

Catalogues from the good ol’ days



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

There was a time when I needed a two-wheeled dolly to bring the mail into the house. Most of the mail was catalogs, from every outdoor retailer known. Sure, there were the usual bills, magazines, and other unimportant stuff, but the catalogs were the gold strike.

Catalogs used to be the only way an outdoor person could find out about all the new equipment available for hunting, fishing, camping, backpacking, and just about anything else outdoor related.

Outdoor programs were not as plentiful on television as they are today. There was always the talking head on one of those Saturday fishing programs (the one for the shut-ins who did not go fishing on Saturday). The obnoxiously successful angler, standing in a \$50,000 bass boat, blabbing on about how he has only caught fish with the new “Hookum’s Deluxe Husky Bass Lure, with optional enterboard” and no other lure in the world will catch fish like this one. Every



You just don’t get good catalogs full of outdoor gear, like we did in the old days. Most catalogs are online, instead of print. (Contributed photo)

angler in the world grabbed the credit card and ordered a few of these lures from the 800-number flashing on the television.

It was not always that way. When I was a kid, growing up in the country, the occasional catalog was my only contact with the outside world to learn about what was new. We did not have television, or when we did, I was usually not allowed to watch it. My grandmother referred to it as an “idiot box” and made me go outside, muttering something about her nerves.

Since the town nearest our place was just a wide spot in the road, there was not a big outdoor store around. The local hardware store had a few guns and odd pieces of hunting equipment, along with a fishing section, but it was definitely not “cutting edge” for new equipment and ideas, hence the need for catalogs.

The gold standard of catalogs was always one from Herter’s or one from Orvis. These were always chock full of new items, guaranteed to make you a better fisher, hunter or make your camping trip much more comfortable. Drooling over this new equipment was all I could afford to do back then, but at least I could dream of the new stuff.

By the time I was older, having acquired a job, education, wife, kids, mortgage, taxes, the full catastrophe, according to Zorba the Greek, I could occasionally order something from a catalog. Usually it was a new item, that prior to first seeing it in the catalog, I never knew existed, yet now that I have seen it, I can no longer fish or hunt, let alone live, without it. My wife, in a rare moment of weakness and compassion, would allow me to order said item, and all was right with the world.

About the same time, a man named Johnny Morris

started the Bass Pro Shop and created the epitome of a fishing catalog. Later, he came out with a hunting catalog, marine catalog, camping catalog, ATV catalog — you get the idea. He went on to buy Worldwide Sportsman and got into the saltwater fishing catalogs.

Other outdoor retailers followed suit, each sending their own special catalog. Our mailman wore a heavy-duty truss for his double hernia he got from delivering all those catalogs.

The catalog era was a good thing for someone who wanted to stay up on all the new, improved, and modified gear available for their outdoor passion. For someone like me, a guy who had to have every new gadget to come down the pike, well, I was the guy the catalog companies were out looking for. I had to try every new thing, so I could write about it, and recommend it to my readers, if the item lived up to expect-

tations. Mostly it was an excuse, because I am just a catalog junkie.

Alas, the catalog era has ended. No longer do I find a treasure trove of catalogs crammed full of hunting and fishing equipment. The mail is nothing more than bills, bank statements, and the odd “vote for me” type of political junk mail. It is all very depressing. I no longer bother getting the mail. I will drive past the mailbox and not even stop to empty the contents. My wife badgered me about getting the mail for years, finally giving up and just getting it herself. There is just no motivation for me to look in the box.

In this on-line world, all the catalogs must be viewed on the computer. No longer can I sit in my recliner with a dog on my lap and a glass of man’s best friend nearby, and peruse a catalog, looking for new equipment. I don’t spend much time surfing the internet for outdoor ideas and products.

I get enough computer time writing several hours a day and the last thing I want to do is search for an online catalog. Besides, it’s just not the same.

Catalogs were a great thing when you only got one or two a year. You learned to cherish them and pour over the contents many times over. When the crazy days of the catalog population explosion came about, it was too much of a good thing. I gave the family finances a double hernia with all the new stuff. After a while, it was no longer a treat and many of the catalogs hit the ash can unopened.

The other day, my wife brought in a catalog from some place called Oriental Trading Company. It was not outdoor gear, but a bunch of toys, tricks, and other childish cheap junk. It was right up my alley. Good to see there is at least one company that still sends out a catalog. Now, where is that Visa card?

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Speed learning with natural resource experts

By ANNE JANIK
FRIENDS OF YOUTH AND NATURE

It’s a bit like speed dating for adults, only this event involves quick learning interactions for kids. Springtime environmental education events are ways for elementary students to engage with natural resource experts to learn as much as possible in a short period.

Each dedicated specialist has 20-25 minutes to engage elementary students about their area of expertise with hands-on activities and tips about their jobs. Students rotate through eight to nine stations in a day to learn about many topics, such as how forests contribute to healthy watersheds, how various aquatic insects indicate water quality, what kinds of items can be recycled, and much more.

Montrose, Grand Junction, and the North Fork Valley all have festivals organized and sponsored by many organizations, partners, and volunteers who work together to provide this opportunity for the youth of these communities.

Presenters, mostly natural resources experts from various agencies, explain aspects of their field that most kids, and even some adults, never think about. As an added bonus, students get insights into various natural resource careers.

“These can be defining moments for young minds that may influence their choices for a lifelong passion or a future career path,” says Anita Evans of

Friends of Youth and Nature, one of the funding contributors to the event.

For the last 30 years, fourth graders from the Uncompahgre Valley have attended the Montrose event organized by the Shavano Conservation District. The Natural Resource Festival (previously known as the Water Festival) draws approximately 450-500 students each year.

This May students headed to Baldridge Park for a full day of fun learning activities. “Classes rotate through nine learning stations, out of 29 featured at the festival, and engage in activities that demonstrate the connections between their lives and the resources they depend on.

Activities are focused on all of our natural resources, with an emphasis on water connections in their lives,” explains Mendy Stewart, education specialist for the Shavano Conservation District, and festival organizer.

“The activities are meant to be ‘hands-on’, where kids really get in the mix of things,” Stewart added.

A wide array of resource topics and activities are featured such as: demonstrating how river water is treated before being sent to our faucets, making Play-Doh watersheds and determining where the rivers and lakes form after a simulated rainstorm, making your own recycled paper, panning for silver while learning about Colorado’s Mining history with the Colorado Department of Reclamation and Mine

Safety, practicing moving water through irrigation pipes with the Uncompahgre Valley Water Users, measuring the flow of a nearby stream with a Colorado Water Commissioner and putting their math minds to work figuring the rate of flow in cubic feet per second.

Other activities help kids to learn things like “Leave No Trace” and how to minimize impacts when exploring nature.

The Colorado State Forestry Department sets up an experiment where students predict the amount and quality of rainwater runoff between two watersheds (actually dirt-filled culverts), one with plants and one with bare soil. After predicting the outcome of a rainstorm, the students learn how plant cover works to slow runoff, so it can be absorbed within the watershed.

“This is a huge benefit to water quality, catching soil and pollutants before they reach rivers,” explains Tanya Banulis, Colorado State forester. Dave Dearstyne, retired Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) soil scientist, focuses students’ attention on detecting some of the millions of microorganisms living in our soil. Who would think to look that closely at dirt?

This event involves a lot of planning and behind-the-scenes work such as pre-festival classroom presentations and festival logistics. The festival’s successes are attributed to the dedication of Stewart and the

supporting host agency, the Shavano Valley Conservation District.

Festival supplies, student transportation, and festival planning are made possible through matching funds to the Shavano Conservation District received from the Colorado State Conservation Board. The goal of this program is to help Conservation Districts in Colorado implement conservation projects and educational activities.

In addition to the festival, the funds have also made conservation education available to San Miguel, Ouray, and Montrose County students. The activities also include source pollution presentations, ninth grade Mancos Shale Soil Salinity Experiments, and fifth and sixth grade conservation poster contests.

Stewart says these events “...inspire learning opportunities for Western Slope students who will be part of an outdoor savvy generation. We hope they will be empowered to use what they learn to influence future decisions about land and water uses that benefit our planet now and in the future.”

Some kids take time to reflect about what they learned during the festivals; others are super excited and cannot stop talking about the day. Parents or relatives can encourage more discussion or help reinforce significant concepts kids learned. Ask your child what learning station impressed them the most? Here are a few questions that will help you start



Shavano Conservation District Board President Steve Hale points out various tributaries on an eight foot Colorado River map, teaching fourth graders about all the tributaries and the many water uses along the Colorado River. (Mendy Stewart/ Shavano Valley Conservation District)

a discussion with your student:

What can you tell me about the Gunnison or Colorado River’s journey to the ocean?

What type of water bugs will you find in your favorite fishing spot?

How fast is the river near you flowing this spring?

What are the components of a beehive?

How can you harness solar power? Can you use it to make a fruit smoothie or baked good?

What should you put into your community’s recycle bins?

What foods are produced locally and where can you find them?

Friends of Youth and Nature is a non-profit promoting opportunities for youth and families to get outside, experience outdoor activities, and explore nature. Your donations as well as grants received by FOYAN from the Gunnison Basin Roundtable (DNR- Colorado Water Conservation Board) and Forever Our Rivers (Connecting Rivers and Communities) have enabled FOYAN to contribute funding for these festivals. Follow our outdoor news blog and receive monthly tips on connecting your children to nature. Learn more, visit: www.friendsofyouthandnature.org.