

The Highpoint

August 2006

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Go

MAGIC MOMENTS

by Warren Levingston

Sometimes one gets lucky when hiking in the high country by having a direct and unforgettable experience with nature. Such experiences are often described as serendipitous moments, based on the Persian tale of the Three Princes of Serendip who were always making discoveries, by accident, of things which they were not in quest of. I have had two of these moments recently.

A friend and I, decided in mid-June to hike 5 or 6 miles on the Continental Divide trail, beginning at Stony Pass. The weather forecast for the day suggested there would be little moisture, mostly sun, and light winds. We arrived around 9:30AM, put on our hiking boots and warm jackets and headed west. We began our walk through a small protected basin, but when we ascended the first knobby hillside, we were met with 30-40 mile-an-hour winds. Neither of us had brought hats or gloves and after 30 minutes, we found it too cold to continue. On the way back, we detoured near some crags to explore a volcanic talus pile that might offer some eroded quartz crystals. Approaching the bottom of the pile, we worked our way around some larger boulders. Hidden partially behind one was a newly-born elk calf. It lay there with its brown eyes open, looking at us, but remained totally still. We



marveled at the sight of the beautiful animal child lying in this most inhospitable environment. Its presence was a special gift.

For two years I had been trying to find the lower entry to the Shenandoah-Dives trail near Silverton. It was noted on two maps, but visually it could not be seen from the road and my first attempt to hike it led to a different trail that ended up at a head-wall. As I read the narrative for this year's Hard Rock 100 race, I noticed that the last leg of the run was on this particular trail. Assuming that 100+ runners would beat-down a recognizable entrance to the trail, I traveled to Cunningham Gulch on the day following the end of the race...and there it was. The trail winds its way up the west side of King Solomon Mountain and goes over the top of Dives Basin into Little Giant Basin. After about 1 1/2 hours and about 2,000 foot gain, I reached a large cirque at the head of Dives basin and sat down for a moment's rest and refueling. I happened to glance up at a nearby-slope and saw a female mountain goat and its kid grazing. It noticed me and began coming down toward me at a leisurely pace. I assumed it would soon trot off. However, it kept coming toward



me, stopping to nibble at the ground, until it was about 20 feet away. I thought to myself, "Oh, oh! It's going to attack me as a way of protecting its kid." So I stood up. But it apparently she was only curious, for she made a slow circle around me, periodically grazing. And then it went downslope into some mine tailings and was gone. What a magic moment! I felt really blessed with this close-up experience of a "wild" creature.

Corn Plastic to the Rescue? Excerpts from the Smithsonian, August 2006

By Elizabeth Royte

Natural food purveyors, Newman's Own Organics and Wild Oats, have been quietly using containers made from PLA, or polylactic acid for a few years. PLA is made primarily from corn, a renewable source, and is bio-degradable. Recently, Wal-Mart announced it would sell some produce in PLA containers in a move to counter criticisms that it has been environmentally irresponsible. But is biodegradable packaging made from corn really the answer?

At Nature Works, the largest lactic-acid plant in the world, corn kernels are delivered and milled, dextrose is extracted from starch and huge fermenters convert the dextrose into lactic acid. Lactic acid is a simple organic chemical that is the by-product of fermentation (or respiration). It is converted to lactide and formed into white pellets, an industrial resin known as polylactic acid (PLA), which in turn is made into conventional plastic containers. Containers made from PLA are made from a renewable resource, whereas conventional plastic packaging uses an estimated 200,000 barrels of oil a day in the US. Also, PLA is in principle compostable, meaning it will break down under certain conditions into harmless natural compounds. This could take pressure off landfills, since plastics already take up 25% of dumps. And producing PLA uses 65 % less energy, produces 68% fewer greenhouse gases, and contains no toxins.

But PLA has considerable drawbacks that haven't been publicized, while some claims for its environmental virtues are downright misleading. PLA decomposes into carbon dioxide and water only in a controlled composting environment. This is not your back

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Seniors Outdoors! is an outing and social club providing organized year-round outdoor activities and related educational opportunities

To Join Seniors Outdoors!
Contact Susan Beck-Brown 375-0948
or e-mail: rdb835@frontier.net

Membership forms are available on the website: <http://www.seniorsoutdoors.org/>, at the monthly meetings, and on outings.

Board Briefs

Treasurer's Report: August '06
Income-----\$4,652.50
Expenses-----\$165.05
Balance-----\$6,249.54

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Tom Rebbin 247-0551

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Treasurer: Dick Reitz 375-1870

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Sharron Chambers 259-9271

Board Meetings are OPEN to all members

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Horse Riders: Dell Manners, 382-9967

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Walt Axthelm, 247-8520

Single Seniors: Carol Milliet, 259-0496

Welcome New Members

Charles and Cheryl Berglund
Judy Hahn
Maryjane Knight
Janie Schmidt
Tanya Scott

Our total membership is now 335
since the renewals of July 2006
Lets keep growing!!!!

!!!! Reminder !!!!

If you want to be listed in the SO! roster, stay on the mailing list and receive your outing schedule, you must get your renewal in by July 31st to: Ann Rendon 884-2729.

I don't exercise at all. If God had wanted me to touch my toes he would have put them up higher on my body.

Hospitality Note

"We would like to be able to thank all those that sign up to help with snacks and cleanup. In order to do that we need you to write your name clearly when signing up to help - thanks".

The EXtra Mile

Many Senior Outdoors! Members go the distance in contributing the time and the expertise that is so vital in moving our group forward - SALUTE

August Trip Leaders: Carol Milliet, Tricia Bayless, Norm Stern, Dan Honig, John Martin, John Viner, Norm Broad, Jim O'Brien, Harry Hance, Rosemary Ennis, Bill Cagle, Sharron Chambers, Beverly Dittmer, Jim Beatty, Susan Beck-Brown, John Montle, Carolline & Graham Murray

August Hosts: Sysea Mapes, Christine Racklin, Lucy Wornson, Georgeann Reitz

Augut Clean-up: Charlotte Detus, Jan Collins, Carol Hansen

(Corn Plastics, continued from page 1)



yard bin but a large facility where compost (plant scraps being digested by microbes into fertilizer) reaches 140° for 10 consecutive days. There are 113 such facilities nationwide but only one quarter of them accept residential foodscraps collected by municipalities. Large amounts of PLA can interfere with composting, making it wetter and more acidic, and because the microbes consuming it demand a lot more oxygen, which is difficult to provide. However, Norcal, a large-scale composter, says it hopes to convert to anaerobic digesters, which break down organic material in the absence of oxygen and capture the resulting methane for fuel.

Wild Oats accepts used PLA containers in half of its 80 stores. In those that don't, customers are on their own and PLA containers are unchanged after 6 month in a home composting operation. Wal-Mart is not about to take back used PLA, saying it is not in the garbage collecting business. Recycling facilities have problems with PLA, worrying that consumers will dump PLA with other plastics, which mix as well as oil and water, and are considered a contaminant. There is no evidence that PLA will break down in standard landfills any faster than conventional plastics.

Environmentalists have other concerns, questioning the morality of turning foodstuff into packaging when so many people in the world are hungry and the steep environmental toll because cultivating corn uses more nitrogen fertilizer, more herbicides and more insecticides than any other US crop. And the fundamental question about plastic containers remains: Are they really necessary?

However, a leader in the international Zero Waste movements says it's visionary to even think about biologically based plastic. And yes, there are problems with PLA, but let's not kill the good in pursuit of the perfect. PLA does save oil and generates far less air pollution. And we have to start somewhere.

Choosing Binoculars for Nature Observation

By Daniel Farmer

Introduction:



This paper aims to help you pick a pair of binoculars for your specific nature interests by reviewing the relevant binocular features. I assume you are not knowledgeable about binoculars and optics. I also assume these are binoculars for hand holding rather than on a tripod or some other mount. Some points are tests you do yourself by looking through the binoculars and some points are specifications you get from the dealer or manufacturer. If you can't find them, you probably don't want those binoculars.

Objective Size

This is a fancy name for the size of the front lenses in millimeters (25.4 millimeters equals 1 inch.). It is always listed as the second of the two numbers describing the binoculars. Thus, a 7 X 50 pair has a front lens 50 millimeters (almost 2 inches) across; and a 6 X 25 pair has a front lens about an inch across. The bigger the lenses, the heavier the binoculars and the more expensive. Binocular lenses run from about 20 to 50 millimeters. A bigger lens lets you see in dimmer light. For both weight and cost reasons, you want the smallest front lenses that will meet your needs. My experience is that daylight nature viewing can be done with a 25 (and maybe as small as 20) millimeter objectives and even low light nature binoculars are no more than 42 millimeters. Between those two numbers, you will need to do your own experimentation. (For example, I have a pair of 7 X 50 boating binoculars and they are too heavy for nature watching.)

Magnification

This is sometimes called "power". It is the first number in binocular specifications. It tells how many times larger something will look than with your eye. Thus 6 X 30 binoculars make something look 6 times bigger (or closer) than with your eye. Typically, magnifications in hand held binoculars ranges from 6 to 10. I think 6 to 8 is the practical range. You want the LOWEST magnification that will do the job, because higher magnification makes the field of view smaller, enlarges the jiggle from your hands, and makes the image dimmer for a

given front lens size. You will need to do some of your own experimenting to figure out what you need, but close and fast suggests a low magnification and far and slow suggests a higher one.

Weight

Very important. You can't test for this in the store because holding them for hours is different than hefting them in the store. Bigger front lenses mean more weight. Here are some weights of a very high quality brand of binoculars to give you a starting point: 8x20: 6.5oz; 8x30: 17.5oz; 8x40: 29oz. Goes up fast doesn't it? That's why I said pick the smallest lenses you can live with. (Incidentally, the price on these sizes went from \$289 to \$769).

Eye Relief

Is how far back from the eyepiece can your eye be without cutting off some of the field of view. It typically ranges from 10 to 25 millimeters, and is important if you want to look with glasses on. More eye relief usually is correlated with higher price.

Close Focus

Is how close will the binoculars focus. This is very important if you will watch nature close to you like butterflies or other insects. Many general purpose binoculars don't focus closer than 15- 20 feet. Good nature binoculars can focus as close as 10 feet. Closer focus is usually correlated with higher price.

Sharpness

This is the basic optical quality. It is clarity, definition, hard focus. You will know when you see it. Test the binoculars on fine patterns that are small and far away. Letters in a distant sign are good. Feather tips are good, etc. As you look at the edge of the field there will be some loss of sharpness with any binocular. How much is too much is up to your eyes and your wallet.

Color Correction

Colors are true AND there are no faint color halos or around bright objects. A look through test. Or read a review.

Flatness of Field

Look at straight lines like fences or window frames and then move them to the edge of the field. They will bend slightly. Again, how much is too much is up to your eye and your wallet.

Internal Reflections

Look at something that is right next to a bright point source of light, with the bright point first inside and then outside the field. NOT THE SUN!!!! Sunlight off a curved chrome bumper is good. There should be no streaks or bands of light. I recently bought a cheap pair of binoculars that I thought were a steal based on my in the store test. The first time I took them to the field they flunked this test miserably.

Roof Prisms v. Porro Prisms

Porro prism binoculars have tubes that take a little jog. Roof prism binoculars have straight tubes. Roof prisms supposedly have superior optical characteristics, but are more expensive. If you get good results using the tests I discussed above, I would ignore the difference, which often seems to be a marketing point.

Comparing with the Best

Assuming you are not going to buy the most expensive binoculars, looking through a pair in the store can provide a useful standard for comparison. Try looking through roof prism bird watching binoculars by Zeiss, Leica, Nikon or Swarovski to get the idea.

Reviews:

Type in "binocular ratings reviews" and do an internet search. The sources I am reasonably sure are objective are the Audubon Society and the Cornell Bird Lab. The birding magazines are probably objective, although they do take ads from manufacturers.



La Plata Electric Company will begin constructing a new power transmission line on Tuesday, July 18, on Bureau of Land Management and private lands in the Grandview area east of Durango. Recreationists using the Sale Barn, Big Canyon, and Cowboy trails may encounter construction equipment for the next two months. Although no trails will be closed, those using the trails may experience temporary short-term delays. Signs will be posted at affected trailheads. Construction work will take place Mondays through Fridays, from 6 a.m to 6 p.m. The project is expected to last at least until mid September.

**So! General Meeting and Pot Luck
September 12**

6:30 Social 7:00 Pot Luck
Rec Center

Celebrate Fall's arrival & pick up the new Fall Outings Schedule.
Bring a dish for 8 with serving utensil and your own table service

A-F Main Dish G-M Dessert
N-R Main Dish S-Z Salad

And please remember to bring a non-perishable item for the Manna Soup Kitchen

Want to save SO! some money?

Get the newsletter on the Web

www.seniorsoutdoors.org

Contact Anne Rendon at 884-2729

to have your name removed from the mailing list.



For Sale

NEW (never used) Prostor bike lift for one bike (PBH-1R—see on www.racorinc.com)—ceiling mount—holds up to 50 lbs.—\$39.99 retail—asking \$25 Dianne Rebbin (247-0551)

DISCOUNTS

SO! members receive a 10% discount on regularly priced merchandise at Gardenswartz, Backcountry, Brown's Shoe Fit for hiking products, and Brown's Sport Shoe on hiking and athletic products.. At Pine Needle you will be able to purchase their \$15 discount card for \$5. Cut out this article and present it to the clerk checking you out.

For more information contact John Montle 259-9469.

CORSAR

Colorado Outdoor Search and Rescue cards

for sale by your co-presidents
every month at SO! meetings

Changes

When changing email address, phone number, or mailing address please alert our membership chair Anne Rendon at TRTRendon@mydurango.net or 884-2729 as soon as possible to ensure that you continue to receive your newsletter, outings schedule, emails, etc.

Membership Renewal Form

The membership renewal form is available electronically.



Seniors Outdoors!
Membership Chair
265 Pine Valley Road
Bayfield, CO 81122