



# SURVIVE OFF THE LAND

Take a look around at the woods next time you are out and you might be surprised how little there is available to eat. (Courtesy photo)



## Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

People come up to me all the time to share their own outdoor and survival experiences. It is great to share experiences, and sometimes, learn from someone else’s mistakes. I have found that learning from what someone else did wrong saves a lot of useless wear and tear on my anatomy, so I listen.

Lately, I have seen an alarming trend. When I ask what provisions, someone carries into the woods when they are on a hike, hunt, walk or whatever, I have been getting a lot of that “living off the land” nonsense.

Back in the 70s, I took a weeklong survival class. The instructor said, “anything that runs, walks, crawls, hops, jumps, skips, flies, or swims, is potential food.” Af-

ter several days of classroom sessions, we took off into the mountains for four days to live off the land.

As a group, we did catch some fish, pick some berries, and ate a couple of snared rabbits. We did not starve as there were some edibles around, but an explanation is in order.

First off, we spent the entire time looking and foraging for food and water, all day. Secondly, there were 7 of us, so we scoured the place. Lastly, I remind you that “edible” does not necessarily mean “good to eat.” It simply means you won’t fall face down in your dinner from eating it. By the end of the trip, I lost eight pounds.

Next time you are on a long hike in the woods, try a little experiment. Once you are several miles in, stop and pretend that the sun is just going over the hill. Off to the west is a rapidly approaching thunderstorm, and it looks like you must spend the night right where you are.

Take a look around. Do you see anything running, walking, crawling, hopping, jumping, skipping, flying, or swimming? Probably not. Unless you have a Happy Meal stuffed in your

backpack, chances are you are going to bed hungry, and probably wet. Remember the thunderstorm?

Open your survival book at home one evening, and flip to the edible plants section. There you will see a page after page of wild edible plants, free for the taking. You will read how to harvest inner tree bark for food, how to boil skunk cabbage, and where to find dandelion leaves for a wild salad. There is even a recipe for pine needle tea.

These are only called survival foods because they are something you would not eat in a normal situation. You probably won’t go to the grocery store and bring home a pound of skunk cabbage. The reality is if you are only eating survival foods, you’ll start to feel sick and weak after a day or two. Some of these “survival foods” have zero caloric value, which makes them pointless to eat. And back to our scenario above, when you looked around, did you see any of those survival foods growing?

Your body can’t digest protein without some amount of fat, and over time, you could develop protein poisoning without it. Rabbit starvation

and the Canadian term, caribou sickness, are common terms for protein poisoning.

Some people think they can just kill a big game animal for food, and all will be right with the world. The first problem that comes to mind, is storing the cuts of meat for the long term. You probably left the chest freezer and canning supplies back at the house. Sure, you can hang a hind quarter for a few days in a dark and shady place, but not for very long. The flies will have a feast, but you won’t.

Basically, no matter how many rabbits, snails, fish, or deer steaks you eat, you can still starve to death because your body needs some fat to digest all that protein. The lesson here is that fat is much more precious in a survival situation than most would think. You would have to find something high in fat content, like a bear or a beaver.

One person who sought to escape to the woods was a young man by the name of Christopher McCandless. He was a subscriber to the philosophy of “living off the land.”

As an avid outdoorsman, McCandless completed several lengthy backcountry

trips, including a long canoe trip down the Colorado River. Somewhere during the spring of 1992, McCandless decided to hitchhike to Alaska, where he would move into the wilds, live off the land, and exist happily ever after. Obviously, McCandless considered himself a master backwoodsman, big mistake.

The wilderness journey to live off the land started when he was dropped off at the head of a trail known as Stampede Trail. He had along a light pack, meager supplies, and 22lr rifle with 400 rounds of ammunition, a book on edible plants, and great desire to be independent. He lasted 113 days.

He ate squirrels, porcupines, rabbits, and even shot a moose once. The moose spoiled because he had no way to preserve it. If you are interested in the story of this young man’s adventure, the Christopher McCandless story was first documented in the book by Jon Krakauer titled “*Into the Wild*,” and later in a movie by Sean Penn of the same name in 2007.

There is much controversy surrounding the cause of death, including possibility of ingesting poisonous plants. If you read the book,

or watch the movie, spoiler alert; McCandless weighed around 165 pounds when he started down the Stampede Trail, and the coroner estimated his weight at death to be 67 pounds. Whether plants caused his problem or not, he obviously starved to death.

The moral of this lengthy story is put some provisions in your pack when you head to the hills. A couple MREs, a handful of Clif Bars, things that are lightweight and nonperishable, to get you through. One power bar will go much farther than copious amounts of boiled skunk cabbage.

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# Wildlife underpass work begins on U.S. 550

STAFF REPORT

Construction of the long-awaited wildlife underpass near Billy Creek on U.S. 550 is set to launch late this month.

The Colorado Department of Transportation announced the underpass and other safety improvements will begin March 25, with an expected completion date by the end of the year.

On tap: widening the road for construction of a southbound passing lane by the Pa-CopChu-Puk campground; the wildlife underpass at Billy Creek (milemarker 111.4), an 8-foot-tall wildlife fence, earthen escape ramps and deer guards.

“We are focusing our efforts along a significant big game migration route where 50 percent of traffic crashes in the last 10 years were wildlife related,” said CDOT Regional Transportation Director Julie Constan, in a news release.



CDOT and wildlife officials lead a site tour of the Billy Creek highway safety improvement area in 2021. Work is now set to begin at the end of March, including wildlife fencing and a wildlife underpass, in hopes of reducing collisions with vehicles. (Courtesy photo/CDOT)

“The new deer fencing will tie into existing wildlife features completing a seven-mile wildlife safety corridor expected to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions by 85%.”

The stretch of road near the Billy Creek State Wildlife Area has been on the list for improvements since at least 2021, when CDOT and Colorado Parks and

Wildlife conducted site tours for the public. The wildlife mitigation project there is a statewide priority, as identified by local planning regions and the Western Slope

Wildlife Prioritization Study. The 2019 study put the stretch of road in the top 5% of need for mitigation efforts. Between mile markers 112.7 and 115.5, more

than 50 mule deer carcasses were found and removed in a 15-year period, with the biggest body count seen during elk and mule deer migration times for summer and winter ranges.

The work on U.S. 550 will mean land closures and traffic shifts, with single-lane alternating traffic; narrowed lanes, width restrictions and reduced shoulders; a lower speed limit and up to 150-minute delays, Monday — Friday.

As well, the driving public is reminded of ongoing safety improvements between Otter Road and the Montrose-Ouray county line, which can result in up to 20-minute delays.

For more information about the Billy Creek project, call the info line at 970-360-1411; email us550wideningproject@gmail.com or visit the project website, www.codot.gov/projects/us-550pacobilly