

Camp coffee and the magic elixir of memories



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Every morning, my wife places a hot mug of the black magical elixir of “going to make it through another day” in front of me at the breakfast table. I have had a relationship with coffee since I was but a wee lad and come from a long line of coffee drinkers.

During my years in law enforcement, I really lived off the stuff. There was a time I probably put away 10 cups a day, and in the Florida heat, that is a lot of coffee. Most folks down there drink iced tea by the gallon, but the cops still prefer the coffee, and we won’t bring up the donuts except to say they go very well with coffee.

Waking up to a campfire, just as the sun begins to hemorrhage its crimson colors in the eastern sky, and the morning air is cool and crisp, with a slight frost on the sagebrush, is the most magical time to have a cup of joe.

Unfortunately, campfire coffee is usually a sorry excuse for my Keurig at home. It is kind of hard to find an outlet for the coffee pot at my favorite camp-sites.

My old man mentor of all things outdoors was Mr. Caster. He taught me everything about hunting, fishing, camping, cussing, girls, hiking, survival, whiskey, and a few things my grandmother would have preferred I learn at an older age, like 40. In other words, Mr. Caster was a perfect mentor.

One thing Mr. Caster was not a good mentor at was making coffee. He carried around an old empty coffee can, in which he boiled water. Once boiling, he threw in copious amounts of coffee beans, ground up at the A & P store, and let the stuff boil until it had the consistency of used motor oil.

He would then pass me a slice in a cup, and tell me “Bottoms up boy, it will make a man out of ya.”

Despite that horrid stuff, I became a coffee drinker anyway. Anyone who is used to starting their day with coffee is not going to accept a substitute while camping.

Those folks with the nice motor homes and RVs will never know the pain of not having a good cup of coffee, as you folks can run your coffee grinders and electric coffee makers right off your generators. As for those of us sleeping on the ground, it is another story.

Cowboy coffee is the traditional coffee preferred by the cowboys of the old west. Coffee was served to cowboys as water with every single meal. There was always a pot boiling on the fire, because cowboys like their coffee piping hot. The coffee bag was treated like bars of gold on the trail.

The coffee was made in a pot over an open fire or a bed of hot coals. The pot was large, often holding three gallons of water, as it had to serve a dozen cowboys. They would pour ground roasted coffee beans in the pot, mixed with water, and waited until it started overflowing outside the pot.

This method still works for us in the field today. Just add coffee grounds to a pot and fill with water. Bring the pot to a rolling boil and serve. The bad thing is all the coffee grounds swirling around in your cup. Either you chew your cup of coffee or learn how to siphon coffee through your teeth, spitting out the grounds.

Some folks prefer instant coffee while in the woods. A couple spoonfuls in a cup of hot water and you have something remotely resembling a cup of joe. I remember when people were on a kick for the instant stuff made by Sanka.

I guess because it had no caffeine was the selling point. I tried the stuff a few times and preferred to drink water from a puddle. Sorry, but instant coffee does not work for a real coffee drinker.

The real secret to making good camp coffee is to remember the three cardinal rules to coffee brewing. The first rule is to always start with high-quality coffee, remember that you get what you pay for.

The second rule is to use whole beans and grind them yourself just before use. This is not always practical for those of us without a motor home. There are



If I could figure out how to lug this around with me in the woods, I would be happy. Until then, it is a thermos. (Mark Rackay/Special to the MDP)

battery powered grinders available, if you have the room. You can grind it at home and store in an airtight container. Remember that coffee degrades as it is exposed to air.

The third rule is to never boil your coffee. If you can, keep it at a temperature just below boiling, remembering that water boils at lower temperatures at altitude. Boiling coffee gives it that burnt taste, so try to keep it brewing just below the boil.

Another method is to take a lesson from your grandparents and use a

percolator to make your camp coffee. The coffee is added to the percolator apparatus, the pot filled with water, and the percolator added back to the pot.

The pot is placed on the heat source, and once it begins to perc, give it about 10 minutes to brew. This method keeps the grounds out of your drink and works very well in camp.

Now days, I hit the field in the morning with a large Yeti mug full of coffee. It usually gets me through to the lunch break. If we have

a fire at lunch, I bring out a small six cup percolator and brew up some pretty good coffee.

I am sure that some of you have other methods of making good coffee while camping and I would love to hear from you about your methods. If anyone has a great idea, I would be happy to share it with the rest of you coffee drinkers.

If any of you still use the method that Mr. Caster made the morning coffee with, just keep it to yourself. My old stomach can’t handle that stuff anymore.

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 970-765-7033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org.

Elk Creek Marina ramp improvements

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

The National Park Service has recently made improvements to the Elk Creek Marina boat ramp at Curecanti National Recreation Area to enhance the visitor experience.

The recent \$126,000 project, funded by park recreation fee revenue coming from boating and camping fees, replaced about 7,000 square feet of concrete ramp that was originally constructed in the 1960s.

It was cracked, broken, and crumbling due to age and heavy use. Repairs can only be made when the ramp is exposed due to low water levels. The repairs now make much of the ramp

smoother and more accessible for boaters.

Millions of dollars of maintenance work occur with the ramp and marina areas at Curecanti in support of water-based recreation. In summer of 2023, 30 comfort stations were rehabilitated and rodent proofed and 30 more are planned for 2024.

Replacement of all fish cleaning stations at Elk Creek and Lake Fork marinas is scheduled for 2024. Also, in 2024 a multi-year 18-million-dollar project will begin to replace all underground water and wastewater infrastructure at Elk Creek and Lake Fork.

During the summer boating season, the Elk Creek boat

ramp is the primary access to the Blue Mesa Reservoir, along with Lake Fork boat ramp. Motorboat access to the reservoirs requires boat inspection to prevent the spread of invasive aquatic species.

Inspection and mitigation services are offered seasonally at no charge. It requires presenting a required boat pass to the inspection station when in season. The National Park Service is committed to providing recreational opportunities at Curecanti and protecting water resources into the future.

More information about Curecanti National Recreation Area and water based recreational opportunities, please visit www.nps.gov/cure.

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(970)249-3098

Nov 11th Veterans film screening:
11am-12pm “True Whispers”
1pm-2pm “The Warrior Tradition”

Nov. 18th 9am-4pm Adopt-An-Elder Navajo rug sale. San Juan Weavers Guild Annual Show & Sale. Native Vendors & fry bread

Nov 19th 11am-1pm Hand Game Program. Ute Mtn Ute tribal members will teach & share the story of the Ute hand game

Nov 25th 11am-12:30pm film screening: “Lost Sparrow” (boarding school system) 11am-12:30pm “Homeland” (Native environmental threats)

Nov 27th 6pm-8pm film screening “Awake” Standing Rock pipeline including Q & A with Native American speakers, CJ & Amerson

Dec 2nd 9am-4pm Annual Holiday Festival. Arts and Craft vendors, Fry bread, silent auction & gift store discounts!

Free Admission to ALL EVENTS!!