

Debunking survival myths



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

There are people that believe anything they read on the internet or social media. I occasionally browse survival blogs and outdoor forums, just to get a chuckle out of some of the nonsense people spew forth as fact. In some instances, following their advice could get you placed in an aromatic pine box for all eternity.

One that always gets me is the old drinking liquor will warm you up in the cold. I hear the stories about “antifreeze” all the time. I remember when goose hunters carried a thermos of hooch to the blinds with them during the cold January hunting days. If you are outside and cold, booze is the last thing you want. You may feel warmer from a shot of hooch, but alcohol actually dilates blood vessels and capillaries, which will cool your core even faster. Have a cup of coffee from a thermos instead.

The same holds true for drinking beer or cocktails in the hot summer days. While a gin and tonic might sound refreshing, it does nothing



If all your survival training comes from the internet or the lips of “experts,” this might be your method of travel home. (Courtesy photo/Mark Rackay)

good for you. Drinking booze will make you sweat even more because alcohol interferes with your body’s ability to control its own temperature, making you feel even hotter.

How about the one about lightning never striking the same place twice? Of course, that is a myth. I actually had someone tell me that it is perfectly safe to sit under a tree with a lightning scar on it because it will not get struck again. If the myth were true, there would be no need for lightning rods.

There are many folks that leave essential survival gear behind, all in an attempt to “lighten the load.” While it

is true that on a day hike, you don’t require the same number of supplies as you would with a 10-day trip, never leave the basics at home. I carry things like a multi-tool, knife, lighter, and flashlight, with me everywhere I go, even around town. I can guarantee, the one thing you left behind, will be the thing you need the most in an emergency.

“If you are lost, wander around until you see something familiar and get your bearings back.” This one really cracks me up. If you are truly lost, or stranded, such as with a broken-down vehicle, stay put. Stay by your car, or wherever you

realize that you are lost. The more you move, the more difficult it is for search and rescue to find you.

Staying at a fixed location, such as your broken-down car, will enhance your visibility and eliminate the need for searchers to recheck other areas of wilderness, guessing on your direction of travel. If another traveler or rescuer happens by your abandoned vehicle, you just missed a chance of rescue. Stay put.

Another myth about thirst involves eating snow to stay hydrated. Some folks have told me this would keep them alive. Truth is, while snow is water, it is frozen. Eating that snow will quickly lower your body’s core temperature, which will send you into hypothermia. The hypothermia will kill you faster than thirst. Best to melt the snow and drink it through a filter.

“Suck on a small stone to stay hydrated.” I remember that one from my Boy Scout Manual, from long ago. We all know you are not going to get water from a stone. The stone in your mouth will just cause saliva to flow, making you think you are hydrated. If you take a spill, you could swallow the stone and choke to death. Probably better to suck a piece of hard candy or chew gum.

One of the most dangerous things people do in emergency situations, is to sacrifice sleep. Studies have shown that going too long without sleep can impair your ability to function the same way as drinking too

much alcohol. Being awake for 18 hours is the same as having a blood content (BAC) of 0.05%, while being awake for 24 hours is equal to having a BAC of 0.10%. Take the time to hole up somewhere and get some sleep, your decision-making ability will improve.

“If you are starving, eat whatever an animal eats.” This one will either get you a ticket on the last train west or make you so sick you will wish you boarded the train. You can’t eat everything that an animal can eat. If you doubt it, look at some of the things you dog ingests. There are things animals can eat that are toxic to humans, such as deadly berries and mushrooms. Think about the things that feed off roadkill.

While looking for shelter, especially when it is raining, snowing, or cold, be sure your sleeping place is above ground. Never sleep on the hard ground, as the ground will draw your body heat away from you faster than the air temperature will. Avoiding contact with the bare ground, with something as simple as a bed of pine boughs, will keep you from getting hypothermia.

Shelter means you must have a roof over your head. I hear about people who will spend all day building a lean-to shelter, only to die freezing to death trying to sleep on the cold ground. The proper thing to do is craft a very well insulated bed to keep you from the cold ground. Add a roof if time allows.

The last thing I would offer is to not take your survival information from those reality survival shows on television. All of those shows give a glorified view of survival in the outdoors. The truth is, when you find yourself in a survival situation, it’s because you have made some really bad decisions, became injured, the weather changed, and you probably experienced some bad luck on the way, and sometimes, a combination of all of them.

If a full-blown, three-alarm emergency arises in the woods, you had better make sure the disaster insurance is paid up. Survival in the woods is not something you should take lightly because it can cancel your life memberships in short order, much to the dismay of your creditors. Get some proper training, carry the right equipment, and stay away from the survival chat rooms.

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Friends of Youth and Nature appoints Abram Herman as first executive director

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

Friends of Youth and Nature (FOYAN), a Western Colorado nonprofit dedicated to connecting youth with outdoor experiences, announced this week the appointment of Abram Herman as its first executive director. Herman, who has served as Vice Chair of FOYAN’s board since 2021 and as a board member since 2019, transitioned into the part-time leadership role effective Nov. 10, marking a significant milestone as the organization evolves from an all-volunteer structure to include paid leadership.

Since its founding in 2018, FOYAN has experienced remarkable growth under volunteer leadership, expanding from serving approximately 800 youth in its inaugural year to providing nearly 9,000 outdoor experiences for Western Slope youth in 2024—a more than tenfold increase in just seven years. The organization is on track

to maintain or exceed this impact in 2025.

“After six years of contributing as a volunteer board member, I’m honored to step into this role and help guide FOYAN’s next chapter,” said Herman. “Western Colorado faces significant youth mental health challenges, including one of the state’s highest youth suicide rates. Our work connecting young people with nature-based experiences has proven to build resilience, confidence, and emotional well-being. My priorities are clear: maintain the quality outdoor experiences for young people that define our work, strengthen partnerships across Delta, Mesa, Montrose, and Ouray counties, and expand our impact through programs like the new Generation Wild Uncompahgre initiative. Every child in Western Colorado deserves access to the transformative power of the outdoors.”

Herman brings extensive leadership experience to

the role, having previously served as Mayor of Grand Junction. He also owns and operates The Sukkah Project®, a seasonal e-commerce business, and leads the Grand Valley Adaptive Climbing Community, which facilitates climbing programs for kids, adults and veterans with disabilities, as well as serving on various nonprofit boards throughout the community.

“Abram’s deep commitment to youth, proven leadership skills, and intimate knowledge of FOYAN’s mission make him the ideal person to lead us forward,” said Anita Evans, FOYAN Board Chair and organization co-founder. “He has been instrumental in shaping our growth and impact over the past six years. As we formalize our organizational structure with our first paid position, we couldn’t ask for a better leader to ensure we continue delivering life-changing outdoor experiences to thousands of

Western Slope children while expanding our reach and deepening our community partnerships.”

Under Herman’s leadership, FOYAN will focus on several key priorities: implementing the newly funded Generation Wild Uncompahgre program through Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) in cooperation with Montrose Recreation District and several area non-profits—this partnership will provide accessible, culturally relevant outdoor programs including hiking, camping, rafting, and youth leadership development; addressing youth mental health and building resilience through nature-based experiences; and strengthening collaborative relationships with partner organizations across the region.

FOYAN works with schools, youth organizations, and families across Western Colorado to eliminate barriers to outdoor participation. The organization provides



Abram Herman will serve as Friends of Youth and Nature’s first executive director the nonprofit announced this week. (Courtesy photo)

transportation scholarships, program funding, and connects youth with experienced outdoor education providers. Recent funding includes support from GOCO’s Generation Wild initiative, El Pomar Foundation, The Mighty Arrow Foundation, Colorado Circle of Dreams, Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Partners in the Outdoors, the Colorado Health Foundation, Western Colorado Community Foundation, Montrose Community Foundation, and many local service organizations.

For more information about Friends of Youth and Nature, visit www.friendsofyouthandnature.org.





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