

# THANKSGIVING WAS DIFFERENT



## Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

My earliest memories of Thanksgiving go back to my childhood, living with my grandparents. My grandmother would have the entire family over to her house. She would cook the largest turkey that she could find, together with all the trimmings. She was a Polish lady and had many old family recipes for dumplings, cakes, breads, and many other side dishes.

The arrangement was simple. She would cook way too much food, and I would do my best to eat myself into a coma. Remember, this was during a time before they invented cholesterol and heart disease. It was the one meal a year that I could eat all I want without getting yelled at.

But Thanksgiving was probably not the way many of us were taught it was in school. Schoolchildren typically learn that the tradition dates back to the Pilgrims, who established Plymouth Colony in 1620, in what is now Massachusetts.

The story goes, friendly Native Americans taught the struggling colonists how to survive in the New World, as the Europeans called it. As the Pilgrims started doing better, in 1621, they invited the Native people over for a feast, as a way for everyone to celebrate and give thanks. Huge turkeys were roasted, along with corn and potatoes, and for dessert,



For our family, we treat Thanksgiving as a time we can get together with family and friends, eat too much, and enjoy each others company, no matter where in the world we happen to be when the day comes. This shot is in the La Pampa region of Argentina. (Courtesy photo)

there were many pies. In reality, the celebration was probably not much of a celebration, and the friendship with the Native people was tenuous and short lived.

Our definition of Thanksgiving revolves around eating turkey, but in days gone by, it was more of a religious observance. The thought is that 1621 marked the first Thanksgiving, but the National Park Service claims that decades before that, Spanish settlers and members of the Seloy tribe broke bread in Florida back in 1565. There was no turkey, but there was salted pork and garbanzo beans, followed by a religious service.

The feast the Pilgrims held back in 1621 had a much different menu. English colonist Edward Winslow wrote about 4 men heading out for a day of hunting and returning with many fowl for the feast. Around 90 Wampanoag people were in attendance and brought 5 deer to the table. There was probably more seafood than anything else, as clams, eel, seaweed

and fish were a staple back then. Reportedly, the celebration went on for 3 days.

The friendly relationship between the English settlers and the Wampanoag was strained at best, and very short-lived. The Wampanoag had lived in the coastal community they called Patuxet for some 10,000 years before the 3-day celebration, probably held in late September or early October.

After losing nearly half of their settlers to sickness during the first winter in America, the English were on the brink of extinction. The Wampanoag were not far behind. Between 1616 and 1620, diseases that were introduced by the European colonizers killed up to 90 percent of New England's Native population in an epidemic now referred to as the Great Dying.

This scene played out in other places in the New World. The Calusa tribe, peacefully resided on the coastal islands, and along the mainland coast of Florida for better than 8,000 years. When the Europeans arrived,

they brought diseases with them, and within 100 years from the first European setting foot in Florida, all of the Calusa people were gone.

Early European colonizers and Native Americans lived in a relative peace for about 10 more years, until thousands of additional settlers arrived. Up to 25,000 Englishmen arrived in the New World between 1630 and 1642, after a plague drastically cut the Native population by what is believed to be more than half.

The arrival of new settlers prompted a fight for land and rising animosity. War exploded in 1675 as Wampanoag warriors began raiding the Colonists. The New England Confederation of Colonies declared war in 1675. The war was bloody, ruthless, and devastating.

It was not until much later that Thanksgiving became a national holiday. Sarah Josepha Hale, the editor of an influential women's magazine, had helped convince President Lincoln that a national Thanksgiving holiday

would help reunite a war-torn country. In 1863, Thanksgiving Day became the National holiday and day of thanks we know it as today.

Reflections on Thanksgiving are not new. According to the New York Post, the United American Indians of New England have been publicly mourning on Thanksgiving for decades. Frank James, an Aquinnah Wampanoag activist, helped establish a National Day of Mourning in 1970. On this day, Native Americans gather in Plymouth, Massachusetts, for a day of remembrance for the millions of Indigenous people who were killed by European colonists, through war and disease.

It seems we are in a time that rewriting history might be easier than really learning the truth. There are so many false narratives, and a lack of written evidence of what really went on during those early years of this great nation that we may never know the whole story. Perhaps we can use

Thanksgiving as a day of reflection, not celebration, and be grateful for what we have, and think about what we can do, to make it better for everyone.

I know that I miss the spread my late grandmother used to put out for us. To me, it was also a day that my entire family got together. The memory of that day is important to me because all of them are gone now. I am the last man standing.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for The Nautical Mile, and several other 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

## Seasonal Big Game Gate Closures on the Norwood and Ouray Ranger Districts

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forests will begin their annual seasonal closure of big game wildlife gates on the Norwood and Ouray Ranger Districts Dec. 1. These closures are intended to reduce human interactions with elk and other wildlife during winter months.

"Elk need to conserve energy to survive the harsh winter months," said Norwood and Ouray Ranger District's Wildlife Biologist, Kara Berggren.

"By reducing human activity in their winter habitat, we can help minimize stress on the animals at a time when they are particularly vulnerable."

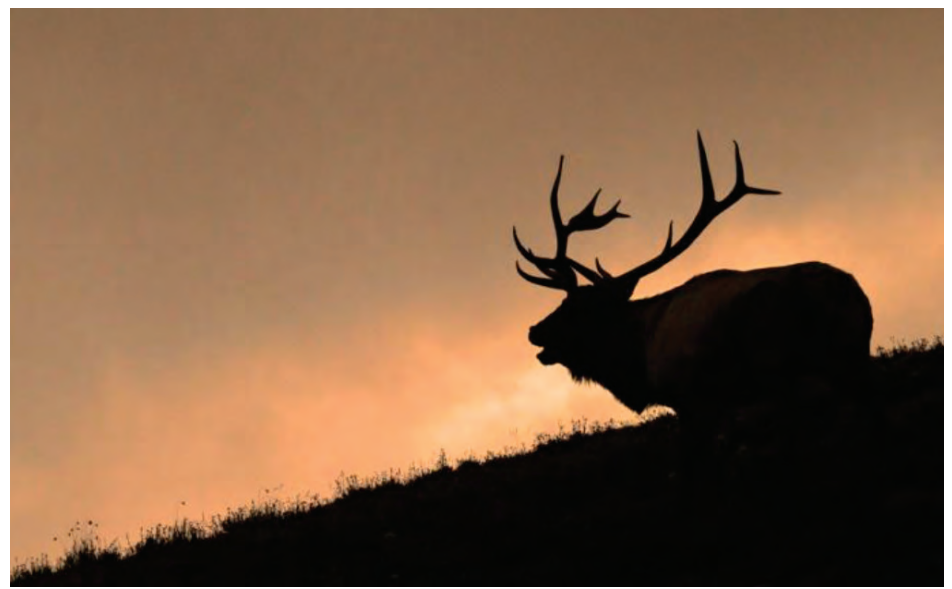
Big game wildlife gates will be closed on the Norwood and Ouray Ranger Districts from Dec. 1 through April 15. Most gates affected by the closure are clearly marked with black and white signs stating: "No motorized vehicles to protect big game winter range."

Visitors are asked to respect these closures to protect critical wildlife

habitat. Individuals who are found to violate the wildlife closures are subject to citations and fines.

For additional information, contact the Norwood Ranger District at (970) 327-4261 or the Ouray Ranger District at (970) 240-5300.

For information and updates on current fire restrictions, conditions, and recreation opportunities on the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forests, visit the forest website. Connect with us on social media (X (Twitter) and Facebook).



The GMUG National Forests will begin their annual seasonal closure of big game wildlife gates on the Norwood and Ouray Ranger Districts Dec. 1; the closure is intended to reduce human interactions with elk and other wildlife during winter months. (Courtesy image/CPW)

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