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Before you go eating wild mushrooms, like this assortment from the mountains of Western Colorado, you better know which ones are edible, and which ones cash in your chips. (Photo courtesy of wikimedia commons/Netherzone)

# Mushrooms: some tasty, others deadly



**Tips from the Posse**  
By Mark Rackay

The most dreaded words I ever heard in my house growing up would be when my grandmother announced she was heading off to the woods to gather a basket full of mushrooms to go with our dinner. She liked to cook them up in butter and add salt and pepper to improve the flavor. If she added kerosene to the things, I don't think they would have tasted any worse.

We are used to the mushrooms we buy in the grocery store, in the cute little cellophane-wrapped containers. These are grown in hothouses and are known for very mild, if any, taste. Such is not the case with wild mushrooms, as they are full of flavor, and not necessarily good flavor.

The other reason I hated my grandmother's mushroom was her nonselective attitude for harvesting them. She figured if it did not run away from her, and it looked similar to a mushroom, she picked it and threw it in with the rest. Her failing eyesight also gave me less than a slight amount of concern. You see, many mushrooms are

deadly, and can cause you to immediately fall face forward into your mashed potatoes in a state of terminal meditation.

Colorado is home to the second largest mycological habitat in the world and is home to 3,000 species of mushrooms. Of all the different mushroom species in Colorado, less than 100 are edible. Over 100 species of mushrooms are considered poisonous. I'm not sure what the other 2800 species that call Colorado home are, if neither edible nor poisonous, but it sure leaves a concern to me in the identification process.

It is a terrible idea for you to run up in the hills and start harvesting mushrooms unless you have exact and very reliable knowledge, and a great deal of experience, in the proper identification of the species. Many of the edible ones look so similar to the poisonous ones, that identification can be near impossible.

As an example, one species of poisonous mushroom is called the destroying angel. This mushroom is one of the deadliest mushrooms in the world, and it lives here in Colorado. The majority of mushroom poisoning deaths are because someone ingested this little bomb. The destroying angel looks very similar to a puffball, and edible species, and is often mistakenly eaten.

The destroying angel, like many other poisonous mushrooms, produces lethal amatoxins, which cause severe and irreversible damage to

the liver and kidneys. Symptoms include vomiting, cramps, delirium, convulsions and usually don't occur for 5 to 24 hours after ingestion. By the time the symptoms show up, it is too late to set your affairs in order.

I am only mentioning one poisonous specie to you here in this column. Hopefully, you will understand the dangers that surround wild mushroom foraging and be absolutely certain of what you are bringing home for dinner.

Mushroom season generally follows the warmer months, and the monsoon season can kick the season into overdrive. Porcini mushrooms, sometimes called king boletes grow during late July and well into September.

Most mushrooms grow at higher elevations, many at 10,000 feet and above. Look for new growth burned areas and heavily wooded regions where the ground remains moist throughout the heat of the day. The most famous edible mushroom, the morel, grows at 8,000 feet in altitude and below. These little edibles like river bottoms and sprout up under giant cottonwood trees.

The black morel, or *Morchella Angusticeps*, is generally thought of as the best tasting and rarest of the edible mushrooms in Colorado. In my opinion, they are pretty easy to identify as they look very unusual. They are found at elevations above 7,000 feet, favoring old burn areas and lush aspen growths.

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# Neighbors of a different kind



**Outdoors**  
By Joel L. Evans

Peaks and valleys. Rivers and lakes. Meadows and boulder gardens. All part of the Colorado experience. Seasons of change, winter gifting snow to the mountains then sunshine rinsing the snowmelt to the valleys. Colorado's geology and the earth's changing tilt to the sun provide the recipe for multiple days of fishing.

So, while Colorado sits somewhat in the middle of the United States portion of the Rocky Mountains, we also have some neighbors with their own peaks and valleys. Go north or south or west (not so much east) of Colorado and neighbors Wyoming, New Mexico, and Utah have waters that make for some great coldwater trout fishing.

Every so often, I have opportunity to make a friendly visit to one of those neighbors. Recently my travels lead to Utah. While winter fishing is a point of engagement, it isn't the prime season in the mountains, so winter travels sometimes involve out-of-town excursions for fly fishing shows and fly tying demonstrations at those shows. Such

was the case recently in Sandy, Utah, near Salt Lake City.

The Wasatch Fly Fishing Expo in April is a late winter, maybe early spring depending on your attitude, show that I attend and indulge in all things fly fishing that aren't actually fishing, meaning vendor exhibits, seminars, a lot of talking and big fish stories. But mostly for me, demonstrating fly tying for two full days.

The show aside, since I am already in the neighborhood, I might as well sample some of the local waters, right? I've burned the gas to get there, I've paid for the lodging to hang out a few days, I'm retired so no Monday morning obligations, so may as well make a few casts in the neighbors liquid gold.

The Wasatch mountain range of north central Utah has lots of rivers to fish. This trip the combination of driving distance and weather forecast and a search for water not muddied by spring runoff took me to the Provo River. The Provo River is a medium size stream, wadeable for much of its distance, and has good access along a highway most of its length. In the perspective of large western rivers, it is not a long river in terms of miles from headwaters to its downstream end.

The Provo River begins in the mountains northeast of the town of Provo, Utah and ends at the town of Provo. And its

proximity to the populace of the Salt Lake City area means it is heavily visited. Yet on this April day, while hardly alone from other fishermen, I was able to find some public access sections with enough elbow room to chase a fish.

Commonly divided in fishing terms into the lower, middle, and upper sections, the Provo has distinct differences from the lower end near the town of Provo, to the middle section with two large reservoirs, to the smaller main stem and multiple tributaries of the upper section. I chose to fish the middle section, somewhat dictated to me by current conditions. In April, and given this year's healthy snowpack, the upper river is still engaged in winter and unfishable. While the lower section was open, the warming days get the runoff going with a brown haze to the water. So, sort of like the three bears, the middle section was just right.

I moved around some. Vivian Park is a public park with stream access up and down river. An abandoned railroad accompanies the river, so the railroad right of-way is now a nice walk/bike path, giving easy access to the river in both directions. I'm not a Utah historian, but I think here the term "Park" was historically a geographical term to describe an undeveloped and open area within a canyon.

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Undecided if its winter or spring, the Provo River in Utah is a good fishing destination with abundant public access. A recent trip to our western neighbor found me connected to a few willing trout in the river below Deer Creek Reservoir. (Submitted photo/Joel Evans)





A view of the Colorado National Monument from the top of Serpents Trail, a 3.5 mile round-trip hike near the area's east entrance.

# National Park Week means free admission tomorrow

By KYLEA HENSELER  
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National Park Week kicks off this coming week, and that means free admission tomorrow, April 22 to national parks and other lands controlled by the National Park Service including near-by Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, Curecanti National Recreation Area and Colorado National Monument.

As much of the Black Canyon is still under around snow, visitors can take advantage of snow-shoeing opportunities, as well as a few open outlooks that promise picturesque views of the park.

According to the park's website, the road to the Black Canyon is open to the visitor's center and

Gunnison Point. The rest of South Rim Road, the East Portal and North Rim Road are closed for the season, though snow removal has begun and may take longer than normal this year due to the increased snowpack.

The latest update on park conditions, dated April 18, said multiple trails are under ice, snow and mud, though snow is melting quickly. Spikes or footwear with extra traction is recommended for trekkers.

A little over an hour north, visitors can take advantage of all areas of the Colorado National Monument, though some restrooms are closed for renovation.

The plateau and canyon offers a number of day trip-worthy activities, including a scenic drive

along the winding 23-mile Rim Rock Drive. For those who like to get out of the car, hikes range from less than one mile to over 10, with around 40 miles of maintained trail in total.

Devil's Kitchen is one 1.5 mile round-trip that can be accessed from the Monument's East entrance in Grand Junction, while multiple shorter hikes can be accessed from the Saddlehorn Visitor Center.

Longer backcountry hikes start at 3.3 miles each way, and hikers should be aware there are no water sources along the trails, so everything must be packed in- and out!

While none of these national lands have events listed on the calendars specific to National Park Week, guests can still take advantage of free admission on Saturday.

## MUSHROOMS

FROM PAGE A10

The black morel usually begins to appear late May and through July. At a quick glance, they look somewhat like a pinecone, which might explain why they are so hard to find.

There are over 180 mushrooms that contain the chemicals psilocybin or psilocin. These compounds have similar structure to lysergic acid diethylamide, or LSD as some of you 1960's kids may remember. These compounds can be obtained from certain types of dried and fresh mushrooms in Colorado and elsewhere throughout the United States.

These mushrooms are affectionately known as magic mushrooms,

shrooms and purple passion on the street. Denver became the first city in the United States to decriminalize psilocybin back in May of 2019. The cities of Oakland and Santa Cruz, California have followed suit. Interestingly enough, it is a felony to grow or cultivate magic mushrooms.

One other type of mushroom I used to search for in the past is the yellow Morel. This mushroom is a choice find and considered one of the best on the planet. Yellow morels are found at elevations of 8,000 feet and below, most commonly around cottonwood trees. These hard-to-find mushrooms are excellent on pizzas and in pastas, or just sauteed up in butter.

I mention used to col-

lect yellow morels, that is until Mother Nature and Mr. Murphy of Murphy's Law fame, got involved in the process. At first glance, the spongy yellow morel appears very easy to identify, except they are often confused with false morel mushrooms, which are ... you guessed it, deadly.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press and avid hunter who travels across North and South America in search of adventure and serves as a director for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse, call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org. For outdoors or survival related questions or comments, feel free to contact him directly at his email elkhunter77@icloud.com.

## NEIGHBOR

FROM PAGE A10

While that remains true, today "park" means a developed picnic area and playground with designated parking. Here I caught a few small brown trout, mostly in one spot — nymphing the inside bend of a large sweeping pool and back eddy. While not crowded, I did have company and limited river distance to fish. So I moved on.

Driving upriver, I found a likely pulloff just below Deer Creek Reservoir. Here the road rises above the river level as the road climbs to the top of the reservoir. What this means as to fishing is that accessing the river itself requires a short

but steep climb down an embankment from the parking area to the river below, which in turn means less fishermen. Not saying no fishermen, but sometimes these days secluded becomes a relative term, defined as less fishermen, not zero fishermen.

This was better fishing water, as least today given the current snowmelt conditions. It was wadeable along the side, and I even found a wide spot to cross the high water — always greener on the other side, right? I had a little better catching experience here, including one good size brown that took me downriver before netting, and one hefty rainbow that wallowed in and out of a

large hole before I could entice him to my side.

It's good to have neighbors with water to fish. I'll be back to the Provo at a later time of the season when I can explore some of the upper river under a sunny sky. The Utah Division of Natural Resources also has a native cutthroat trout program that I have signed up for. It's a grand slam to catch the four native cutthroat of the state — the Bonneville, the Bear Lake, the Yellowstone, and the Colorado River subspecies. I'm planning days on the calendar now!

Joel L. Evans is an avid fisherman, outdoor writer and photographer, who has explored Western Colorado for decades.

# Open house slated for proposed land swap

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forests will be hosting an open house on the proposed Mt. Emmons land exchange.

In this proposal, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, would exchange three parcels of federal land totaling 550 acres adjacent to the Keystone Mine approximately 3 miles west of Crested Butte in

exchange for four parcels of land owned by the Mt. Emmons Mining Company totaling 625 acres located in Gunnison and Saguache counties.

The U.S. Forest Service will hold an open house May 3, at the Lodge at

Mountaineer Square, 620 Gothic Road, Crested Butte, from 4 p.m. — 6 p.m.

"We've received requests for an opportunity to review certain specialist reports before a decision is made," said Chad Stewart, GMUG Forest Supervisor.

"While we are not offering a second comment period, this open house will provide the public, stakeholders and cooperators time to ask questions and allow us to explain the progress to date. We look forward to engaging with

the public in this collaborative process."

In addition to Forest Service personnel, representatives will be present from Mt. Emmons Mining Company, Crested Butte Land Trust, Town of Crested Butte and Gunnison County.

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News tip or story idea?

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