

# The joys of truck camping



## Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

My wife and I were in our middle teen years when we were married. We both worked and attended school. When winter finally called an end to the festivities and allowed the spring thaw to begin, it signaled the beginning of fishing and camping season for us.

We did not have any money to throw around back then, so fishing and hunting were not just entertainment, but some protein on the table. We had it worked out that we could leave work and head directly to the mountains. I had it timed, one minute from punching the clock to punching the starter on the truck and heading west.

I have never been, and still am not, a big fan of camping and the camping lifestyle. Some folks go camping just for the sake of camping. If there is not fishing or hunting involved, yours truly is not going to be in attendance. Camping was just the easiest way to be in the hills at first light to start fishing or hunting, so camping was a necessity.

Our tent had several openings, beside the flaps, and most of them were strategically located to allow a view of the night sky. This did not bode well in the event of a nighttime shower. Since I hated pitching a tent in the black dark, with the light of a pressure lamp, I soon came up with the idea of just sleeping in the truck.



Four Wheel Campers of Montana makes truck camping a luxury, not like the old days. (Courtesy photo/Mark Rackay)

My 6-foot-1 and 200 plus never-you-mind pound frame made it near impossible to sleep in the cab. In those days we did not have the fancy 4 door cabs trucks come with now. It was just you, a bench seat, gear shift, and a non-tiltable type steering wheel. Add a wife and two dogs and you have a sleepless night.

Since we usually arrived five or six hours before the sun came up, it seemed silly to make a camp, so we decided to roll out the sleeping bags in the bed of the truck, and life got quite a bit easier. Next morning, I fired up the old Coleman stove on the tailgate, brewed a couple cups of coffee, and we hit the river at dawn.

Many folks have discovered the ease of car/truck camping for the quick overnighter. With the modern SUVs, trucks with camper shells, and station wagons, it is not a bad way to go. I still hit the rack in the truck sometimes and have learned a few things along

the way that make it a little easier to take.

If you want an early start in the morning, say to hit the goose blind, jump off spot for a turkey hunt, or be first on the stream for a fishing trip, sometimes getting there the night before makes more sense than leaving in the wee hours to drive to the spot, only to see someone else beat you there.

The most important tip I can mention is to keep your truck bed clean. Don't drag in mud, brush, stickers, blood, fish guts or anything else you don't want to roll a sleeping bag out in. Keep the bed of the truck sealed up as much as possible during the day so rain, dust, road debris or snow don't land in your "bedroom." A truck camper shell really fills the need here.

You must really manage your space, as space is a very limited commodity. Consider making some kind of storage unit, for your gear. A raised platform where the hunting

and fishing equipment could live in the basement while you sleep on top.

Organize your cooking gear, food, and everything else you bring, into waterproof containers that can be placed under the truck when you make your bed up. Don't just throw everything haphazardly everywhere (my preferred method of packing). The idea is to keep it simple, so the truck bed to be converted to sleeping quarters in a couple minutes.

In the early days, I threw all the fishing tackle, hunting guns and ammunition, extra clothes, food, and coolers into the cab of the truck. This made everything a complete circus in the morning when I wanted to hit the woods early, moving everything around again. Waterproof tubs would have been much simpler.

Getting a good sleep is vital to enjoying your truck camping experience. It ensures you will be rested enough to tackle the activities of the day. Aside

from making sure you stay warm and dry, there is the comfort factor.

First is a pillow. A small one, like an airline pillow, is far better than sleeping with your head on a tackle box or a rolled-up hunting jacket with all kinds of junk in the pockets. If I don't support my neck at night, I will spend the day eating Tylenol and ibuprofen for the neck/headache I got as a reward.

The second thing to assure you a little comfort is a mattress pad of some kind. I know you don't have the room to bring along your Perfect Sleeper mattress from home, but a small pad of some kind will make all the difference in the world.

Remember that a truck bed has these neat little ridges along the floor. I am not really sure what useful purpose they serve, but I know you don't want to roll a sleeping bag directly on top of them. A sheet of plywood over the top of the bed makes a nice flat surface to lay out on and

can be easily removed back home to return the truck back to "work state."

The tailgate makes a perfect spot to make a quick pot of coffee and whip up some breakfast in the morning. I keep the small stove, utensils, and the breakfast foods and coffee in a tub right next to the tailgate so I can find it easily in the dark.

My first camping vehicle was a Chevy Vega wagon I bought for 400 bucks and was probably ripped off. That vehicle served me well for 2 years before it died, probably of natural causes. After that we moved to a pickup truck.

With the truck, we eventually added a camper shell, which made life much easier in the woods. From there it became a camper, then came a pop-up trailer, and finally evolved into a tag trailer.

We eventually owned a fifth wheel and a toy hauler, each with their own breed of comfort, ease of use, and misery, all wrapped into one. Looking back, the old truck camping was the easiest and the most fun. I still truck camp from time to time, but my wife prefers to have something better than a truck bed between her and the cold, hard ground; like three floors of a luxury hotel.

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# Year-End Giving Gets Kids Outside

By Abram Herman

FOYAN

As the end of the year approaches, many households are starting to consider where to direct year-end giving dollars. There are many crucial needs in our community that deserve support; in a perfect world, we would be able to fund every cause, but in the real world you'll need to make choices about where to contribute your year-end donations in a way that aligns with your values and your hopes for the future.

If youth mental health, resiliency, and public lands are important to you, then supporting programs to get western slope kids into outdoor educational and recreational programs provides a long-term solution for those issues facing our youth, and our community at large.

What impact does an early introduction to the outdoors have on who a child will become as an adult, and how are they affected physically, mentally, and emotionally as they grow up? As it turns out, childhood exposure to outdoor activities can be directly connected to positive long-term outcomes in these areas.

## Physical Wellness

Children are increasingly neglecting outdoor play in favor of the digital world—reducing kids' screen time is often a major struggle for parents. Computers, mobile devices, and video games are passive forms of entertainment, and they don't call for physical coordination, strength, endurance, or any of the other attributes necessary for a healthy body. Outdoor play, on the other hand, promotes all of these things, and is a natural method of encouraging physical activity in young people.

A 2015 metanalysis of studies regarding the effects of time spent outdoors on children found, "outdoor time is positively related to physical activity and negatively related to sedentary behavior in children aged 3–12 years" (<https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/12/6/6455>). The more outdoor time children have, the more physical activity they take part in and, conversely, the less sedentary behavior they display.

## Mental Health & Resiliency

Many people spend time outdoors because it brings them a sense of happiness and well-being. If adults need to get away to nature

every now and then to stay happy, surely children must benefit from these quieter natural spaces as well.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a 2018 study showed that the more time children spend in nature and the greater sense of connection they personally feel with nature, the less likely they are to experience psychosomatic symptoms such as irritability, anxiety, difficulty sleeping, headache, stomach ache, backache, and other maladies. The benefits start with as little as 30 minutes of outdoor activity per week (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29679604/>).

As we consider ways to address the increasing prevalence of mental health challenges in young people, including a disproportionately high suicide rate in our area, outdoor activities can play a crucial role in building resiliency and promoting mental well-being in our youth.

## Stewardship of Public Lands

Physical activity, cognitive development, and emotional well-being are relatively easy to quantify in research. But what about something like the desire to preserve our natural areas, or an understanding of the importance of good stewardship



Students build blue bird nesting boxes as part of a Public Land Day celebration on the Grand Mesa, Uncomaphgre and Gunnison National Forest. This effort is to help kids learn about our local natural resources on public lands and engage in actions that teach them how to become stewards of our environment. (Courtesy photo/Anne Janik)

practices for our public lands—can we quantify these outcomes?

Though it's more difficult to show a correlation between time spent outdoors during childhood and an individual's likelihood to become a good environmental steward, it has been shown that the amount of time spent outdoors has a direct correlation with a child's feelings of connection with nature. This sense of connection with the natural world then has a direct influence on behaviors related to environmental stewardship in children such as, "conserving water, turning out lights, recycling, talking

about the environment, and picking up litter" (<https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=nerr>). The more time young people spend in the outdoors, the more likely they will become involved with environmental stewardship and preservation of our public lands.

As you consider how to distribute year-end donations in our community in a way that most aligns with your values, know that when you donate to organizations that provide opportunities for local kids to get outdoors for science education and recreational field trips, you're not only

directly contributing to their physical and mental well-being—you're also helping to raise a generation that will value our natural environment and ensure the preservation of public lands for years to come.

Friends of Youth and Nature (FOYAN) is a non-profit organization that promotes opportunities for youth and families to go outside, experience outdoor activities and explore nature. To contribute through Colorado Gives Day and multiply the impact of your donation, please visit <https://www.coloradogives.org/organization/friendsofyouthandnature>