



Ridgway State Park on a sunny day. (Kylea Henseler/Montrose Daily Press)

Ridgway State Park plans full weekend of events

By KYLEA HENSELER
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Birds, fish and bright stars are the stars of this weekend’s events at Ridgway State Park. With summer in full swing, the park is ramping up activity and making sure there are plenty of activities for kids on summer break and adults alike.

All of this weekend’s events are free, though the ones not held at the visitors center will require guests to pay the park’s

entry fees. A regular daily vehicle pass is \$10, while discounts and yearly memberships are available.

Tonight from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Kevin Corwin, chair of the Colorado Bluebird Project will kick off the weekend with a presentation at the park visitors center about bluebirds and why they’re important to Colorado.

Tomorrow morning, Park Naturalist Shelby Martinez will lead a fishing workshop from 9 to 11 a.m., open to new and

experienced anglers of all ages.

“I want to get anybody and everybody who wants to come out,” she said. “I have 50 poles ready.”

The event will take place at the Paco Ponds accessed via the park’s Pa-Co-Chu-Puk entrance, and guests can ask gate attendants exactly where to go.

Martinez said the clinic will include instruction on fish ecology and handling, as well as how to properly set up a fishing rod. The ponds are stocked with pond

and rainbow trout, and guests will also have a chance to try their hand at catching some fish.

Martinez said this event is popular with kids and campers, and the park aims to run it at least once per month during the summer.

Another popular recurring event, evening star parties hosted by the Black Canyon Astronomical Society, will also return this weekend.

The event will run from 9 to 11 p.m. at the visitors center and will include a presentation from

the society and free telescopes members of the public can use to gaze up at the stars.

Martinez noted the park is in the process of becoming a certified Dark Sky Place, a designation that requires it to meet strenuous standards of light pollution and visibility. While it’s not quite there yet, Martinez said it’s getting close — and is an amazing place to see the stars.

“It’s pretty magnificent to be able to see the sky here at night,” she said.

Slow learners gamble with their lives

I have spent decades in careers that are not known for their inexpensive life insurance premiums. There have been so many near nasties in multiple businesses not particularly known for their security, including law enforcement in South Florida, fast boats, rescue diver, and multiple years in Search and Rescue, that I stopped counting.



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

My recreation in the outdoor world is not always known as a “safe sport” either. That risk or potential danger is part of what keeps all us outdoor folks doing our outdoor thing. I’m not afraid of my death, I just don’t want to be there when it happens.

We all take chances. Chances like a shortcut on a hike, walking down a slippery slope when it would be safer to go around, playing games with the weather, staying out too late, and the list goes on. Sometimes you get away with it, slipping away from Old Murph’s grasp, getting away with it as neat and free as a parakeet on parole.

The mountain is not the best place to take chances. The mountain could not care less about your bank balance or your Rotary attendance. Fate pulls a switchblade one fine morning, and you find yourself with an emergency on the mountain.

The point of this would

be that everyone makes mistakes, it’s inevitable. How you handle it comes from your preparedness and your level of training. What you learn from it should make you smarter and better trained, better suited to handle the next emergency. Then there are those other people.

Those other people who don’t learn a thing from an experience. Whether it is mind boggling acts of idiocy, bad genetics, or just plain garden variety stupidity, these people amaze the rescuers. Let me tell you about a recent rescue of a hiker near Flagstaff, Arizona.

Phillip Vasto, from New York City, was vacationing near Flagstaff when he decided to hike to the summit of 12,633-foot Humphrey’s peak. The Coconino County Sheriff’s Office received a call at 7 p.m. on March 2, 2022, from the 28-year-old man, stating he had become lost on the



Outdoor recreation is not always known as a “safe sport.” (Mark Rackay/ Special to the MDP)

10-mile round-trip hike to the summit. He stated he was going to try and hike back down.

The search and rescue team did an admirable job, locating the man at 10,600 feet, and evacuated him with a SnoCat. Vasto declined medical attention back at the parking lot but

stated that he left for the hike at around 2:30 p.m. but had much difficulty staying on the trail because of the deep snow, and he got disoriented as night fell.

The first question that comes to mind was why he left so late on a hike. Being that time of year, the dark

probably came around 6 p.m. I also wonder why he hiked up a trail buried in several feet of snow in the first place, alone, at a place he had never been before, but it gets better.

Tomorrow is another day. Ol’ Phil had some time to think about his hike and just maybe he should

have gone bowling instead. No such luck. The next evening, the sheriff’s office received another phone call from Phillip Vasto, who said he was injured after a fall while he was once again trying to reach the summit of Mt. Humphreys.

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Bill with river guide, Dawn Cooper, and Fred Blackburn rafting the Colorado. (Bill Harris/ Special to the MDP)

I am getting back into my normal routine following an exhausting, but memorable trip to Portugal. That means I am back on the birding trail with a few mountain bike rides thrown in for good measure.

Electric Hills Trails was in primo shape this past spring. All that wonderful precipitation since last summer has helped the trails firm up. Volunteers got busy doing some solid work on Rolling Black-out this spring. The four boardwalks across the irrigation ditch are in place. Vanderplaats and company should be back at it soon to wrap up construction of the final few miles of the 17-mile trail system. Looking forward to a grand opening this fall.

Many of my birding friends know it, but now the rest of the world does — I am going for a Colorado Big Year — try to see as many bird species as I can in the Centennial State in 2023. Since I do not have



Outdoors

By Bill Harris

a blank check to fund this endeavor, I have to choose where and when carefully.

In April, four of my birding buddies joined me on a trip to northeast Colorado. Our target bird was the greater prairie chicken and we ended up spotting 90 other species despite some blustery spring weather. Several trips to western Colorado hotspots have yielded some good results. I am now at 233 Colorado species; goal 275. Plans to visit other parts of the state are in the offing.

In early May, I was the birding guide for a group from Colorado Canyons

Association rafting down the Ruby/Horsethief section on the Colorado. It was running at 30,000 CFS. It has since topped that flow and was not much below 17,000 CFS in late June — amazing. I hear Lake Powell is up 35 feet, a drop in the bucket for that containment.

Another memorable experience recently was organizing a birding excursion for author Scott Weidensaul on the Fourth of July. Scott was in town at the invitation of the Black Canyon Audubon Society and the Friends of the Montrose Library speaking about his recent book, “A World on the Wing.”

Bruce Ackerman and Don Marsh rounded out our crew. We did a 4-mile hike on the Uncompahgre Plateau and spotted 34 bird species. A great morning of birding got a bit more exciting when I couldn’t locate the trail that would take us back to our vehicle. A quick map check, a brief discussion, and some

poking around got us back on track.

With advancing years, I have slowed down. The passion remains but my back and legs do not tolerate the miles like they used to. I stepped down from our local trail group’s steering committee, Montrose-Uncompahgre Trails, last December. With the infusion of young, new blood into the organization, I decided it was time to let a new generation of trail advocates lead the way.

In that same vein, I have decided to give up my monthly contribution to the Montrose Daily Press. In 2007 Laurie Brandt and I approached Steve Woody, the publisher of the Press at the time, with the idea of having a weekly column devoted to the outdoors. Prior to that, the Press ran an occasional “hook and bullet” article.

To his credit, Steve thought it was a great idea. Laurie recruited a couple of other writers and as

they say, the rest is history. What I appreciate the most is the trust Steve and subsequent publishers have had in me and my fellow columnists. Never once was I told what to or not to write about, no sideboards.

The seeds of my writing vocation go back to a creative writing course in college and the encouragement of Jim Haining, a college friend. Writing “Bicycling the Uncompahgre Plateau” helped me hone my writing style and opened the door to magazine and newspaper articles.

It has been an honor and a privilege to enter the readers’ world for a few minutes once a month. I hope the Press’ patrons have enjoyed reading about my adventures and occasional misadventures. Hopefully my writings have inspired readers to get outdoors more and explore. I truly believe that the outdoors provides solace for the mind, body, and soul.

Thanks to my Outdoors column colleagues, past and present, who provided the writing variety and excellence that have made the Outdoors section a quality addition to the Daily Press. Thanks to the editors at the Daily Press who tweaked things when needed.

A big shout out to the many outdoors companions with whom I have shared literally hundreds of adventures over the years. The only thing better than an adventure is sharing it with others.

And finally, thanks to all who have provided encouragement and kind words over the years. Those words are what kept me writing. You will see an occasional article from me when the inspiration strikes.

Happy Trails.

Bill Harris has traveled the back country of the Colorado Plateau since 1976 and is author of “Bicycling the Uncompahgre Plateau.”

LEARNERS

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This time, since there were injuries involved, the sheriff summoned the help of the Arizona Northern Air Rescue Unit. The helicopter, together with search and rescue people, evacuated Vasto and another hiker who had stopped by to help. Vasto was transported to the same parking area as the night before near the trailhead, and once again, Vasto refused medical treatment.

Phillip Vasto said in an interview with the Arizona Daily Sun, that he started his second attempt earlier,

around 9 a.m., reasoning he would have “all the time in the world” to reach the summit safely. Along the way up the trail, Vasto joined up with two other hikers. The two hikers turned around after 3 p.m. because they did not want to get caught on the mountain after dark.

Vasto continued on for a little while but the strong winds made him decide to turn around. On his way back down, he reported that he slipped off the snow-covered trail, scraping his leg. He then began to feel numb and dizzy. He noticed that his phone was nearly out of battery, so he phoned for help.

The Coconino Sheriff’s office stated they told Vasto he’d best not make this a three-peat. Considering search and rescue people are all volunteers, and he had made the crew miss out on dinner and a night’s sleep twice, I would say he got off lucky.

I wish I could tell you that such acts are rare, but I cannot. Our own Montrose County Sheriff’s Posse has had several of these types of rescues over the past 10 years, and I am sure Delta Search and Rescue can add a few to the list.

We had a husband and wife walk down Chukar Trail in the Black Canyon

to fish. Once there, they got into one of those family arguments, and the wife walked out without the husband. He was angry, so he stayed put until darkness, when he then tried to hike out. He thought it might be easier to leave the trail and hike straight up the canyon to the top. Bad idea.

Wife came back the next day to look for him and had brief contact with him on the cell phone, and he stated he could not reach the top. It was at this point wife called for help and Montrose County Sheriff’s Posse, along with sheriff’s deputies responded.

The man was very dehydrated and hiked all the

way back down to the river, where the deputies eventually found him the next afternoon. He was escorted all the way out and brought up to the trailhead to an awaiting vehicle with his wife. Paramedics treated him for dehydration and heat exhaustion.

The couple kissed and made up, and all was right with the world, so the posse and the deputies all went back home. It was then the wife remembered she left her fishing rod back down at the river. ... Yes, it was another long night.

We all make mistakes and bad decisions. When you do, use it as a learning tool and do better the next

time a situation arises. Don’t do it the same way and expect a different outcome.

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 970-986-1071 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org.

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