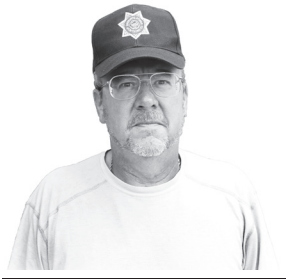


Get Ready to Hit the Trails



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Winter is not my best season. I am certain that God made winters so we could get an idea of what eternity feels like. Hiking, camping, and backpacking are way in the future, fishing is still month away, and hunting season is but a distant memory. Noting to do but sit in the house and eat. Sounds like pre-season fever to me.

No matter what your chosen outdoor activity, pre-season fever hits you at some time or another. When the winds howl down the chimney and the woodpile is getting low, is when it hits the worse. For me, that is usually February.

This pre-season fever is far too familiar to require any comment whatsoever, but in the eyes of a publisher, a blank page for a column does not sell many newspapers. And, unless you stole this paper from your neighbor's driveway, you are a case in point. With that all being said, maybe we can make better use of this time of year.

Although several months away, it's the first trip of the season is always the hardest for me. Putting boots on the ground, with a heavy pack, and heading up the trail on an early mountain morning, never seems to end up as I planned. The first trip of the year leaves me with soreness in muscles that I never knew I had. I thought I was in good cardio shape until I

headed up the trail under the weight of that pack.

Start by going through your equipment. Your gear probably needs some love and attention. Remember, you probably stuffed it on a shelf in the garage, with overflow to the closet floor. Time to pull it out, dry it out, dust it off, and get rid of any freeloading insect life that may have taken refuge for the winter.

One of these years, when something more important doesn't arise, I will get really organized, and store my gear at the season end, in storage totes. Each item strategically placed in a bin, with a label identifying the contents. Of course, all the items will have been properly washed, dried and prepared for storage. It's amazing how many more important things arise. Until then, garbage bags and piles of stuff on floors and shelves will have to do.

While you are getting everything cleaned up, it is time to check things over that may need repaired or replaced. Tears in tents, sleeping bags, and packs, should be addressed. Good time to make sure the stuff that is supposed to be waterproof, actually is.

Hopefully, you pulled all the batteries out of everything before throwing things into storage. Regular alkaline batteries just love to leak, especially in cold places like the garage. Flashlights, GPS, radios, and anything else battery operated should be checked and given fresh batteries. The spare batteries in the bottom of the pack need to be tested and chucked if no longer fully charged.

Most of my flashlights are the rechargeable type, and I carry rechargeable spare batteries. All of them need a going over, and recharged. Charge the battery back-up you carry for your cell phone.

Speaking of packs, best check the contents for leftover food and snacks. I once found a turkey sandwich that had evolved into an intelligent life form and was grazing on half a bag of leftover trail mix. That was a pack that needing an airing out for sure.

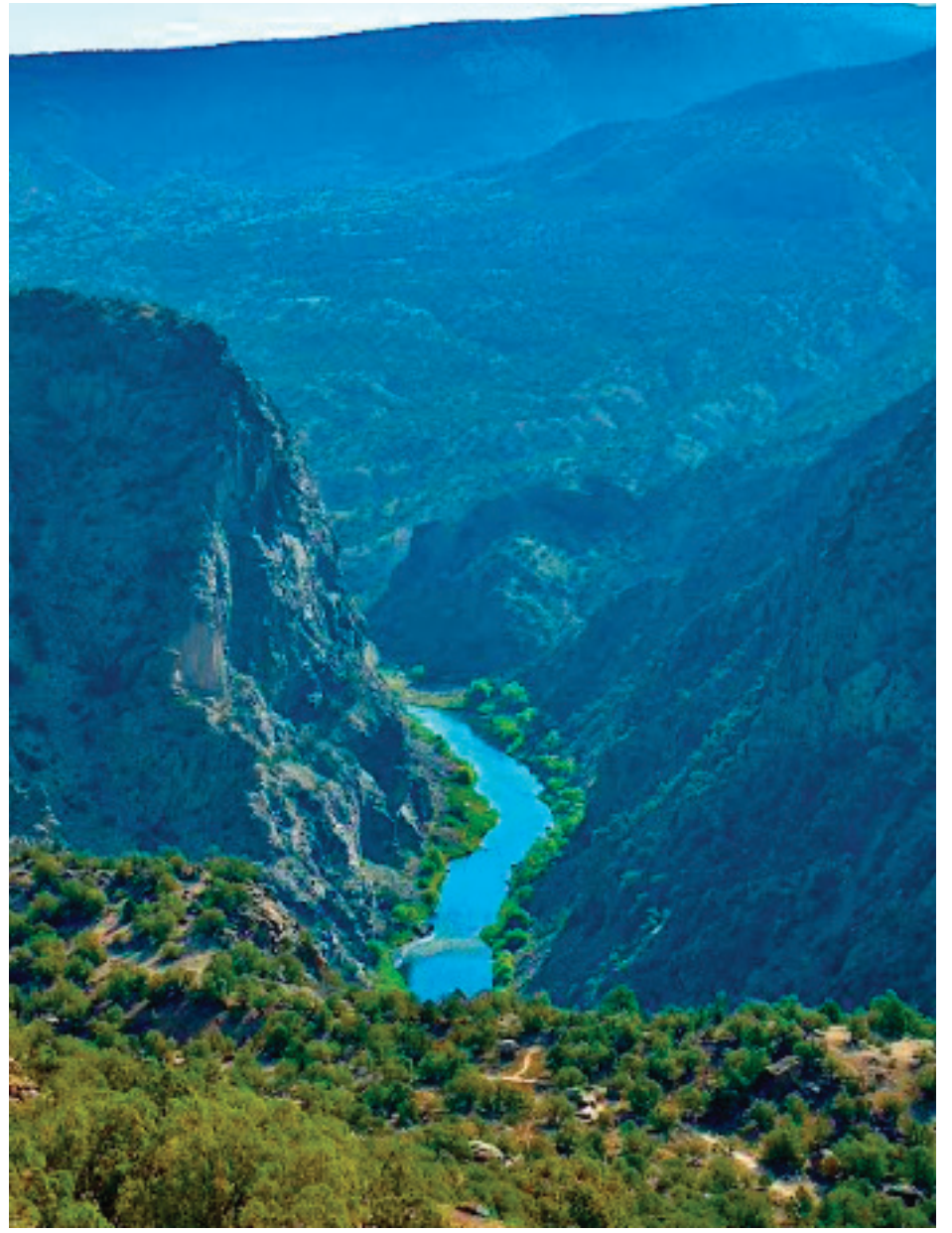
This is also the time to take a look at your physical condition. If you are doing a regular workout, you are a step ahead of the game. In the weeks before your outdoor season begins, consider stepping up the pace a bit. Hikes around the neighborhood, wearing a pack with some weight in it, will get you in shape for the first hike of the year.

If you have not been on a regular exercise routine, it would be better to start slowly. If you push yourself too hard in a workout, your reward will be sore muscles for several days, and you will not be able to work out again until the soreness heals.

It is much better to begin slowly and progress in intensity over a course of months rather than try and cram it all into a week. Start by fast walking 20 minutes a day, every other day. Add 5 minutes a day every week and you will get there before you know it.

Most people who exercise forget about their core. The core is probably the most important region to a hiker or backpacker. All movement originates from the core, which includes the muscles of the hips, upper legs, waist and abdomen.

A strong core promotes good posture, improves breathing (which is all important at altitude) and reduces the risk of ankle sprains and knee problems. Exercises like sit-ups, planks, superman's and floor cobras will help the core and improve your back strength to carry the heavy pack.



If you want to spend time recreating in places like this during the spring and summer, you had best start getting ready now. (Courtesy photo)

Spring is when I usually replace worn out footwear. When the shape of your boots begins to change, especially in leather boots, it is time to replace. Material that has been subjected to moisture, creeks, snow and mud can shrink and take on a "curled up" kind of shape. Once this happens, the structural integrity is gone and again, your risk for injury increases.

Footwear, like tires on your truck, has just a certain number of miles before the structural integrity of the insoles dies. Most quality footwear is only good for 500 miles. Shin splints, knee problems, plantar factitious, and most other lower body problems come from bad footwear.

You can't just by new hiking shoes and head to the trail, they need broken in. The only way to break them in is to wear them. When you are taking those neighborhood walks is the perfect time. Remember, blisters and sore feet are not your friend on a hike, get all that done before taking to the trail.

I'm not sure that exercise and cleaning up equipment is going to help me get through the long winter months in which I am incarcerated in the house, but at least I can get my stuff ready. My wife thinks the best cure for my pre-season fever is to help her do household chores. Since I am in the house, there aren't many hiding places, so at least

I can look busy when I am going through my equipment.

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 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

HAMM

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Climbers must find the right teammates, try a few smaller missions together, and make sure everyone's on the same page.

"Sometimes it works out, sometimes it doesn't," she said. And on a tough expedition, you want the right people next to you.

There's also a logistical piece.

Before attempting anything in a foreign country, Hamm coordinates visas, talks to locals and other climbers, makes an emergency

plan, evaluates resources in the region, customizes a packing list and makes a plan for if the right gear gets lost during transportation.

Then, she attempts a climb at high altitude that no one has ever tried before.

Her training is physical, but also mental, and just acclimatizing is no small feat.

"You have to meditate and work on breathing techniques before you go, and acclimatize really, really well," she said.

The right attitude is essential at elevation, but it's important even on the ground.

Hamm climbed for the love of it, and it was the sponsors that found her. Carefully watching and learning from others as she gained experience contributed to her success as a guide as well as an athlete, and now she's happy to share some expertise with aspiring climbers.

"Learn your technical systems, whether that's anchors or a new belay device or when you're working on movements," she advised.

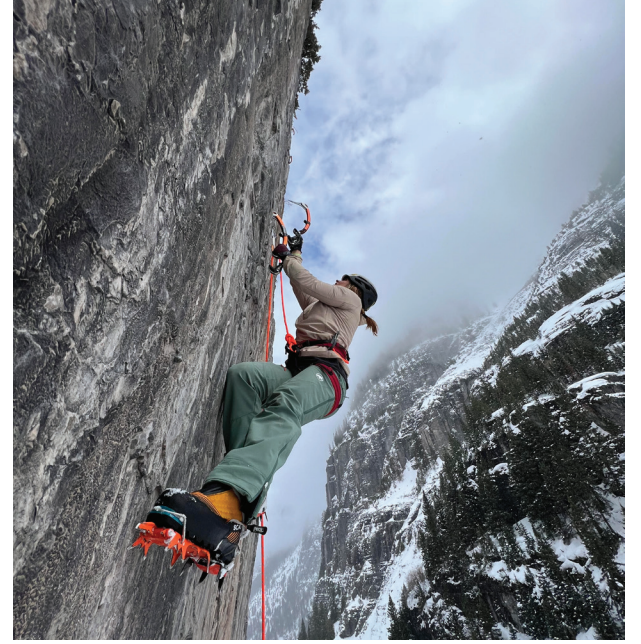
Hiring a guide service, or joining a mentorship program, is another way to keep advancing. Even You-

Tube offers good videos focused on technical skills like building anchors, and Hamm recommended the AMGA's page in particular.

Along the way, she said, "You might mess up, but hopefully you're not messing up too much to where you cause an accident."

More than 10 years into her journey, Hamm is still happy to be out there "putting dreams together, and going out and climbing, not really worrying about what's going to happen."

"I like climbing, I like adventuring, and I like to be a little wild," she said.



Hamm has climbed around the world, but spent years living on the Western Slope including Ouray. (Courtesy photo/Lindsey Hamm)








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