

Rocky Mountain Outdoors

the newsletter of Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers & Photographers, Inc.

March – April 2020

Writer's Corner

Sensory Perception

Text & photo by Virginia Parker Staat

Writing is like painting with words, the paper is the canvas, the pen is the brush, the words are the colors and the verbs, nouns and adjectives are the blending of the hues that add depth to the picture you are creating. ~ Reed Abbitt Moore

On our recent visit to the Kimberly region of Australia, we discovered the baobab. These trees are truly magnificent with their massive, bottle-shape trunks, spreading crowns, and finger-like branches. They only reside in the drier regions of Africa, Madagascar, and northern Australia. Known as *trees of life*, a single baobab can hold 120,000 liters of water in the fibrous pith of its trunk and branches. In times of drought, Bushmen poke holes in its trunk to draw out the water while animals chew on the baobab branches, using them like straws to drink.

We were so entranced by the baobab that David asked his sister Roberta if we could commission her to paint one for us. Roberta is an amazing and accomplished Plein Air painter. She flatly told us no. Although her answer was disappointing, her reasoning made complete sense to me.

Roberta told us she could only paint something she knew. I asked her to explain her process. Whenever she paints, Roberta first needs to spend time with her subject. If it is a tree, she stands under it. She looks at it from a distance and from all sides. She needs to observe the way the air smells, the feel of the bark, and the texture of the soil beneath the tree. She watches the way the tree sways in the wind. She listens to the rustle of its leaves. She looks closely at the plants and landscape surrounding the tree. She wants to hear stories about it and observe how others react to it. Finally, she uses her camera to capture what she has learned so that when she returns to her studio she can recall the entire sensual experience.



Although I didn't recognize it until Roberta's explanation, in many ways, her approach to painting is similar to my approach to writing about a specific place or thing. I need to know it personally. I am tactile and want to touch. I want to use all my senses to absorb my subject matter.

To be successful outdoor writers, I believe we must take the same artistic approach as a painter to understand our subjects before we begin writing. We must immerse ourselves on an experiential level in order to successfully draw word pictures with our pen like an artist uses a brush to create paintings. These vivid word pictures evoke emotion and connection in our readers.

When we immerse ourselves in our subject, we use all of our sensory perceptions. In *Writing about Nature*, John Murray describes this approach to writing: "Above all, look for texture, color, lines, shadowing, and movement in the same way an artist does. Search for those important details that make the scene singular. At the same time, look for images that will make the scene familiar to your readers."

Our nature experiences don't need to be as exotic as standing under a baobab tree. Backyard experiences can be just as sensual. When outdoor writers focus on their subjects in an artistic way, we utilize all of our senses to form word pictures that come alive for our readers. In the process, we can better impart our stories, connect with and challenge our readers, share our experiences, advocate for nature, and, most importantly, engage our readers' imagination to see our subjects with new and focused eyes.

Jack's Jaunts

Bargaining in Nepal ~ 1977

Text & by photos Jack Olson



Before I went to Nepal I'd never bargained for anything in my life. See the price and either pay it or walk away. I mean, easy, isn't it? Then, Nepal changed everything. We'd only been out a day or two on our trek, still in the foothills. We

made camp and were just sitting around when a boy, maybe eight years old, wandered in and displayed this wooden block with Hindu symbols and said 12 rupee. I didn't know how to respond but was still thinking dollars. I said 8. He said 11, I said 8. He looked about to cry. One of our party said, "Jack, you're supposed to go up." We finally settled on 10. Even then my troubles weren't over. I pulled out a 10 rupee note and he shook his head. Paper money had recently been introduced and people in the back country didn't trust it. They wanted coins. Fortunately, I had ten metal rupees.



I worked on learning the basics of the Nepali language. We had lots of time to study in our tents at night because it became very cold very fast. After about twelve days of trekking we reached the major Sherpa village of Namche Bazaar. It was the largest town in the Everest region, with about 1,600 population at an elevation of 11,000 feet. I walked into a shop and my eyes bulged as I sighted the



most magnificent, terrific, wonderful yak bells in history. Each of the three bells had a different, complementary tone. And they were strung together in a yoke with two colors of braided yak hair. Be still my heart. I started right out bargaining in Nepali. He said 135 rupee! 135! I tried 100 and he just shook his head I tried 105 but no luck. I figured I'd be back on the way down, but, of course, he knew that, too.

We trekked on up, did the Everest stuff, and got back to Namche Bazaar on about the 25th day. I walked in to the shop and wondered if the man would recognize me. I poked around and finally touched the beloved yak bells. He smiled, I smiled---and the battle was on. He knew I wouldn't be back through but I knew I wanted those yak bells. We went round and round loudly. He dropped off 135 to 130 and I raised to 115. About then an elderly woman, I figured his mother, came out with cups of tea for us. It was Tibetan tea, tea with salt and rancid yak butter. At first I thought maybe this was a ploy but realized later that it is served only to an honored guest. We settled on 120 rupees.

I'm sure the man made the best deal in Namche Bazaar that day. But, as an honored guest, I made the best deal of my life.

[Author's Note: Asked about the value of a rupee – the currency of Nepal – Jack tells us that it isn't that simple. As best as he can remember the exchange rate in 1977 made a rupee worth about eight cents American. We weren't talking about a lot of money, but it was a different world economically. The trek organizer, who lived year-round in Kathmandu and Nepal, briefed participants on etiquette in the backcountry, such as what was proper for women to wear, understanding the Hindu and Buddhist religions, and money. Jack says he made it clear that when the group stepped into the backcountry, a rupee was worth----a rupee. A certain number of rupees could buy a goat, or a pan, or a certain amount of rice. He said a group of Americans throwing money around could totally upset the economy, so we learned to fit into the culture. It's hard to explain, Jack says, but it was just easier for us then, and for me now, to say, A rupee is a rupee.]

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The Unwelcome Guest

Text & photo by Maryann Gaug

Arriving at Wheeler Peak campground in Great Basin National Park, I found the perfect campsite for Rover, my camper van, for 4 nights. I leveled Rover, got settled, and paid the campground fee. Then I opened the door to the bathroom and there was the snake. ACK!! A SNAKE!! ACK!! A small one, about 2 feet long, yellowish with a black pattern, with oblong head - at least it wasn't a pit viper (venomous). Maybe a small bull snake or large garter snake. It wriggled on the floor trying to crawl up the wall. Heck, I was at 9,880 feet! I had no idea of how it got in the bathroom. I was so shaken that I didn't even take a picture. I decided to find someone to help me (I figured I needed at least 4 hands and 2 heads). By the time I dragged three reluctant guys, each with a beer in hand, to Rover, the snake was gone. I stuffed towels in the one place it might have come in. I wasn't even sure when it came onboard since I had just driven 185 miles through desert country. The little critter wasn't in the bathroom when I left that morning. I made two stops on the way. ??? I figured that even though I didn't know how it wiggled its way into Rover, the snake had found its way outside. I started to breathe again! That was enough excitement for this trip. I had come to hike, rest, and take the tour of Lehman Cave.

I called the Visitor Center to see what type of snakes lived in the park. The ranger said it might be a garter snake, but checking on a very slow internet, that was hard to verify. The other choice was a striped whip snake, but it had no stripes.

Before going to bed, I made sure my headlamp was handy for my usual middle of the night toilet trip. I normally just find my way by the refrigerator indicator lights. I definitely didn't want to step on the SNAKE in the dark!!! Time came to pee and no snake lurked by the toilet. Whew!

The next day I hiked a trail which wound through an ancient bristlecone pine forest. One tree was estimated to be over 3,200 years old. Then I headed up toward the rock glacier below Wheeler Peak. Such a beautiful day. I relaxed and enjoyed being part of the mountain setting.

When I arrived back at Rover, I left my hiking sticks next to the side door. I changed clothes and was checking out the photos I had taken. Suddenly I remembered my hiking sticks and decided to put them away. I walked to the side door and ACK!! The snake was at the base of the window. Perhaps it issued a "let me out" vibe to the universe resulting in my hiking sticks thought. Well, at least

this time I knew what to do. First I took a picture. Not the best one with the light outside, but a picture. I put the camera on the counter. I exited Rover via the passenger door, grabbed one of the hiking sticks, opened the side door, and put the tip under the snake's middle and lifted it. Its skinny tail wanted to hang on to the door lock, but I kept lifting and it let go. I carefully walked down the campsite driveway, the snake wriggling on the tip. I crossed the road, and just before I reached the woods on the other side, the little guy fell off onto the road. I watched it slither into the woods. Big sigh of relief! The snake was now outside, no longer hiding out in Rover.

Of course my brain then decided to go paranoid that the snake would return to Rover. I wished I had picked it up again and walked farther with it. I showed the snake picture to the camp host, who didn't know what it was. Then I started to be concerned about the little snake. If it came from a desert area, surely it would freeze at 9,800 feet.

I texted some friends about the snake's second appearance and the extraction. Unfortunately one suggested it might not be the only one. ACK!! I must admit, realizing that the snake had been in Rover the last 24 hours, including while I was sleeping, was not a comforting thought. I wondered what it ate and decided to check the peaches I had stashed under the bed. I reached under, wondering if I would grab a snake, and a text alert sounded. I jumped! At least the peaches looked normal, no nibbles.

A little later I went to the vault toilet across the road.



Walking back, the snake was sprawled across the side of the road, perpendicular to the woods. At least it faced away from Rover. I grabbed my camera and two hiking sticks, but a car drove by and the little critter disappeared. I looked for it, but nothing. Every time I exited Rover the next few hours, I looked to see if the snake was hanging out. I can't say I slept very well.

My fears were allayed the next day when I showed the picture to a ranger familiar with area snakes. She said it looked like a gopher snake. The species lives in the park and as long as it finds mice or little gophers to eat, it would be just fine. A little more research taught me that the little guy was indeed young, probably hatched fairly recently. Adults grow to 4.5 feet long. One subspecies is the Great Basin gopher snake, also called a bull snake. The photo I found on the internet was a match. The little snake definitely had had an adventure and I had had more excitement than I wanted.

At least it wasn't a rattlesnake!

Survival Tips

Survival Myths and Misconceptions



By Peter Kummerfeldt

Much of the information available to people who want to learn more about survival and surviving is based on material that is outdated. Unfortunately, early outdoor writers created a problem for those of us interested in learning how to survive a wilderness emergency. Many of their techniques and procedures that were once state-of-the-art are no longer

valid, yet they are still commonly published in books and magazine articles.

Times have changed. The needs of a lost or stranded person today are different from the needs of the mountaineers who trapped beaver in the American West and lived off the land while doing so. If you were to open many of the currently available “how-to-survive” books you would find techniques and procedures that date back to those who survived by manufacturing what they needed from the resources on hand. The question is “How appropriate are these techniques and procedures today?” In many cases they are not! New and better techniques have been developed. Technology has advanced and now provides us with more reliable equipment than was available 100 years ago.

As a result of this misinformation, inexperienced people finding themselves in trouble today still believe they can rub sticks together and start a fire. They believe that a waterproof, wind proof shelter can be built from natural materials. They believe they can live off the land until they are rescued. *It must be so – it’s in the book!* Many of the current, popular outdoor writers perpetuate the problem. The rubbish that is published would never be published if the writer first went out and tested the procedures.

Many myths, misconceptions and misunderstandings exist today, and as a result the inexperienced outdoor person, when confronted with an unexpected night out in the bush, experiences unnecessary discomfort, hardship, injury and sometimes death because of their reliance on antiquated, inaccurate information.

The following is a short discussion of some of the more blatant myths and misconceptions commonly found in print today.

Firecraft. Were you to believe the advice given in most survival literature, the ability to produce heat and light in an emergency is an easy one: simply rub sticks together and presto you have fire. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The writers would have you believe that tinder can be ignited using the lens from your eye glasses. Or that you

can remove a lens from your camera or binocular and using the lens focus a beam of sunlight onto the tinder until it ignites. These writers talk of “shaving and shaping a piece of ice into a lens” and then using it to ignite the tinder. None of this makes any sense when there are other much more reliable devices available. For instance, carry a metal match and a container full of Vaseline saturated cotton-balls to start your fires.

Cigarette lighters have been touted as a piece of equipment that should be carried in a survival kit. Cigarette lighters are difficult to light when your hands have lost their dexterity, they do not perform well under cold conditions or at higher altitudes, and if accidentally dropped into a fire they explode, sending shrapnel in all directions.

Matches come in many forms and to the unknowing they may all look alike. Another trap! What do the words “safety,” “strike anywhere,” “stormproof,” and “waterproof” really mean? In each case there are significant survival ramifications. “Safety” means the match can only be ignited using the striker on the side of the box from which the match was removed – they may not work on the striker of another box. The words “strike anywhere” would lead us to believe that the match could be literally “struck anywhere.” Not so. While these matches do not need the matchbox striker to be ignited, finding a suitable substitute is not always possible. “Stormproof” matches are less susceptible to wind and water than other matches but are often hard to light and quickly wear out the matchbox striking pad. “Waterproof” matches are coated with a lacquer-like material which must be worn through before the striking surface of the matchbox comes in contact with flammable material on the match head. Every time a match head is scraped across the striking pad the lacquer is deposited on that striking surface which will eventually (before you run out of matches) become so contaminated that other matches will not light.

Sheltering. Here, once again, confusion exists about the kinds of shelters carried by those who venture into the outdoors to hunt, fish, backpack, etc. and those needed by a survivor. Most survivors first become aware of their need for shelter as it begins to snow or the sun is setting over the western horizon. Many survivors are already dehydrated and possibly hypothermic as they begin their survival experience. Some are injured. Could they build a lean-to or debris hut that is windproof and waterproof in that condition? I doubt it. Building a shelter from natural materials is possible if time allows, if there are plenty of natural materials available, if the survivor has practiced building an emergency shelter previously, if cutting tools (knife or saw) are available, and if the survivor is uninjured. But lacking time, skill, natural resources, tools, and the use of both hands, building a windproof, waterproof shelter from natural materials becomes impossible.

It is wiser to carry waterproof material with you. Carry a

See Myths on pg. 5

Myths from p. 4

large orange or blue plastic bag or an 8'x10' tarp that you can crawl into or under to protect yourself rather than trying to build one of the many survival shelters shown in the books. Bags or blankets made from Mylar plastic (space blankets) are the most commonly carried survival shelter material, and the most useless in an emergency. They tend to tear very easily when nicked or punctured.

Signaling. In addition to staying alive, a survivor's greatest need is to be rescued as quickly as possible, and to do that they must be able to indicate to others that they are in trouble and need help. Once again, the books, manuals, and magazine articles are full of nonsense. Three fires placed in a triangle, wetting a slab of wood to form a reflective surface, and other labor-intensive, less-than-effective procedures are commonly featured in survival literature. With the equipment available today inexpensive, effective devices can be purchased with which to signal. Carry a good glass signal mirror and a loud whistle. Carry a personal rescue beacon.

Surviving an emergency. This is difficult but not impossible if you are prepared. That preparation must be based on good information, selecting your clothing and equipment carefully, and practicing your survival skills. Select your "experts" carefully. Read widely and compare the recommendations that are given. What worked for one may or may not work for you. Select procedures and techniques that work under a wide variety of conditions – procedures and techniques that you can count on and then practice the techniques. Just because you are told something works, don't accept that advice until you have tested it in the field. Remember, "It may be more important for you to know what does NOT work than what does!"

Suggested Reading:

- *The Psychology of Wilderness Survival* – G.F. Ferri
- *Outdoor Safety and Survival* – Paul H. Risk
- *Northern Bushcraft* – Mors Kochanski
- *Survival – a manual that could save your life* – Chris & Gretchen Janowsky
- *98.6 Degrees – the art of keeping your ass alive.* – Cody Lundin
- *The Survivor Personality* – Al Seibert
- *Life at the Extremes* – Frances Ashcroft
- *Last Breath* – Peter Stark
- *Survival Psychology* – John Leach
- *Deep Survival* – who lives, who dies and why – Laurence Gonzales
- *Surviving Extremes* – Kenneth Kamler
- *Surviving a Wilderness Emergency* – Peter Kummerfeldt

Conference Plans Almost There

October 5-8, 2020

Several pesky little points remain to be resolved, but details – and a registration form – for this year's RMOWP conference are coming soon.

E-mails will be sent to you, and information will be available at www.rmowp.org, within the next few weeks (we hope).

Conference dates are **October 5-8, 2020**, with headquarters in beautiful downtown Alamogordo, New Mexico.

Costs are expected to be similar to recent conferences.

See you there!

Free App for Firearms Enthusiasts

Gunsmithing expert Fred Zeglin, longtime RMOWP member from Montana, has announced the release of the free GaugeGuide app. He tells RMOWP, "This is the very first, and at this time the only app available to help folks know which headspace gauges will work for any given cartridge. There are many gauges that interchange or cross-over from one cartridge to another to safely measure or establish headspace in a gun."

Correct headspace is important for function, accuracy, and safety in firearms, he says, adding that headspace gauges are used to insure that the chamber is cut to the correct length and that when a round is chambered it will function as designed by the maker. Zeglin recommends having the headspace checked any time you buy a used gun.

Zeglin operates 4D Reamer Rentals LTD, which rents gauges and reamers to gunsmiths throughout the U.S., and he has published two books that deal specifically with firearms' headspace, in addition to several other books and DVDs on various aspects of firearms. Zeglin has been building custom hunting rifles for more than 30 years and has taught firearms classes for the National Rifle Association and other organizations.

The free app can be downloaded at: <https://gaugeguide.en.aptoide.com> or from the blog section of 4D's website, www.4drentals.com. You can buy Zeglin's books and DVD's in the online shopping section of the website or through amazon.com.

Contest Deadline Announced

Entries for the RMOWP annual contest must be submitted or postmarked by **July 8, 2020**.

There are no changes to the contest rules from last year. Both rules and entry forms are available for download at www.rmowp.org and results will be announced at the annual conference in Alamogordo, NM.

See you there.

Rutting & Rooting

by Kenita Gibbins

Rutting Season in Rocky Mountain National Park

The elk stands tall and weighs up to 1000 pounds, becoming a fascinating species within the deer family.

My two friends, Linda Bundren and Diane McKinley, and I found the antlers particularly interesting when we spied a male elk trying to get the velvet off his rack. We relished seeing a bull close. The tips of the antlers shone in the fading light of the day.

The rutting season lasts from early September to mid-October. I believe once the territory becomes his then he can go about attracting the females and get his passion for mating done with the help of urine smells he rolls in.



The females seemingly aren't attracted to the males in the least. The scene we watched showed him and us her backside. Her two yearlings poked their heads out of the tall grass. We learned from a viewer that we must not get near the mature female. Mr. huge elk rested on the ground, but noticed everything and would/could unquestionably rise to reach us. He thinks we want to steal her. After all, he stole her in the first place.

Lady Elk can get pregnant every year while she is still tending to her baby or babies from the last mating season. Her fertile time lasts only about two days. The males must establish their territory and harem before mating time peaks. The cows, once in with other cows, can get downright aggressive with the hooves used to battle. We hoped to see male encounters, but the bulls we saw wandered around by their restless selves. Bugling had begun. The message of the grunts, shrieks, and other shrill sounds of communication with the cow elk show the sparring starts.

Rooting for Dragonflies - The Wolves of the Air

After our week in Estes Park with the group, Diane and I had time to go to the Denver Botanic Gardens to continue shooting with our cameras. We headed for the beguiling Monet pond. A volunteer asked me if I enjoyed the water lilies. "Well, yes, but not right now. I'm busy watching the mating games of the dragonflies." She said, "Oh, I didn't know about that!"

Shooting insects proves to be a lot more challenging than filming elk. The species at the pond shows off a sparkly fluorescent blue color. They have big eyes in comparison to the rest of their bodies, stretching to about a skinny 1 1/2 inches long. Their wings hardly show up at all. I read that even though their flying wings are transpar-

ent, they give each insect the power to soar. These predatory insects don't stay in place very long. They can eat their weight in mosquitos. So we click our cameras as quickly as possible and then try to find another mating pair. Seeing two dragonflies doing their mating thing fascinated us. He grabs the back of her head, and she curves her body. She can then capture his sperm.

The sperm thrive in the water where new lives of nymphs form and look nothing like the adults. They grow by breaking through their own skin. Each nymph molts about 12 times in one to three years underwater. At the final molting, the nymph crawls out of the water and looks like his parents. He now has eight more weeks of life to repeat the cycle.

Fee-Free Days at National Parks

Want to visit a national Park, monument, or other National Park Service property this year and don't have a pass? Choose the right day and admission is free. The park service started the year with free admission on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

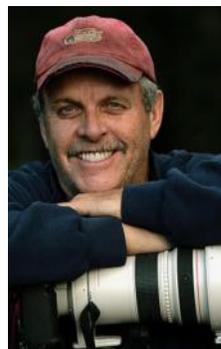
Fee-free days in the remaining months of 2020 are:

- Saturday, April 18, the first day of National Park Week and National Junior Ranger Day
- Tuesday, August 25, National Park Service Birthday
- Saturday, September 26, National Public Lands Day
- Wednesday, November 11, Veterans Day

There are 419 National Park Service properties nationwide, with at least one site in each state, and entrance fees ranging from free to \$35 for the more popular parks.

Member Ken Papaleo Dies

Award-winning photojournalist Ken Papaleo of Evergreen, Colorado, died last month of cancer at the age of 73. A member of RMOWP since 2009, Papaleo was a photo-



(Photo courtesy Papaleo family.)

grapher for the Rocky Mountain News in Denver for 28 years, helping the newspaper win two Pulitzer prizes for photojournalism. After the newspaper ceased publication 11 years ago, Papaleo started a photography blog and concentrated on shooting landscapes, often hand-painting color on black-and-white images. He won numerous awards in the RMOWP annual photography contest, and gave a presentation at the 2015 RMOWP conference in Ouray, Colorado, "The Evolution of a Professional Photographer," showing us his work from his early days through his more recent hand-tinted landscapes. Survivors include Papaleo's wife, Pam, and three children, Jordan, Kelley, and Jamie.

President's Column

A Comparison of Crafts

Pres. Virginia Parker Staat

Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers and Photographers. How did these two separate crafts ever come together? A quick check with long-time members Don and Barb Laine and Jack Olson led me to discover that when RMOWP began in 1973, most members were writing and using their own photos to accompany their stories. They considered themselves outdoor communicators rather than purveyors of a specific craft.

Over the years, photography and writing diverged. Digital photography revolutionized the industry. Outdoor writing also changed direction with a rise in eco-defense writers, including Edward Abbey, Terry Tempest Williams, Barry Lopez, and Peter Matthiessen.



Virginia and Roxanne

Fast forward to today, and we find ourselves once again blending these two artistic mediums with photo essays, narrative photography, photojournalism, and more. This re-convergence brings us full circle. But can we really compare photography to writing?

Brandon Trean believes the answer is yes. He says, "A writer is just a photographer of thoughts."

In actuality, the two crafts are more similar than expected. As an example, whether we look through the lens of a camera or at a sheet of paper, each craft has boundaries that the artist must acknowledge.

Each photograph or story must have a purpose. As photographers or writers, we focus on what we want our audience to see.

Each art form has basic techniques that must be learned,

Dues reminder
RMOWP treasurer Maryann Gaug warns that March 31 is the deadline for membership renewal. First notices went out in January, follow-ups in February, a phone call is next.
Non-renewing members will be dropped April 1.

whether it is camera operational knowledge or grammar and punctuation. We each have rules that must be followed and we must be comfortable enough with the process to know when those rules can be broken.

Each craft employs storytelling. And both must edit.

Australian photographer and writer Megan Kennedy takes the comparison of crafts even deeper, saying, "Both writing and photography rely on narrative and visual language to operate. Light and space are illuminating factors in both mediums too."

The artist in each field has a personal voice. As an example, after my years with RMOWP, I can often pick out the photographer behind the Members Choice photos. Some of our photographers have specific subject matter while others saturate their photos in rich colors. A writer's voice is the same. We each use a certain language style and rhythm when writing our stories.

For me, Brendan Van Son says it best, "I have found that I love photography for the exact same reason I love writing: it is an outlet of my vision of the world."

When I look at the future of RMOWP, I am excited. Together we can explore our respective crafts and find strength in each. When combining the two crafts of photography and writing, we can do something exceptional.

If your vision of the world is best shown through the artistic expression of photography and/or writing, I invite you to join us at our RMOWP Alamogordo conference from October 5 through 8. See you there.

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