

Rocky Mountain Outdoors

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

May - June 2021

Let's Have a Conference!

There's good news across the country and in New Mexico, as we begin to get the Coronavirus pandemic under control and get closer to the normal life we had in the good old days. Although there are still more questions than answers about the rest of 2021, it's looking good that RMOWP will gather for a conference **September 26-29 in Alamogordo, New Mexico**, home of White Sands National Park. See pages 2-3 for photos of the Alamogordo area.

New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham announced that the state is "conquering Covid" and should be able to fully reopen by July 1. She said she expects 60 percent of the state's adults to be fully vaccinated against Covid-19 by then, which would allow the loosening of restrictions, including the size of gatherings, although she added that she expected some regulations such as indoor mask requirements (for those able to wear them) to remain in effect for a while.

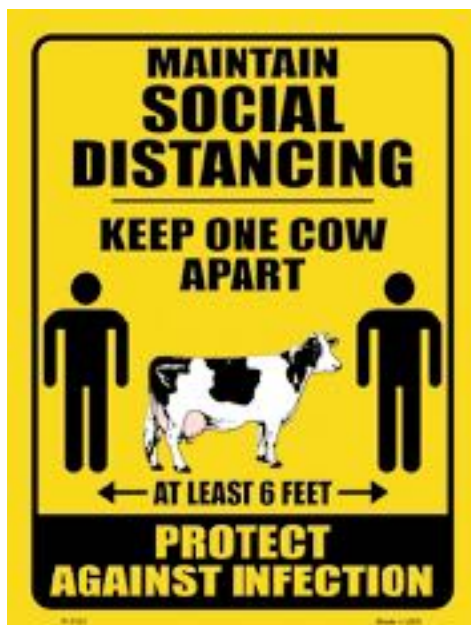
In keeping with your thoughts from our recent survey, and depending on what restrictions there may be at the time, we'll be looking at a conference with more outdoor activities and staying at least somewhat socially distanced, but at least we'll be able to see each other face-to-face, maybe even without masks!

Alamogordo (Spanish for fat cottonwood tree) is a small city in south-central New Mexico, about 90 miles north of El Paso and 210 miles south of Albuquerque. It will be our headquarters for treks to some of the most scenic and fascinating destinations in southern New Mexico.

We'll photograph the glistening white gypsum sands of **White Sands National Park**, explore **Three Rivers Petroglyph Site** with more than 21,000 ancient petroglyphs, discover the true Wild West at **Oliver Lee Memorial State Park**, and drop in to the **New Mexico Museum of Space History** for a glimpse of the beginnings of America's space program.

Headquarters will be the Holiday Inn Express, with nightly rates of just under \$140, which includes breakfast. We expect to email registration forms and more details in June, but in the meantime mark your calendars for September 26-29, that's Wednesday through Sunday, in Alamogordo, New Mexico.

Jumping for Joy at the Prospect of a Rocky Mountain Outdoor Writers & Photographers Conference in 2021.



Sign posted on the (closed) Visitor Center at Oliver Lee Memorial State Park near Alamogordo in late March this year.



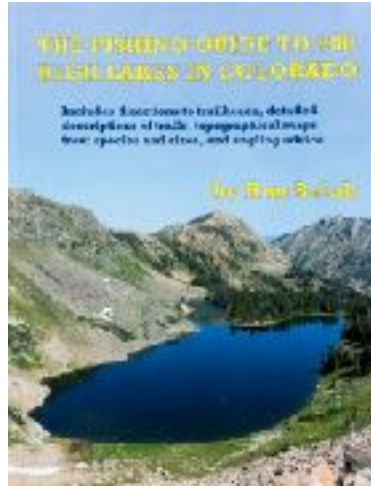
*"Leaping Baboon" © Dan Bernskoetter
3rd Place Altered/Composite Category, RMOWP 2020 Contest*

New Colorado Fly Fishing Guide

Ron Belak, longtime RMOWP member from Kittredge, Colorado, tells us that he recently published his second book, *The Fishing Guide to 800 High Lakes in Colorado*. He describes it as "the most comprehensive and up-to-date fishing guide for Colorado's high-mountain lakes, covering all of the major mountain ranges in Colorado."

Ron says the guide is comprised of a series of articles originally published in *Colorado Outdoors* magazine, the official publication of Colorado Parks and Wildlife. The articles were updated in 2020 and 2021, with current stocking data, gill-net surveys, and information from additional fishing trips. Over 800 lakes are featured in the book, he says, and he has personally fished about 600 of them.

The 190 pages of this 8.5 by 11-inch paperback, which sells for \$38, contain detailed descriptions of trails and/or roads leading to the lakes, species present, sizes of trout, and anticipated fishing conditions. There are more than 300 color photographs plus 60 topographical maps that show the proximity of lakes to each other and the surrounding terrain. While many of the lakes are accessible only to hikers, backpackers or equestrians, almost 200 lakes and small reservoirs can be accessed by ATVs, 4WD vehicles, or even passenger cars.



This book is available from the printer through the link [The Fishing Guide to 800 High Lakes in Colorado by Ron Belak | BookShop \(bookbaby.com\)](#) or through Ron's website, www.ronbelak.com, where you can also get information on Ron's first book, *Fly Fishing Colorado's Backcountry*. Those who want an autographed copy can contact Ron directly at ronbelak@msn.com.

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Photos from Around Alamogordo

New Mexico Museum of Space History

Photos by Barb Laine



Nike surface-to-air missile



Lunar Module



"German Air Force Tornado 45+11" which served at Holoman Air Force Base from 22 July 1999 to 10 June 2009.

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White Sands National Park



*Soap tree yucca along a dune ridge at sunset.
© 2009 William Horton*



*Wind and melting snow create fascinating striations in the gypsum. If you look carefully, you can just see snow-capped Sierra Blanca on the horizon.
© 2010 William Horton*

Three Rivers Petroglyph Site



© William Horton

Oliver Lee Memorial State Park



Photos by Barb Laine

Zoe inspects a prehistoric "mortar hole" — a result of grinding seeds and grains into flour over many years.



Francois-Jean "Frenchy" Rochas homesteaded here in the late 1800's, building rock walls to keep his sheep from wandering off. Remnants can be seen throughout the park — some go straight up the steep hillsides.



March Full Moon 2021

Writer's Corner

Wisdom from a Master



By Virginia Parker Staat

"Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive."

~ Barry Lopez

Acclaimed nature writer Barry Lopez passed away on Christmas Day, 2020. I recently read a tribute to Lopez in the journal *ISLE*:

Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature

and Environment. I learned several interesting things about the man. For example, Lopez was an accomplished photographer before he became a writer. Perhaps his beginning in photography enabled him to paint those lovely landscapes into words. Lopez was a master at writing landscapes. His lyrical descriptions earned him a National Book Award and other exemplary honors.

Lopez was also a great teacher and enjoyed sharing his craft with others. By studying the works and lessons from great writers, we can improve our own. With this in mind, I began researching writing lessons Lopez had offered. Here are a few snippets of wisdom from this master.

Lopez was an avid traveler, visiting over 70 different countries during his lifetime. In an interview with the *Seattle Times*, Lopez said that writing about all he has seen and heard on his treks would be meaningless without a larger purpose. He offered this advice to outdoor writers: "The writer is the servant, not the important person. Your job is to find language that elevates human experience to such a level your reader will feel, when she moves away from your pages, more confident, with a deeper sense of her own self-worth."

Lopez once asked an indigenous Australian man about the difference between fiction and nonfiction stories. The man told Lopez, "You know for us the difference is not between fiction and nonfiction. It's between an authentic and inauthentic story. An authentic story is about us. An inauthentic story is about you."

Lopez took the man's statement to heart. He later said, "So if you're going to tell a story, and you want it to be an authentic story, it seems to me it's got to do two things: First of all, it's got to help, the story has to help. And the second thing is, it's got to be about us."

The listener or the reader does not want to be in the position of being lectured to or being treated as somebody who's not capable of knowing, or treated like an outsider, and that's a very valuable lesson for me as a writer... I want everything that I write to end with this note: Here's what I saw, what do you think? Instead of saying 'here's what I saw, and here's what you should believe.'"

From his blog, Lopez offered this advice to nature writers: "Be discriminating and be discerning about the work you set for yourself. That done, be the untutored traveler, the eager reader, the enthusiastic listener. Put what you learn together

carefully, and then write thoughtfully, with respect both for the reader and your sources."

At a Sun Valley Writer's Conference interview Lopez discussed how he approached his writing subjects. He said, "You know, when you write about the world, you try to learn something about its components. When I was young, I really wanted to learn about wolves. They were so metaphorically rich. They translated their lives, translated a narrative, into so many corners of human experience that if I devoted myself to that subject, I'd learn something. And if I was lucky, I'd be able to write about it in such a way that a person could say, 'I learned something from this book that I needed for my own life.'"

What made Barry Lopez's writing so full of wisdom? In *The Land's Wild Music*, Mark Tredinnick wrote, "His words are full of weather, hydrology, the flight of birds, the eloquent tracks of animals, the work and words of men and women, the anguish of wolves, the grief of streams, the sound of shifting basalt river stones, somewhere—and they seem to be both sound and also elusive, as places are, as the land, is. From these elegantly limned relationships in the land he allows ideas to rise like fish to the surface of his mind, and he allows an intuited poetic order of place to tincture and illuminate the spaces made by the tender forms of his sentences, just like dawn on the land."

For me, Barry Lopez was much like a translator. He would become part of a parcel of landscape and learn its language, its history, its flora and fauna, its stories. Then, with respect and purpose, Lopez would translate what he learned and weave it like a tapestry into rhythmic and lyrical words. His voice will be truly missed.



"Child Weaver" © Ron Belak
1st Place, Cultural category, 2020 RMOWP Contest

Colorado's Surprising Eastern Plains



Text and photos by Jack Olson

Colorado has the highest average elevation of any state in the country, even including Alaska. Colorado is all mountains. Right? Wrong! About a third of the state is prairie; some regions are near 3,000 feet elevation.

One of the most surprising and unique areas of Colorado is Paint Mines Interpretive Park, named for the colorful



bands of clay that were used by early American Indians to make paint. Fifty-five million years ago this area was a region of tropical forests. Now, animals including coyotes, hawks, rabbits, and falcons call it home.

As much as 9,000 years ago indigenous people lived in this area and used red, yellow, and white clay, created from oxidized iron compounds, for pigments, pottery, and bricks. There are about four miles of trails throughout the hoodoos, spires, and ravines, plus a parking area, restroom, and interpretive signs.

Hikers are instructed to stay on the trails and not climb on the geological formations. Pets, horses, and bicycles are prohibited. The park is open daily dawn to dusk,



with free admission. To get there take U.S. 24 east from Colorado Springs about 30 miles to Calhan, turn south onto Yoder Road/Calhan Highway, then east onto Paint Mines Road and watch for the designated parking area. More information is available in the parks section of the El Paso County website (www.elpasoco.com), phone 719-520-7529.

When I've visited Paint Mines in the past, my friends and I were the only people to be seen. I like to explore



and had heard about this colorful area. Now, Paint Mines has been somewhat publicized, but I don't think you will find the 750 acres crowded.



Additionally, in the town of Calhan, you will find St. Mary's Holy Dormition Orthodox Church. An active church community, this is the only such denomination in Colorado. Just north of the active church is the previous church structure and cemetery. Look for the distinctive crosses atop the churches – traditional Russian Orthodox crosses, with three horizontal crossbeams, the lowest one slanted.



St. Mary's Holy Dorition Orthodox Church on the plains east of Colorado Springs, in Calhan. The active, present-day church, above, boasts two cupolas displaying the traditional Russian cross - three cross pieces, the lowest at an angle. To the right is the original church, where the cemetery is located.



Spring in the Colorado Mountains

Text & photos by Maryann Gaug ©2021

Early April and I am already seeing changes along my favorite hiking trail near my house. No, the wildflowers are not yet blooming. At 9,000 feet elevation they're still snuggled under at least a foot of snow, gathering nutrients to burst forth in another month or two. In this country May showers bring June flowers. April embodies a battle between Winter and Spring.

Spring equinox recently passed, and most cultures celebrate this time of fertility, new life, and rebirth. At least in the Northern Hemisphere. Our southern friends celebrate harvest instead and the approaching slumber of life, bringing in crops for the winter ahead. I ramble, but think about the differences across the equator. Differences that northern societies either ignored or didn't know about when they made up many rules and names for familiar occasions in their part of the world, many of which dominate our present lives.

Back to April. The sun traverses the sky overhead, both higher and farther north than in the cold, dark days around winter solstice. The longer days bring an hour or more extra warmth to my part of the planet. I can see the earth stretching, trying to wake up. The brilliant sun slowly warms the snow, changing the frozen substance into its liquid form, which in turn sinks into the soil. The nearby creek washes away its

winter cloak, gaining volume. In no time at all, it is happily singing, free once again.

After a few warm days, as the snow slowly softens and sinks, Old

Man Winter decides it's not time for Spring to take over. Another cold front, another snowstorm passes through. Often only a few inches of snow blanket the land again. A thin new sheet of ice may stifle the creek's enthusiasm, slowing its emergence and growth. Icicles and ice crystals form on rocks and downed trees, creating a mini-winter wonderland along the flowing water. Sometimes a foot or more of heavy wet white stuff dumps from the sky, smothering Spring's exuberance.



Spring frees the creek from its winter-bound isolation and the water again jumps and gurgles and sings as it wends its way along the trail.

The warmer, higher sun wrinkles the snow's skin into patterns. I understand why the native peoples of the Arctic North have so many names for snow. I've found my own words to describe the snow texture:

wrinkled, fried, bubble wrap, crusty, crunchy, hollow, mushy, frozen, slushy, and snow cone to name a few.

Wrinkled snow almost matches the wrinkles on my face, created over a life of hiking in the summer sun. Fried represents uneven mini-lumps on the snow surface, as in fried chicken or little penitentes.

Bubble wrap looks just like small bubbles in the packing plastic.

Crusty snow results

from freeze-thaw cycles, the frozen layer covering the softer snow that the sun hasn't yet melted. In the trail, that snow crunches under my boots, destroying the quiet of earlier softer snow winter hikes. Mushy, slushy, and snow cone are different degrees of water content in the changing snowpack.

Hiking trails can be a challenging mess as Spring and Winter fight it out. I carefully watch where I step, making sure to stay on the most compacted part. As the snow melts, the bottom layer becomes rotten, probably due to water running beneath. Easy to break through the hollow snow and sink to my knees, it's possible to hyperextend that most important of joints. Along a side slope or next to vegetation, the sun reflects off the nearby surfaces, melting the snow closest to them. Walking along an angled snow trail can be challenging, and I slide, even with coils on my boots. In the sunniest spots, mud soon appears, creating a different type of slippery, gooey mess.

Green leaves surface along the trail. Kinnikinnik appear, probably staying green during their sleep time. Sharp-looking dark spear tips show up on aspen tree branches, soon to become a soft leaf bud, ready to burst on the scene. The green shoots of skunk cabbage peek above the ground as if to see if it's safe to come out. The next storm buries them, but little-by-little they continue to grow.

Occasionally on a sunny day, a little spider wanders across the trail. I'm always amazed that the little creatures can walk on the cold snow. A mourning cloak butterfly appears, the yellow edges of its wings catching my eye. Isn't it a little early for butterflies? Looking around the woods, I spy the first robin.



"Fried" snow results in a lopsided and bumpy trail — hiker beware.

Cont. on next page

Down in the valley, the osprey return from southern climes to their nests, sprucing up their homes of twigs and adding fluff for their soon-to-be-laid eggs and newly hatched chicks. Little calves appear in the ranch meadow, sticking close to Mom and nursing often. Geese arrive to join those that overwintered. The eagles lay an egg or two around the first of March. This year, I've only seen one eagle. Perhaps their failure to produce a chick last year sent them to a new nest. My garden slowly awakens from its winter slumber as the green tips of tulips and daffodils poke through the soil and sometimes snow.

This tug-of-war between Spring and Winter continues for at least two months in my world. We have names for this season: fool's spring, second winter, spring of deception, third winter, egg laying, the arrival of newborns.

Perhaps it's really the sun that's winning. Traveling higher, farther north, and lingering longer, its warmth pushes Winter's last gasp away, slowly but deliberately forging ahead. The sun continues to work its magic and the weather patterns change, sometimes taking until early June. Spring finally wins the battle of the seasons, as Winter retreats into hibernation.



Ice crystals form on rocks even in the fastest-moving water. This rock's delicate ice cap displays Mother Nature's artistic hand.



*"Lady Liberty" © Diane McKinley
1st Place, Historical category, 2020 RMOWP Contest*

National Park Service Issues New App



Planning to visit one or more of the 423 properties managed by the National Park Service? There's an app for that.

The National Park Service has announced that it now has a free mobile app ([go.nps.gov/app](https://www.nps.gov/app)) to provide up-to-date information about all its properties. It contains all sorts of information to help you plan your trip to a National Park, including interactive and downloadable maps, self-guided tours, and current alerts and closures.

The app is available for download in the [iOS App Store](https://www.apple.com/app-store) and [Google Play Store](https://www.google.com/playstore).

RMOWP Calendar

MAY IS ELECTION MONTH AT RMOWP

Ballots were emailed May 6 and many of you have already voted. **Thank you!** Reminder ballots will go out later this month to any who haven't yet responded. Thanks to everyone who has served in the past and those still on the board, and those of you who will be asked to serve in the future! The changing of the guard will take place on June first.

CONTEST DEADLINE: JUNE 28

RMOWP's Annual Writing and Photography Contest deadline is fast approaching. Both the guidelines and entry form are available at [rmowp.org](https://www.rmowp.org).

CONFERENCE: SEPTEMBER 26-29

Hope to see you in Alamogordo, New Mexico this year. See the article on page 1.

A Splendid Way of Working

Photos & text by Virginia Parker Staat

Springtime in Texas is a wonderful sight. Enormous clusters of wildflowers bloom along roadsides, in pastures, and in our yards. Like most Texans, David and I enjoy taking an annual pilgrimage to view this amazing array of colors.

This year we drove to Brenham, Texas, an area known for its bluebonnet fields. We discovered a large pasture completely covered in a quilt of sapphire blue and white. As we were taking photos, I noticed that David checked his camera's display after almost every shot. I often glance through my photos at the end of a shoot to check for composition, but I rarely look closely at my photos. I prefer to wait until I can see the entire image on the computer screen. Of course, I also take about a dozen photos to David's one.

Isn't that the way it is? We each have our own way of working. David is into the process. I'm definitely an end result person.

As we explore and grow in our respective crafts, we find what works best for us as individuals. Then we use our way of working to express ourselves in our writing and/or photography. For me, that's part of the joy of belonging to RMOWP. Sharing ideas gives me an opportunity to discover new techniques and better ways of working.

Whatever way you may approach your writing and/or photography, I'm certain you'll find creative camaraderie and new perspectives with RMOWP, too. Please join us!



Pasture of bluebonnets.

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