

That Didn't Go as Planned



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Once again, it is time for that “New Year, new me” thing. Seems everyone will be making resolutions for the year and some of those resolutions might survive until the evening of January 2nd. I am not one for making resolutions, especially when I know I am destined to fail. My wife has all kinds of resolutions for me, and most are ridiculous, like spending less money on outdoor equipment or fewer hunting trips. All those ideas are good for a laugh but have no chance of success. I see no reason for her to come up with these absurd ideas, other than to disturb marital bliss.

My wife also wanted me to write something upbeat and optimistic for the New Year. She also subscribes to the clean slate, fresh start, and do-over thinking that the 1st day of the year brings. I live in the real world and will not subscribe to that line of thinking. I will, however, use this opportunity to go over some of the things from last year, in the hopes we don't make the



That is the old year setting in the west, and looking back to the east, is the New Year, and a new beginning. (Photo/Mark Rackay)

same mistakes again. Sort of a do-over for those of us who survived.

For starters, last winter we had a husband-and-wife team head up to the Uncompahgre Plateau for what they described as a “nice drive in the mountains.” This couple drove their two-wheel drive pickup over the top of the road blockage and large sign that read “ATV and Tracked Vehicles only beyond this point.”

We had a tough time figuring out how the truck fit between the posts they drove through past the

blockage. I might point out that the truck had highway type tires as well. As expected, they only made it another couple hundred yards before the truck was hopelessly stuck in the snow.

Sometime after 11PM, the Posse was dispatched for the rescue of these people as they had no cold weather clothing or supplies. We did bring them back to town safely, but their truck remained there until springtime, when the road was reopened and tow service could get to it. Remember, the Posse will

rescue people but will not tow the vehicles or attempt to get them unstuck.

In early February, we had a call for 2 women who were stuck on 25 Mesa Road, just inside the Forest Service boundary. We responded shortly after midnight with a couple vehicles and 3 responders.

In this case, we encountered a locked USFS gate, that should have signaled to everyone the road is closed, turn around. Instead, these people went cross-country through the brush and around trees, to find a way through the closure and get back on the snow-covered road. We used our key to unlock the gate in emergencies and proceed further up.

We found them another 300 yards up, stuck in a deep snowdrift in the middle of the road. Again, the vehicle had no offroad or snow tires, just plain highway tread. We managed to get them back to town but left the vehicle where it was at. They faced a tow bill that might be well over a thousand bucks, and the tow service can't get there until spring, when the gate is unlocked. Also, the USFS rangers probably were going to cite them for breaching the closure.

These 2 rescue missions were similar the 10 we handled for similar reasons. 9 of the 10 stranded vehicles had only highway type tires, and 6 of the vehicles were 2-wheel drive only. In other words, these people should not have even attempted to venture up there in the first place. Also, none of them had any survival equipment, extra warm clothes, or food and water. 4 of the people had medical conditions, where they should not have been there in the first place.

If you venture into the backcountry during the winter months, be prepared with survival supplies, have a vehicle that is properly equipped with snow or traction tires and chains, and has 4-wheel drive. Do I need to mention anything about not going past the locked gates or barricades? Also, make sure you have plenty of cash in the bank for the tow company.

We had another mission last April for a gentleman who took his pick-up truck, with 2-wheel drive but with offroad tires, on an excursion up the 25 Mesa Road. The gate was

open at this point, but roads were snow covered and a mess. This gentleman turned the wrong way on Divide Road, thinking he was heading to Nucla, when he was actually heading toward Montrose.

He made it several miles before turning on another road and got hopelessly stuck. He then began walking to “Nucla,” but went the wrong way again. Some 7 miles away from his vehicle, we found the very tired man and brought him back to town. The lesson of this mission was if you have no idea where you are, you should probably stay put, rather than get further lost. Secondly, as you head uphill into the backcountry, and notice the roads getting bad, there is no reason to expect them to get better the higher up you go.

Last year I wrote a piece about weather lore, and predicting the weather by watching the clouds and such. I also mentioned my lack of faith in the weather forecasts that are provided. Well, I received some pushback from several meteorologists proclaiming how their long-range forecast is 90 to 95 percent accurate. As an experiment, I downloaded 4 different weather apps on my phone to compare and follow the forecasts.

First, I question how the long-range forecast can be so accurate when most times, these 4 apps did not agree. I also noticed that 2 of the apps changed their forecasts regularly, sometimes several times during the same day. This does not breed much confidence in my view, but I did come to a couple conclusions I can share here.

Before you go on any trip, for any duration, take a close look at the forecasts. Try using a couple weather apps and get a feel for what to expect. Also, plan for the worst. In winter, be ready for snow, wind, and cold, regardless of what the forecast is. When you are in the field, pay close attention to the weather, clouds, and everything else around you, watching for changes. If possible, check those weather apps a couple times each day, to keep track of any changes or warnings.

I found the Weather Underground and the NOAA Apps to be the most accurate for our

mountain area. The Weather Channel App and especially the AccuWeather App were the least accurate and changed the most throughout the day. I think the latter 2 are mostly computer generated and have little feel what the mountains can do to a storm front. The lesson here is use every tool at your disposal for a forecast, before you go, and prepare for the worst. Don't get caught off guard, don't rely on just weather lore, and monitor several weather forecast services, not just one.

I had my own little lesson last summer. We went back to Zimbabwe for a safari, choosing an area of the bushveld that is very dry and very hot. Daytime temps reached 105 degrees, and it was very dry, so perspiration was almost nonexistent.

During our long safari type hikes, lugging a pack and rifle, I drank a bottle of water every half hour, but it just wasn't enough. A case of sports drinks would not have been enough. I came down with a serious case of heat illness, that cost me 2 full days of the trip. I should have been taking large doses of electrolyte powders in the water and hammering the salt and mineral tablets as well. Water was just not near enough. That is a mistake I won't make again.

A good idea for the New Year for us outdoor folks might be to think things through a little better, before we just jump into an idea. While we are at it, let's make sure we are properly prepared, and the vehicles properly equipped, before heading out. Pay attention to those closure too, they are there for a reason.

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