards. I was weaving in and out of a grove of young cottonwood trees that was interspersed with sumac bushes and young Russian olive trees. I noticed a black-billed magpie fly into a thicket, so I headed toward it. As I approached, I started to see movement in several large sumac bushes. I froze and slowly

brought my binoculars up for a better look. Several dark-eyed juncos, white-crowned sparrows and song sparrows darted around in the cover. Two spotted towhees scolded me. I then expanded my search to the taller trees nearby. American robins moved about, jockeying for the best roost, choking down Russian olives. The robins shared the trees with a lesser goldfinch, a yellow-rumped warbler, house finches and cedar waxwings. Most notably I spotted a hermit thrush. Hermit thrushes rarely spend the winter in the Uncompahgre Valley. I have seen them in Belize in the winter. By the time I tallied a count, there were at least three dozen birds made up of eleven species. Another instance of encountering a mixed flock was a week earlier. Kathy and I were cross-country skiing on the Uncompahgre Plateau. I had left my binoculars at home, thinking I would see few birds, if any. We had skied several miles and were headed back to our truck when I noticed birds flying in the trees above us. I stopped to get a better look. I had to remind myself that all birds do not leave the high country in the winter. Moving through the trees was a mixed flock of black-capped and mountain chickadees, and red-breasted nuthatches. They appeared to be gleaning seeds from the numerous spruce cones and dormant insects hidden in the bark of the trees. I could hear them calling, which helped with identifying them. Within a few moments the flock had moved on. The more I thought about it the more banding together in large flocks when feeding in the winter makes perfect sense. There are many more eyes on the lookout for a marauding northern goshawk, Cooper's or sharp-shinned hawk.



A hermit thrush wintering in Belize. (Bill Harris/Special to the MDP)



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Sometimes understanding what gardening seed catalogues are talking about can be a bit perplexing. (Linda Corwine McIntosh/Special to the MDP)

Taking the guesswork out of ordering seeds



Gardening from A to Z
 By Linda Corwine McIntosh

I bet you’ve been receiving gardening catalogues and emails to order seeds since well before Christmas.

I kind of like that because it gives me a chance to figure out what exciting things I want to plant this coming spring and get them ordered before I get busy in the spring. And it actually makes me hopeful that spring really is going to come again!

If you’re a bit new to gardening you might find some things in the catalogs that are somewhat confusing to say the least. Some of the catalogues will tell you very clearly what they’re talking about, but some leave you scratching your head and searching the internet to try to figure out what they’re saying. Maybe I can help.

You may have noticed a bunch of different letters next to the seeds that you’re ordering and wondered what that is all about.

Some catalogues have an “F” or “F1” or even “F2” label on some of the seeds. This actually refers to the breeding. Many of these seeds are sterile or the plants won’t resemble the parent plant. Some seed companies do this through genetic engineering so their plants can’t be replicated or kind of “stolen.” This may not make any difference to you unless you plan to save the seeds for new plants next season.

The same thinking kind of holds true for hybrid and non-hybrid seeds. If you want to save the seeds, non-hybrids are what you want. One reason they make hybrid seeds is to bring the best traits of two parent plants together to get the best of both parents.

An “F2” is developed from the second generation and is not considered a hybrid. These plants

have a bit more diversity. If you want to develop something that’s different from the parent plant or a little bit crazy in your garden, you may want to try F2s. Simply save the seeds from the plant with the traits that you like best, and see what develops.

Just keep in mind that most, if not all, true hybrid plants will not be the same as the original hybrid plant when reseeded. This is why many of us depend on seed distributors for future crops. The troubling thing about this is, we’re losing some of the genetic diversity and your favorite seed could disappear if the manufacturer stops producing the seed.

A lot of people prefer heirloom seeds. These seeds are non-hybrid seeds, or, the “anti-hybrids.”

Before World War II the majority of produce grown in the United States was from heirloom seeds. The exact definition of what officially makes an heirloom variety is still being debated. Some say the strain needs to have been grown prior to 1940, which is when hybrid strains were developed. Others insist that the strains need to have originated before 1920.

Regardless, many people refer to them as “treasure.” Oftentimes, heirloom seeds have been handed down from generation to generation, making them somewhat historical or special to a family.

The heirlooms are further classified by “open-pollinated” varieties. In some catalogues, or on some seed packs, it will refer to this as “OP.” So now you may be wondering, what does open pollinated mean? This simply means that the seeds saved from these plants are the result of pollination between the same or genetically similar parents and will produce a plant identical to the parent plant.

You may also see seeds labeled as pelleted. This means they have been coated with materials that dissolve as they absorb moisture. They’re kind of like a candy coated M&M. This can lead to a bit faster germination and can make small seeds easier to plant. They also help you to achieve a more uniform stand and use fewer

seeds because you won’t have to thin the plants as much. They do cost more though.

You may also see “determinate” seeds. That just means these plants usually ripen over a “determined” period of about three to four weeks. This is great if you want a lot of produce almost all at once. A lot of people like this if they’re canning. On the other hand, “indeterminate” varieties should produce for the expected production time until frost.

Just be aware of how many days it will take a certain variety, such as tomatoes and melons, to produce. The average last spring frost date of 32 degrees for Montrose is May 12. The average fall frost date is Oct. 17. This gives you about 148 growing days. Many varieties require 100 days to mature and won’t always give you a great crop before frost hits, so I try to stick with shorter season varieties.

In the Montrose area you’re looking for plants that are labeled zone 5. If you really desire a longer season plant, you may want to start the seeds in the house using a plant heat pad and a grow light. This works a lot better than placing them in a bright window, and the internet has some pretty cool grow lights. Cold frames and Wall-o-Waters can also help extend the season.

Along with looking at the zone, you also need to be aware of the type of soil that you have. Most of the soils in our area are compacted clay and high in alkali. Long rooted vegetables, such as carrots may not do well in our clay soils but fortunately shorter varieties are available.

So that should definitely factor into your choices. You can amend your soil to improve it, but you can’t really change the alkaline soil. Planting varieties that are more suited to our soil conditions or using plants that are native to the Southwest is wise.

I hope my simplified version of terms helps you enjoy a little winter seed shopping spree. I think that’s a great way to pass the cold long days.

Linda Corwine McIntosh is a CSU advanced master gardener, commercial pesticide applicator and ISA certified arborist.

Golden moment: Rivers earn Gold Medal trout fishery status

By JOHN LIVINGSTON
 CPW

Years of consideration and conservation work all led to a golden moment for two pristine rivers in central Colorado.

During its meeting Jan. 18 in Colorado Springs, the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Commission welcomed the Gunnison and Taylor Rivers as the newest Gold Medal trout fisheries in the state. CPW’s Gold Medal Program showcases the most elite fisheries throughout the state.

The stretches nominated and approved include 20 miles of the Taylor River below Taylor Park Reservoir and 12.5 miles of the Gunnison River starting west of the town of Gunnison at Twin Bridges extending up to the town of Almont.

“I’m pretty excited to be able to announce these two waters into our Gold Medal Program,” said CPW Assistant Aquatic Section Manager Josh Nehring. “It’s an achievement that came about by a lot of work by a lot of people over a number of decades. It’s amazing to see the quality of fisheries that we have here.”

Fisheries in Colorado may be designated by CPW as “Gold Medal” if they meet two qualifying criteria. The standard is 60 pounds of fish per acre along with at least 12 quality trout of 14 inches or greater per acre.

With the addition of the Gunnison and Taylor Rivers, Colorado now boasts 19 Gold Medal sections on 13 rivers that total roughly 362 miles. The state also has three lakes that have

earned Gold Medal designation.

While the Gunnison and Taylor are newly-designated Gold Medal streams, CPW aquatic biologists believe the rivers have produced Gold Medal quality trout fishing since the 1990s.

CPW Aquatic Biologist Dan Brauch said that while the rivers had met the biological criteria for designation for decades, it was important to ensure the streams provided long-lasting fish habitat for all life stages of trout.

“Significant work went into maintaining conditions on the Gunnison and Taylor Rivers to allow those fisheries to continue to persist,” Brauch said. “We have sampled the rivers quite a few times in the last 10 years, and we continued to see good numbers of quality-size trout and abundant trout.

“The Gunnison and Taylor Rivers really represent a successful conservation story with lots of partners that have made this fishery what it is today.”

CPW surveys streams regularly through the process of electrofishing. Fish are collected, weighed, measured and returned to the water. Data collected through these surveys provides invaluable data for CPW to assess the health of a fishery and to determine waters worthy of Gold Medal nomination.

“It does take quite a bit of work to get fisheries to this standpoint,” said Nehring, who grew up in neighboring Montrose and has enjoyed fishing the two rivers since he was a child.

“Just the habitat that

goes into it, the monitoring of the fisheries, making sure our regulations are appropriate and we aren’t getting too many fish harvested. There are a lot of things that go into making sure the system is healthy.”

Brauch and Nehring thanked a multitude of public and private partners that have come together throughout time to support the Gunnison and Taylor fisheries as work has been done to improve and protect trout habitat through the Gold Medal stretches.

While celebrating the conservation success story that has led to Gold Medal status for the rivers, CPW Area Wildlife Manager Brandon Diamond encouraged anglers to help protect these resources for generations to come.

“It’s extremely important right now for all water users and conservation-minded people, including anglers, to view these incredible resources through a stewardship lens,” Diamond said.

“And I strongly encourage all of us to evaluate how we can contribute to the long-term conservation of these waters and how we fit in as stewards of the land and river resources.

“The Gold Medal designation is certainly something we are locally proud of. The Gunnison Valley has always been very supportive of wildlife conservation values, and we hope to continue that relationship moving forward.”

John Livingston is a public information officer for Colorado Parks and Wildlife, based in Durango.



The Gunnison and Taylor rivers are the newest Gold Medal waters under Colorado Parks and Wildlife’s Gold Medal program for elite fisheries. (Jerry Neal/video still)

SURVIVAL

FROM PAGE A10

Our ancestors did not have the stores of ammunition available today. Even as a kid, I remember my grandfather making a single box of 22s last an entire summer. When he shot a varmint, he rarely missed, and he considered practice a waste of precious ammo.

Navigation skills have pretty much gone by the wayside. Everyone has a GPS these days and very few can navigate without one. I think back to my long ago passed old man mentor, who never heard of a GPS. My mentor Mr. Caster did not even carry a compass. He used landmarks, the sun or moon, and never got lost. Truly that is a forgotten skill.

For those of you who fish, take a look at your fishing equipment. Boat fishers have GPS, depth finders, and instruments to show bottom structure, water temperature, bait fish, and everything in between. The rods, reels,

and types of line and lures can be mind boggling to comprehend.

My grandfather told me about fishing a creek when he was a kid. He said he would cut a willow, tie some braided line to it, a basic hook, and dig worms for bait. In the end, I bet he caught more fish than I ever did with my fancy equipment.

Before you get to feeling bad, remember that many of the things we do every day, people of the past could not have comprehended would ever come to be. When they wanted to talk to a neighbor, they walked over and visited. We grab a cell phone and call.

Think of the technology used in modern day transportation. We can be anywhere in the world, in about 24 hours. We drive everywhere in cars and trucks. Recently, we have a craft on Mars, sending back pictures. Perhaps it is all relative.

I look at my own grandchildren and think what a future world in the

great outdoors will be like for them. Someday, they will look back and think about how old fashioned we were, doing outdoor skills the hard way. At least they will have videos on YouTube to show them how we did it and not have to rely on memory. Now if I can just remember where I parked my truck. My wife says there is an app for my phone that will help me with that. I wonder what my grandfather did when he forgot where he parked his truck.

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