



At days end, it is pretty easy to sit back and blame the moon phase for your lack of success in the outdoors, but success begins with understanding the phases. An African mood rise over a mopane campfire. (Photo/Mark Rackay)

Understanding moon phases



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

The moon has always been a curiosity to me, never really understanding it. I clearly remember watching the moon landing on a black and white television, and other than that, never gave the moon much thought, except for the way it had an effect on my hunting and fishing.

I know enough about the moon's phases that for the 5 days after the full moon, fishing and hunting stink, at least where I lived. Fishing in the Keys seemed to dry up after the full moon, never getting good again until well into the waning phase. The tides were always strongest on the

full moon, with the lowest of the lows and the highest of the highs, but often times there were only 2 tide days and that always meant stay home.

Full moon while hunting, regardless of what the experts say about the rut, means to me the game is up feeding all night, and staying in bed all day. Since we can't hunt at night, that means stay home on the full moon.

I know that I have a cynical view of this, and I throw some jest out there because in reality, to be successful in the outdoors, you should understand the moon phases. The moon goes through a cycle of phases each month, based on its position in relation to the Earth and the sun. The phase shows the illuminated portion of the moon that is being lit by the sun.

The moon rotates on its axis in the same amount of time it takes to orbit the Earth, about 27 days. Because of the Earth's gravitational pull, the orbit of the moon and Earth are synchro-

nized. We can only see one side of the moon, the near side, which represents half the lunar surface. If you want to see the other side, you have to call NASA and get a ride.

The phases the moon goes through are dependent on the moon's position in relation to the sun. The phase we see is the portion of the moon illuminated by the sun, with zero percent being the new moon, all the way to 100 percent lit up being the full moon.

In the new moon phase, the moon is a complete shadow, but as the moon continues its orbit, the visible area grows, or waxes, until it reaches full illumination. The phases then reverse as the visible area decreases or wanes, hence the terms waxing and waning.

There are a total of 8 phases of the moon, starting with the new moon. This is the primary phase, with zero illumination, or the darkest nights. It is the beginning of the lunar cycle, as the sun and the

moon are aligned on the same side of the earth.

The next phase is called waxing crescent, that goes from zero to 50 percent illumination. The moon will show a thin crescent of light on the right side. As each day passes, the area lit on the moon will gradually widen, covering more surface, until reaching first quarter.

First quarter means the moon is at a right angle to the sun from the Earth, with half the moon illuminated on the right side. It is called first quarter because the moon has completed one quarter of its orbit around the Earth, having nothing to do with the amount of light showing on the surface. From our perspective, half the moon is illuminated, and some people refer to first and last quarter as a "half-moon."

Waxing gibbous is the next phase, where the moon is illuminated 50 to 100 percent, more than halfway lit, but not fully. Gibbous is a Latin word that means a shape convex outward on one side.

Full moon occurs when the moon is on the opposite side of the Earth from the Sun, and the entire visible side of the moon appears illuminated from our view. Basically, the Sun and moon are on opposite sides of the Earth. Full moon carries many myths, legends, and superstitions, and after many years in law enforcement, I believe them.

When we start back toward a half moon, with now the left side of the moon illuminated, we are in waning gibbous. The moon will work from 100 to 50 percent lit, going the other way.

The last quarter phase is next, sometimes called third quarter, named that because the moon has completed three quarters of its orbit. Here, the left side will be illuminated, around 50 percent. The moon is at a right angle with respect to the Sun from the Earth.

Finally, we reach waning crescent, the phase that falls between the last quarter and the new moon phases. At

the start of this phase, the left half of the moon is illuminated, and gradually diminishes, until a very thin crescent appears on the left side. When the moon is no longer illuminated, we made it back to the new moon phase.

Now that I understand how all the moon phases and their proper names, I need to figure out how to do better fishing and hunting during the full moon phases, or find something else to blame it on.

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. Personal email is elkhunter77@icloud.com For information about the Posse call 970-765-7033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

CERRO

FROM PAGE B1

was that Cerro Summit hosted a ski hill complete with a rope tow pre-World War II. The old narrow-gauge railroad crossed the property with a section of the railbed and culverts still intact.

Funds were raised to hire

the Western Colorado Conservation Corps to bolster the volunteer trail-building effort. Over one thousand volunteer hours went into clearing a corridor and building trails. Trailhead improvements and trail signs were installed.

In June 2015 city and county officials, sponsors, and MUT volunteers gathered to

dedicate a metal CST sculpture created by All-Metals Fabrication of Grand Junction.

Additional work has been done on the trail system since 2015, but it needs some maintenance, mainly to cut back the encroaching plant growth. It's a small trail system compared to others that

allow mountain bikes, but a lot of fun. I see hikers and dog-walkers as well as cyclists using the trails. It is just below 8,000 feet elevation, so cooler in the summer than Montrose.

MUT will be sponsoring an evening volunteer trail work session on July 23rd. MUT will be at the Cerro Summit

trailhead starting at 5:30 PM. Tools will be provided, but if anyone can bring long-handled loppers that would be helpful. Bring work gloves, water. Wear sun protection and closed-toed footwear.

MUT will provide food and beverage. For more information and to sign up contact Bill at 970.901.4022.

GREAT OUTDOORS Company

KÜIHL®
BORN IN THE MOUNTAINS™

10 SOUTH SELIG AVE MONTROSE, COLORADO 81401 970-249-4226