



BEST SUMMIT HIKES IN COLORADO

55 CLASSIC ROUTES and 100+ SUMMITS

JAMES DZIEZYNSKI

WILDERNESS PRESS





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3RD EDITION

JAMES DZIEZYNSKI



WILDERNESS PRESS ... *on the trail since 1967*

Best Summit Hikes in Colorado: 55 Classic Routes and 100+ Summits

1st edition 2007

2nd edition 2012

3rd edition 2023

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Interior photos and front cover photo by James Dziezynski; author photo by Sheila Dziezynski

Project editor: Kate Johnson

Maps: James Dziezynski and Scott McGrew

Cover design: Scott McGrew

Book design: Jonathan Norberg; execution by Annie Long

Proofreader: Emily Beaumont

Indexer: Rich Carlson

Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Dziezynski, James, author.

Title: Best summit hikes in Colorado : 55 classic routes and 100+ summits / James Dziezynski.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022055322 (pbk.) | LCCN 2022055323 (ebook) | ISBN 9781643590707 (pbk.) |

ISBN 9781643590714 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Hiking—Colorado—Guidebooks. | Mountaineering—Colorado—Guidebooks. |

Trails—Colorado—Guidebooks. | Colorado—Guidebooks.

Classification: LCC GV199.42.C6 D95 2023 (pbk.) | LCC GV199.42.C6 (ebook) |

DDC 796.5109788—dc23/eng/20230112

LC record available at lcn.loc.gov/2022055322

LC ebook record available at lcn.loc.gov/2022055323

Published by  **WILDERNESS PRESS**

An imprint of AdventureKEEN

2204 First Ave. S., Ste. 102

Birmingham, AL 35233

800-678-7006; fax 877-374-9016

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Printed in China

Distributed by Publishers Group West

Front cover: The summit of Rio Grande Pyramid (see Hike 52, page 267)

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DEDICATION

In honor of our beloved rescue English Shepherd, Mystic, who ran like the wind on hundreds of Colorado mountains. His life was a long 17 years. He passed peacefully on a bluebird September day, looking out onto the mountains where we made memories that will last a lifetime. We will miss his courage, his playful spirit, and his irreplaceable companionship.

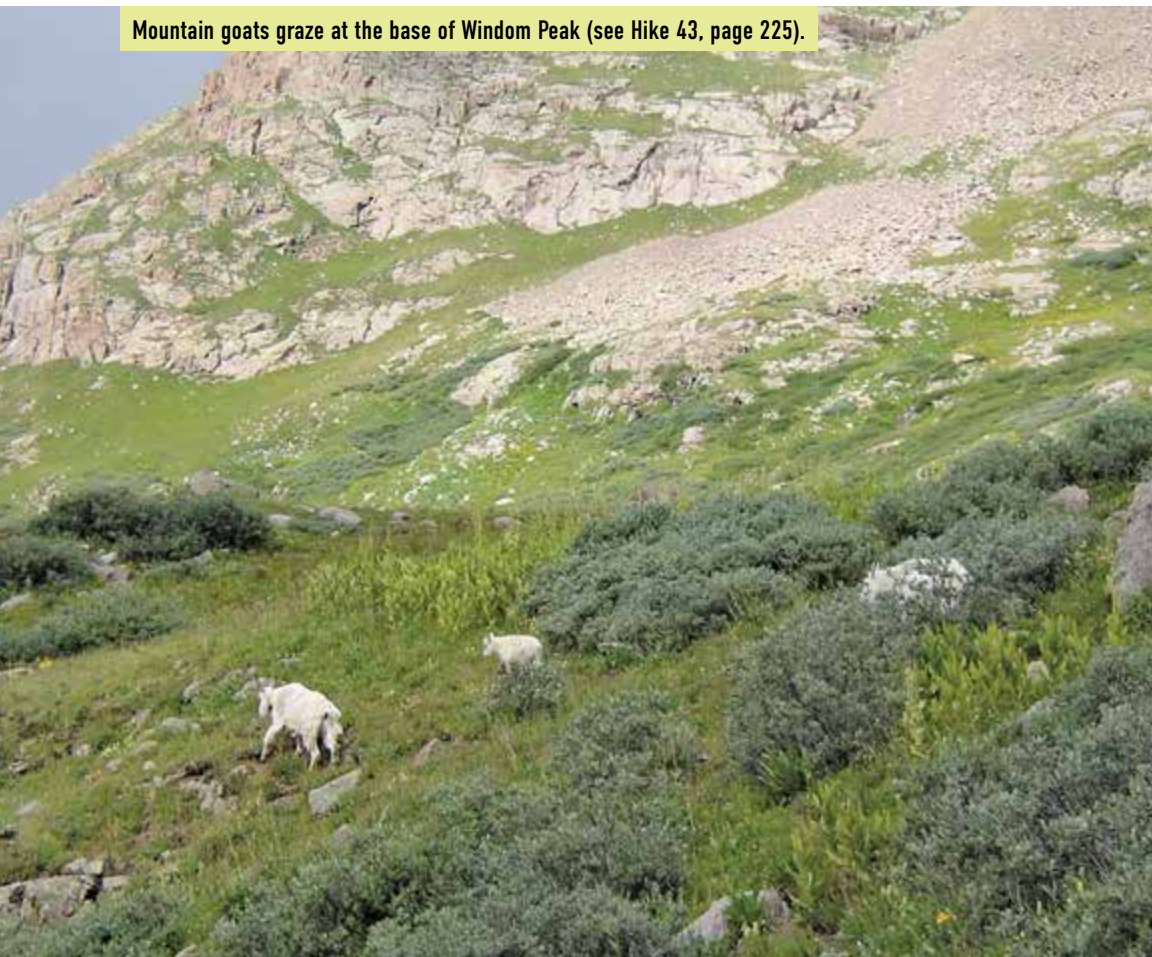
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My heartfelt thanks to my wife, Sheila, for her support and encouragement through the years, starting with the first edition of *Best Summit Hikes in Colorado* in 2007 all the way to this third edition. This book wouldn't have been possible without the support of my best mountain hiking buddies: our rescue pups, Mystic and Fremont.

Big thanks to my friends Meredith Knauf, David Tanguay, Paul Lenhart, Jenny Salentine, Anna Papuga, and Richard Harvey, who are patient enough to put up with the scouting out, climbing, and photographing of the mountains in this guide. Their enthusiasm and alpine toughness make my job much easier.

Additional thanks to Jon Bradford, Wendy Cranford, Candice Blodgett, Zander Baron, and Janet Seston.

Mountain goats graze at the base of Windom Peak (see Hike 43, page 225).



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- 1 James Peak 13,294'
- 2 Navajo Peak 13,409'
- 3 Jasper Peak 12,923'
- 4 Green Mountain 8,144' | Bear Peak 8,461' | South Boulder Peak 8,549'
- 5 Lead Mountain 12,537'
- 6 Clark Peak 12,951'
- 7 Mount Richthofen 12,940'
- 8 Longs Peak 14,255'
- 9 Mount Alice 13,310'
- 10 Mount Ida 12,880' | Chief Cheley Peak 12,804'
- 11 Mount Chapin 12,454' | Mount Chiquita 13,069' | Ypsilon Mountain 13,514'
- 12 Mount Sniktau 13,234' | Grizzly Peak 13,427'
- 13 The Citadel 13,213'
- 14 Peak 1 12,805' | Tenmile Peak 12,933'
- 15 Pacific Peak 13,950'
- 16 Mount Powell 13,534'
- 17 Deming Mountain 12,902'
- 18 Stanley Mountain 12,521' | Vasquez Peak 12,947' | Spirit of 707 12,707' | Peak 12,900'
- 19 Mount Elbert 14,433'
- 20 Mount Sherman 14,036' | Gemini Peak 13,951' | Dyer Mountain 13,855'
- 21 Mount Hope 13,933'
- 22 Huron Peak 14,003'
- 23 Mount Ouray 13,971'
- 24 Carbonate Mountain 13,663' | Tabeguache Peak 14,155'
- 25 Mount Yale 14,196'
- 26 Fools Peak 12,947'
- 27 Mount Thomas 11,977'
- 28 Mount of the Holy Cross 14,005'
- 29 Bison Peak 12,431'
- 30 Mount Zirkel 12,180'
- 31 Hahns Peak 10,839'
- 32 Geissler Mountain 13,301'
- 33 Summit Peak 13,300'
- 34 Hesperus Mountain 13,232'
- 35 Mount Sopris 12,953'
- 36 Treasury Mountain 13,462'
- 37 Bellevue Mountain 13,233'
- 38 East Beckwith Mountain 12,432' | Far East Peak 12,374'

- 39 West Spanish Peak 13,626'
- 40 Blanca Peak 14,345' | Ellingwood Point 14,042'
- 41 Mount Adams 13,931'
- 42 Eureka Mountain 13,507' | Hermit Peak 13,350' | Yahoo Mountain 13,005'
- 43 Windom Peak 14,082' | Sunlight Peak 14,059' | Mount Eolus 14,083'
- 44 Cross Mountain 12,703' | Base of Lizard Head 12,935'
- 45 Storm King Peak 13,752'
- 46 Uncompahgre Peak 14,314'
- 47 Redcloud Peak 14,034' | Sunshine Peak 14,001'
- 48 Golden Horn 13,769'
- 49 Mount Sneffels 14,150'
- 50 Lone Cone 12,613'

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- 51 Cooper Peak 12,296'
- 52 Rio Grande Pyramid 13,821'
- 53 Sawtooth Mountain 12,391'
- 54 Mount Flora 13,132'
- 55 Tabor Peak 13,282'

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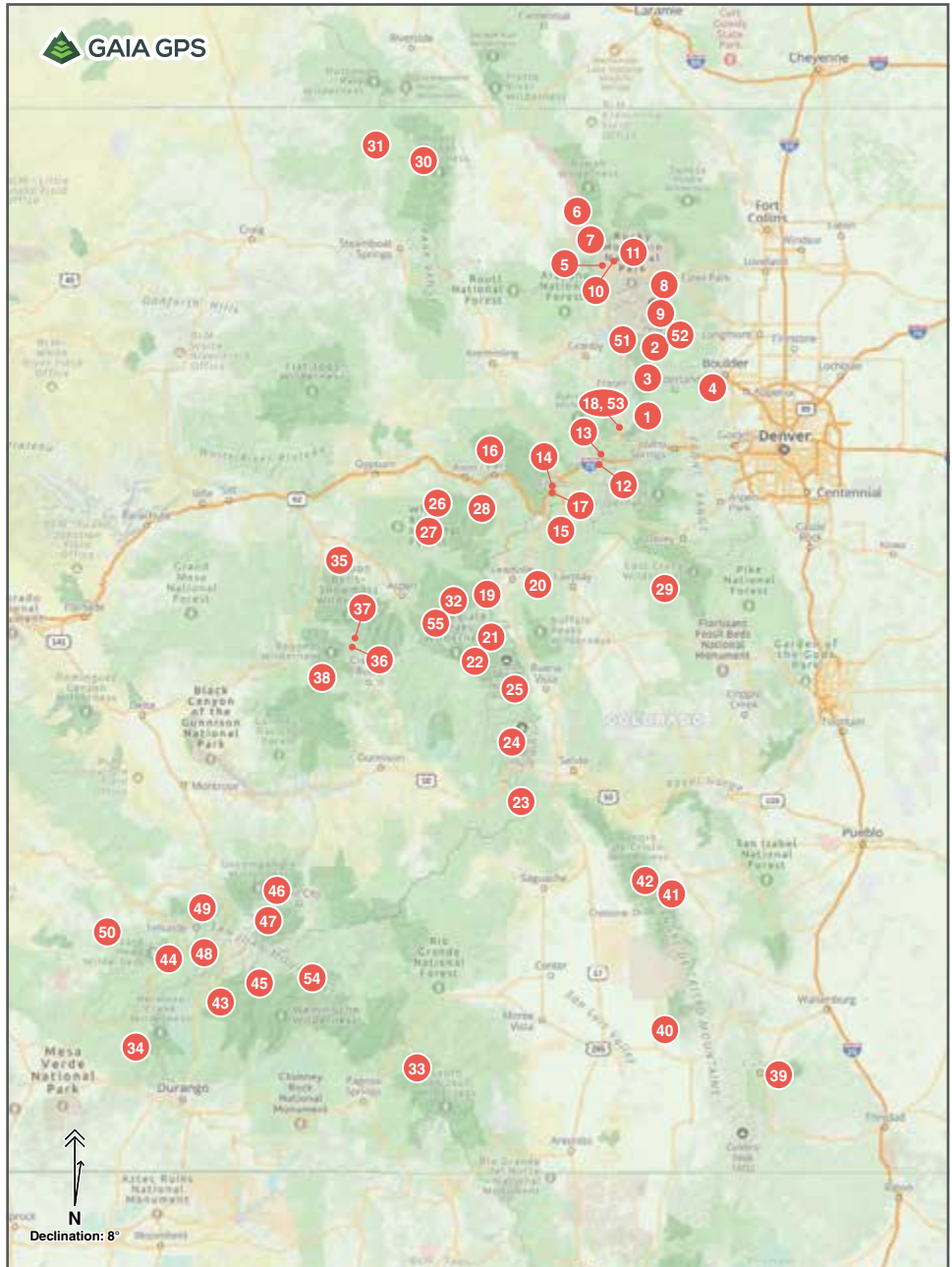
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Best Summit Hikes Colorado



PREFACE

It's been 15 years since the first edition of *Best Summit Hikes in Colorado*. I had to go all-in to bring that guide to life, and it remains one of the most exciting, demanding, and fulfilling projects of my career. The fact that there is still enthusiasm and energy for the book—enough to warrant a third edition—is a testament to how wonderful this collection of mountains is. I am humbled to know this book still has a pulse.

This edition replaces two-color maps with full-color. I've also trimmed down the information in the front of the book to make space for an additional five hikes.

The five bonus hikes are the most exciting update. The three hikes within a 90-minute drive of the Denver–Boulder metro area nearly made the cut in earlier editions but, in order to balance the overall coverage of the guide, were left out. The other two—Tabor Peak near Aspen and Rio Grande Pyramid near Lake City—are fun, challenging summit hikes, each with a unique vibe.

I've revisited every summit in this guidebook at least once since 2012, when the second edition came out. Some mountains, such as Bison Peak and Peak 1, have gotten much more well known over the years. Others, such as Fools Peak and Summit Peak, are even more wild. The fourteeners are more popular than ever but are nonetheless some of the best hikes in the state.

Finally, I would be remiss not to mention the passing of one of my premier hiking partners, my dog Mystic. He passed peacefully at 17 years old, having climbed around 300 mountains in Colorado—and a couple dozen out of state too! He was part of that first edition as a young pup and part of this third edition as a seasoned veteran. Losing a soul dog is never easy, but I take comfort in the memories and adventures we had along the way. Many of the very best days of my life have been spent on mountains in the company of dogs. If you're doing any of the class 1 or class 2 hikes in this guide, you'll be walking in his paw prints, so raise your water bottle and give a toast to one of the great ones. And as my friend Johnny Copp famously said, "Make your own legends." I hope this guide continues to help you create memories with friends (and dogs), all amid the inspiring grandeur of the Rocky Mountains.

THE COLORADO ROCKY MOUNTAINS

OVERVIEW

Wind, water, fire, ice, and earth are the artists responsible for shaping Colorado's mountains. These elemental influences have made the landscape regions distinct both in character and contour. While all major mountains in Colorado are considered part of the broad North American Rocky Mountain Range (which runs from New Mexico to British Columbia), subranges have undergone varying degrees of elemental influence. The resulting geological deviations give each mountain region its unique flavor.

For example, the glacially carved Sawatch Range is known for its gentle slopes and great elevations, greeting hikers like a kindly old grandfather. Crumbling marine shale gives mountains in the Maroon Bells–Snowmass Wilderness the essence of a great manor house in disrepair; this wilderness is a place where seemingly solid rocks embedded in the earth can pop out like loose teeth. Pods of pristine peaks can be found in the sporadic outcrops and dramatic profiles of the Sangre de Cristo Range of the Rocky Mountains, while incredible sculptures of imposing granite define the remote Grenadier Range, daring you to enter their impressive kingdom.

There are many more subranges in Colorado, not to mention sub-subranges, such as the Spanish Peaks in the Sangre de Cristo Range. Ranges are defined primarily by geology, though categorization can be dictated by other factors too. One example is the well-known group of high mountains in the Sawatch Range known as the Collegiate Peaks, which bear the names of prestigious Eastern US universities—a far cry from the mellifluous names that had been bestowed upon them by Indigenous people. They differ little from surrounding Sawatch mountains, though it is interesting to note that they were initially grouped (before being named by white explorers) according to mining boundaries.

However they appear on the map, as you spend more time in the mountains, you will begin to unveil the “personalities” of individual peaks. Until one actually sets foot on the slopes, the raw facts serve merely to foster curiosity. Experiencing them with your own senses reveals the spirit of each peak. Each journey to the high country transforms that two-dimensional mark on the map into a vivid memory. And whether the mention of a mountain brings to mind warm memories or recollections of chilling close calls, every step will be an adventure of the sort that hikers yearn to live.

GEOLOGY AND BIOLOGY: A VERY BRIEF HISTORY

The definitive characteristic of the Rocky Mountains can be found right under your boots. Eons of change have put the “rock” into the Rocky Mountains. How these mountains were built is an intriguing tale. Fossils abound in compressed chronicles of stone, each representative of a past ecosystem. Dynamic transformations over the years have yielded a wealth of information and, conversely, have contributed to new scientific mysteries.

To summarize all the geological mayhem, Colorado's rock has been shaped by three primary forces: plate tectonics, volcanic eruptions, and glacial polishing. Starting at the bottom of the pile are the Precambrian foundations of igneous and metamorphic rock,

formed some 600 million years ago when most of Earth was a volatile, volcanic work in progress. Very little is known about this period. To put it in perspective, scientists believe the most advanced form of life at the time was a multicelled piece of slimy bacteria. (Similar life-forms can be found today in the back of my refrigerator.)

Then, 300 million years ago, the land began to rise up as continental plates collided. This created enormous sand dunes and other soft formations that served as a holding place for the mountains to come. Much of the trademark flagstone adorning the buildings at the University of Colorado Boulder was formed in this era. Around 250 million years ago, the gnawing power of erosion had whittled down this sandstone, making space for great lakes of silty water and nearly uninhabitable swamps. Rising temperatures made life demanding for primitive creatures. If that wasn't bad enough, an event known as the Great Extinction, in which life was eradicated on a global scale, made survival for our prehistoric friends an incredible act of endurance. This period of unexplained catastrophe ushered out the old, slimy age and introduced a new explosion of diverse life across the globe.

Between 250 and 100 million years ago, Colorado's climate transformed flat, muddy swamps into great tropical forests. Incredibly dense and lush, these forests were ideal homesteads for a variety of dinosaurs. The really big boys called Colorado home, including the biologically enigmatic sauropods, such as *diplodocus* and *brontosaurus*. These huge creatures had shockingly tiny brains, an anomaly offset by the fact that all they had to do was eat and grow bigger. Giant ferns grew in the verdant swamps, unchecked by dry weather or pollution. It was a great time for all. But, like all good things, it had to end.

Persistent erosion and changing temperatures began to have a profound effect on the landscape between 100 and 65 million years ago. Swampy basins lost their thickets of vegetation, resulting in marshy lakes that continued to expand onto flat tracts of land. All the hard work that plate tectonics had done to build up the land was nearly for naught. By the end of this era, most of Colorado was hundreds of feet underwater. This inland salty sea was host to incredible creatures, from gargantuan coastal dinosaurs to enormous flying reptiles. Shells of ammonites and other critters from this period can be found today in several regions, notably the Elk and Gore Ranges.

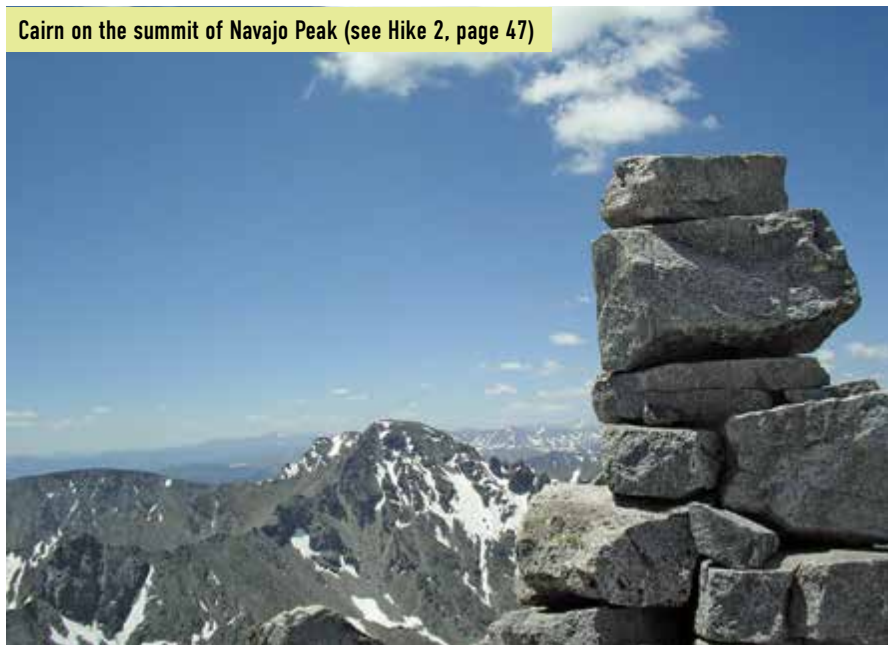
From about 60 to 38 million years ago, the mountains began to rebound. An uplift of plates elevated mountains to modest heights: 3,000–4,000 feet higher than the seas below. Water rose with the land, pooling in isolated lakes or disappearing completely. Fearsome predators such as the jaw-some *Tyrannosaurus rex* roamed the land. As a whole, the animals and plants of this era show a gradual downsizing trend. The great giants found food sources vanishing, or they became snacks for smaller, more aggressive species. The times, they were a-changin', setting the stage for the huge alterations in the land. Scientists widely agree that an asteroid struck Earth during this period. (The theory is based on high levels of iridium found in rock and plant samples, thought to be a direct result of a huge meteor slamming into Earth in the Yucatán Peninsula near the modern-day city of Cancún in Mexico.) This collision affected life-forms of all sizes and triggered volcanic flows throughout the region. The impact was felt on a global level, yet it was only the first act in a show that would take place over the next few million years. The greatest changes were just around the corner.

Colorado's defining era was about to begin. Roughly 37 million years ago, massive continental plates were thrust into motion. This movement slid the North American Plate westward over the steadfast Pacific Plate, unleashing torrents of volcanic lava and ash. Incredible pressure pushed the land higher and higher, transforming those unassuming 3,000-foot hills into crowns atop enormous peaks. For millions of years, the land was altered as heavy rains washed away volcanic ash. Geologists are a bit puzzled that the mountains formed in the region that is present-day Colorado. Normally, tectonic-based ranges rise a mere 20–600 miles from the oceanic coast. These mountains rose up about 1,000 miles inland, possibly indicating a distinctive geologic event that has never been repeated.

Dinosaurs too big (or perhaps too dull in the skull) for the new land to support disappeared. Smaller, smarter, and faster was the order of the day. The last titans gave way to more-adaptable creatures. Mammoths, camels, bison, lions, and other warm-blooded animals flourished, replacing the reptiles that had ruled this domain for millions of years. This golden era introduced the reign of the giant mammals, a tenure that was to be very short-lived. Of all the creatures in this ancient mammalian menagerie, only a select few would survive into the modern day.

About 1 million years ago, things began to calm down, and the Colorado we know today began to take shape. Rock that had lain for millions of years undersea was now sky-high. The Colorado Plateau rose up from huge faults and rifts. Plate motions made mountains out of molehills; in the east, the Sangre de Cristo Range and its subrange the Wet Mountains are direct results of this powerful subduction. Volcanic eruptions added to the

Cairn on the summit of Navajo Peak (see Hike 2, page 47)



artistry. For example, the striking, crumbling precipice of Lizard Head Peak, just outside of Telluride, is the durable throat of a long-extinct volcano.

A mere 16,000 years ago, an ice age passed over the land. This was the last hurrah for the monster mammals, including the tusked mammoth. Only the hearty bison survived the advancing and receding glaciers, just to be hunted to near-extinction by white men in the 1800s. Glacial rivers smoothed and polished the land, carving deep cirques in the sides of mountains. In modern times, these glaciers are making their last stand as Colorado's mountains prepare for the next great geological event.

Poets would have us believe that mountains are static and permanent features, everlasting monuments that contrast with humankind's brief stint on Earth. The less romantic truth is that mountains are constantly changing. Discrete modifications in height occur every few years, though it takes precision instruments to sense most changes. Events such as the explosive eruption of Washington's Mount St. Helens in 1980 are business as usual for mountain ranges but have a long-lasting impact on humans when they occur in our lifetime. Mountains are no less subject than we are to the forces of nature, though they offer resilience that projects permanence.



A sunny winter day
warms up a foxy friend.

WILDLIFE

High-elevation critters are a hearty bunch. Despite the harsh conditions experienced at altitude, animals of many sizes flourish, all the way up to 14,000 feet. Survival depends on clever adaptations to the environment. These creatures employ a great bag of tricks to endure year after year. Hibernation, torpor, seasonal fur camouflage, ingenious den designs, and unique physiological adaptations are among the strategies that are proven winners in the alpine kingdom.

Hikers and backpackers entering the backcountry need to respect local wildlife. Once on their turf, we need to play by their rules. They experience the world through a different set of sense organs, oftentimes superior to our own eyes, ears, and noses. And since neither man nor animal is looking for trouble, reducing the chance of a bad encounter is essential for both.

By now you should know never to feed the wildlife, no matter how cute or hungry they look. Feeding animals can make them reliant on hikers as a food source. At high-traffic areas such as Rocky Mountain National Park, the pudgy jaybirds and ground squirrels begging at popular trailheads prove that many people disregard this rule. Wildlife must remain wild. An animal that retains the skills that have kept its kind alive for hundreds of years must not lose that proficiency by developing a craving for Cheetos.

Do not approach wild animals, and never do anything that would frighten them. Animal behavior is unpredictable, and it is always best to give even “friendly” animals their space. Slow-moving and less aggressive animals should not be stressed out by visitors trying to approach or handle them. Take photographs from a safe distance.

To put it simply, be respectful. Life is hard enough in the high country; the last thing the animals that live there need is meddling humans to goof things up.

ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS

What to Do If You Encounter a Mountain Lion

Mountain lion encounters are rare, since the big cat is an elusive animal. In places where human development infringes on habitat and territory (such as Boulder and Colorado Springs), the chance of seeing lions increases. Hikers are seldom bothered by mountain lions; attacks on humans usually happen as a result of the chase-and-kill reflex triggered by a runner, biker, or jogger.

Unlike that of bears and other predators, mountain lion behavior is highly unpredictable. Lions may quietly stalk unsuspecting passersby until they have exited the cat’s territory without incident. Other times, lions will burst out of the woods for no apparent reason other than to attack. If you come across a mountain lion, do not run! Mountain lions (which can run close to 45 miles per hour) can easily chase down a human (which, on average, can sprint at top speed about 18 miles per hour for about 15 seconds). If you come upon a lion, look at it without directly gazing into its eyes (focus on the feet). Slowly back away; if the animal is focused on you, speak firmly but calmly.

If you come across a mountain lion, do not run! Mountain lions (which can run close to 45 miles per hour) can easily chase down a human (which can sprint at top speed about 18 miles per hour for about 15 seconds).

More-extreme measures need to be taken if the lion has an active interest in you. When a lion perks up and begins stalking you, you must act. Do everything you can to make yourself look bigger, including opening your coat or waving around your hiking poles and arms. Groups of hikers should huddle together and make noise, throwing rocks or sticks at the lion. Try to pick up potential weapons without crouching down. Do not turn your back on a mountain lion. Children and smaller people, usually women, should get behind larger companions. If the confrontation has gotten to this stage, aggressive scare tactics should repel mountain lions (who aren’t used to having their prey fight back).

In the worst-case scenario—an attack—fight back with all you have. Punch, kick, swing, bite, scratch, and aim for the eyes or nose. Try to stay on your feet and get back up if you get knocked over. Mountain lion attacks usually come in one or two powerful waves; these cats are normally not endurance fighters, although emaciated lions may fight to the last. Never play dead with mountain lions. This apocryphal defense applies only to some grizzly bears. A mountain lion will seize the opportunity of passive prey by administering a deadly bite to the neck. Climbing trees is another bad idea. Mountain lions are proficient

climbers, and you'll only end up out on a limb. If you successfully fend off the animal, leave the area immediately. You'll probably be roughed up if you've survived an attack. Keep your guard up; patient mountain lions are capable of regrouping and finishing off wounded prey. Report any attacks to the local sheriff or wildlife bureau.

What to Do If You Encounter a Black Bear

Feared, hated, and reviled for centuries, black bears have earned an unfair reputation as bloodthirsty killers. They are nowhere near as aggressive as grizzly bears, yet they carry the burden of being associated with their ferocious cousins. Many are shy and will run away at the first sight of humans. Most conflicts occur in areas where human and bear habitats overlap (and even then, bears are more prone to raid a garbage can than attack a person). Most black bear attacks are defensive in nature, with the attacker usually defending a kill or protecting cubs.

Black bear attacks are rare, but they do happen, most often when a hiker surprises a bear or comes too close to a den with cubs. If you encounter a black bear, give it space. If the bear does not go away, you need to leave the area—even if it means missing out on a coveted summit. Black bears aren't looking to pick a fight. If you see them stand up on their hind legs, it is not always an aggressive action; they are simply trying to get a better view of things. If a bear becomes uncomfortable, it will begin growling, slapping the ground, or clamping its jaws as a warning. This is your cue to leave. Back away slowly and do not turn your back on the bear; as with mountain lions, look at the animal but not directly into its eyes.

One thing to note is that most of the audible and visible displays of a black bear are defense mechanisms designed to scare you off. Even the bluff charge, where a bear runs at you while growling, is more often than not a (terrifying) warning, telling you to get lost. In most circumstances, there is no reason to intimidate the bear. Quietly leaving the area is the best decision for both of you.

While their habits are somewhat predictable, that does not mean that black bears will never assault humans. When they decide to attack, they will not bother with the defensive behaviors noted above. An aggressive bear may casually walk over on all fours without barking or growling, giving the illusion of a harmless saunter. A seemingly calm bear coming toward you is a threat. At this point, you must take measures to fend it off, including making yourself look larger. Yell out loud and throw rocks, sticks, and whatever else is around at the bear. Do not run, but slowly back away. Bears are excellent runners, swimmers, and tree climbers. Again, research has shown that most black bear attacks are defensive in nature, usually by a sow protecting her cubs. Measured swats or light bites that do not break the skin are extremely effective in frightening off intrusive hikers.

In the rare case of an all-out attack, fight back. As with mountain lions, do not play dead. Most black bears only want you out of their territory, and playing dead leaves you in the danger zone with a greater chance of being killed. Bear spray may give you peace of mind, but its effectiveness in real life is marginal at best. A determined bear will continue to attack through the pain, and you may end up blinding yourself in the confusion.

The key to bear safety is to avoid confrontations that may turn ugly. Be smart and respect bears of all sizes.

Tips and Common Sense When Dealing with Wildlife

- Always give animals ample space and respect. Elk, deer, and other “gentle” wildlife can attack if frightened or threatened.
- Never attempt to feed any wildlife, period.
- When scaring away smaller animals, such as marmots, aim carefully when throwing sticks or stones. Your goal is to scare them, not injure them.
- Be especially cautious when in close company of mountain goats and bighorn sheep. These encounters often happen on high ledges or ridges, where a well-timed head-butt could cause a nasty fall.
- Report any animal attacks to park rangers or Colorado Parks & Wildlife.
- Stay alert during dusk and dawn, as these are prime hunting times for predators.

Additional Tips for Those Who Hike Alone

- Use a bear bell or other noisemaking device.
- Leave a detailed plan of where you'll be hiking with a friend or family member. Include your route, your starting and ending trailheads, what gear you'll be wearing, and what time you expect to be home. Include emergency phone numbers to contact.
- Remember to keep your first aid kit stocked; it goes without saying that you should bring one on every hike.
- Stay calm during one-on-one encounters with wild animals. Even if you're terrified, maintaining a confident demeanor and dominant posture will help in confrontations with predators.

TREES, PLANTS, FUNGI, AND FLOWERS

Alpine Flowers

Alpine flowers are among the most rugged and beautiful in the world. Wildflowers bloom in every hue, often together in a single meadow. Seeing natural bouquets in remote mountain meadows is a treat. Of the hundreds of purple, red, blue, yellow, pink, and orange flowers, there are a few that stand out. My personal favorite is the whimsical **elephant's-head**, a pink specimen that grows in watery areas between 8,000 and 11,000 feet. Flowers on the stalk resemble a totem pole of miniature pachyderms, each with a gleefully raised trunk. **Mountain columbine**, the state flower of Colorado, comes in a variety of shades. Columbine alternates colored stripes (usually light blue, purple, or red) with white petals that spread out like a parasol. **Monkshood** is a popular purple perennial that is a relative of the buttercup. **Indian paintbrush** is a red or white flower that looks like a tussled thistle. In years of heavy rainfall, the “paintbrush” part of the plant may bloom fiery red. Other flowers of note include lupine, cinquefoil, Parry's primrose, wild rose, buttercup, spring beauty, larkspur, white phlox, king's crown, and marsh marigold. A good book to consider if you'd like to learn more about alpine flowers is the budget-friendly *Colorado Trees and Wildflowers* by James Kavanagh (Waterford Press, 2017).

One of the best surprises to be found in Colorado's backcountry are wild berries. Raspberries, blueberries, mountain strawberries, huckleberries, and blackberries are among the treats growing wild. Shrubs that produce such berries usually bloom in late summer, mostly in areas close to a steady water supply. Wild strawberries are a succulent surprise, just edging out wild raspberries as my personal favorite.

Fungi

Wild mushrooms are another mountain delicacy. Unless you are well versed in mycology, however, never attempt to eat unknown fungi. Many mushrooms are poisonous and can make you very sick. For those who know what they're looking for, keep in mind that many wilderness areas require a permit to gather mushrooms. Permits are usually free and serve as a way for biologists to monitor the growth of certain mushrooms; call the park service ahead of time to find out more.

Areas with high precipitation, such as the central San Juans, host a variety of quirky mushrooms that make colorful decorations along the trail. The poisonous **fly agaric** is like a mushroom you'd find in a fairy tale, its bright-red dome speckled with white faux barnacles. Shaggy stems are yellow mushrooms that look like they were molded from fluffed custard. Giant **boletus mushrooms** resemble huge ground sponges in color and texture. Those in the know will keep an eye out for tasty **morel mushrooms**, prized culinary delicacies that proliferate in the wake of forest fires. (Connoisseurs will actually follow wildfires around the country in hopes of scavenging a harvest of morels.)

If you are interested in learning more about Colorado's mushrooms, check out the Colorado Mycological Society's website, cmsweb.org. This comprehensive site has information on the different types of fungi and mushrooms growing in Colorado's mountains.

Notable Shrubs

Hikers have a love-hate relationship with the various **mountain willows** found in the high country. These are among the toughest plants on Earth and are the only widespread vegetation found in the high arctic regions. On the positive side, many willows color the landscape in autumn with tranquil reds and yellows. Occasionally they work well as emergency handholds, and dense thickets can provide shelter when fast-moving thunderstorms appear out of the blue. Their sturdy roots also help keep soil from being washed off of steep slopes. On the negative side, many willows grow more than 6 feet tall and present a veritable obstacle course for bushwhackers. Besides being extremely difficult to navigate through in thick patches, the branches are scratchy, and their dense roots can disguise swampy holes just waiting to swallow your boots. Trying to navigate a willow patch in winter can make the most mild-mannered hiker explode with expletives, especially after postholing for an hour to hike half a mile.



Alpine flowers are tough and beautiful.

As you ascend higher, you will encounter the group of thick, low-lying shrubs collectively known as the **krumholz**, a German word meaning “twisted wood.” The presence of these shrubs—versions of subalpine firs, Engelmann spruces, and limber pines that have adapted to their harsh environment by growing in dwarfed proportions—denotes the termination of the treeline, which occurs anywhere between 10,400 and 12,200 feet in Colorado. Shrubs forming the krumholz are incredibly tough; they’d better be if they hope to withstand the fury of the elements on a daily basis. They grow in dense outcrops, usually protected by rocks. Year after year, they endure weeks of subzero temperatures, hurricane-force winds, torrential downpours, and a very brief growing season. Although they may appear lifeless, many of the shrubs you’ll encounter in the krumholz are hundreds of years old. Be respectful of such wizened elders when you trek in alpine regions.

Topping out the list of high-altitude plants are the tiny alpine **avens**, a vital food source for resident pikas. Growing in small, dense patches, avens are surrounded by brawny, bright-green stalks that resemble little ferns. Yellow or white flowers bloom in the summer and early autumn. Avens have developed amazing alpine adaptations: Long taproots grow deep into the scarce alpine soil to suck up fleeting moisture; thick “hairs” protect stems and leaves from wind damage; and red pigmentation filters out powerful ultraviolet rays and efficiently converts sunlight into heat.

Major Trees

Conifers (trees whose seeds are encased in woody cones) dominate the mountainsides where conditions are favorable to growth. Engelmann spruces, Douglas-firs, subalpine firs, and lodgepole pines grow in areas that are cool and have adequate water supplies. Drier regions (usually the sunnier south-facing hills and valleys) are more suited to ponderosa pines. Blue spruces and western hemlocks are other common trees growing between 8,000 and 12,000 feet.

Aspens are symbolic of Colorado’s forests. They are deciduous (Latin for “temporary”) trees, meaning they shed their leaves to conserve energy when cold weather arrives. Colorado’s aspen trees are known as quaking or trembling aspens because of the way sunlight plays off their rounded leaves and because of the “shimmery” sound they make when the wind blows. Aspens are members of the willow family. Each stand of trees is actually one living unit, with every tree sharing a common network of roots. Trees that spawn from this network (known as clones, as they share identical genetic markers) live between 80 and 140 years before dying off and letting new trees generate from the root system. These roots go deep enough into the ground to resist the devastating effects of fire and avalanches; this is why you will see aspen stands rebound in areas affected by these phenomena, while other trees take years or decades to repopulate. Modern biologists have proposed the oldest living thing on Earth may be an enormous aspen stand in Utah known as Pando. The powdery film on the bark of aspen trees serves as a natural sunscreen; in a pinch, it can also work as a very basic sunscreen (SPF of about 5) for human skin.

Lower elevations find other **deciduous trees**: poplar, cottonwood, and balsam are common near rivers and lakes. Because of their fibrous makeup, these trees split poorly, rot

easily, and are ill-suited for burning. If you are hunting for campfire wood, stick with the sappy (but burnable) evergreen trees or dried aspen logs.

SAFETY IN THE MOUNTAINS

Altitude

Note: The following overview is not a substitute for attaining a deeper knowledge of altitude-related symptoms. Wilderness first aid courses are great opportunities to learn more and are advised for those spending a great deal of time at altitude. Suggested reading includes *Altitude Illness: Prevention and Treatment* by Stephen Bezruchka, MD, and *Going Higher* by Charles Houston, MD, both published in 2005 by Mountaineers Books.

We humans have grown rather fond of oxygen. The air we breathe enables our intricate respiratory systems to relay oxygen to our vital organs. At altitude, decreased oxygen levels cause the body to alter how it uses the invaluable gas. This series of adaptations is known as **acclimatization**. Simply put, acclimatizing allows your body to properly function when the concentration of oxygen in the air is reduced.

First off, it's important to know what happens to the air at altitude. *Thin air* is a layman's term used to describe the paucity of oxygen at higher elevations, due to lower atmospheric pressure. At sea level, air compressed by the weight of the atmosphere; therefore, oxygen molecules are abundant. As you ascend higher, the weight of the atmosphere lessens, meaning the particles of air have more space to move around. As a result, less-dense air will contain lower concentrations of oxygen. Air circulating the summit of Colorado's highest peaks (14,000' above sea level) will contain roughly one-third of the oxygen found in the air at sea level.

People used to living at sea level begin to feel the effects of altitude at around 5,000 feet. Journeys to higher elevations can provoke severe changes; life-threatening ailments associated with altitude have occurred as low as 8,000 feet. Knowing what is happening to your body is key to functioning well at altitude. A little understanding will help make each trip to altitude an enjoyable one. The most important thing to remember: Ascending slowly and avoiding overexertion are vital in adapting to altitude. And if you begin to feel bad—very bad—descent is the smartest decision and the easiest way to feel better.

How Our Bodies Adapt to Altitude

The body has three major involuntary systems that change to cope with decreased oxygen levels, though how proficiently they do so is different for each individual. Respiration rate, heart rate, and red blood cell production all speed up to increase oxygen levels. Most obvious to the hiker is an increased rate of respiration. By breathing faster (even at rest), the body is able to coax more oxygen out of the air. When respiration takes priority, simple tasks such as drinking from a water bottle or holding a conversation can leave one winded. Above 13,000 feet, it is normal to rest and catch your breath every few steps.

Heart rate increases to efficiently pump each oxygen-reduced packet of blood through the body. Anyone who has felt the curious heart-pounding that results from performing simple tasks at altitude knows that it doesn't take much to trigger the familiar throbbing

sensation in the chest. Opening the wrapper of a candy bar or fighting with the stubborn cap on summit register tubes can leave one wheezing!

Red blood cell production adapts to altitude much slower than respiration and heart rate, taking approximately a month to fully adjust to a given altitude. For those spending weeks or months at altitude, this is the final step to being fully comfortable. The more red blood cells present in the body, the more carriers there are for oxygen. Blood initially gets thicker at high elevations due to dehydration. The blood remains thick as the body acclimates to the increased red blood cell count.

Other bodily functions are also affected by these primary changes in body rhythms. Diuresis is inevitable; as the body speeds up, it needs to expel more extraneous fluid. Urinating a lot is not necessarily a bad thing. Urine color is a good indicator of hydration. Clear urine is a sign of proper hydration, while concentrated yellow or foul-smelling urine is an indication that the body needs more fluids. It can be annoying if you're trying to get a good night's sleep, but not peeing a lot at altitude can be a sign that your body is not making the proper adjustments. (Don't be alarmed by this; just pay attention and respond accordingly.)

Digestion can also be affected by altitude, as there is often not enough oxygenated blood in the digestive tract to break down fatty foods. As a result, appetite may diminish (though psychological factors may play a part in this too). Sour or acidic stomach is common at altitude; regular antacids can help. Increased flatulence is a comical side effect for some, though more discreet individuals may find it a bit embarrassing. Hey, you're up in the mountains; let it rip! Farting can relieve pressure and make you feel better, so don't hold it in.

You may also need to defecate more than you would at home. This is normal; as things speed up in your body, so will your metabolism. Cheeky National Outdoors Leadership School (NOLS) instructors have dubbed the telltale light-brown piles of unacclimated hikers "NOLS gold." Lighter-colored feces are a result of nutrients passing through the body too quickly to be fully absorbed. A yucky side effect is the appeal of such nutrient-rich piles to animals—that's why it's important to properly dispose of human waste. Make a hole at least 8 inches deep for your deposit, and cover it up; pack out any nonbiodegradable materials.

Another altitude-related condition to be aware of is high-altitude edema, or peripheral edema, a temporary swelling of the face, eyes, fingers, and ankles. This condition is more prevalent in women, though it will affect most people going up to 14,000 feet to some degree. A less scientific term for this condition is *sausage fingers*. By itself, it's not a threat, but it is an early indicator of other possible conditions, notably acute mountain sickness (AMS). Again, there's no reason to be alarmed, but pay attention. Using hiking poles (which keep the fingers active in the act of gripping) can help prevent peripheral edema in the hands. Prolonged peripheral edema can split the skin on the thumb and fingertips, sometimes below the fingernail. Besides being painful, this can make performing some simple chores (such as priming a pump stove) difficult.

High-altitude edema, or peripheral edema, is a temporary swelling of the face, eyes, fingers, and ankles. Using hiking poles can help prevent peripheral edema in the hands.

How Long Does It Take to Acclimate?

How Long Do the Effects Last?

Full acclimatization takes about one month for most people, though most feel strong at high altitude (more than 5,000') after three to four days. The higher you get, the more time the body needs to acclimate: acclimating from sea level to 8,000 feet is easier than adapting from 8,000 feet to 16,000 feet. If properly ascending, hikers in Colorado generally feel “normal” after two to three days above 10,000 feet. After approximately 6–10 days, your body will have completed most major altitude-related adjustments. It takes roughly 7–14 days to lose the major benefits of acclimatization.

Illnesses and Symptoms of Altitude Sickness

Just about everyone who ventures up to altitude gets a sampling of AMS at one time or another. In mild cases (which are most common), the condition is bearable, though a little uncomfortable. Slight headaches, nausea, loss of appetite, malaise (a vague lack of energy or ability to think clearly), and sleeplessness are common and can often be dealt with by using over-the-counter pain relievers. For fast relief (that has worked for me), Advil Liqui-Gels (ibuprofen) are tops. Aspirin or acetaminophen may work better for you. Mild AMS can occur anywhere from one to three days after arriving at altitude and usually lasts a few hours to two days, as symptoms gradually diminish. These symptoms are generally harmless, but they do raise a yellow flag. If they do not subside, they could lead to more severe AMS.

Moderate cases of AMS are quite a bit worse. This is the worst mountain ailment I've experienced, and even though it truly was a moderate case, I felt like I'd just gone 10 rounds with Mike Tyson in a room lit by 80,000-watt light bulbs after eating a gallon of moldy mayonnaise. If you couldn't guess, moderate AMS is like a powerful hangover and is generally unaffected by most pain relievers (though antacids, such as Tums, or antidiarrheals, such as Pepto-Bismol, may soothe your stomach). In a moderate case, the symptoms of mild AMS are amplified: the headache is more intense, the nausea often results in vomiting, and even simple exertion can leave you out of breath. The only way to feel better is to descend. Going higher may be possible for stubborn souls, but it could cause the condition to worsen. Descending 1,000–3,000 feet will make a big difference and is recommended. (It may even rebalance the body enough for you to give the hike another go in a few hours.)

Severe AMS is no joke. This life-threatening condition cannot be ignored, as it may be a precursor to cerebral edema. All the symptoms of moderate AMS are present, along with the following: lack of balance and muscle coordination, confusion, or severe mood changes. At this stage, affected individuals may become unaware of their surroundings and may become angry, hostile, or unintelligible. A good test is having them walk a straight line, similar to the sobriety test issued by the police. Rapid descent is your only choice; get the affected person down any way you can. Wait until the person is back to normal (which may take days or may not happen at all until you descend farther) to resume ascending, watching carefully for a potential recurrence.

When diagnosing AMS, it is important to note that the symptoms may mimic those of hypothermia (covered on page 23), fatigue, stress, dehydration, or nerves. A good rule of thumb: If the person isn't having fun (or if they can't tell you whether they are or not), descend immediately.

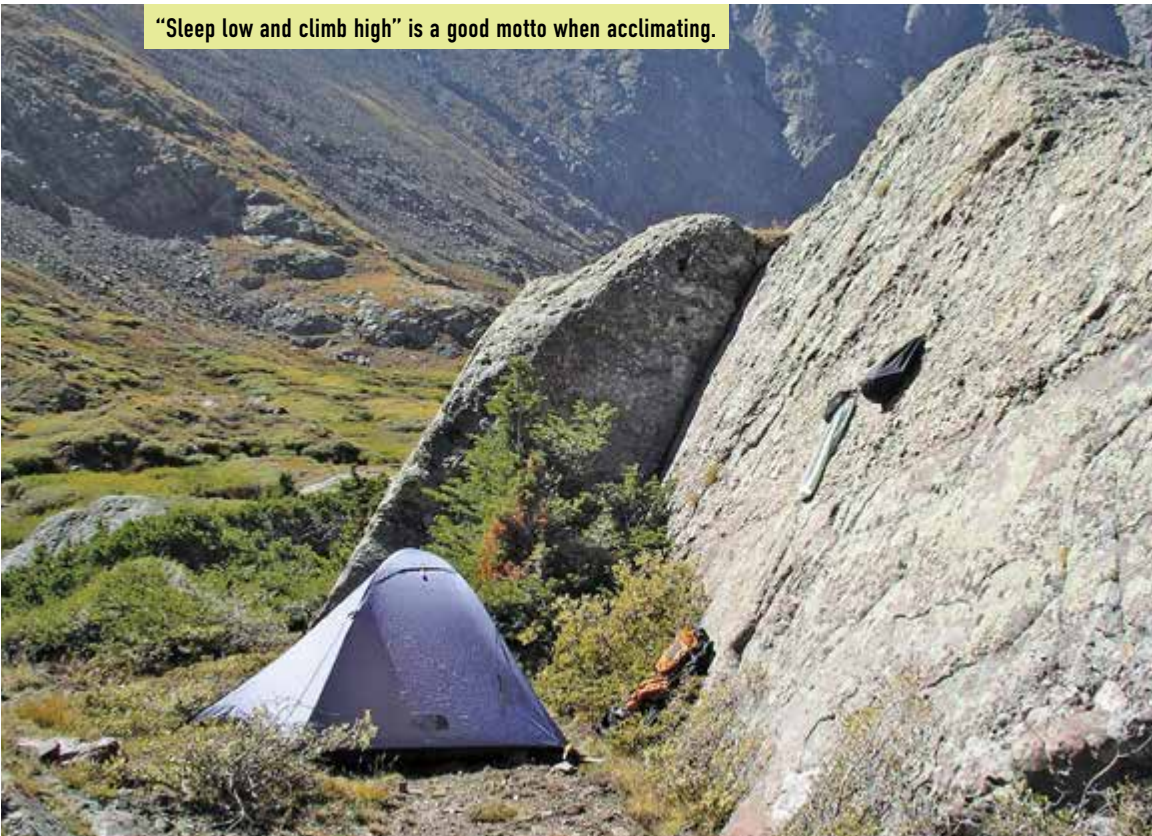
Fitness and Altitude

Research on fitness and altitude is a mixed bag. Some sources insist that fitness has nothing to do with altitude sickness, though all agree obesity seems to be a catalyst for AMS. Fitness levels seem to have no impact on involuntary adjustments, so in a technical sense, it may be genetics or nutrition (or both) that determine the rate of acclimatization. That being said, stronger legs and lungs are undoubtedly a boon at altitude. Powerful muscles and leaner bodies will exert themselves less, thereby decelerating the effects brought on by tough physical efforts. Add in the psychological edge of knowing your body is mountain-ready, and it's safe to say that fitness does play a part in adapting to altitude. The key for a newcomer to altitude is to keep a moderate pace, hydrate properly, and don't be a hero. Once you are adjusted, you can try all the push-ups you want on the top of your favorite fourteeners. In the meantime, give your body the time it needs to adjust—whether you exercise infrequently or are an Olympic marathon runner.

Sleeping at Altitude

Oh, sweet sleep, how elusive you can be for those who seek slumber on high! A person's body continues to adjust to altitude even if they're completely tuckered out. Even the most worn-out backcountry traveler may find sleep hard to come by. An increased rate of respiration inhibits deep sleep and promotes snoring—just ask your beleaguered tentmate. Also, having to urinate more will wake you from a sound sleep, often several times a night. In addition, you may feel your heart pounding for no good reason; other times you may

"Sleep low and climb high" is a good motto when acclimating.



feel as though you are suffocating. The strange, sometimes scary, irregular patterns of a companion's breathing may also keep you awake. An odd breathing cadence, known as periodic breathing, is normal at high altitudes and in most cases is nothing to worry about.

The key to good sleep: Sleep low and climb high. Don't attempt to sleep at elevations over 10,000 feet if you have just arrived from low elevation. Once over 10,000 feet, only increase sleeping elevation by 1,000 feet per night. Avoid caffeine and sugar before bed. As tempting as it may be, do not take sleeping pills. Over-the-counter pills decrease the rate of respiration and are detrimental to proper acclimatization. When you do fall asleep, you may have what the Sherpas of the Himalayas call the "sleep of the dead," a dreamless passing of time. More common are brief, incredibly vivid or erotic dreams, thought to be a result of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep while your body stays in a near-waking condition. Remember, a good night's sleep is essential to good performance in the mountains. You can get away with a day or two of bad sleep, but once your body is more comfortable at altitude, make the time to get a good night's rest.

Prevention and Treatment of Altitude Sickness

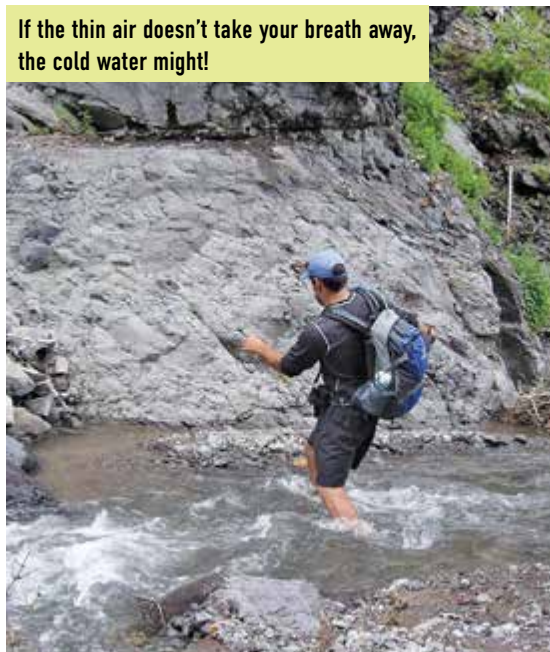
The golden rule for treatment of altitude-related illnesses is descend, descend, descend! In Colorado, a difference of 1,500–2,500 feet will usually alleviate any symptoms of AMS. If HAPE (high-altitude pulmonary edema) or HACE (high-altitude cerebral edema) is present, descend as low as you possibly can. (For people living in high-altitude places, such as Leadville—elevation 10,000 feet—this may require leaving town.)

For mild cases, ibuprofen, acetaminophen, or aspirin can help relieve discomfort without having to descend. Antacids and antidiarrheals can help settle queasy and gassy stomachs. Energy drinks such as Gatorade and Cytomax can help prevent dehydration and restore sugars and electrolytes to the body.

Preventing altitude sickness is easier said than done. Ascend slowly and don't over-exert yourself. Out-of-towners should spend at least one to two full days above 8,000 feet before heading out to the peaks in this book. Locals in Colorado may be able to ascend and descend quickly enough to avoid any ill effects of altitude. Day hikes taken at a reasonable pace are often easier on the body than forcing a night's sleep at altitude. And one last axiom: Never take a headache higher.

In my experience, it is best not to rely on prescription drugs—your body will naturally adjust without them and will, perhaps—as is the case with muscle memory—more readily acclimate the next time you visit high altitudes (this is a common belief among Russian mountaineers). However, for those pressed for time or hoping to bag that one special summit, doctor-prescribed options are available.

If the thin air doesn't take your breath away, the cold water might!



Drugs for Altitude Adaptation

Note: Always consult your doctor before trying prescription drugs. Medicines used for altitude adjustments affect the heart, the blood vessels, and the respiratory system. Never borrow a friend's prescription unless the situation is life or death (HAPE or HACE, for example).

Acetazolamide, known by the brand name Diamox, is taken to ward off mild to moderate AMS and to help facilitate sleep at altitude. Basically, this medicine helps the body balance pH levels in the blood, which can help regulate respiration and aid in acclimatization. Acetazolamide is taken both before heading to altitude and while there; it may also be taken if AMS

becomes apparent. In that sense, it is both a preventive and a cure. While it may not be useful in cases of severe AMS, it should be taken nonetheless to reduce the work the body has to do to get back to normal. For those coming to Colorado from lower elevations, acetazolamide is a good option that has proven to work well, especially at elevations of 12,000–14,000 feet.

Dexamethasone is a steroid that is usually reserved for severe cases of AMS and HACE. It is often carried by mountain guides for use in emergency situations. If you are heading to the remote backcountry for a number of days with unproven or weaker companions, it may be wise to take along “dex” (available by prescription only) in case of extreme emergencies.

Nifedipine is used specifically to curb the effects of HAPE. This drug is rarely seen in Colorado, though it may be advised for hikers who have had previous bouts of HAPE at altitudes up to 14,000 feet.

Use of narcotics of any kind should absolutely be avoided. Speaking frankly, marijuana should never be used at altitude—besides impairing judgment, marijuana decreases respiration and can actually promote or worsen AMS.

There are other drugs prescribed for those with specific conditions, including issues with vision, digestion, or prior illnesses. The scope of this book does not cover individual cases—consult your doctor.

It is best not to rely on prescription drugs—your body will naturally adjust without them and will perhaps more readily acclimate the next time you visit high altitudes.

Dogs at Altitude

Because animals are infinitely tougher than humans, it would be hard to tell if your dog was feeling bad at altitude. In general, dogs seem to be barely affected at altitude—many can be seen joyfully running up to the summits of Colorado's highest peaks. It's important to keep dogs hydrated and, of course, to keep an eye on their demeanor. If they become lethargic or struggle to keep up, it may be a good time to turn around. They aren't immune to altitude, but they are naturally better equipped to deal with it.

WEATHER: THE WILD WORLD ABOVE THE MOUNTAINS

If **one needs** to be assured that mountain environments are untamed, simply look to the sky. Mountain weather is a powerful element of backcountry travel that must be respected. Predicting weather at high altitude is a difficult science. The factors that contribute to storms may not be evident until the clouds are already forming. This isn't to say that mountain weather is completely random. Storm trends tend to be good heralds of what to expect in a given mountain range or at a specific time of the year. While clouds can build up quickly, how they do so can offer clues to the oncoming weather.

(*Note:* If you want to be a storm expert, see Appendix D for more-comprehensive resources on mountain weather.)

Why So Many Storms? How Mountain Weather Builds

From late spring to midautumn (prime hiking season in Colorado), afternoon storms should be expected to roll in between 1 and 4 p.m. every day. Storms and lightning are daily threats during this time because of the temperature variations from night to day and the moisture present. Nights are cool and promote condensation of water vapor in the air; after sunrise, heat from the sun initiates evaporation. As hot and cool air collide, electricity forms in the condensed clouds and continues to build throughout the day. At the hottest part of the day (often around 2–3 p.m. in the high country), the balance is tipped, and the storms unleash brief but formidable torrents of rain, sleet, snow, and hail.

If no larger fronts have been forecast, these storms usually run their course by late afternoon. *Be warned:* These storms often display the violent power of lightning, making exposed travel above treeline especially dangerous.

General Weather Advice

The proven best advice for safe hiking in Colorado is to start early! Beginning your hikes in the early morning (and in some cases, before dawn) will ensure that you are back into the safety of treeline if storms hit. For hikes in this book, consider the estimated time and distance along with your own pace to formulate the best time to start, summit, and finish a hike. Being off summits by 11:30 a.m. or earlier is a good guideline. As you get better at reading weather, you'll be better able to tell if you can push it back a little later. As a side note, with almost all hikes, if I can't be on the trail by 8:30 a.m., I'll change the summit from a goal to an optional bonus.

I'm not a big fan of dawdling on summits unless the weather is near perfect. Some people like to snack, nap, or recharge on top of mountains, even when storms are looming. If you arrive at the summit later than expected, snap a few pictures, and then descend to a safer locale—preferably in treeline—to eat and rest.

To determine how far away a storm is, you can use the rule of counting the time between lightning and thunder: Count the seconds between the sight of lightning and the crash of thunder and divide by five; for example, a 5-second count means that the storm is 1 mile away. Continue to count successive flashes and booms. If the time decreases, the storm is drawing near. If the time increases, the storm is moving away.

If you wake up on the morning of a hike socked in by fog, it isn't necessarily a reason to call off the hike. If a cold front has moved in, it may cause rain and fog, but it can also ward off thunderstorms. If you are good at navigating in these conditions, it's worth giving it a try, but be aware that you run the risk of storms building without your having any way of seeing them coming until that first flash and boom.

If you can feel or see electricity in your hair, the storm is forming right above you. This is an especially dangerous situation. If you're this close to the storm, it's advisable to drop metal items—such as hiking poles, snowshoes, and ice axes—and recover them later.

Local forecasts are good general indicators, but they do not apply to the variable conditions at elevation. The following sections discuss such conditions in greater detail.

Be prepared for bad weather. I bring a sturdy Gore-Tex shell and light rain pants on every hike, even when the weather looks clear.

Reading the Clouds

Many of Colorado's days start off sunny and clear, often with a smattering of clouds harmlessly hanging in the sky. As the sun begins to heat up the atmosphere, radiation and wind cause moisture to evaporate and rise. Air becomes less dense as it warms, creating lower air pressure—the perfect canvas for storms. Moisture that rises with the warm air eventually cools and forms clouds.

The clouds that form over the course of a typical Colorado day can clue you in to developing weather. **Cumulus clouds** look like puffy, cottony towers that initially form as individual mounds. Their presence indicates that the cycle of weather has been set in motion, with moisture cooling on high. As long as they remain spaced out and their bottoms remain fluffy and white, you are in no immediate danger. When cumulus clouds begin to build and fuse together, the sky will become dense, with individual clouds being less distinct.

Be wary of cumulus clouds if they begin to have dark, flattened bottoms and start to grow into towering pillars that reach high into the sky. When this happens, cumulus clouds transform into **cumulonimbus clouds**, which most people recognize as thunderheads. These powerful clouds bring lightning, rain, snow, thunder, and hail—it is very important to pay attention to cumulonimbus clouds, especially after noon. A wise safety rule: When puffy white clouds begin to turn an angry shade of gray, it's a good time to assess your position on the mountain—cumulus clouds can build very quickly, forming storms from clear skies in less than an hour.

Other clouds you may see in Colorado:

- **Stratocumulus clouds** resemble darkened cumulus clouds lumped together. Unlike the epic, storm-nurturing cumulonimbus, stratocumulus clouds indicate a cold front and precipitation, often free of lightning and thunder. These clouds are common in winter and on colder days.

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A wise safety rule: When puffy
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good time to assess your
position on the mountain.*

- **Lenticular clouds** are the sleek, smooth clouds that arc like the bubbles in a lava lamp. These high-altitude clouds indicate strong winds and changing fronts; they often precede bad weather, which will generally arrive within 48 hours.
- **Nimbostratus clouds** form a uniform, gray cloud cover below 8,000 feet that creates fog and rain. It is often possible to climb above these moisture-laden systems to clear weather above.
- **Cirrocumulus clouds** are wispy, white, distant clouds that often form in flat sheets (such as the mackerel sky). These high-altitude dwellers form above 20,000 feet and are stabilizing clouds, meaning they carry no precipitation.
- Similar in form to cirrocumulus clouds are **altocumulus clouds**, which form from 8,000 to 20,000 feet. Altocumulus clouds have the same globular, wavy appearance as cirrocumulus clouds, but the white is interwoven with darker gray patches, indicating an oncoming cold front and potential storms later in the day.

Barometers

Many people who venture into the outdoors have barometers built into their watches, GPS units, or other electronics. Barometers measure atmospheric pressure; as a general rule, lower atmospheric pressure indicates bad weather, while higher pressure is a sign of clearing weather. Keep in mind that atmospheric pressure drops as you ascend, even on the clearest of days. I've learned to pay close attention to the fluctuations in my barometer when sketchy weather begins to blow in—a fast drop in pressure nearly always means storms are coming. Barometers aren't perfect at predicting storms, but they give you one more clue in deciphering mountain weather.

Avoid ridges when storms are brewing.



Lightning

Pressing your tongue against the terminals of a standard 9-volt battery creates a mildly uncomfortable shock that indicates how much charge is left in the battery. Multiply that voltage roughly 5,555 times and you have the power behind an average lightning bolt! Anyone who has ever been caught in one of Colorado's brief but violent storms knows the fearful helplessness one feels when at the mercy of such a powerful and unpredictable adversary.

Lightning travels far too fast for a person to outrun and may strike several miles away from the visible center of a storm, even under clear blue skies. Many people only think about the most obvious danger from lightning: getting hit by a thunderbolt. While a direct strike is the worst thing that can happen, it's not the only threat. Splash strikes occur when lightning jumps from the initial strike target to surrounding areas. Ground strikes (or step voltage) hit the hiker from below as lightning dissipates into the surrounding ground. Contact strikes occur when a person is holding something that absorbs a direct strike, such as an ice ax or tent pole. Finally, shock wave strikes happen when a nearby bolt is powerful enough to generate a shock wave that can easily knock a large man off his feet.

Safety in Lightning Storms

Obviously, avoiding storms is the best practice in the mountains. Weather forecasts should always be consulted before heading out. However, even the most prepared and knowledgeable hiker can be caught in fast-building storms. I've seen storms metastasize from clear blue skies directly overhead in less than 15 minutes (and at all times of the day).

If you are caught in a storm, stay calm. You must assess the danger quickly and act accordingly. Storms don't give you time to factor in all the variables: if you need to seek shelter, do so without hesitation. Following are a few rules for finding relatively safe places in lightning storms:

- Stay away from water, including the faux safety of gullies and streambeds.
- Get as low as safely possible, hopefully back into treeline or the lowest areas in open meadows. Never stand under trees in open areas—keep moving to safer areas.
- Immediately get off summits and ridges, even if it means diverting to an off-trail pocket of safety.
- If you smell, hear, or feel electricity in the air (examples: your hair stands up or your snowshoes start to hum), move down quickly! Even if your lungs are burning, move as fast as you can to safer places. Sometimes you have to suck up the pain and just keep moving.
- Space out a minimum of 60 feet from your companions (think of this as the distance between a pitcher and catcher on a baseball field). If one member should get injured by lightning, maintaining this distance will keep others from being hurt.
- Stay away from metal objects such as hiking poles, ice axes, and climbing gear. While metal doesn't attract lightning (a common myth), it does conduct electricity. Tent poles are especially dangerous—if you are stuck in your tent, make sure you are not in contact with the poles and that you are insulated from the ground on a foam pad or backpack.
- If you are stuck in the storm with nowhere to go, assume the safety position. Sit on a backpack or foam pad to protect yourself from ground-traveling electricity.

Crouch down, but do not lie down (the idea is to minimize your contact with the ground). If you're in the heart of a storm, sit on your pack and pull your knees close to you. Interlock your hands and put them over your head, resting your elbows on your knees. This last resort is known as the "Oh, s—!" position in most circles. Should lightning strike, it will course through your hands and into your legs, terminating in the ground. It sounds painful, but this position channels electricity through your body without it coursing through your vital organs. Lightning is especially prone to exit through the eyes or ears . . . not pretty stuff. For additional safety, feel free to consult the god of your choice while in this posture.

- Caves make great shelters, but be wary of "spark plug gaps" (gapped rocks that have an exposed or open top). These gaps actually attract lightning—look for better shelter if you can.

Lightning Strike First Aid

In the awful instance a companion is struck by lightning, it is imperative to act quickly. A body hit by lightning does not hold an electrical charge, so it will be safe to touch. Any type of strike will often induce cardiopulmonary arrest—quickly check the ABCs of first aid: airway, breathing, and circulation. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) should be performed if the victim has stopped breathing or has no pulse. CPR is an invaluable technique that anyone heading into the backcountry should know.

In the case of a "light" strike, in which the victim does not lose consciousness or vital functions, there will still be extensive burning that may not show up for many hours after the initial injury. Any tangle with lightning requires an immediate exit from the mountain and a visit to a hospital or medical facility. Call for help, if possible, and evacuate the victim from the area as soon as you can.

Weather Trends by Season

Weather can blow in from any direction, at any time of the year. I've seen lightning in January, snow in July, and hail on 80°F days. While anything is possible, there are some general patterns Colorado weather follows each season. These patterns can help you assess weather trends and make an informed decision when field forecasting.

SPRING CONDITIONS (MARCH–EARLY OR MID-JUNE) Spring weather is often cool, bright, and free of thunderstorms. Days start cold and only warm up slightly, making early spring less prone to lightning storms. A bigger threat in spring is the danger of avalanche and rotten snowpack. As the sun heats up the snow, cornices become especially vulnerable to breaking off and triggering snowslides. Hiking conditions in spring often require winter mountaineering gear, such as crampons, ice axes, helmets, and ropes. This is also the ideal time to attempt couloirs and other steep snow routes, depending on the stability of the snowpack. Late spring is a great time to hike, as many of the mountain flowers and trees are in bloom.

SUMMER CONDITIONS (MID-JUNE–SEPTEMBER) Summer is the season of storms—but also of the best mountainside conditions. Nearly every day is punctuated by thunderstorms

that roll in from approximately 1 to 4 p.m. Trails will be clear of most snow, and the days are long. Start early (predawn on longer hikes) and be off summits by 11:30 a.m. Only a few multiday storm fronts hit Colorado each summer, so you should have a weather window most mornings to reach your summit. Night hiking is also a nice option.

AUTUMN CONDITIONS (LATE SEPTEMBER–LATE OCTOBER)

Autumn is a very brief season in Colorado. As the weather cools off, storms become less common. Another benefit of cool air: it does wonders to keep a hardworking hiker from overheating. Beautiful colors emerge in the foliage during this season. There is less daylight and a better potential of snow (and of the rare but dreaded snow-thunderstorm). Autumn is perhaps Colorado's most enjoyable and safest time of the year to climb mountains.

In the summer, start early and be off summits by 11:30 a.m. Only a few multiday storm fronts hit Colorado each summer, so you should have a weather window most mornings to reach your summit.

WINTER CONDITIONS (LATE OCTOBER–MARCH) Winter in Colorado is beautiful and dangerous. Summits are hard-fought prizes that require in-depth mountaineering experience to attain. Trailheads often require a monumental effort to reach. The skills required for winter conditions take years to develop and demand a hearty constitution. Avalanches, hypothermia, frostbite, and fatigue are constant threats. Personally, I love winter adventures, but they must be undertaken with caution and courage. Appendix A (page 283) mentions a few good starter peaks for winter hiking. For those robust enough to challenge the outdoors in the harsh months, a unique and hidden world is yours to discover.

GENERAL FIRST AID

Mountains in Colorado, even the “easy” ones, are rife with natural booby traps and hidden hazards. Seemingly stable talus fields roll under your feet when you least expect it; solid-looking snow patches will swallow your legs in shin-bruising postholes; rocks will careen down from above like Randy Johnson fastballs. Bumps and bruises are part of the game in the mountains. Minimizing your risks and beefing up your knowledge in case of injury are important factors in safely enjoying the mountains.

Note: This overview is not a substitute for outdoors-related first aid training. I would highly recommend all backcountry hikers take a wilderness first aid course and be certified in CPR.

Blisters

Nothing ruins a good hike quite like painful blisters (or a hiking companion who won't shut up about theirs). Ill-fitting boots are the primary culprits, especially new ones that haven't been properly broken in. It's a good idea to wear your new boots around town before setting out into the backcountry. Leather boots in particular require a suitable break-in time to mold to the shape of your foot.

Water and moisture also play a role in blister formation. When feet are wet, the skin is softer and more likely to blister. Bulky or bunched socks can cause friction blisters. Irritants such as pebbles, twigs, or debris in your boots can also be to blame.

Blister prevention starts with well-fitting boots. The toes should be a little less than half an inch from the end of the boot. Wearing loose or improperly laced boots on descents can contribute to blister formation. A single-layer, lightweight noncotton sock (such as Smartwool light hiking socks) helps keep feet cool and dry. Wool and wool-synthetic blends will wick moisture away from the feet. Cotton acts like a sponge, keeping moisture in the fibers and against the skin. I like to bring an extra pair of socks and a small towel in case I splash into an unexpected puddle. For hikes where there will be river crossings, I make sure to bring sandals or water shoes so my boots don't get soaked. For swampy or muddy hikes, a pair of Gore-Tex (or similar waterproof material) gaiters will prevent water from seeping in above the top of your boots. If you are prone to blisters in a specific spot on your foot, adding a piece of moleskin can help prevent a blister.

Blister treatment should be administered at the first sign of discomfort. Most blisters start off as hot spots, which are pink or red spots of irritation on the skin. Applying moleskin or waterproof plastic tape can ward off blister formation. Avoid using Band-Aids, as the non-adhesive part of the bandage will continue to rub against the skin. If a blister has already developed, do not pop or drain it. Ruptured blisters are breeding grounds for infection. Keep the blister intact; as long as it is not punctured, you will not risk infection. Cut a small circle out of moleskin and pad the area around the blister, leaving the actual blister exposed but below the level of the moleskin material (in other words, make the blister the middle of a moleskin doughnut). Tape the moleskin in place (covering the blister hole if you wish) with medical tape.

Only if the blister has already ruptured or is too large to comfortably continue hiking should you try to drain it. This should be a last resort. Clean the area thoroughly. Sterilize a needle with a match or stove flame. Once you have done so, poke a small hole at the bottom of the blister and gently squeeze the fluid out, top to bottom. Immediately clean the wound with Betadine or another antiseptic and apply a sterile pad. Clean the area several times a day to prevent infection.

Dehydration/Overhydration

Dehydration is the most common ailment suffered in the mountains. Because hikers often don't drink until they feel thirsty, dehydration may not be apparent until the individual feels excessively tired or cranky. It is important to drink before a hike—about 8–10 ounces—and continue to drink roughly 8 ounces every half hour.

Dehydration is a catalyst for more serious problems, including cramping, hypothermia, and AMS. Signs include moodiness, loss of energy, and dark urine. A well-hydrated hiker should urinate frequently in the mountains, and the liquid should be clear and copious.

Sports drinks such as Gatorade, Cytomax, and Endurox will help replace salts and electrolytes; adding in a mildly salty snack, such as pretzels or nuts, can help replace salts, which in turn help the body process water. (Electrolytes are electrically conductive ions that help balance fluid levels in the body by both hydrating the cells and preventing overhydration.)

I like to bring 70–100 ounces of water in a hydration pack, along with 32 ounces of Gatorade, when I hike. I sip from the hydration pack all day and enjoy the Gatorade as a treat on layer breaks, summits, or snack breaks.

Overhydration is rare but something to look out for as well. Humans cannot process much more than 1 liter (32 ounces) of water per hour; excess water will usually be filtered out through the body. This process can dilute the absorption of nutrients from food in the intestines. In other words, if you are dehydrated, there is no need to chug two (16-ounce) bottles of water in 5 minutes; 8–16 ounces will be adequate. In extreme cases (usually during marathons or other high-endurance sports), water intoxication can occur. For most hikers, this isn't a threat.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia is a dangerous condition that results from a loss of body heat to the extent that core temperatures fall below 95°F. Prolonged exposure to wind, rain, snow, and chilly temps can bring about hypothermia. Many cases of hypothermia occur on rainy days, when temperatures can be anywhere between 35°F and 55°F—so this is not just a winter-weather malady.

Dehydration can speed up the onset of hypothermia. The initial signs of mild hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, loss of coordination, and change in mood. Hypothermic hikers may not be able to zip a coat or put on gloves, and they may not realize where they are. In their confusion, hypothermic victims may insist on continuing to hike or will agree to wait alone for other members of the party. Never leave a hiker who you suspect is hypothermic alone. In severe cases, the victim may become completely disoriented and collapse, unconscious. If core temperature continues to drop, the victim may lapse into a coma, which can cause permanent damage or death.

Hypothermia must be assessed and dealt with immediately. The first priority is to get the victim out of wet clothes and, if possible, out of the wind and weather. Often, layers of dry clothing, adequate shelter, and warmer settings will be enough to reverse mild hypothermia. The victim should consume liquids, preferably those with a sugar base. The liquid does not need to be heated, though a warm mug may feel good to hold. The important thing is to get water into the body. If camping, get the victim into a sleeping bag and heat up water in watertight bottles to place in the bag. In an emergency, body-to-body contact will help, but care must be taken that it doesn't chill the other person to a state of hypothermia. Warming should be done gradually.

Remember, hypothermia affects judgment and coordination—do not climb higher

Storm-free days are a reason to celebrate in Colorado.



until the victim and their partner are certain the effects are gone. On a personal note, I once got mild hypothermia on a 60°F, sunny and windy day, thanks to a very steep snow slope and a poorly wicking first layer (which was brand-new). My hiking partner noticed that I was shivering and, moreover, that I was complaining—which is not characteristic of me in the mountains. When I peeled off the offending layer, it was soaked with sweat. Before the condition got worse, I put on dry layers and drank Gatorade until I felt better. We finished the day without further incident, but it goes to show that hypothermia can occur in unlikely conditions.

Intestinal Ailments, Giardia, and the Importance of Water Filtration

As the body adjusts to altitude, it often produces more acids in the stomach. Most stomach-aches and nausea in the mountains are a result of the body responding to changes in elevation. Nerves can also play a role. Whatever the cause, it is wise to bring along antacids and to avoid fatty foods and alcohol on hikes. More severe nausea that does not respond to antacids can be a sign of AMS; if accompanied by vomiting, head down to a lower elevation.

Diarrhea may occur if a person is overhydrated, nervous, or experiencing mild AMS. In these cases, it is important to drink enough to replace lost fluids; sports drinks and salty snacks will help replenish the body's balance. Because energy bars can be hard to digest (or enjoy) at altitude, I suggest bringing along palatable gels (I prefer chocolate Gu) to help replenish lost electrolytes and sodium.

All water in Colorado should be treated with a filter, with purification tablets, or by boiling. That seemingly fresh mountain stream is prime habitat for the pesky protozoan *Giardia lamblia*, more commonly known as giardia. Giardia has a long incubation period, with symptoms appearing anywhere between one week and one month after exposure. These include bouts of explosive diarrhea, flatulence, cramps, vomiting, and dehydration. Without treatment, symptoms may last up to six weeks, but your doctor can prescribe anti-parasitic medications to reduce their duration.

Hygiene and Sanitation

Keeping clean outdoors can be a challenge, but staying hygienic is imperative. Leave No Trace practices (see page 35) mean you'll have to pack out any nonbiodegradable hygiene products, but staying clean is worth it. Use alcohol-based hand gel after going to the bathroom, as well as before eating snacks or preparing meals. Keep those hands clean!

On camping trips, I always bring baby wipes (such as Wet Ones) to keep myself clean and avoid that “crusty” feeling. These have to be packed out, but they can keep your butt cleaner than wiping with leaves or snow. They can also help menstruating women stay clean.

Be cautious when accepting snacks or drinks from strangers; the food is probably safe, but the hands of your new friend may not be.

When brushing your teeth, bathing, or washing your hair, make sure to use eco-friendly toothpaste, soap, and shampoo.

Sunburn and Snow Blindness

At high elevation, radiation from the sun is extra powerful and needs to be taken seriously. High in the mountains is not the place to work on your tan. Ultraviolet rays from the sun are more concentrated (because there is less atmosphere above you to absorb them), causing unprotected skin to burn quickly. Avoid sunburn by applying sunscreen with a minimum SPF of 30 every 90 minutes. In real life, hardly anyone keeps to this schedule while hiking. I like to use a less precise but equally effective system. I keep a small bottle of sunscreen in my pocket and put it on every time I stop for snacks, to pee, or to adjust my layers of clothing. Sometimes I'll end up putting it on three times in an hour, but it's better than getting burnt. Keep in mind that even cloudy days shower your body with UV rays. Wearing a wide-brimmed hat will help keep the sun off your face and neck.

Although you may not be lobster-red, even a subtle sunburn will make sleeping difficult, keep you from hydrating (as the body is repairing the damage), and make you feel achy all over. Pain relievers will help you feel better and make sleep come a little easier. Drink enough liquids to help your body heal. Lotions will help soothe burns and relieve the itching that comes with peeling sunburn.

Note that hiking on snow doubles the amount of radiation being aimed at your body. It's not unusual to get burns on your palms, under your chin, or other less noticeable places from reflected light. Make sure to apply sunscreen to all exposed skin.

Snow blindness is a painful, often debilitating condition where the cornea of the eye becomes inflamed; put simply, it is sunburn of the eyes, and it takes several days to go away. The victim will experience severe headaches, sleeplessness, and general fatigue. There's not much one can do to expedite healing, except stay in a dark room and take ibuprofen at regular intervals. I will say this several times in this book: do not skimp on good eye protection. Make sure your glasses are large enough to cover the entire area around your eyes, including the sides and bottom. Lenses must block out 95%–100% of all UVA and UVB radiation. Prevention of snow blindness is easy; recovery is not.

Although you may not be lobster-red, even a subtle sunburn will make sleeping difficult, keep you from hydrating, and make you feel achy all over.

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion occurs when the body works up excessive heat that it cannot effectively dissipate. Dehydration is the first symptom of heat exhaustion; most cases are triggered by exertion in hot, dry environments. A victim will have cool and clammy skin, weakness, and nausea and may even faint. In extreme cases (known as heat stroke), the pulse will be rapid and the victim may become seriously disoriented.

Cooling the victim down and providing fluids are important steps in reversing heat exhaustion. Cease any strenuous activity, and rest, preferably with the feet elevated. Work on cooling the face, head, and body. Find shelter in the shade, or set up a tent (with the



Conditions change drastically above treeline.

doors open) to provide shade if you are above treeline. Many cases of heat exhaustion occur when there is snow on the ground; use it to your advantage to help cool the victim. Once the person feels better and can hold down liquids, assess the situation. Unless the person is feeling 100%, descend and try for your summit another day.

Frostbite

Frostbite is a painful and serious condition in which the blood vessels in the body freeze and crystallize, causing damage to body tissue and circulation. Injury from frostbite can cause permanent impairments and, in severe cases, loss of appendages. Most frostbite occurs on the nose, ears, fingers, and toes; when the body gets cold, it prioritizes the areas close to the heart, leaving body regions distant from the core more vulnerable. Initial symptoms include discoloration of the skin, sharp pain, numbness, and a burning or pricking sensation.

If caught in the early stages (considered frostnip), warming the injured body part will prevent further damage. Note that frostbite rarely appears without hypothermia, so make sure to treat your victim for both conditions, if necessary. In severe cases, the skin will become blue or black, and hideous blisters may swell up. Never rub or massage frostbitten skin; this will further damage the tissue. Only a slow (and painful) thawing of the injury in lukewarm water will regain sensation. In these cases, evacuate the victim and seek medical attention. If the foot is severely frostbitten, do not attempt to thaw it in the field; once rewarmed, it will be too painful to walk on.

Note that women are more prone to frostbite than men. Poor circulation, diabetes, or overly tight clothing and footwear can also promote frostbite. Avoid drinking alcohol when

hiking in the cold, as it can dehydrate the body and make the limbs less sensitive to the warning signs.

Fractures, Sprains, and Broken Bones

Twisted ankles and sprained wrists are among the most common injuries in the mountains. Tend to any swollen or bruised limb immediately. SAM splints (soft aluminum splints lined with foam) or inflatable splints are lightweight and can be used to set and immobilize injuries. In a pinch, you can use hiking poles, sleeping pads, or an ice ax. Have the injured hiker take anti-inflammatory medicines, such as aspirin, ibuprofen, or naproxen, and begin evacuation as soon as possible.

Shock

Shock occurs whenever the body experiences a sudden loss of blood pressure. Normally, blood loss from an injury is the cause, but shock can also result from witnessing a disturbing event or from sheer panic. Loss of blood pressure can disrupt the circulatory system and, if prolonged, can cause permanent damage to vital organs or death. A victim of shock may display any of the following symptoms: confusion, rapid pulse, clammy skin, dull or distant eyes, and rapid breathing. Additionally, the victim may feel nauseous, weak, and frightened. If shock occurs, do everything you can to keep the person warm. If they are conscious, provide liquids. Talk to the victim and reassure them that they are not alone. Be calm and help ease them by tactfully apprising them of the situation. Always seek medical attention for shock, especially if caused by blood loss.

Panic

Mountains can be intimidating places, and for good reason. No matter how experienced the hiker, the bottom line is that Mother Nature holds the trump card when it comes to control. Storms, stress, exposure to heights, witnessing an accident, or unexpected illnesses can induce panic. A panicked individual can “lock up,” both physically and mentally. Fear can literally make one weak in the knees and impair balance and judgment, often in the places where concentration and focus are imperative. If you begin to panic, focus on taking at least five deep breaths. Remember, your body is reacting to a perceived risk—one that must be dealt with using logical thought. If you are on tricky terrain, breathe deeply and flex your fingers slowly a few times—assure your body that your mind still has control. Figure out your safest option and follow through with confidence. This advice is easy to dispense from the comfort of my warm office, but it's a bit more difficult to execute in the heat of the moment. My own experience has been that when you control your breathing, you control your mind, and thus control your body.

If you are with companions who begin to panic, talk to them calmly and reassure them of their options in simple, supportive language. Offer suggestions in a positive tone. Once the moment of panic is over (for example, a tricky move has been accomplished), continue to be reassuring and positive. Panic is one of those ailments that is really all in the

head—which proves that mountain climbing is just as much about mental strength as it is about powerful legs and lungs.

SUGGESTED FIRST AID KIT

Every hiker should carry an individual first aid kit, including any specific medications they may need. In addition, groups heading into the backcountry should also carry a group kit with extra supplies. Keep in mind that the group should be made aware of any preexisting medical conditions before heading into the backcountry, and appropriate treatments should be included in your kit. Here is sample list of what every basic first aid kit should have:

- **Adhesive bandages (such as Band-Aids)** At least 10 standard 1-inch-wide bandages
- **Alcohol pads** To clean small wounds. For large wounds, use soap and water with a syringe (alcohol will damage exposed tissues). Make sure to replace the pads in your kit every six months, as they can dry out even when left in the package.
- **Antacids (such as Tums)** To neutralize stomach acids
- **Antibiotic ointment packets or tubes (such as Neosporin)** To help wounds heal and to prevent infection
- **Aspirin** Used as a painkiller and as a blood thinner (which may help with altitude adjustment). Avoid giving aspirin to children; instead, administer acetaminophen-based pain relievers such as Tylenol.
- **Butterfly bandages** To serve as temporary stitches for minor wounds
- **Elastic bandage (such as Ace)** To compress sprains or similar injuries
- **Foam-lined aluminum splint (such as SAM)** To immobilize a broken or fractured limb
- **Ibuprofen** Good old “vitamin I.” Ibuprofen is an anti-inflammatory that is available under brand names such as Advil, Motrin, and Nuprin.
- **Iodine or other antiseptic** To clean wounds
- **Laxatives** To help with constipation
- **Medical scissors** To cut medical tape or dressings
- **Medical tape** To secure dressings or to tape up fingers and hands when climbing
- **Menstrual pads** Aside from their intended use, these are also useful for absorbing blood in large wounds
- **Moleskin** To pad blisters or as a blister preventive
- **Pen and paper** To record accident vitals
- **Roller bandages** To wrap around wounds and hold dressings in place
- **Rubber gloves** To prevent infection from bodily fluids or wounds
- **Safety pins** Various uses, including holding dressings in place
- **Sterile gauze pads** At least two medium and two large pads for larger wounds
- **Sterile tweezers** To remove debris, slivers, ticks, or glass from skin
- **Sugar packets or sugar candies** For low blood sugar, particularly important when someone in your group has diabetes
- **Syringe** To wash out wounds

- **Thermometer** To gauge body temperature
- **Ziplock bags** To pack out contaminated materials

Besides these things, I keep a small LED light in my first aid kit; these lights are inexpensive and can come in handy when fumbling through your kit at night. I keep two packets of energy gels in my kit for fast, easy-to-digest energy. I bring an emergency reflective blanket to keep myself or a victim warm.

A few other items to consider:

- Sunscreen
- Lip balm with sunscreen
- Hand warmers
- CPR mask/shield
- Small backup knife or multitool

People who have allergies to bee stings should carry an epinephrine auto-injector (such as EpiPen), available through your doctor. Other prescription drugs, such as Diamox (to deal with altitude), should be acquired as needed from your doctor.

NUTRITION

Eating at altitude is a matter of getting the right calories into your body via food that your stomach can tolerate. Gels, energy gummies, and energy-focused snacks are the easiest to digest and can power a full day on the mountain. Classics like peanut butter and jelly are fine, but be aware that carb-heavy breads can be slow to digest at altitude for some people. Avoid greasy and fatty foods on the hike, as they provide poor energy and can sit in your stomach like a sour, burning ball of regret.

GEAR

As much as I appreciate a good pair of lederhosen, I can't blame modern hikers for outfitting themselves in more practical (if less stylish) attire.

You don't need to have the latest and greatest in everything to enjoy the mountains, but I highly recommend not skimping on two vital items: boots and sunglasses. Boots are going to be what physically connect you with the mountain. Because you will be on your feet for many hours, you owe it yourself to get the most comfortable and functional footwear you can. Likewise, high-quality sunglasses will keep your eyes safe in the optically hostile environment of high-altitude sunlight. As a hiker on a budget, I'm reluctant to spend big bucks on trendy new gear, but keeping my eyes and feet in top shape is worth every last dollar.

Footwear

Boots are the most important pieces of gear for hikers. Proper fit, durability, and "grippy" outsoles (the tread) are essential qualities in a good boot. Different boots perform well in different settings, though with enough time on the trail, you'll begin to develop a penchant for a particular type of boot.

DAY HIKERS/TRAIL SHOES are great for three-season, on-trail adventures. These lightweight, sneaker-style shoes may also be a better option for overnights where you will be backpacking in and then climbing a summit with scrambling or actual climbing.

HIKING BOOTS shine when you'll be navigating off-trail terrain or carrying a heavy backpack. They also are better for shoulder-season conditions when snow and ice may be encountered.

FULL-ON MOUNTAINEERING BOOTS are required for winter ascents—which, in Colorado, basically means from November until early June. Sturdy, waterproof boots that can accept crampons are pricey, but your feet are worth it. Please note that “frontcountry” insulated winter boots make poor mountaineering boots, even though they are considerably cheaper. They lack good outer soles, don't vent well, and are not stiff enough to work well with crampons.

Eyewear

High-altitude sun is especially harmful to our eyes, which is why I highly recommend tossing those gas station shades for something more mountain worthy. Good mountain sunglasses will have lenses that block out 95%–100% of UVA and UVB rays. Make sure your lenses don't distort your depth perception, a common drawback of cheap sunglasses. Also ensure that peripheral light is adequately shielded. Frames should fit comfortably on your head; glasses that are too tight can form friction sores behind the ears (ouch).

Layers

Dressing in layers instead of a single garment is standard practice in the mountains. Temperatures fluctuate at various points in a hike, from the hot sun in the parking lot to the chilly gusts on summit ridges. A simple system of layers will help keep you comfortable in every weather condition.

Technical hiking clothes aim to keep you dry and warm. Fabrics designed to wick moisture from sweat away from the skin dry quickly, preventing chills. Here's a rundown of a good layering system:

FIRST LAYER Thin, lightweight, and nice to the touch. Your first layer rests against your skin, so it should fit well and dry quickly. Cotton is a no-no for the upper body (read the sidebar on the opposite page); it does not wick and can make you very cold when wet. An adequate quick-drying shirt is usually made of synthetic fibers, such as polypropylene or Capilene. Old-school hikers may prefer silk, which is functional but gets very smelly after a few uses.

For the lower body, go with underwear that is comfortable. Synthetic, wicking underwear is available in both short and long versions. While some women may prefer cotton for its breathability, this benefit is lost once the material gets wet. Or you can always go commando and not wear any undies at all.

SECOND LAYER This is your insulating layer. Fleece jackets are a great choice, especially microfleece and Windstopper garments. Vests can help keep your core warm and are easy

to stuff into your backpack. For the lower body, nylon or synthetic fabric shorts or pants will do just fine. Zip-off pants that convert into shorts are popular and practical. Avoid cotton jeans and other cotton pants, as they will keep moisture next to your body.

THIRD LAYER In colder weather, a down or thick fleece jacket is a good idea. Keep in mind that it can snow in any month in Colorado, so if storms are forecast, it's not a bad idea to bring an extra layer of warmth anytime of year.

OUTER SHELL LAYER Complement your layering system with a waterproof, windproof shell. Gore-Tex or equivalent shell fabrics will keep you dry while allowing heat and water vapor from the inside to vent. For pants, lightweight, water-resistant garments are acceptable unless you intend to glissade on snow, in which case you'll want something tougher. Gore-Tex pants with reinforced knees and seat are perfect for glissading.

COTTON KILLS?

Perhaps "cotton kills" is a bit overdramatic, but it's not entirely off the mark. Cotton is hydrophilic, meaning it loves to absorb water. This makes it a poor choice to wear when you're working up a sweat in the mountains. Heat loss is rapid when moisture is present, and cotton garments keep sweat against your skin, making your body work harder to get and stay warm. Cotton garments that get saturated can chill a body, even in mild temperatures, bringing on hypothermia. In this regard, cotton can indeed be a catalyst for life-threatening conditions.

Cotton should be avoided as a base layer. The same goes for cotton jeans, pants, and shorts. Finally, avoid wearing the classic cotton waffle-weave long underwear so popular in the Midwest; you'll essentially be wearing a skintight sponge.

Backpacks

Backpacks for day hikes should be able to carry all your gear and food. A volume of 1,800–2,500 cubic inches will give you enough room to stuff everything in. A good pack will fit comfortably on the back. Most will have adjustable shoulder straps, a waist belt, and a chest strap. Another good feature of many packs: an inner hydration sleeve to hold a water bladder (such as a CamelBak). A backpack made of high-quality, abrasion-resistant material will be more durable and may even give curious marmots a challenge when they try to gnaw their way to your M&M's.

Hydration Systems

I'm a big fan of hydration systems. CamelBaks and similar systems let you hydrate without stopping, meaning you can take small sips throughout the day without much effort. Water bladders of 70–100 ounces should suffice for day hikes in Colorado. The one drawback with hydration systems is that they freeze easily. When hiking in temps at or near freezing, blow

water from your straw back into the bladder to keep the tube from freezing solid. Tube and bladder insulators are available, but for extremely cold weather, you're better off using water bottles and insulated holders.

Hats and Neck Gaiters

Baseball caps, visors, and wide-brimmed hats are great for keeping sun off your face and are recommended at elevation. Cotton baseball caps and visors are OK, but for winter-style caps, go for fleece, wool, or wool blends. Soft fleece neck gaiters are a secret weapon in staying warm. While it's true that you lose a great deal of heat through your head, you also lose a good percentage of warmth through your neck. Keep it warm with a neck gaiter.

Gloves

Gloves can be layered for effective warmth. Thin liner gloves are often warm enough to keep your hands comfortable on windy days. Shell gloves are needed for colder weather or when traveling on snowfields. For really chilly conditions, use a mitt instead of a glove (keeping the fingers together keeps them warmer), along with a waterproof, windproof shell. Convertible mitts that pull back to allow the fingers to perform dexterous tasks are useful as well.

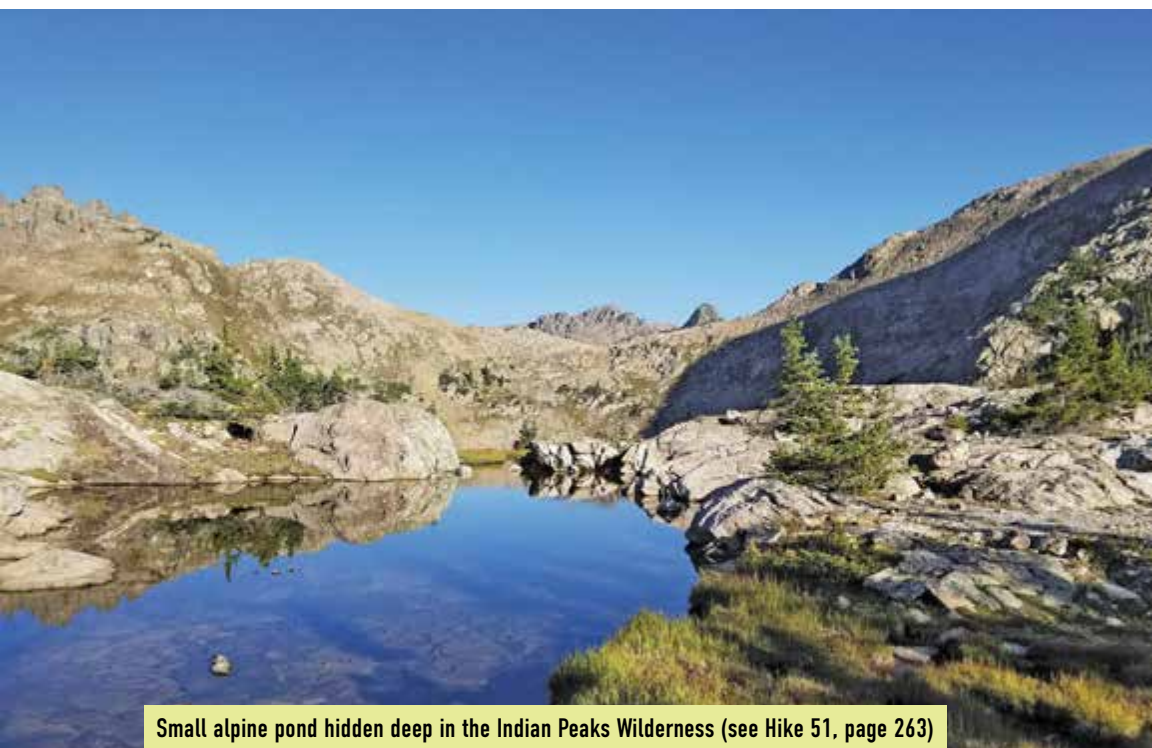
Navigation and GPS

Paper maps are a must for every hike, as is knowing how to use a compass. Because electronics can fail, you need to have a reliable manual system to navigate vast landscapes. Dense forests and barren tundra are prime venues for people to become disoriented. That said, I am a huge proponent of GPS navigation. Today's GPS systems are accurate and affordable, and most have improved battery life and satellite locking. Integrating a GPS with your computer can help you track out hikes or examine your stats when you are finished. This book is very GPS-centric. For tracking the hikes, I used two Magellan eXplorist 600 units, an older Magellan Meridian Platinum for backup, and a basic Magellan eXplorist 100 for super backup. When fully equipped, I resembled a deranged, bird-watching cyborg. More detailed information on using GPS with this book can be found on page 38.

Besides triangulating your position on Earth, many GPS units offer additional helpful information such as elevation, distance traveled, barometric pressure, time of day, elevation maps and contours, temperature, bearing, and heading. More advanced units also have accurate compasses and storm-warning features. GPS units are fun and functional, and they add a margin of safety for the hiker who knows how to use them.

Watches

Keeping track of the time is important to ensure that you elude the inevitable afternoon thunderstorms. Most watches will function perfectly fine at altitude. If you are using a watch that measures altitude and barometric pressure (most watches use barometric pressure to determine altitude, so you will probably have both functions), make sure to



Small alpine pond hidden deep in the Indian Peaks Wilderness (see Hike 51, page 263)

calibrate your watch at the beginning of your hike. All hikes in this book have an accurate starting elevation that you can use to set your watch's altimeter.

Useful Extras

Here's a short list of additional items you might find helpful in the outdoors:

TREKKING POLES Amazingly, the most-asked question I've gotten on hikes is whether or not I like using my trekking poles. I love 'em! I know they aren't for everyone, but they suit me well. Besides stabilizing my hiking, they help me set a good cadence. I use them to test snow and water depths, and in a pinch, I've used them to scare away animals. Some people find them cumbersome, but I recommend giving them a try—I rarely hike without mine.

SANDALS OR WATER SHOES Bring these along if you anticipate water crossings. The last thing you want is to slog around for hours in waterlogged boots.

Cameras

When the first edition of *Best Summit Hikes* came out in 2007, the transition from film to digital cameras was just about complete. In the years since, digital has fully taken over, and mountain photography has never been easier. For many outdoorspeople, dedicated

digital cameras have been replaced by high-quality smartphones, most of which take excellent photos.

There will always be a place for high-end photography in the mountains, but for most of us, a good phone camera or a decent point-and-shoot will do the trick (most of the photos in this book were taken with point-and-shoot cameras). I suggest buying an extra battery/batteries for your camera when spending time in the mountains. Portable, small, and lightweight solar rechargers are perfect for multiday outings, and you can pick up a decent one for around \$100.

A picture-perfect day on Rio Grande Pyramid (see Hike 52, page 267)



OTHER HIKING CONSIDERATIONS

THE 10 ESSENTIALS

This list has stood the test of time. These survival items should be in your pack every time you head into the backcountry:

1. Complete basic first aid kit, with items updated every six months
2. Map and compass
3. Pocketknife and emergency whistle
4. Matches and fire starter
5. Emergency bivy sack/blanket/shelter
6. Flashlight or headlamp
7. Clothing for warmth and for rain protection
8. Extra food
9. Extra water
10. Sun protection

The ever-important “11th essential” is a hiking companion, though I don’t recommend trying to stuff them into your backpack—unless they’re really tired.

LEAVE NO TRACE

Leave No Trace ethics promote keeping wilderness areas pristine by minimizing human impact. There are seven basic tenets:

1. Plan ahead and prepare.
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces.
3. Dispose of waste properly.
4. Leave what you find.
5. Minimize campfire impacts.
6. Respect wildlife.
7. Be considerate of other visitors.

For more detailed information on each of the seven principles, visit the Leave No Trace website (lnt.org). In addition to these, I would suggest packing out what you pack in, as well as picking up any trash you find along the trail and packing it out.

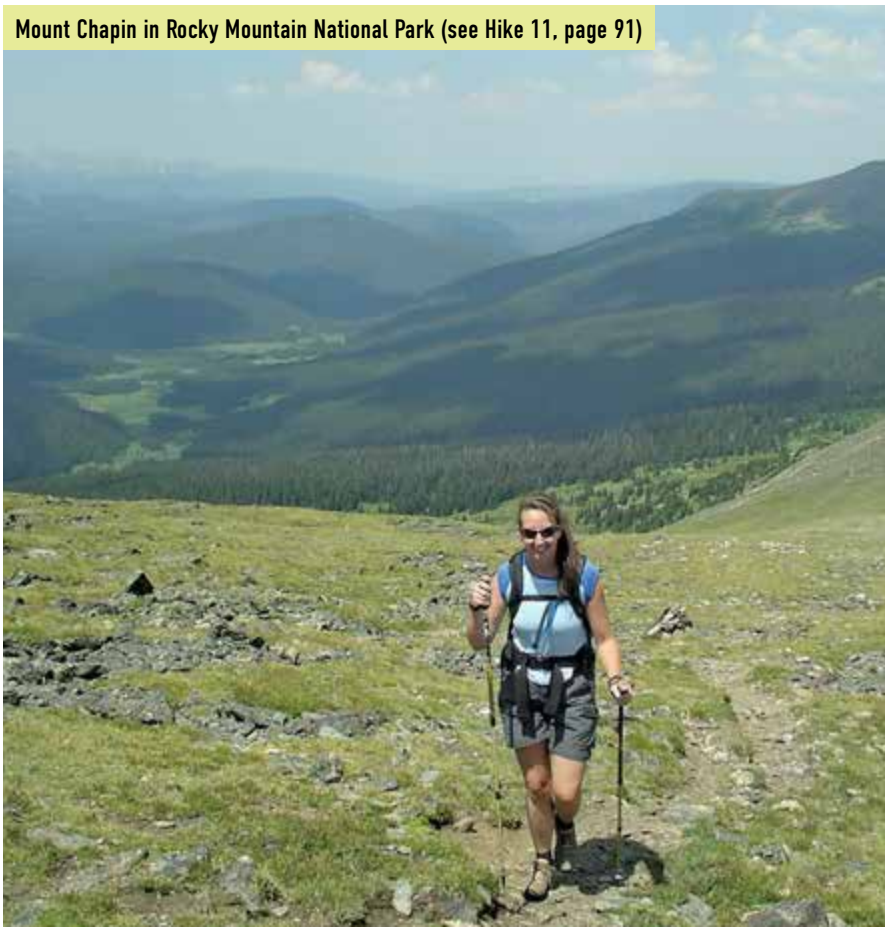
TRAIL ETHICS

When out on the trail, you’ll meet all manner of man and beast. It’s important to be respectful of the land, the wildlife, and other hikers. Here’s a simple list of 10 things you can do to maintain courtesy in the backcountry:

1. **Greet other hikers with at least a smile.** On crowded peaks, you may be smiling a lot, but there’s nothing wrong with that, is there?
2. **Be tactful before offering unsolicited advice.** Most people will ask for help if they need it when in the mountains.

3. **Control your canine companion.** No matter how friendly your dog is, if he jumps on strangers or insists on thrusting his snout into their groins, keep him on a leash!
4. **If someone needs help, help them.** It sounds logical, but I've seen many people refuse to help others in need for whatever reason. Of course, if you are traveling solo (especially if you're a woman), use your best judgment before committing to helping others. Unfortunately, that's the way of the world.
5. **Always yield to uphill hikers** and don't be offended if they don't say hi. It's tough work climbing at altitude—give them room to maintain their pace.
6. **Yield to horses and bikers.** And don't step aside with a scowl; they will pass in a few seconds.
7. **Don't be afraid to tell new trail friends** that you would like to hike alone (or with your partner). Likewise, respect the wishes of others you may meet on the trail. Remember, many people embrace the solitude found in the mountains.
8. **Encourage other hikers** and keep a positive tone.
9. **Never downplay other hikers' accomplishments,** and never speak in condescending tones. Boasting that you hike Mount Elbert as a warm-up is obviously going to deflate the hiker who trained all winter to reach the top. We all climb for different reasons.
10. **Finally, don't take out your frustrations on your hiking partners.** If you don't feel well or if it's not your day, say so. Alert your partners if you are starting to feel off or ill. Good communication will make every outing a better experience.

Mount Chapin in Rocky Mountain National Park (see Hike 11, page 91)



USING THIS BOOK

My goal in writing this book was simple: provide accurate information for the best summit hikes in Colorado in an enjoyable-to-read format. All of the standard routes in this book are nontechnical and may be climbed without ropes or protection, though some sections may require scrambling and exposed moves. Although I provide a difficulty rating system, I always say there are no “easy” mountains in Colorado. Because of the variable nature of weather and the influence of altitude, even a short hike with mild terrain can be difficult for the uninitiated. Likewise, a technical scramble may be less taxing on your legs and therefore easier on your body. Be ready to sweat, no matter where you hike . . . and bring your camera. These are truly the best summit hikes in Colorado!

DRIVING DIRECTIONS

I find clear, concise driving directions of utmost importance—starting a day late and frustrated because you couldn’t find the trailhead is not only annoying, but it can also take you out of a safe weather window. I put extra time and effort into writing my directions, and I hope they will get you to the trailhead with ease. Because backcountry roads can change, I encourage readers to call ahead to see if conditions are suitable for your vehicle.

VEHICLE RECOMMENDATIONS

In describing the roads that lead to certain trailheads, I’ve added notes for those of us who don’t have 4x4, high-clearance trucks. Following are the types of vehicles I will mention in those notes:

PASSENGER CAR (PC) Passenger cars include any vehicle with low clearance and without off-road modifications. Minivans often fall into this category. Trailheads that have easy access via a paved road or well-maintained dirt roads are perfect for passenger cars.

TOUGH PASSENGER CAR (TPC) This is a polite way to describe a beater, a vehicle you aren’t afraid to sacrifice a few parts of to reach a trailhead. My car fills this bill perfectly. Trailheads that TPCs can reach are generally passable but may have a few areas where your car will bottom out or have to blast through mud and water.

SPORT UTILITY CAR (SUC) Sport utility cars describe any light-duty, off-road vehicle with decent clearance. All-wheel drive (AWD) or 4x4 transmissions are standard for most of these vehicles. (Note that AWD is inferior to true 4x4. AWD uses power transfers to delegate a certain amount of available torque to whatever wheel can best use it, while 4x4 spreads an even amount of torque over all four wheels, giving them each power and traction at all times.) SUCs can handle mildly rutted roads, relatively steep terrain, and some rocky roads, though those without a “low” 4x4 option may have trouble. Examples of this type include Subaru Outback, Toyota RAV4, Honda CRV, Honda Element, Ford Escape, and small pickup trucks.

SPORT UTILITY VEHICLE (SUV) It may be odd to see these lawyer-pleasing behemoths beyond the familiar confines of the Starbucks parking lot, but most SUVs actually do

perform well in the backcountry. SUVs can tackle most rugged terrain, though many lack the high clearance to navigate tougher or more remote roads. Examples include Chevy Suburban and Blazer, GMC Yukon, Ford Tahoe and Explorer, Honda Ridgeline, Jeep Grand Cherokee, and Nissan Pathfinder.

4X4 HIGH-CLEARANCE TRUCKS (4X4) These are vehicles specifically designed for the rigors of rocky, rough, and steep roads. These trucks or Jeeps have high ground clearance, true 4x4 transmissions (usually with four high and four low settings), rugged suspension, tough tires, and strong engines. These vehicles can make it up almost every road and are required for one of the best hikes in this book, Storm King Peak in the Grenadiers (Hike 45). Examples include Toyota Tacoma, CJ series Jeeps (Wrangler, Rubicon, and so on), Dodge Ram, Nissan Frontier, Nissan Xterra, and Chevy Silverado.

MODIFIED 4X4 These amazing machines have been customized with huge tires, reworked suspensions, powerful engines, roll cages, and increased torque to get over anything in their way. Clever adaptations such as winches and independent tire-control mechanisms help these modified monsters succeed on 4x4 roads. Most of these vehicles are purely recreational, and very few are street legal. They are the only vehicles that have a shot of making it up the awesome test piece road that leads up to Mount Blanca (see page 211).

GPS

Just thinking about the complexity of satellites in space beaming information down to a cool little handheld receiver makes me feel like James Bond. While GPS units are undoubtedly valuable tools for tracking eclectic supervillains, I tend to use mine purely for wilderness navigation.

The hikes in this book have all been tracked and mapped using GPS. You don't need a GPS to use this book, but you will find it a nice complement to the information provided in each hike profile. One thing to consider: Even the best GPS units have a slight margin of error that may conflict with the data collected on your personal GPS. (Note that this same margin of error is present in many traditional cartographic techniques as well.) When using GPS, it's important to give the technology leeway for slight differences.

KEY INFORMATION

ROUND-TRIP DISTANCE This is the total mileage you will be hiking over the entire route. Remember, distance is not an indicator of how easy or difficult your trip will be—some of the 5-mile hikes in this book are many times more difficult than those double that length.

HIKING TIME The low end of estimated hiking times (for round-trip distances) are my personal hike times, including time taken for photography, snack breaks, and bathroom breaks. My estimates are meant to provide a good idea of what the average hiker can expect as a time investment; they are not meant to judge ability or fitness. Less experienced hikers should expect to complete the hikes in the upper range of the times given, while strong hikers will probably complete the hikes in less time than the estimates.

DIFFICULTY I have rated the hikes on a scale of 1–10, with 1 being the easiest. None of the hikes in this book require ropes, so the difficulty is relatively based on the challenge of nontechnical scrambles and hikes. Contributing factors include steepness, off-trail route finding required, distance, terrain, scrambling difficulty, and exposure. Not included in difficulty ratings are seasonal tribulations such as ice, snow, and high-river crossings (though such conditions are noted when the prime hiking time is during a specific season).

CLASS I'm not a huge fan of the class rating system due to variations of opinion on what defines a particular type of terrain (not to mention that the structure of these ratings is more beneficial to technical rock climbers than hikers). Class ratings were first introduced by the Sierra Club in the 1930s to offer a relative scale for gauging hikes in the Sierra Nevada Range; the influence of rock climbers has since changed the title of the system to the Yosemite Decimal System. While the system has been universally adopted, class designations are most useful when they are region-specific. To make the system useful for Colorado's hikes, I've modified the ratings to accommodate Colorado's varied terrain. Here's how the class system works for this book:

Class 1: Easy, on-trail hiking terrain with few obstacles and minimal exposure. Class 1 trails are well-maintained and easy to follow (they may even be dirt roads). Many hikes begin with class 1 terrain that gradually gives way to sections with more difficult ratings.

Class 2: This is your standard hiking trail. Terrain may be rocky or muddy and may require the use of hands for very short segments. On-trail class 2 routes are festooned with rocks and may be steep, with minimal exposure. Off-trail class 2 includes stable rock and talus fields, wide-open tundra, stable ridgelines, and easy-to-navigate fields.

Class 2+: This designation refers to class 2 terrain that has sustained, simple scrambling or steep, strenuous trails that offer low-technical challenges. A 2+ rating may also cover off-trail terrain that is rife with obstacles, such as fallen trees, swamps, and river crossings. Additionally, 2+ covers loose talus fields, rocky ridges, and off-camber paths.

Class 3: This is the fun stuff! Class 3 terrain utilizes handholds and is often steep; in other words, class 3 is true scrambling. Route finding is important on class 3 terrain, as a majority of it is off-trail or on rocky ridges. Exposure is more noticeable, though under normal conditions you shouldn't need ropes (though if you're climbing off-season, they might be a good idea). Helmets are a good idea on class 3 terrain.

Class 3+: The hardest hikes in this book are 3+; these are advanced routes that require skilled scrambling and difficult route finding and may require tricky moves in highly exposed areas. Class 3+ routes have solid handholds, but you will need to commit to your moves. Some moves on class 3+ routes may be unnerving, though fall potential is low (think technically easy moves with low fall probability, but high consequences in the case of a fall). Helmets are recommended on 3+ terrain.

Class 4: None of the standard routes in this book are class 4, though by some definitions, the class 3+ routes may be considered low class 4 in other regions. Class 4 goes beyond scrambling and gets into low-level climbing; slipping or falling on class 4 terrain may be fatal, so the stakes are high. Often, class 4 routes are found on rock that is too loose to be protected or on ridges that have sustained, highly exposed sections with good handholds.

Class 5 and up: Used to designate technical rock climbing using protection, ropes, harnesses, and belay devices.

Examples of class designations for hikes on some familiar Colorado peaks:

Class 1: Bison Peak, Longs Peak (from standard trailhead to the boulder field), Mount Thomas

Class 2: Mount Elbert, James Peak, Uncompahgre Peak

Class 2+: Mount Sneffels, Windom Peak, Blanca Peak

Class 3: Longs Peak (from boulder field to summit), Mount Eolus, Mount Richthofen

Class 3+: Mount Lead, Fools Peak, Storm King Peak

Class 4: The finishing move on Mount Sunlight Peak, North Maroon Peak

Class 5: The Diamond on Longs Peak, bolted climbs, vertical routes

START ELEVATION The elevation above sea level at the beginning of your hike.

PEAK ELEVATION The elevation of the summit.

TOTAL ELEVATION GAIN The total amount of elevation you will gain on both your ascent and descent; it is not the difference between start and summit elevations. Elevation gain is graphically displayed in the elevation profiles provided for each hike.

TERRAIN Terrain features may not be obvious on maps. Knowing what will be under your boots lets you equip yourself accordingly.

BEST TIME TO CLIMB Almost all of the hikes will be most enjoyable from late June to mid-September, though some peaks are best scaled in early spring, when snowfields provide optimal terrain. A few peaks are great to climb year-round.

GEAR ADVISOR These are suggestions about gear that I found very helpful. This includes footwear suggestions and terrain-specific gear such as helmets, ice axes, gaiters, crampons, or sandals for water crossings.

CROWD LEVEL If you're looking for solitude, check the crowd level. Traffic levels will always be higher on weekends during hiking season. Following are definitions for the four crowd levels.

High: This designation refers to popular trails that see a lot of traffic. Such trails are good for social hikers or those wanting the comfort of others on the mountain—a very common occurrence on fourteeners, since they are Colorado's "glory peaks."

Moderate: You probably won't be alone on hikes with a moderate crowd level, but you won't be overwhelmed by the masses. Such hikes are often somewhat well known. A moderate crowd level can be expected on the easier-to-access thirteeners.

Low: You'll probably have the summit to yourself, but you'll likely see a few others out and about on low-traffic peaks. You can expect low traffic on hidden gems or on mountains with remote trailheads.

Hermit: These are peaks where you have a great chance of being all alone, save for a few resident animals. These are the true secrets of Colorado (though some of these peaks may have initial access areas where you'll encounter hikers headed to alternate destinations). Don't expect summit registers; if there are logbooks, expect them to have a short list of exclusive signatures. These hikes are great for solitude, but I'd still highly recommend bringing along a companion for hermit hikes.

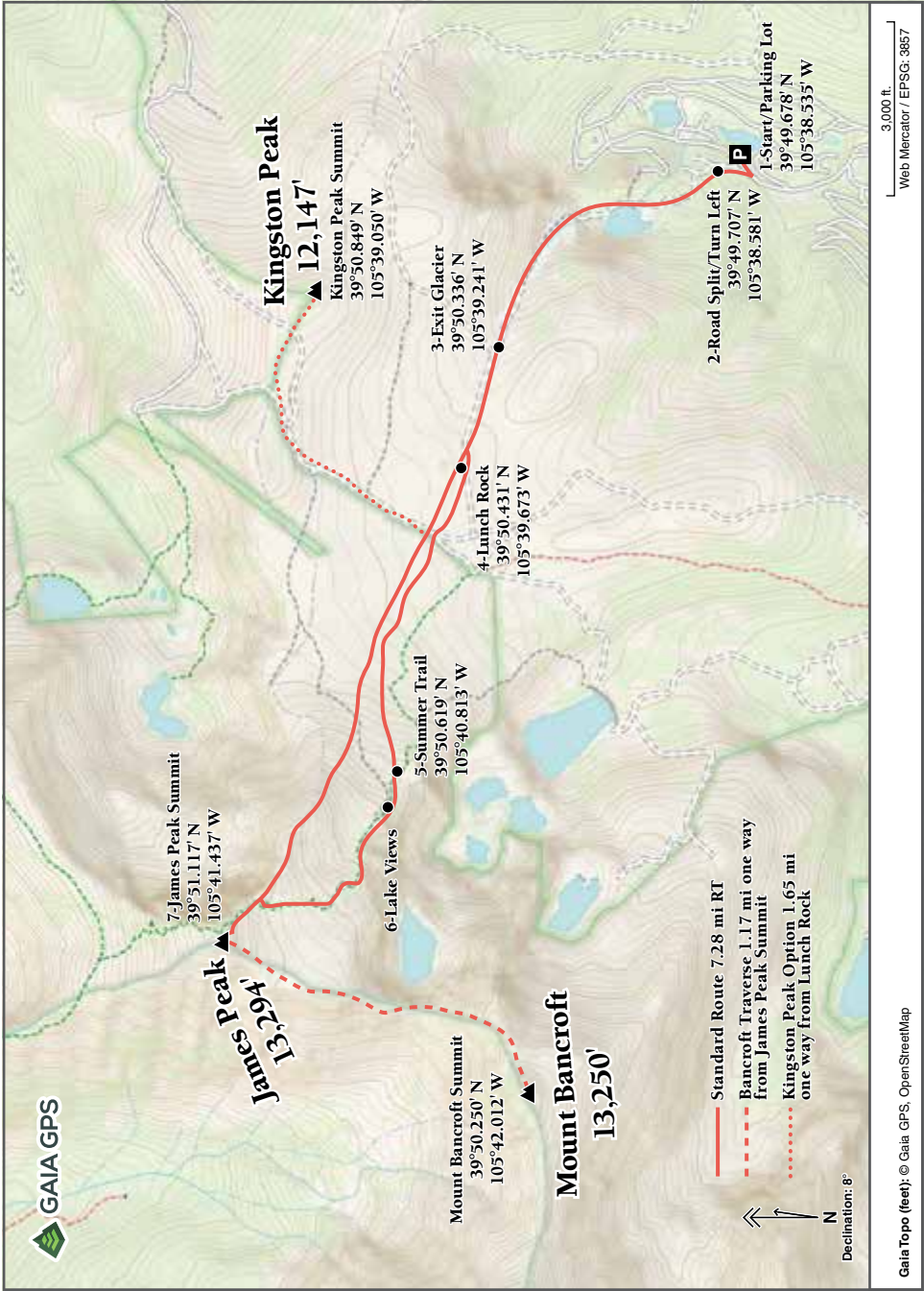
THE HIKES



Looking out on a mountainous world (see Hike 55, page 279)



James Peak



1 JAMES PEAK

James Peak offers stunning alpine scenery and glacial goodness. Start on St. Marys Glacier, traverse an alpine meadow, and then ascend an aesthetic dome to the top.

ROUND-TRIP DISTANCE 7.28 miles

HIKING TIME 4.5–6 hours

DIFFICULTY 4/10

CLASS 2

START ELEVATION 10,300' (St. Marys Glacier Trailhead)

PEAK ELEVATION 13,294'

TOTAL ELEVATION GAIN 2,950'

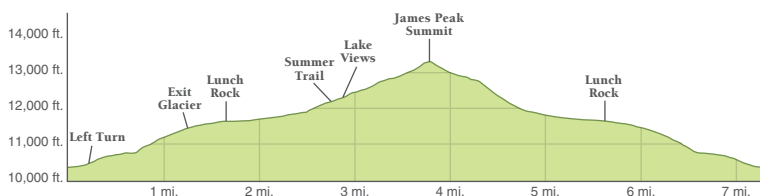
TERRAIN Year-round glacier, alpine plains, rocky slopes on the descent ridge

BEST TIME TO CLIMB Early June–September

GEAR ADVISOR Crampons and ice ax in early spring

CROWD LEVEL Moderate on the peak; high on the glacier

TRAILHEAD GPS 39°49.681' N, 105°38.537' W



Location Indian Peaks Range in the James Peak Wilderness/Arapaho National Forest near Idaho Springs

Intro James Peak is the centerpiece of the 14,000-acre James Peak Wilderness, a relatively new wilderness area designated in 2002 (prior to that, James Peak was part of the Indian Peaks Wilderness). James stands as the high point of Gilpin County, and its prominent half-dome profile is visible from the east, especially when viewed from the foothills of Boulder County. Relatively speaking, James is one of the easier thirteeners to climb, yet it has all the incredible scenery and the majestic feel of Colorado's highest mountains.

Why Climb It? James Peak is a year-round attraction, thanks in part to St. Marys Glacier, a permanent ice field that graces the base of the standard ascent route. The glacier offers a great training ground for snow travel and is a short, steep warm-up for the southern slopes that lead to James' summit. Cresting the horizon at the upper terminus of the glacier, James Peak's impressive profile comes into view at the far end of a spacious alpine meadow. The flats leading to the final rise are great places to catch your breath while keeping an eye out for dozens of flowers and the occasional troop of ptarmigans.

Pushing for the summit can be done on a well-maintained, switchbacking trail or by a direct climb of the rolling southeast ridge. Summit views include a unique perspective of the front-side runs at the Winter Park and Mary Jane ski areas. Best of all, when James Peak holds snow, it's possible to have some rip-roaring fun glissading down the summit slopes and the glacier. As a bonus, James Peak's Trailhead is easily accessed from I-70 and is a relatively short drive from Denver, Boulder, or Golden.

Driving James Peak is easily accessible by passenger car. The trail begins off a paved, maintained road.

How to Get There From I-70 (East or West), take the Fall River Road exit (Exit 238, which is also labeled St. Mary's/Alice). In gazetteers, this is listed as 275 Rd. If you are westbound on I-70, this exit is roughly 1.5 miles from Idaho Springs. Follow Fall River Road northwest 8.6 miles. Be ready for some steep switchbacks as you get closer to the trailhead. At approximately 8.3 miles, you'll pass the well-hidden town of Alice on your left; a bit farther up you'll see the general store off the main road on your right. You're almost there. Continue to the top of the hill, bypassing a rusted-out ski lift and a parking area blocked off by boulders on the left (this is the old parking area). At the top of the hill, you'll see a fenced-off mining shack and a well-traveled dirt road with a ST. MARY'S GLACIER sign. This is where you start your hike. Drive past the trail approximately 200 yards to a parking area on the left side of the road. Note that this lot gets very crowded on weekends, so arrive early or you'll have to park farther down the road. Also, please walk up to the main trail you passed; do not scramble up the improvised (and eroded) trails that have been cut into the hill directly from the parking lot.

Fees/Camping While there is no fee for entering the James Peak Wilderness, nearby parking areas are privately owned and as of 2022 are charging a \$5 fee for using their lots. Don't let the ugly, excessive signage and petty towing threats ruin your day; it's still an incredible hiking area.

Route Notes None

Mile/Waypoint

0.0 mi (1) From the parking lot, walk 200 yards uphill (southwest) on the paved road to reach the wide, well-worn dirt road that leads up to St. Marys Glacier. You'll see a sign pointing out the glacier.

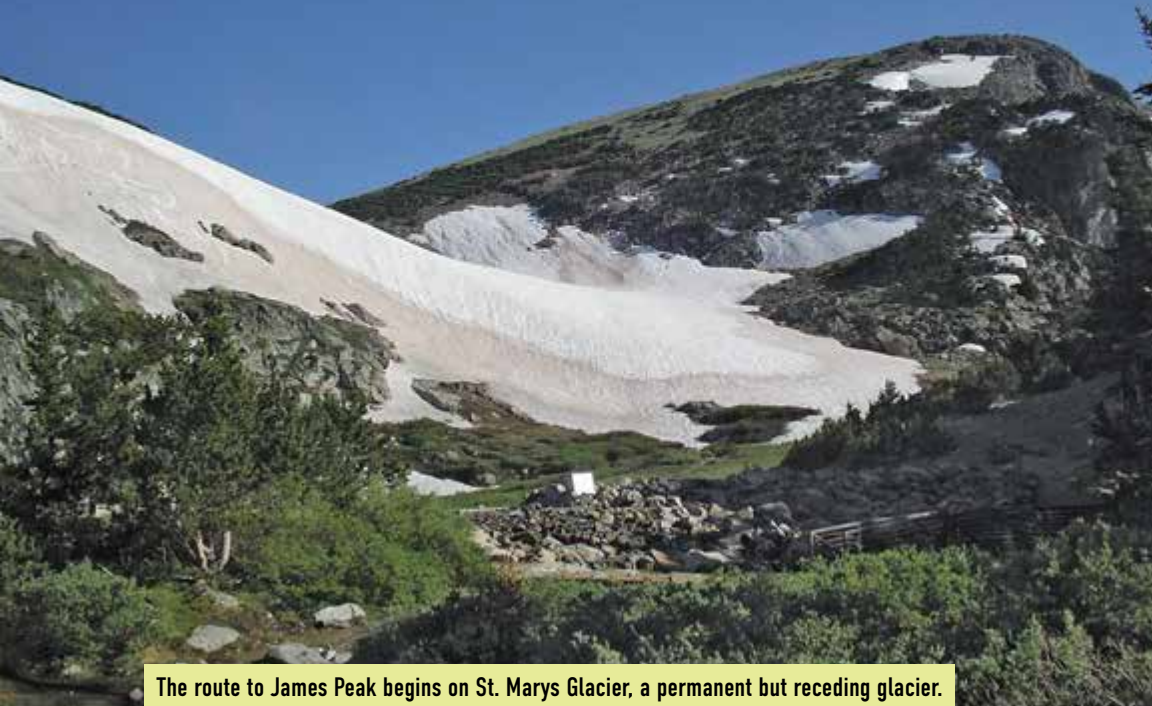
0.2 mi (2) The wide road splits. Head left and uphill. (The road going to the right simply leads to a parking area for people who feel like driving their 4x4s up the 0.1 mile from the road.) Follow the well-worn and rocky path as it winds up to the woods toward St. Marys Lake.

0.5 mi Pass by St. Marys Lake. The enormous, curving profile of St. Marys Glacier will be before you. Cross a small metal bridge and continue to the glacier. It doesn't matter if you take the higher path or the lower path; they both lead to the glacier (though the lower path can be mucky in spring).

0.7 mi Get on the glacier and continue your ascent. Follow the icy snow to the top of the glacier. This is a steep, 0.5-mile ascent, with wonderful photo opportunities. The alleyway is notorious for funneling fierce winds, especially in the colder months.

1.2 mi (3) Top out and exit the glacier. Where the snowfield ends depends on the time of the year. A semi-maintained trail fades in on the left (west) side when there is no snow. This is a good waypoint to mark on your GPS; in bad conditions, it's easy to miss the entrance of the glacier. From here, you'll see the expansive flat plains with James Peak dominating the horizon. Continue along the plains to Lunch Rock.

1.7 mi (4) Lunch Rock is a battleship-shaped formation that is the only distinguishing feature on the otherwise flat traverse to the base of James' slopes. There are some small, natural caves and man-made wind shelters in Lunch Rock. This is another good



The route to James Peak begins on St. Marys Glacier, a permanent but receding glacier.

reference point. The faint, “sort of there” trail to the base of James, which is the left fork on the map at waypoint **4**, is the easiest way to make your ascent. From here, continue along the flats, crossing a 4x4 road en route to the south slopes. The trail from the top of the glacier begins to fizzle out, but you can see where you need to go.

2.7 mi (5) Once the snow has melted off, a cairned, switchbacking trail is evident on the southeast slopes. This trail will lead you to the top. Alternatively, you can head directly up the steep hills to James’ summit. When there is snow, this is a good option, but be sure to test the snowpack; these slopes are at a prime avalanche angle. Note that when dry, the rocky hill makes for rough climbing (but is a good descent route).

2.9 mi (6) Don’t miss the stunning views of the alpine lakes dropping off to the south. Continue to follow the cairns and well-worn trail. There is something of a false summit at 13,000 feet, where you gain James’ southeast ridge. A glance north looks down into the impressive couloirs stretching down to James Peak Lake.

3.8 mi (7) Reach the flat summit of James Peak. From here, you can return the way you came or descend directly down the rolling southeast ridge. Following the ridge gives you some new views to the north and is quicker, especially when the snow allows for glissades. When there is no snow, it’s a rocky class 2 descent, so if you don’t feel like banging up your knees, return via the standard trail.

4.7 mi When you get to the bottom of the southeast slopes and resume the flats, aim for Lunch Rock. You can pass it on either side; on the return, the main trail is to the right of Lunch Rock.

5.7 mi (4) Pass Lunch Rock.

6.1 mi (3) Return to the glacier and follow it back to St. Marys Lake. Follow the well-worn trail to the road and parking lot. Don't shortcut down the hill to the parking lot just off the top of the trail.

7.28 mi Finish at the parking lot.

Options From the summit of James Peak, Mount Bancroft (13,250') is a 1.17-mile traverse to the southwest. This class 2+ traverse is a great way to get two thirteeners. This is best done as an out-and-back from the James Peak trail.

A much more moderate option is to grab nearby 12,147-foot Kingston Peak. From Lunch Rock this is a 1.65-mile class 1 walk up along a Jeep road.

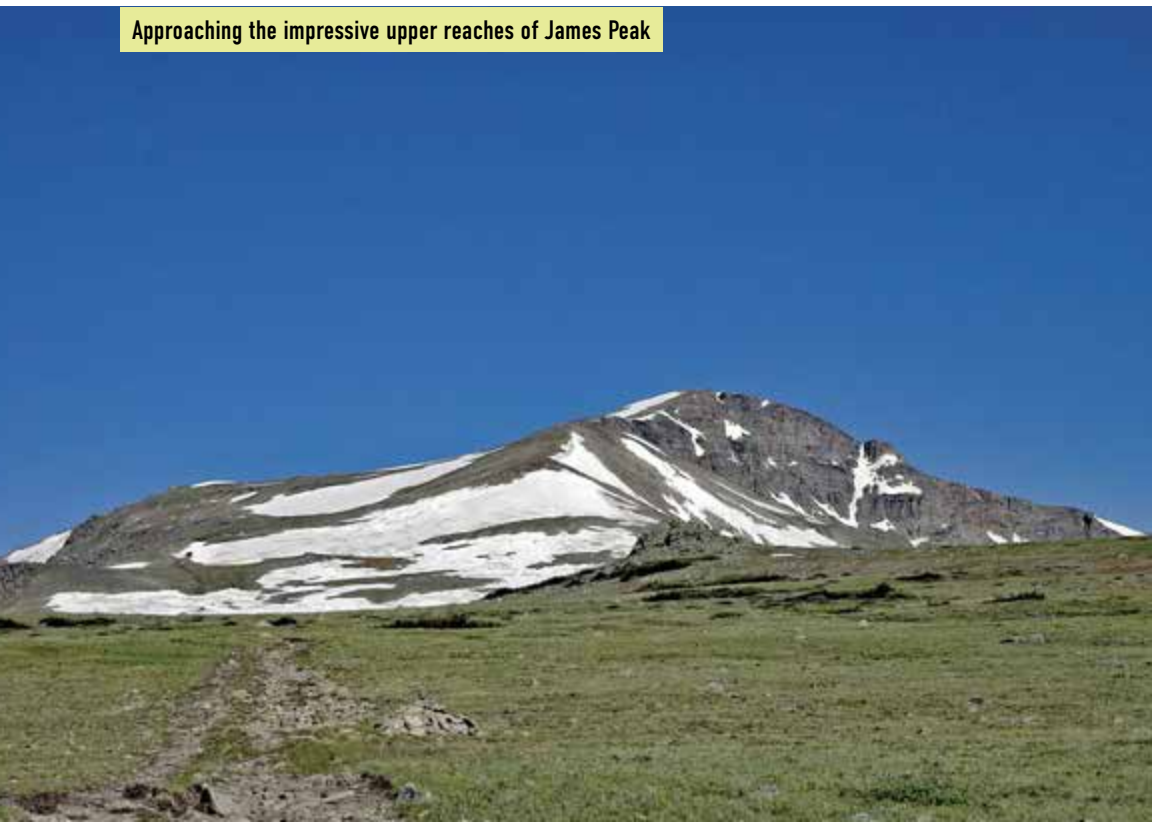
Quick Facts James Peak is named for mountaineer, botanist, and historian Edwin James, who served on Stephen Long's Colorado expedition. James's claim to fame was his historic first ascent of Pikes Peak, which initially was dubbed James Peak. Zebulon Pike had surveyed the mountain in 1806 but never climbed it; James and two companions did the trick in 1820. Cartographers used both names—James Peak and Pikes Peak—on early maps, eventually favoring the alliterative Pikes Peak for the fourteener.

James Peak was officially named in 1866, five years after the death of Edwin James. A fine mountain in its own right, this peak is a respectable consolation for a pioneering Colorado climber.

Contact Info [Arapaho & Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland, Boulder Ranger District](#)

fs.usda.gov/recarea/arp/recarea/?recid=28178
303-541-2500

Approaching the impressive upper reaches of James Peak



2 NAVAJO PEAK

A trip to the glacial basin below Navajo leads you to the base of Airplane Gully, where ghosts of the past await. A thrilling scramble is the grand finale to Navajo's airy summit.

ROUND-TRIP DISTANCE 8.9 miles

HIKING TIME 6.5–8 hours

DIFFICULTY 8/10

CLASS 3

START ELEVATION 10,500' (Long Lake Trailhead)

PEAK ELEVATION 13,409'

TOTAL ELEVATION GAIN 2,825'

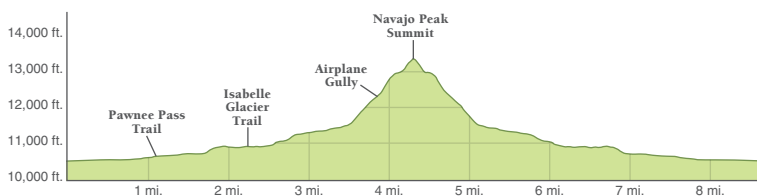
TERRAIN Steep, loose gully and airy but solid scrambling on summit block

BEST TIME TO CLIMB June–September

GEAR ADVISOR Gaiters, stiff boots, ice ax in spring, helmet, and GPS

CROWD LEVEL Low

TRAILHEAD GPS 40°04.696' N, 105°35.004' W



Location Indian Peaks Range in the Indian Peaks Wilderness/Roosevelt National Forest outside Ward

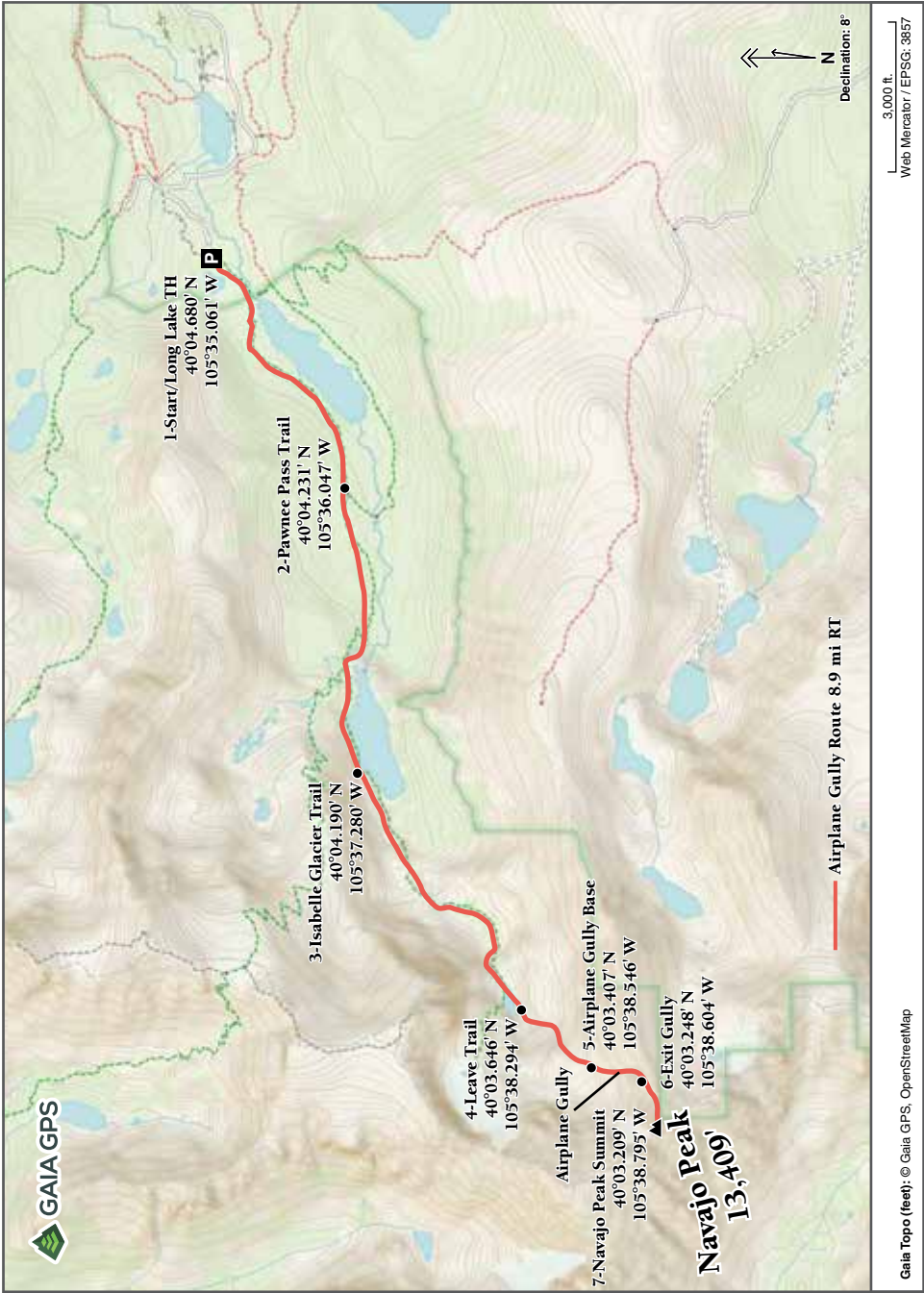
Intro From a distance, the clean, four-sided pyramid block that sits atop Navajo Peak brings to mind ancient Mayan temples. Among the peaks that grace the skyline from Brainard Lake Recreation Area, Navajo offers the most challenging standard route. Half of the hike is off-trail, culminating in a gully climb and an exciting class 3 scramble to the summit. Along the way, you'll have a chance to examine the wreckage of a C-47 aircraft that crashed in January 1948 en route to Grand Junction. Parts are strewn throughout the gully, and a huge piece of the bulkhead rests near the gully exit.

Why Climb It? Shipwrecks and ghost towns fascinate humankind. We are drawn to relics, the shells of history, which hold stories of hardship and bravery and are at the same time symbols of mortality. The wreckage on Navajo Peak is half of the appeal of this hike. Debris from the crash is strewn throughout the gully; small, rusty gears are so numerous that they seem like bizarre metallic sunflowers pushing through the rocks. Besides serving as an archive of aviation history, the scramble to Navajo's summit is exciting in itself. Beginning on-trail in the beautiful Long Lake area of Indian Peaks, an easy start leads to an off-trail adventure, where you'll pass two of Colorado's permanent glaciers (Isabelle and Navajo). After a loose scramble up the gully, the remaining ridge climb to the summit concludes with an exposed but very solid scramble 35 feet to the summit block.

Driving Passenger cars can reach the trailhead with ease: the road is paved all the way.



Navajo Peak



How to Get There Take CO 72 (Peak-to-Peak Highway) to Brainard Lake Road, which is above the town of Ward. From Nederland, it is 12 miles to this turnoff; from Lyons, it's 10.2 miles from the junction with CO 7. If you are approaching from Boulder, it's quicker to take US 36 north out of town approximately 6 miles and take a left onto Left Hand Canyon Drive. Stay on this road 17 miles, all the way through the car graveyard/town of Ward. At the top of the road, take a right on CO 72 and then a quick left to Brainard Lake Road. Follow this road 5 miles (you'll pass a pay station and Brainard Lake), and follow the well-marked signs 0.5 mile to Long Lake Trailhead.

Fees/Camping Starting in 2021, the Brainard Lake recreation area began using a timed-entry reservation system for trailheads. The reservations are for specific trailheads and become available for sign-up two weeks in advance. Choose the 5–8 a.m. slot for this hike (you can arrive earlier than 5 a.m.; just leave the printed receipt on your dashboard). Note that once you have arrived, there is no forced leave time.

As of 2022, you can make your reservation at recreation.gov/timed-entry/10087515. Vehicle access is \$14 per day. Motorcycles are \$9 per day.

Route Notes The off-trail portion of this hike is a little easier in spring, when snow covers the boulders in the basin above Lake Isabelle. Snow in Airplane Gully melts out early, so you shouldn't have to bring crampons after early May. The moves to reach the summit are exposed, but the rock is very solid. The crux of the climb is the short downclimb off the summit.

Mile/Waypoint

0.0 mi (1) Start at the Long Lake Trailhead and go west. Enjoy the flat trail, which is a great warm-up. At the west end of Long Lake, stay right and follow the trail to Pawnee Pass (for the time being).

1.1 mi (2) Pawnee Pass Trail. Continue west to Lake Isabelle.

1.9 mi (3) After hiking up some switchbacks and crossing a cool waterfall, you arrive at Lake Isabelle and the Isabelle Glacier Trail. Follow the lake on its north side; do not go up the trail to Pawnee Pass. Instead, stay on the trail to Isabelle Glacier. This trail climbs above Lake Isabelle, eventually coming to a flat, marshy section with a small lake at 11,500 feet.

3.5 mi (4) You will need to get off-trail at the marshy section. However, do not follow the steep, switchbacking trail to the north going to Isabelle Glacier. Instead, head southwest to the dry basin at the foot of Airplane Gully. It is best to stay on the left (west) slopes instead of dropping down to the flat part of the basin, as the tracks indicate.

3.9 mi (5) This is the base of Airplane Gully (12,280'). Finding the right gully can be tricky. Looking up at Navajo Peak, you'll see the Navajo Glacier on the right, the lumpy north face, and a steep gully that ends where the summit pyramid joins the ridge—this is not your gully. To the left of this gully is an outcrop of rock; Airplane Gully runs to the left of this rock. There is a minor talus fan of large boulders at the base (as well as a silver wing from the plane, with identification numbers). When you go over to the base of the gully, it will seem very climbable.

There are many loose rocks in Airplane Gully, so be careful if you are scrambling above people. It's steep, but I'd still only rate the gully class 2+. More difficult than its grade is its total of 900 vertical feet. About halfway up (at approximately 12,550'), the gully forks.



Take the right fork, despite the fact that the straight south route offers a keyhole of blue sky through the rocks topping its exit. The correct fork climbs southwest. At 12,900 feet, just before the exit, lies the largest part of the wreckage. A major section of the bulkhead, motors, gears, and wires are everywhere. Do not touch or take any of the wreckage. It's illegal to take pieces of the plane, as it's a recognized crash site. Furthermore, the heavy metal pieces sit in a loose, unstable gully—they may shift at any time. Above the wreckage, a grassy slope exits onto Navajo's east ridge.

4.2 mi (6) At the gully exit, the final pyramid looms before you. To reach the summit, hike up to the base of the block, favoring the south (left) side of the slope. Head west until you reach about 13,260 feet. There is a perilously balanced rock on the west side known as the Monkey Fist. This is your cue to begin scrambling north on exposed but solid rock. It's a short push, maybe 30–40 feet with several class 3 moves. Note that more experienced climbers can find a way up the face to the right (the east face) via several class 3+ and class 4 sections. Novice or inexperienced hikers may find the exposure a bit unsettling.

4.4 mi (7) Navajo Peak's tiny summit has a register tube and a cairn. It can accommodate two people, though there are places for others to sit just below the summit. The downclimb back to the east ridge can be tricky. The safest and easiest way is to retrace the way you came, even though it looks like the rocks drop off into oblivion. There

are several slightly more direct exits you can take by going down the southeast side; if you take them, you'll have short sections of face-in downclimbing, with some fall potential—class 4 stuff.

Once you are safely on the ridge, return via Airplane Gully. The loose rock makes this descent tough; I'd recommend using an ice ax or trekking poles for stability, even when there is no snow. Once you're out of the gully, return to Lake Isabelle, regain the well-worn trail, and enjoy the hike out.

8.9 mi Finish.

Options Navajo Peak is a fairly demanding day, so linking to other routes isn't advised. There are some good views if you explore northeast on Niwot Ridge, which would require a left turn at the top of Airplane Gully (waypoint **6**). Navajo's southeast ridge looks as if it would provide an exciting class 3+ traverse over to nearby 13,150-foot Arikaree Peak, but unfortunately Arikaree is in the off-limits Boulder watershed. The impressive stand-alone peak you see from atop Airplane Gully to the east, 13,276-foot Kiowa Peak, is also forbidden, for the same reason. Fines are strictly enforced for trespassing in the Boulder watershed.

Quick Facts Ellsworth Bethel advocated naming a series of peaks to honor native peoples. That series is now known as the Indian Peaks. Navajo Peak is one example; others include Apache, Shoshoni, Arapaho, Pawnee, and Arikaree Peaks, as well as Niwot Ridge. A mountain was named in Bethel's honor as well, though not in this range. You can spot Mount Bethel when driving east on I-70 just past the Eisenhower Tunnel, thanks to the snow fences high on its slopes, which are its trademark.

The airplane wreckage is from a crash that occurred on January 21, 1948. Three men were killed when the C-47, en route from Denver to Grand Junction, was caught in bad weather and was pushed into the ridge by strong winds. The crash site was not discovered for several months.

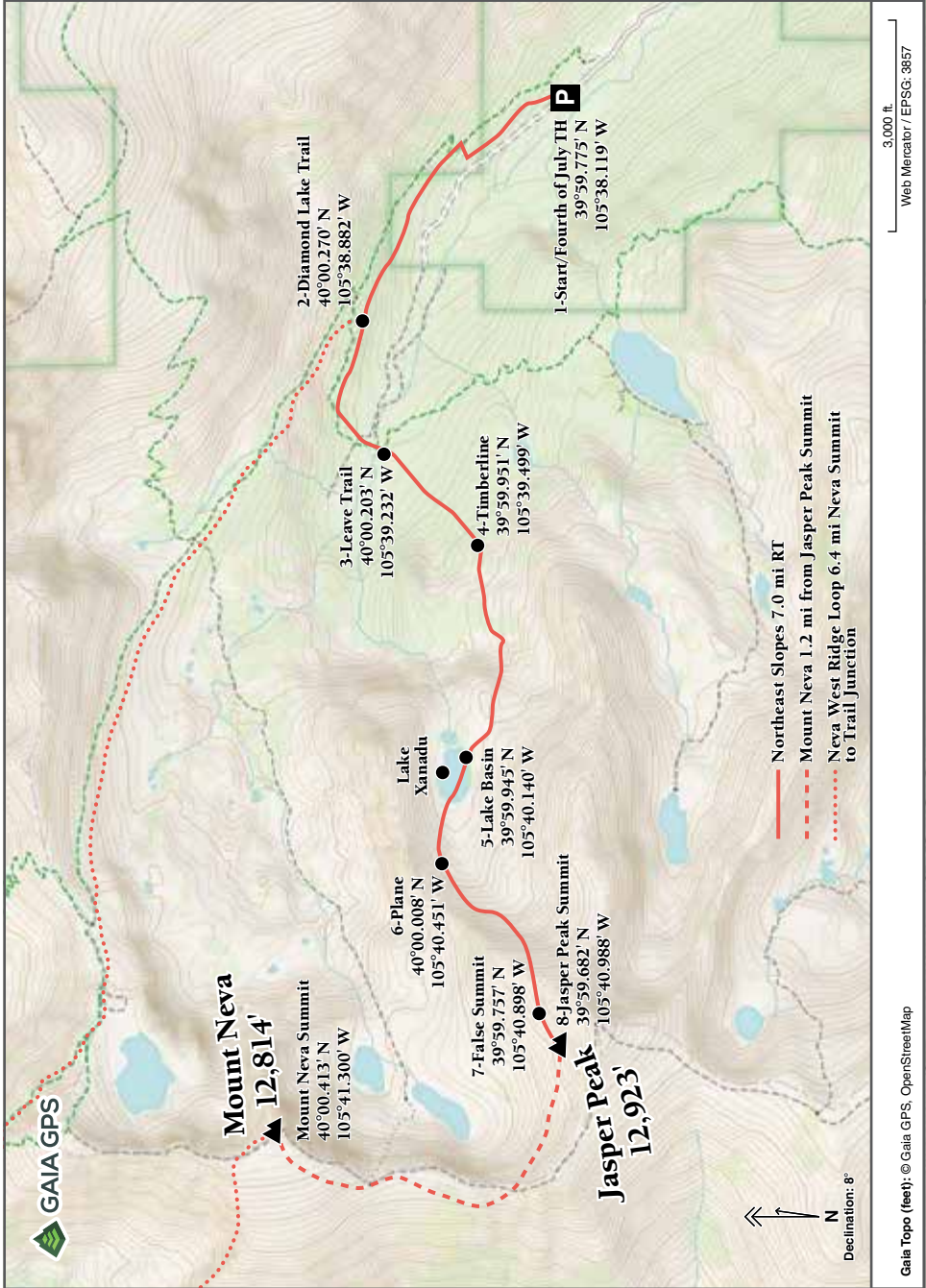
Contact Info The good news: the Brainard Lake Recreation Area is free from sometime in October until early June. The bad news: the road is closed at the pay station, roughly 2 miles from Brainard Lake. You can park there and bike, ski, or hike in if you want to try an off-season ascent. This area is very popular in the winter for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing.

**Arapaho & Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland,
Boulder Ranger District**

fs.usda.gov/recarea/arp/recarea/?recid=28178

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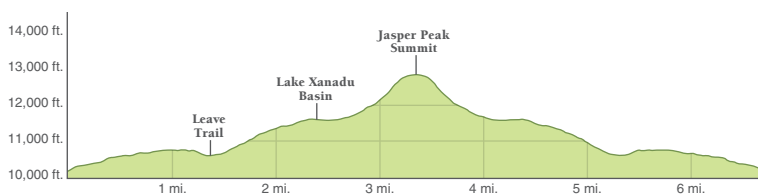
Make parking reservations at recreation.gov/timed-entry/10087515.



3 JASPER PEAK

Jasper is such a secret that it doesn't even appear on the map! It's not a formally named peak. This great climb requires off-trail navigation and passes through one of the most beautiful basins in the Indian Peaks.

ROUND-TRIP DISTANCE	7.0 miles
HIKING TIME	5.5–7 hours
DIFFICULTY	7/10
CLASS	2+
START ELEVATION	10,170' (Fourth of July Trailhead)
PEAK ELEVATION	12,923'
TOTAL ELEVATION GAIN	3,010'
TERRAIN	Spongy, off-trail forests leading to snowfields and grassy rock slopes
BEST TIME TO CLIMB	Late May–September
GEAR ADVISOR	GPS, gaiters, ice ax, and crampons in early spring
CROWD LEVEL	Hermit
TRAILHEAD GPS	39°59.705' N, 105°38.065' W



Location Indian Peaks Range in the Indian Peaks Wilderness/Roosevelt National Forest north of Nederland

Intro Jasper Peak (also known as Mount Jasper) has held its name informally for years, despite not appearing on official maps. It is a hard mountain to spot from lower elevations. When the peak becomes visible at higher elevations, it has a very alluring pyramid shape, just begging to be climbed. It takes solid navigational skills to reach Lake Xanadu Basin, a stunning alpine lake tucked away in the folds of the Indian Peaks. Prime hiking time for Jasper is in late May and early June, when snow on the northeast face is stable enough for an ascent and for blazing glissades on the way down.

Why Climb It? It's good that Jasper doesn't appear on the map. The on-trail hikes in this area of the Indian Peaks see a lot of traffic, yet this mountain remains a mystery to most. Once you leave the trail, navigation through the trees is a fun challenge (without severe repercussions if you take a wrong turn). After making your way through woods and meadows, you'll find yourself in a pristine basin with the small, sparkling Lake Xanadu as the centerpiece. There is also a small plane wreck at the west end of the lake, a curious relic in such a remote area. Climb to a false summit that hides the true apex a short distance beyond. Strong hikers can continue the fun by taking the optional trek over to Mount Neva (12,814').

Driving Tough passenger cars can make it to the Fourth of July Trailhead. The road is rocky, with sections of washboards and ruts, but it is passable by car. I've driven up in my Honda

Accord many times, and I've seen other similar cars in the parking lot. Road maintenance is performed every spring, so the road may be in better shape in mid-June.

How to Get There To reach the Fourth of July Trailhead, start in Nederland and go south on CO 119 toward Eldora Ski Area. About 0.2 mile out of town, turn right and follow the signs for Eldora Ski Area (Road 130). At 1.4 miles down this road, there is a left turnoff for Eldora Ski Area—do not take this road. Instead, continue straight, and at mile 2.9 pass through the small town of Eldora. At the end of town, the road turns to dirt. Continue 1.4 miles to a split; stay right (the left road goes to the Hessie Trailhead). The road gets rougher but is still passable in normal conditions. Drive 4.4 miles farther and the Fourth of July Trailhead will be on your right, just past Buckingham Campground. The little access road into the parking lot may be the toughest driving of the whole trip.

Fees/Camping There are no fees to hike in this area. Overnight camping trips in the Indian Peaks require a \$5 backcountry permit June–September. Buckingham Campground is free and first come, first served.

Route Notes A majority of this hike is off-trail, and you'll need to perform basic navigational skills to reach Lake Xanadu Basin. (Once you're there, the route is visually clear on good days.)

Mile/Waypoint

0.0 mi (1) Start at the Fourth of July Trailhead. Get on the well-worn Arapaho Pass Trail and follow it 1.0 mile to the junction with the Diamond Lake Trail. You'll get a preview of Jasper from viewpoints on this section of the trail.

1.0 mi (2) Bear left onto the Diamond Lake Trail. You will be going downhill and into deeper woods.

1.4 mi (3) Say goodbye to the trail once you reach Middle Boulder Creek. Cross the modest stream, and head southwest through the woods. The ground is spongy, but the trees are well spaced. If the weather is clear, in the clearings you'll have glimpses of where you need to go. The difficult navigation (in trees) lasts only about 0.5 mile.

1.8 mi (4) You will reach timberline around 11,060 feet. There will be a large mountain ridge due west and a small bulge south of the mountain. The easiest way to reach Lake Xanadu Basin is to find the gap south of the small bulge (between the small bulge and a ridge to your left, farther south). Find a good route up to the basin from here; it's easier when snow covers the boulders.

2.4 mi (5) Soak in the views at the flat and accommodating Lake Xanadu Basin. The moderate slopes to the southwest become obvious.

Note on Alternate Route: Those who like ridge walks can make the steep scramble directly north of Lake Xanadu and gain Jasper's northeast ridge. Follow it on class 2+ terrain to Jasper's summit.

2.7 mi (6) On the west end of the lake is the wreckage of a small silver-and-red airplane. It's an interesting sight, especially in contrast to the beauty of the area.

Gain the northeast slope and find a good line up to connect with the northeast ridge. In early spring, you may need crampons for the snow. Follow these slopes west and intersect with the northeast ridge.

3.3 mi (7) False summit! At 12,887 feet, you're almost there. The actual summit is just beyond, via an easy scramble heading southwest.

3.5 mi (8) Jasper's summit may surprise you. When the snow is melted, it's a grassy patch with small wildflowers. The Winter Park and Mary Jane ski areas can be seen to the west, and Mount Neva is visible to the north. Return the way you came, or continue north on the optional route to Mount Neva. If returning via the standard route, take care when navigating back to the Diamond Lake Trail (GPS is a huge help at this point).

7.0 mi Finish.

Options Mount Neva is 1.2 miles from the summit along a class 2+ ridge. Head north to reach Neva. Once you are there, it's best to return to Jasper and descend via the standard route—Neva's north ridge to Arapaho Pass is a class 4 route, which may require ropes.

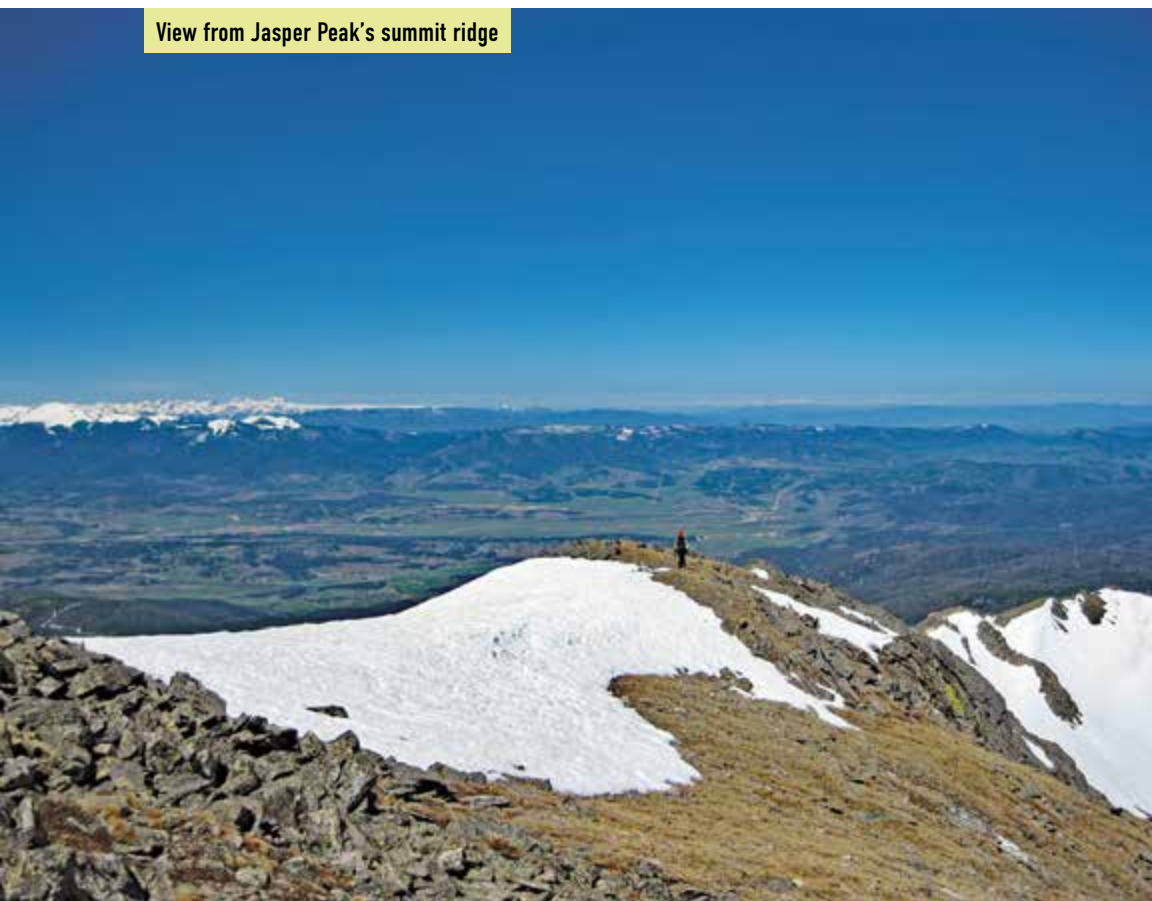
Quick Facts Lake Xanadu is an unofficial name but one that seems to fit the area well. The only landscape feature with an officially recognized name around here, Mount Neva, is named after the brother of Arapaho chief Niwot.

Contact Info **Arapaho & Roosevelt National Forests and Pawnee National Grassland, Boulder Ranger District**

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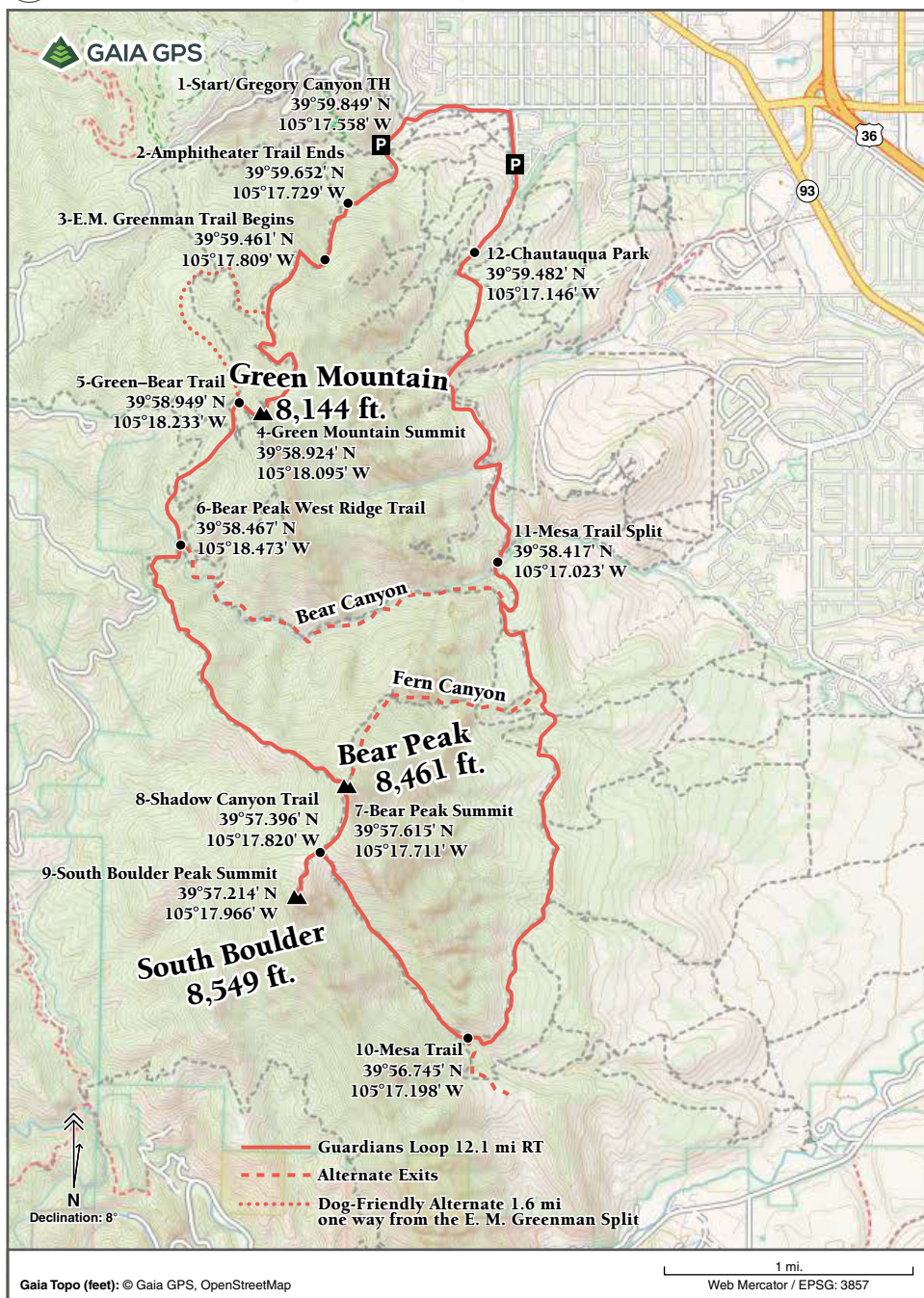
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View from Jasper Peak's summit ridge





Green Mountain, Bear Peak, and South Boulder Peak



4

GUARDIANS OF THE FLATIRONS:

Green Mountain, Bear Peak, and South Boulder Peak

This three-peak traverse is the pride of Boulder, giving you a deluxe tour of the local mountains and the slanted pinnacles of the Flatirons. It's a big hike that's right in town.

ROUND-TRIP DISTANCE 12.1 miles

HIKING TIME 7–10 hours

DIFFICULTY 6.5/10

CLASS 2

START ELEVATION 5,833' (Gregory Canyon Trailhead)

PEAK ELEVATIONS Green Mountain: 8,144'; Bear Peak: 8,461'; South Boulder Peak: 8,549'

TOTAL ELEVATION GAIN 5,171'

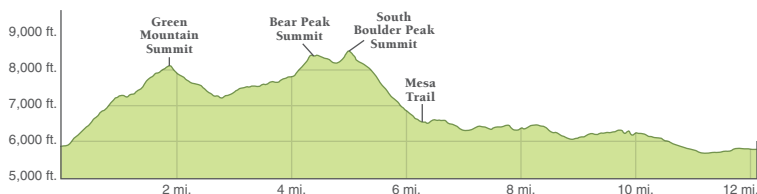
TERRAIN On-trail tour of Boulder's Flatirons

BEST TIME TO CLIMB Year-round; may be very hot midsummer

GEAR ADVISOR Normal gear

CROWD LEVEL Moderate overall; high on Green Mountain and the Mesa Trail

TRAILHEAD GPS 39°59.850' N, 105°17.565' W



Location Boulder Mountain Parks in beautiful Boulder, Colorado

Intro Who says you need to have your head in the clouds to have an epic day? This three-peak traverse begins in the civilized confines of Boulder. First, wind your way to Green Mountain through shady, vanilla-scented ponderosa pine forests bracketed by towering rock formations. Descend from Green into a hidden world of alpine flowers and grandiose valleys. It will seem hard to believe that a city of 90,000 people is just on the other side of the ridge as you drop into Bear Canyon. Gradually ascend to the rocky summit of fashionable Bear Peak, and complete the traverse by visiting the less popular (but slightly higher) South Boulder Peak. Descend via the rocky Shadow Canyon Trail, where the Devil's Thumb will be poised to your left, frozen mid-smite. Complete the loop with a casual return hike below the impressive Flatiron rock formations.

Why Climb It? The Flatirons serve as the mountainous backdrop to Boulder and denote the eastern terminus of the Rocky Mountains. Their abrupt angles and reddish hues make them the perfect ambassadors for the subsequent peaks that rise to the west. This hike gives you an extended tour of the area, offering great views of Boulder and Denver to the east and of the Indian Peaks and Front Range to the west. On clear days, you can see from Longs Peak to Pikes Peak. The western side of these mountains is surprisingly wild; standing on the summit of Bear Peak feels as though you're on the dividing line between civilization and wilderness. As the trail drops down to the base of the Flatirons, it bypasses dozens of amazing rock formations. Even though it's in town, the elevation gain and mileage give you a workout on par with one you'd experience on higher mountains.

Driving Any vehicle can make it to the trailhead; the road is paved all the way.

How to Get There From US 36 in Boulder, take the Baseline Road exit, turn west onto Baseline Road, and continue 1.8 miles. You'll pass Chautauqua Park on your left. Just after the large signs for Boulder Mountain Parks and the fire danger warnings, turn off left as the road bends abruptly uphill to Gregory Canyon Trailhead. If this parking lot is full, you can park on the designated south side of the short access road or simply go 0.1 mile back to Chautauqua's parking lot. On weekends, these parking lots fill up fast.

Fees/Camping There is a \$5 parking fee at the Gregory Canyon Trailhead (this fee does not apply to Boulder County residents). You'll have to be at the trailhead early most summer days to score a spot; the lot and parking along the road are usually full by 6:30 a.m. Free parking can be found at Chautauqua, though on busy weekends this area is serviced by a shuttle.

Route Notes Many trails intersect this route, especially once you drop down onto the Mesa Trail. Read the description closely so you don't take a wrong turn along the way. This route is very well marked, with signs at most junctions.

Mile/Waypoint

0.0 mi (1) Start at Gregory Canyon Trailhead. There are two trails you can take to start your hike: the Saddle Rock Trail and the Amphitheater Trail; our route favors the Amphitheater Trail (on the east side of the parking area). Get on this trail, staying right at the early intersection with the Bluebell-Baird Trail, and begin hiking upward, quickly reaching a section of steep "stairs." Pass the Amphitheater Express Trail on your right. This short spur trail goes to a rock-climbing crag. Stay on the main Amphitheater Trail.

0.4 mi (2) The Amphitheater Trail ends and joins the Saddle Rock Trail, which comes in from the right. Stay left on the Saddle Rock Trail and continue uphill through the vanilla- and pine-scented forest. Continue to follow the Saddle Rock Trail. Do not turn off at the Saddle Rock climbing access trail on your left, at 0.7 mile.

1.3 mi (3) The Saddle Rock Trail ends and becomes the E. M. Greenman Trail, which comes in from the right. Bear left and continue your ascent on the E. M. Greenman Trail. This trail will lead you to the summit of Green Mountain. Note that there is one slightly tricky part at mile 1.45—the trail takes a turn to the left over some large tree roots. A worn but incorrect path to the right has been blocked off with rocks and sticks. Stay left over the roots and the trail will become obvious again. Follow it to Green Mountain's summit.

2.0 mi (4) Green Mountain summit. There is a register here and a neat metal plaque that identifies the mountains on the horizon to the west. You can see at least four other mountains that are included in this book: James Peak (Hike 1), Jasper Peak (Hike 3), Longs Peak (Hike 8), and Mount Alice (Hike 9). Continue south off the summit and down a well-worn, switchbacking trail.

2.1 mi (5) At this four-way intersection, turn left onto the Green-Bear Trail, which goes downhill to the southwest. Keep your eye out for green bears! The trail feels worlds away from the din of Boulder. Enjoy the wildflowers. There are also good views of the back sides of Bear Peak and South Boulder Peak.

2.9 mi (6) The Green-Bear Trail ends in Bear Canyon. At the signpost, take a right onto the Bear Peak West Ridge Trail. This well-traveled and well-marked path starts out as a

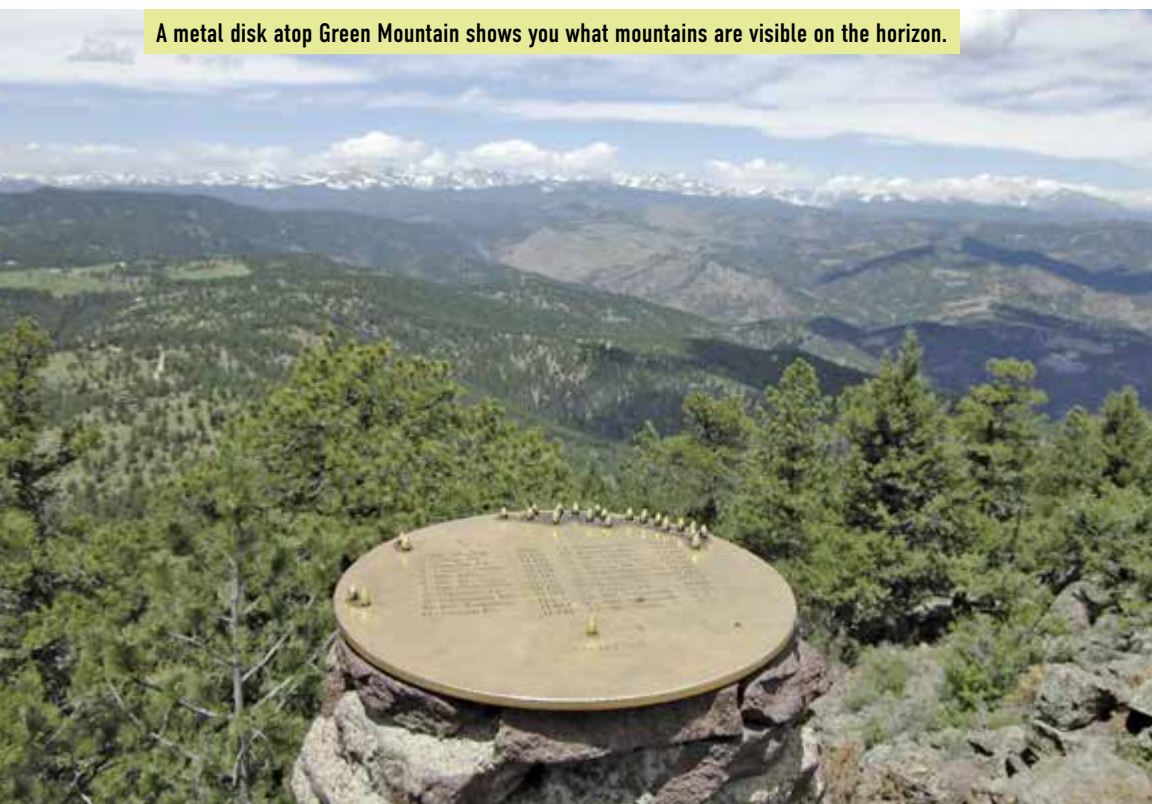
series of gentle switchbacks and then begins climbing more steeply up the rocky slopes of Bear's west ridge.

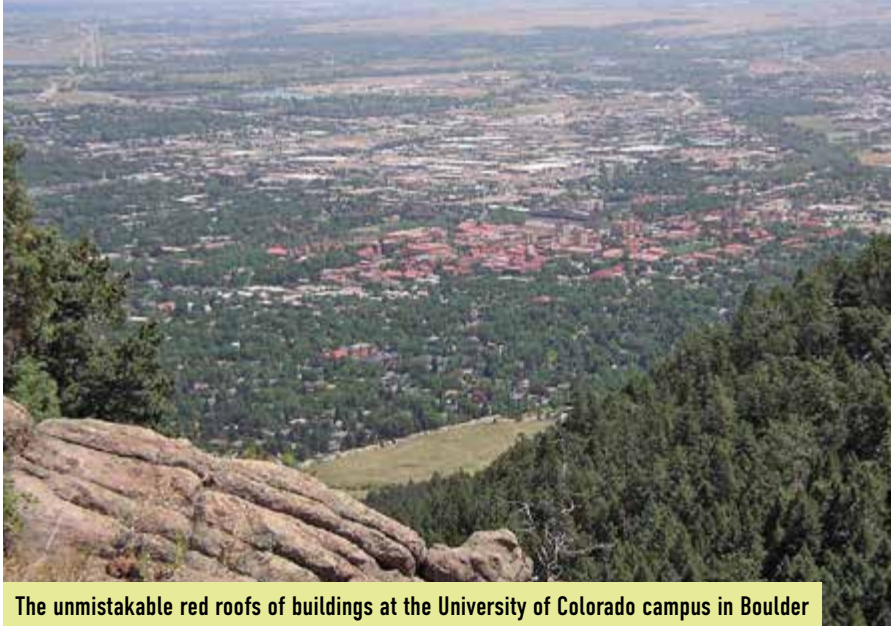
4.4 mi This trail ends just below the rocks that make up Bear Peak's summit. The scramble up looks tough, but there is an easier way. Traverse a short distance left (north), where you can scramble directly south on a "ramp" to the top. (This is the most difficult scrambling on the hike, and it's only class 2.)

4.5 mi (7) Bear Peak summit! These are the best 360-degree views on the entire hike. To the south is Pikes Peak; to the west, the Indian Peaks; to the north, Longs Peak and Fort Collins; and to the east, the sprawling metropolis of Denver and its suburbs. Exit the summit the way you came up, and return to the west side of the peak below the summit, where the Bear Peak West Ridge Trail ended. Pick up the connector trail, in the rocks, that goes south to South Boulder Peak.

4.9 mi (8) A dip in the ridge between Bear and South Boulder Peaks introduces the Shadow Canyon Trail on your left. Eventually, you will descend on this trail; for the time being, however, stay on the South Boulder Peak trail heading southwest. The ghostly forest here is the result of a lightning-caused wildfire in June 2012. Recovery in the past decade has been steady, though the husks of charred trees will defiantly remain for years to come.

A metal disk atop Green Mountain shows you what mountains are visible on the horizon.





The unmistakable red roofs of buildings at the University of Colorado campus in Boulder

5.1 mi (9) South Boulder Peak summit! This is the highest point of your hike, even though it is blocked by trees on the east side. Keep your eyes open for wild raspberry bushes up here. Return to the junction with the Shadow Canyon Trail.

5.4 mi (8) Take the Shadow Canyon Trail southeast and descend via this rocky road. There are a few brief sections where the trail passes over talus fields; follow the cairns to resume the trail after these interludes.

5.9 mi In a slight clearing, look up to your left. From this angle, the upturned Devil's Thumb gives you its approval.

6.5 mi (10) At the bottom of the rocky trail, you'll enter a small clearing with a few trails intersecting. Turn left (north) onto the marked Mesa Trail and begin the lower tour of the Flatirons. From here on out, you'll be on the class 1 Mesa Trail until you reach Chautauqua Park. You will have many great views of the Flatirons on your left. Several trails intersect with the Mesa Trail along the way. Stay on the Mesa Trail, and continue going north.

9.1 mi (11) This is the only tricky part of the Mesa Trail, though it's still well marked. After passing the Bear Canyon cutoff, you'll pass a small stream on your right. The wide dirt trail you're on continues to the west; make sure you stay on the Mesa Trail, which cuts off to the left (north) uphill and becomes a singletrack footpath again. Follow it north through a four-way intersection just below the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) to your right. After this, you'll drop in and out of Skunk Canyon and continue to the boundaries of Chautauqua Park. Several trails continue to come in on both sides of the Mesa Trail.

10.8 mi (12) The Mesa Trail turns into a gravel path as you drop down into Chautauqua. Look west to see the loop you just made over the mountains. To return to Gregory Canyon Trailhead, you can hike west on Baseline Road or take a footpath that parallels the road in the open meadow.

12.1 mi Finish.

Options If you'd like to cut an hour or two off your hike (and still bag the three peaks), bring two cars (or a bike and a car). You can leave a vehicle at the Shadow Canyon/Mesa Trail Trailhead, accessed by taking CO 93 (Broadway) out of Boulder and then taking a right onto CO 170 at a stoplight (a convenience store is on the right). Follow the road toward Eldorado Springs 2 miles, and the marked trailhead will be on the right. At waypoint **10**, instead of turning onto the Mesa Trail after your descent of Shadow Canyon, follow the Shadow Canyon Trail 1.5 miles to this parking lot. You could also park a car at the NCAR lot (no fee), accessed by taking CO 93 and then turning west onto Table Mesa Drive and following it to its terminus. You would end your hike at NCAR by taking the Mesa Trail past Fern Canyon and turning right at the well-marked sign at the top of a small hill (shortly after waypoint **11**); this trail leads to NCAR.

If you want an early exit, you can follow the Bear Canyon Trail (at the end of the Green-Bear Trail) or the Fern Canyon Trail (from the summit of Bear Peak) east. Both intersect with the Mesa Trail, shaving time off your hike but still giving you a fun loop.

A dog-friendly detour to the summit of Green goes right (north) 0.5 mile to the E. M. Greenman Trail and then connects with the Ranger Trail. Go left (southwest) on the Ranger Trail 0.9 mile to a flat intersection. Then go left (southeast) to the Green Mountain Summit trail 0.2 mile to the top. The loop is 1.6 miles one-way.

Quick Facts These three peaks have very common names. Did you know that there are more than 20 Green Mountains in Colorado? One twist on this Green Mountain: it may allude to E. M. Greenman, an early Boulder conservationist. Chautauqua Park was part of an educational movement at the turn of the 19th century that aimed to create communities in which members were encouraged to delve into the arts and sciences as a part of daily life. Touring units of entertainers would visit Chautauqua communities in each state. While the concept was a positive, progressive alternative to mundane living, many of the Chautauqua communities soon became too expensive for normal folks, and the exclusivity stymied the movement, though the practice still exists to some degree in Boulder today.

The lower portions of this hike were heavily damaged by the “100-year-flood” event of September 2013. It took several years to restore the trail to its previous condition. A few additions, such as a short ladder and minor trail diversions, were added to work around some of the worst erosion. And if that wasn't enough, the saddle between Bear Peak and South Boulder Peak was scorched just after the second edition of this guide came out in 2012. Thankfully, that trail section was not significantly damaged.

Contact Info This hike is especially beautiful on a snowy winter day. If you're hiking in the summer, bring a little extra water, as it can get very toasty in Boulder from June until September. If you want an adventurous view of fireworks on the Fourth of July, Bear Peak is a fun (and social) place to watch the displays from towns across the Front Range.

City of Boulder Open Space & Mountain Parks

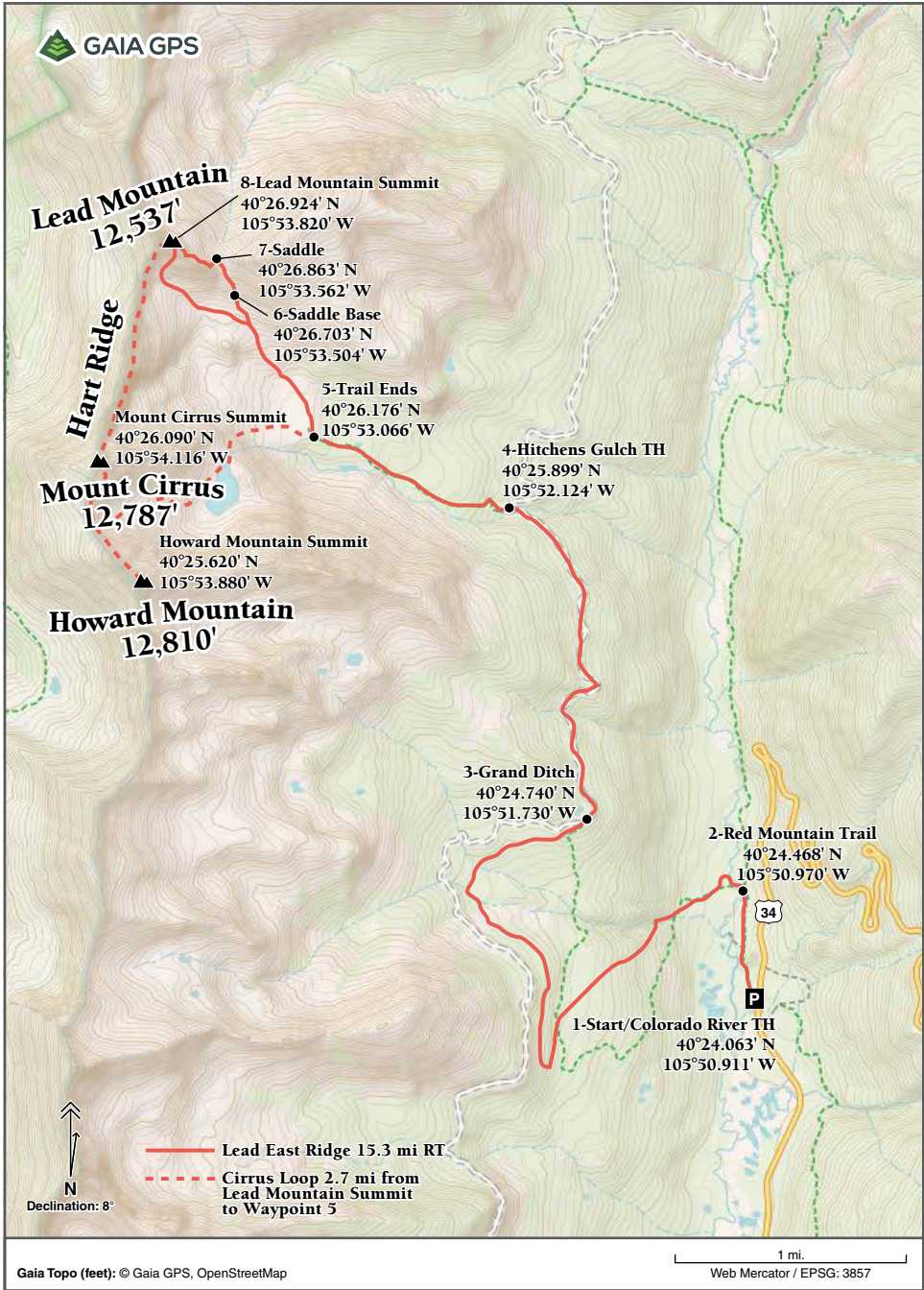
bouldercolorado.gov/government/departments

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Lead Mountain

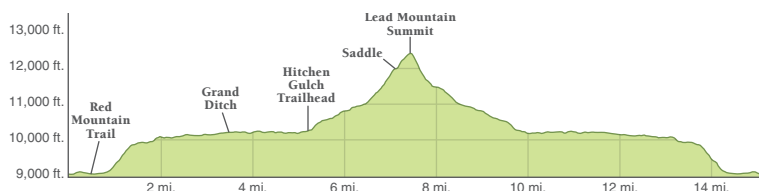


5 LEAD MOUNTAIN

GOOD
OVERNIGHT

This beautiful, airy ridge is a great scramble that will keep you on your toes. The rock is solid, and the views are phenomenal. An optional loop to Mount Cirrus adds to the fun.

ROUND-TRIP DISTANCE	15.3 miles
HIKING TIME	9–14 hours
DIFFICULTY	9/10
CLASS	3/3+
START ELEVATION	9,100' (Colorado River Trailhead)
PEAK ELEVATION	12,537'
TOTAL ELEVATION GAIN	3,727'
TERRAIN	Long prelude to exciting class 3 ridge
BEST TIME TO CLIMB	July–September
GEAR ADVISOR	Helmet and good grippy boots
CROWD LEVEL	Hermit
TRAILHEAD GPS	40°24.100' N, 105°50.924' W



Location Never Summer Range in Rocky Mountain National Park outside of Estes Park

Intro Lead Mountain has one of the premier ridge walks in the state. The exposed, airy, class 3 traverse is short, but it certainly gets your attention. The rock is solid for the most part. Those hikers uncomfortable with hanging out on the spine have the option to drop down slightly to the south side, where the terrain is less exposed. The Never Summer Range is a special treat for hikers looking to get away from the crowds. The loop over to Mount Cirrus may be Colorado's best class 3 route that's not in the Grenadiers.

Why Climb It? The mileage looks daunting, but a good deal of this hike is the long and scenic approach. Trails are class 1 from the trailhead, all the way to the end of the Hitchens Gulch Trail, 6.2 miles in. The actual class 3 terrain is only roughly 1.3 miles on the standard route, but every foot is an exciting experience. Lead's east ridge is airy and exhilarating, with sheer drop-offs to the north. While the rock is solid, the exposure will boost your concentration. A few moves may be considered class 4 or 3+ if you stay on the spine of the ridge. The holds are solid and obvious, but if you blow it, you'll be shuffling off this mortal coil with haste. If you aren't used to this kind of exposure, an alternate class 3 route on the south side of the ridge is just as good.

Driving Any vehicle can make it to the trailhead; the entire drive is on paved roads.

How to Get There From the east entrances (Beaver Meadows or Fall River), go about 4 miles (from either) to the intersection of US 34 and US 36. Continue on Trail Ridge Road (US 34) 28 miles, up and over the high point near the Alpine visitor center. After the road exits the final hairpin turn downhill, it's about 1.2 miles to the Colorado River Trailhead

on the right (west) side of the road. The turnoff is well marked. This trailhead is 11.5 miles north on US 34 from the west entrance at Grand Lake.

Fees/Camping It costs \$25 for a day pass to Rocky Mountain National Park. There are several drive-in campgrounds in the park that cost \$10–\$14 a night; call for more information. As of 2021, Rocky Mountain National Park is using a timed-entry reservation system from May 28 to Oct 11. You must make a reservation at recreation.gov/timed-entry/10086910 even if you have a season pass to the park.

Route Notes I highly recommend the Mount Cirrus loop for strong hikers. Camping near the base of Lead Mountain makes this route more reasonable than a huge day hike.

Mile/Waypoint

0.0 mi (1) Start at the Colorado River Trailhead and head north on the very well-trodden La Poudre Pass Trail. You will be on this smooth section for only a short distance.

0.5 mi (2) Turn left (west) onto the well-signed Red Mountain Trail. The turnoff sign includes mileages to Hitchens Gulch, Grand Ditch, Dutch Town, and Thunder Pass. Stay on this pleasant trail all the way to the Grand Ditch. Along the way, you will pass the rather benign canyon called Hell's Hip Pocket.

3.3 mi (3) After a nice walk in the woods, you come to . . . a road? This is the Grand Ditch. Turn right and hike north on this easygoing road (Lead Mountain is directly west, but you have to loop around to reach it). Public access to this road is limited to foot traffic, so vehicle sightings are rare. (And no, you can't drive up here as a shortcut.)

5.2 mi (4) Eventually, you'll come to the Hitchens Gulch Trailhead on your left (west), where the road crosses Dutch Creek. There is a sign here for Hitchens Gulch and Dutch Town. A good trail heads northwest toward Lead's talus-filled basin. Hitchens Gulch Camp area is at mile 5.5; Dutch Town is at mile 5.9. Stay on this trail until it ends abruptly at a post near a mosquito-filled swamp.

6.2 mi (5) Luckily, there is only one small hill to climb after the trail ends (there may still be a faint footpath). Atop this hill, you're out of the trees, and the incredible rock-filled basin is before you. Gradually ascend, first on rocks and then on grassy slopes, northwest to the scree slope that goes to the saddle between Lead and Point 12,438. Some crazy rock formations are on 12,438, and it looks like some large boulders have peeled off the mountain in recent times.

7.0 mi (6) You will come to the base of a loose, red scree gully. The grass on the right side is deceptive; the terrain there is just as loose as the middle of the gully. It's a bit of a knee burner. Make your way to the saddle and get ready to climb.

7.2 mi (7) You are now in the saddle. Don your helmet and get ready to head west on Lead's east ridge. To the north, there is a great view of Mount Richthofen (Hike 7). You can go a short bit on the north side of the saddle to gain the obvious ramp up to the ridge.

Climbing the east ridge: This ridge is quite short, only about 0.4 mile to the summit, but it will take a while to get up. As mentioned, the route is all class 3 and 3+, with the easier sections coming at the lower parts of the ridge. The rock is quite solid but with some big-time exposure. Staying on the ridge all the way up is a thrill, with a few 3+ moves thrown in to keep your heart rate up. Take your time to find and test good holds—they are there. After the initial “connecting ramp” puts you on the east ridge

proper, you have the option to drop down to the south side and traverse via rocky ledges just below the ridge. This terrain is still fun class 3, minus the exposure. Scramblers on the ridge will make it directly to the summit, while those on the south side will have a fun, solid-rock gully leading to the top. This thrilling little scramble is a great way to wrap up your hike.

7.6 mi (8) Lead Mountain's summit! If you're going for the Hart Ridge Loop, your path awaits. If Lead was your objective (which is probably the case if you're doing this as a day hike), you have two descent options. You can retrace the east ridge, which has some sketchy spots with exposed downclimbing but is the fastest way to get back. Experienced scramblers will prefer this route. The other option, which I've outlined on the standard route, goes south via the lower path's ascent gully. Drop down and head right (west) on ledges toward Hart Ridge. Going left onto Lead's face looks more direct, but it cliffs out with difficult and dangerous class 4/5 gullies to downclimb. Aim for the ground below the saddle between Lead Mountain and Mount Cirrus: the scrambling is class 3, but it is much safer than other routes. Once you reach the big talus field, head southeast back to where you came up. Return the way you came and bask in the afterglow of this fine summit.

15.3 mi Finish.

Options Hart Ridge runs between Lead Mountain and Mount Cirrus (12,787'). This fun class 3 scramble is a great option and may actually provide the safest descent route. It's 1.0 mile between summits. From the top of Lead Mountain, go south along the ridge. It begins with relatively easy terrain; at 0.5 mile, the scrambling becomes similar to that on Lead. Again, the holds are solid, and the exposure is thrilling. Once you top out on Cirrus, keep going south to the saddle between Cirrus and Howard Mountain at 12,810 feet. (Howard is a quick diversion if you'd like to summit another peak.) Hike/surf down the broad gully of loose scree to Lake of the Clouds at 11,430 feet. From Lake of the Clouds, shuffle down the slopes back into the basin and return via the Hitchens Gulch Trail (waypoint 4), picking up

Lead Mountain's airy ridge is narrow in places.



the route on which you began the hike. This option is approximately 2.7 miles from the top of Lead, over Cirrus, down to Lake of the Clouds, and back to the basin where you hiked up—about 6 miles round-trip from Dutch Town Campground.

Quick Facts Lead Mountain earned its name in 1879. Lead wasn't a particularly coveted ore, and it served more to frustrate miners than to line their pockets.

In 1914, James Grafton Rogers named three sky-high peaks in the Never Summer Range for clouds: Cirrus, Cumulus, and Nimbus. Later, Mount Stratus was added to the mix. Howard Mountain may seem like an atmospheric outcast among these mountains, unless you consider that Luke Howard was the English meteorologist who first named and classified cloud formations. It's a good theory, but according to Rogers's own account, Howard appeared on maps prior to the naming of the cloud mountains. Thus, the true namesake of Howard is a mystery. Just for fun, I like to think it was Moe Howard, leader of the Three Stooges. (Harry Moses Horwitz, also known as Moe Howard, was born June 19, 1897, making this theoretically possible, assuming he took his stage name early in life.)

Hart Ridge is named for Lieutenant Eldon C. Hart, who was killed while flying for the Kansas Air National Guard when his F-100C Super Sabre fighter jet crashed into Mount Cirrus on January 30, 1967. The wreckage is on the west side of the mountain, so you won't be seeing it on this route.

Contact Info To secure your timed-entry reservation and pay your entrance fee, please visit recreation.gov/timed-entry/10086910.

Rocky Mountain National Park

nps.gov/romo

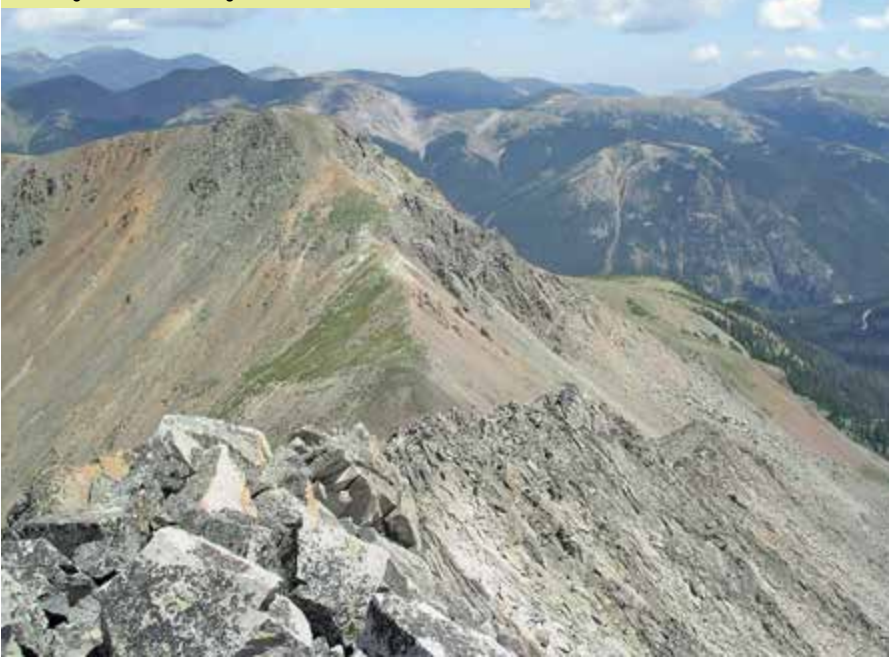
General Park Information: 970-586-1206

Visitor Information (recorded message): 970-586-1333

Backcountry Information: 970-586-1242

Campground Reservations: 800-365-2267

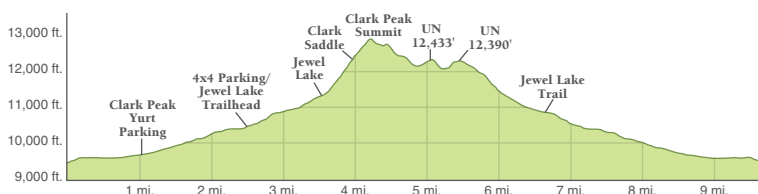
Looking back on the ridge from Lead Mountain's summit



6 CLARK PEAK

Clark Peak is the high point of the Medicine Bow Mountains, a lesser known but beautiful range in the Colorado State Forest. The hike features a skywalk ridge traverse.

ROUND-TRIP DISTANCE	9.5 miles for cars; 4.2 miles from 4x4 parking
HIKING TIME	3–6 hours
DIFFICULTY	5/10
CLASS	2
START ELEVATION	9,470' (Ruby Jewel Road)
PEAK ELEVATION	12,951'
TOTAL ELEVATION GAIN	4,087'
TERRAIN	Nice trail, steep grassy slopes, great flat ridge walk
BEST TIME TO CLIMB	June–September
GEAR ADVISOR	Trekking poles
CROWD LEVEL	Low
TRAILHEAD GPS	40°34.683' N, 105°58.496' W



Location Medicine Bow Range in State Forest State Park near the small town of Gould

Intro Clark Peak is the high point of the Medicine Bow Range (as well as the high point of Jackson County). Its setting in northern Colorado means you'll be hiking on unique topography, complete with dramatic basins and prolific peaks. Views from the top are awesome, especially the far-off view of the seldom-seen northwest face of Longs Peak. State Forest State Park borders the Rawah Wilderness, and both areas offer great backpacking.

Why Climb It? Clark feels very different than most other peaks in Colorado—in a good way. Those who have hiked in Wyoming's Wind River Range may find the atmosphere in the Medicine Bows familiar. This route passes Jewel Lake, a dreamy alpine pool at the base of a dramatic basin. The stiff, off-trail hill that goes from Jewel Lake is flooded with flowers of all colors. From Clark's summit (which will be hidden until you actually ascend to the top), the southern skywalk to neighboring unnamed peaks is a transcendent traverse. Many who hike in this area return to backpack and camp (the terrain is similar to the Mount Zirkel Wilderness in Steamboat Springs).

Driving Passenger cars—even tough passenger cars—will be fine on the well-groomed dirt of County Road 41 but can only reach 1.0 mile up Ruby Jewel Road before it gets too rough (read below for more info on the road conditions). High-clearance sport utility vehicles or 4x4s are needed to reach the trailhead; sport utility cars and all-wheel-drive vehicles can make it most of the way up Ruby Jewel Road but will struggle with the last 1.5 miles. The road is steep and very rocky in sections, with smooth, flat sections between. There is a minor stream crossing just before the parking lot.

APPENDIX A:

Best Hikes and Others of Note

Only have a half day to hike? Have friends from out of town looking to snag a summit or two? Trying to get away from the mind-numbing pace of everyday life? Here are a few suggestions for these and other situations.

BEST DAY HIKES FOR OUT-OF-TOWN FRIENDS WHO AREN'T hardcore hikers but still want a good summit Guardians of the Flatirons (Hike 4), Mount Sniktau (Hike 12), Mount Elbert (Hike 19), Mount Sherman (Hike 20), Mount Thomas (Hike 27), Geissler Mountain (Hike 32), Treasury Mountain (Hike 36), and Cross Mountain–Base of Lizard Head Traverse (Hike 44)

BEST OVERNIGHT ADVENTURES Mount Alice (Hike 9), Fools Peak (Hike 26), Mount of the Holy Cross (Hike 28), Mount Zirkel (Hike 30), Summit Peak (Hike 33), Mount Adams (Hike 41), Chicago Basin Fourteener Circuit (Hike 43), and Storm King Peak (Hike 45)

BEST FROM THE DENVER/BOULDER/GOLDEN METRO AREA WHEN YOU HAVE PLANS LATER THAT NIGHT James Peak (Hike 1), Mount Ida group (Hike 10), Mount Chapin group (Hike 11), Mount Sniktau (Hike 12), The Citadel (Hike 13), Peak 1–Tenmile Peak (Hike 14), and Pacific Peak (Hike 15)

BEST HIKES THAT GET AWAY FROM THE CROWDS Mount Alice (Hike 9), Mount Powell (Hike 16), Fools Peak (Hike 26), Summit Peak (Hike 33), Hesperus Mountain (Hike 34), East Beckwith Mountain (Hike 38), Storm King Peak (Hike 45), Golden Horn (Hike 48), Lone Cone (Hike 50), Cooper Peak (Hike 51), and Rio Grande Pyramid (Hike 52)

BEST HIKES WITH EXCELLENT SCRAMBLING Navajo Peak (Hike 2), Lead Mountain (Hike 5), Mount Richthofen (Hike 7), Longs Peak (Hike 8), Mount Alice (Hike 9), Fools Peak (Hike 26), Bellevue Mountain (Hike 37), Blanca Peak (Hike 40), Mount Eolus (Hike 43), Storm King Peak (Hike 45), Mount Sneffels (Hike 49), and Cooper Peak (Hike 51)

BEST HIKES FOR WILDFLOWERS (IN SEASON, OF COURSE) Deming Mountain (Hike 17), Stanley Mountain and Vasquez Peak (Hike 18), Mount Sherman (Hike 20), Mount Hope (Hike 21), Mount Thomas (Hike 27), Mount Zirkel (Hike 30), Treasury Mountain (Hike 36), Bellevue Mountain (Hike 37), and Mount Adams (Hike 41)

BEST HIKES TO DO WITH YOUR DOG James Peak (Hike 1), Guardians of the Flatirons (Hike 4), Clark Peak (Hike 6), Mount Sherman (Hike 20), Huron Peak (Hike 22), Mount Thomas (Hike 27), Mount Zirkel (Hike 30), Hahns Peak (Hike 31), Mount Sopris (Hike 35), and Uncompahgre Peak (Hike 46)

BEST HIKES THAT STAY ABOVE TREELINE MOST OF THE TIME Mount Sniktau (Hike 12), Stanley Mountain and Vasquez Peak (Hike 18), Mount Ouray (Hike 23), West Spanish Peak (Hike 39), Eureka Mountain–Hermit Peak (Hike 42), and Uncompahgre Peak (Hike 46)

BEST OFF-TRAIL ADVENTURES Navajo Peak (Hike 2), Jasper Peak (Hike 3), Clark Peak (Hike 6), Mount Richthofen (Hike 7), Mount Powell (Hike 16), Mount Ouray (Hike 23), Fools Peak (Hike 26), Hesperus Mountain (Hike 34), Treasury Mountain (Hike 36), Mount Adams (Hike 41), Storm King Peak (Hike 45), Golden Horn (Hike 48), and Lone Cone (Hike 50)

BEST LUNG-BUSTERS Navajo Peak (Hike 2), Lead Mountain (Hike 5), Mount Richthofen (Hike 7), Mount Sniktau (Hike 12), Peak 1 (Hike 14), Pacific Peak (Hike 15), Mount Powell (Hike 16), Stanley's Wall (Hike 18), Fools Peak (Hike 26), West Spanish Peak (Hike 39), Mount Adams (Hike 41), Storm King Peak (Hike 45), Mount Sneffels (Hike 49)

BEST HIKES TO DO WHEN THERE IS STILL SPRING SNOW James Peak (Hike 1), Navajo Peak (Hike 2), Jasper Peak (Hike 3), Clark Peak (Hike 6), Mount Sniktau (Hike 12), Mount Sherman (Hike 20), Bison Peak (Hike 29), and Hahns Peak (Hike 31)

BEST HIKES FOR AUTUMN LEAVES AND COLORS Mount Powell (Hike 16), Mount Hope (Hike 21), Huron Peak (Hike 22), Fools Peak (Hike 26), Mount Sopris (Hike 35), Bellevue Mountain (Hike 37), East Beckwith Mountain (Hike 38), and Uncompahgre Peak (Hike 46)

BEST SOCIAL HIKES (LOTS OF PEOPLE) James Peak (Hike 1), Longs Peak (Hike 8), Mount Elbert (Hike 19), Huron Peak (Hike 22), Mount of the Holy Cross (Hike 28), Chicago Basin Fourteener Circuit (Hike 43), and Redcloud Peak-Sunshine Peak (Hike 47)

BEST HIKES WITH CRAZY AND COOL NATURAL ROCK FORMATIONS Guardians of the Flatirons (Hike 4), The Citadel (Hike 13), Bison Peak (Hike 29), Mount Zirkel (Hike 30), Summit Peak (Hike 33), Hesperus Mountain (Hike 34), Bellevue Mountain (Hike 37), Mount Adams (Hike 41), Storm King Peak (Hike 45), Uncompahgre Peak (Hike 46), Golden Horn (Hike 48), and Lone Cone (Hike 50)

BEST HIKES TO SEE WILDLIFE Clark Peak (Hike 6), Mount Ida group (Hike 10), Mount Chapin group (Hike 11), Mount Thomas (Hike 27), Summit Peak (Hike 33), Chicago Basin Fourteener Circuit (Hike 43), Storm King Peak (Hike 45), and Mount Sneffels (Hike 49)

BEST HIKES TO SEE MINING RUINS AND GHOST TOWNS James Peak (Hike 1), Peak 1 (Hike 14), Pacific Peak (Hike 15), Mount Sherman (Hike 20), Huron Peak (Hike 22), Hahns Peak (Hike 31), and Golden Horn (Hike 48)

HIKES WITH AIRPLANE WRECKAGE Navajo Peak (Hike 2), Jasper Peak (Hike 3), Lead Mountain (Hike 5), and Mount Yale (Hike 25)

BEST ON-TRAIL SUMMIT HIKES Guardians of the Flatirons (Hike 4), Longs Peak (Hike 8), Mount Ida group (Hike 10), Peak 1 (Hike 14), Mount Elbert (Hike 19), Huron Peak (Hike 22), Mount Thomas (Hike 27), Mount Sopris (Hike 35), Uncompahgre Peak (Hike 46), and Redcloud Peak-Sunshine Peak (Hike 47)

APPENDIX B:

Good Weekend Getaways

All right! You have a long weekend to go out hiking. Try pairing up the suggested hikes, or go for a nice overnight in the following areas:

Great two-night trips—leave Friday and return Sunday:

- Lead Mountain (**Hike 5**)
- Clark Peak (**Hike 6**)
- Mount Alice (**Hike 9**)
- Deming Mountain (**Hike 17**)
- Fools Peak (**Hike 26**)
- Mount of the Holy Cross (**Hike 28**)
- Mount Zirkel (**Hike 30**)
- Summit Peak (**Hike 33**)
- Blanca Peak–Ellingwood Point Traverse (**Hike 40**)
- Mount Adams (**Hike 41**)
- Eureka Mountain–Hermit Peak (**Hike 42**)
- Uncompahgre Peak (**Hike 46**)

Additional hikes with very good backcountry camping or extended camping:

- Mount Sopris (**Hike 35**)
- Blanca Peak–Ellingwood Point Traverse (**Hike 40**)
- Chicago Basin Fourteener Circuit (**Hike 43**)
- Storm King Peak (**Hike 45**)
- Golden Horn (**Hike 48**)
- Cooper Peak (**Hike 51**)
- Rio Grande Pyramid (**Hike 52**)

APPENDIX C:

Colorado's 100 Highest Peaks

Thanks to [SummitPost.org](https://www.summitpost.org) for this chart. Peaks listed without rank are considered unofficial, meaning they are too close to a neighboring summit to be considered a ranked mountain. Highlighted mountains are featured in this book as standard or optional hikes.

PEAK NAME	RANK	ELEVATION	RANGE
Mount Elbert (Hike 19)	1	14,433'	Sawatch
Mount Massive (Hike 19)	2	14,421'	Sawatch
Mount Harvard	3	14,420'	Sawatch
Blanca Peak	4	14,345'	Sangre de Cristo
North Massive	–	14,340'	Sawatch
La Plata Peak	5	14,336'	Sawatch
Uncompahgre Peak	6	14,309'	San Juan
Crestone Peak	7	14,294'	Sangre de Cristo
Mount Lincoln	8	14,286'	Mosquito
Grays Peak	9	14,270'	Front
Mount Antero	10	14,269'	Sawatch
Torreys Peak (Hike 12)	11	14,267'	Front
Castle Peak	12	14,265'	Elk
Quandary Peak	13	14,265'	Tenmile
Mount Evans	14	14,264'	Front
Longs Peak (Hike 8)	15	14,255'	Front
Mount Wilson	16	14,246'	San Juan
Mount Cameron	–	14,238'	Mosquito
Mount Shavano (Hike 24)	17	14,229'	Sawatch
Mount Belford	18	14,197'	Sawatch
Crestone Needle	19	14,197'	Sangre de Cristo
Mount Princeton	20	14,197'	Sawatch
Mount Yale (Hike 25)	21	14,196'	Sawatch
Mount Bross	22	14,172'	Mosquito
Kit Carson Peak	23	14,165'	Sangre de Cristo
El Diente	–	14,159'	San Juan
Maroon Peak	24	14,156'	Elk
Tabeguache Peak (Hike 24)	25	14,155'	Sawatch
Mount Oxford	26	14,153'	Sawatch
Mount Sneffels (Hike 49)	27	14,150'	San Juan
Mount Democrat	28	14,148'	Mosquito
Capitol Peak	29	14,130'	Elk
Pikes Peak	30	14,110'	Front
Snowmass Mountain	31	14,092'	Elk
Mount Eolus (Hike 43)	32	14,083'	San Juan

PEAK NAME	RANK	ELEVATION	RANGE
Windom Peak (Hike 43)	33	14,082'	San Juan
Challenger Point	34	14,081'	Sangre de Cristo
Mount Columbia	35	14,073'	Sawatch
Missouri Mountain	36	14,067'	Sawatch
Humboldt Peak	37	14,064'	Sangre de Cristo
Mount Bierstadt	38	14,060'	Front
Conundrum Peak	–	14,060'	Elk
Sunlight Peak (Hike 43)	39	14,059'	San Juan
Handies Peak	40	14,048'	San Juan
Culebra Peak	41	14,047'	Sangre de Cristo
Ellingwood Point (Hike 40)	42	14,042'	Sangre de Cristo
Mount Lindsey	43	14,042'	Sangre de Cristo
North Eolus (Hike 43)	–	14,039'	San Juan
Little Bear Peak	44	14,037'	Sangre de Cristo
Mount Sherman (Hike 20)	45	14,036'	Mosquito
Redcloud Peak (Hike 47)	46	14,034'	San Juan
North Maroon Peak	–	14,019'	Elk
Pyramid Peak	47	14,018'	Elk
Wilson Peak	48	14,017'	San Juan
Wetterhorn Peak	49	14,015'	San Juan
San Luis Peak	50	14,014'	San Juan
Mount of the Holy Cross (Hike 28)	51	14,005'	Sawatch
Huron Peak (Hike 22)	52	14,003'	Sawatch
Sunshine Peak (Hike 47)	53	14,001'	San Juan
Sunlight Spire	–	13,995'	San Juan
Grizzly Peak A	54	13,988'	Sawatch
Stewart Peak	55	13,983'	San Juan
Columbia Point	56	13,980'	Sangre de Cristo
Pigeon Peak	57	13,972'	San Juan
Mount Ouray (Hike 23)	58	13,971'	Sawatch
Fletcher Mountain	59	13,951'	Tenmile
Ice Mountain	60	13,951'	Sawatch
Gemini Peak (Hike 20)	–	13,951'	Mosquito
Pacific Peak (Hike 15)	61	13,950'	Tenmile
Cathedral Peak	62	13,943'	Elk
French Mountain	63	13,940'	Sawatch
Mount Hope (Hike 21)	64	13,933'	Sawatch
Thunder Pyramid	65	13,932'	Elk
Mount Adams (Hike 41)	66	13,931'	Sangre de Cristo
Gladstone Peak	67	13,913'	San Juan
Mount Meeker	68	13,911'	Front
Casco Peak	69	13,908'	Sawatch
Red Mountain A	70	13,908'	Sangre de Cristo

PEAK NAME	RANK	ELEVATION	RANGE
Emerald Peak	71	13,904'	Sawatch
Drift Peak	–	13,900'	Tenmile
Horseshoe Mountain (Hike 20)	72	13,898'	Mosquito
Phoenix Peak	73	13,895'	San Juan
Vermilion Peak (Hike 48)	74	13,894'	San Juan
Frasco Benchmark	–	13,876'	Sawatch
Cronin Peak	75	13,870'	Sawatch
Mount Buckskin	76	13,865'	Mosquito
Vestal Peak	77	13,864'	San Juan
Jones Mountain A	78	13,860'	San Juan
North Apostle	79	13,860'	Sawatch
Meeker Ridge	–	13,860'	Front
Clinton Peak	80	13,857'	Mosquito
Dyer Mountain (Hike 20)	81	13,855'	Mosquito
Crystal Peak (Hike 15)	82	13,852'	Tenmile
Traver Peak	–	13,852'	Mosquito
Mount Edwards	83	13,850'	Front
California Peak	84	13,849'	Sangre de Cristo
Mount Oklahoma	85	13,845'	Sawatch
Mount Spalding	–	13,842'	Front
Atlantic Peak (Hike 15)	86	13,841'	Tenmile
Hagerman Peak	87	13,841'	Elk
Half Peak	88	13,841'	San Juan
Turret Peak	89	13,835'	San Juan
Unnamed Peak 13,832	90	13,832'	San Juan
Holy Cross Ridge (Hike 28)	91	13,831'	Sawatch
Iowa Peak	–	13,831'	Sawatch
Jupiter Mountain	92	13,830'	San Juan
Huerfano Peak	93	13,828'	Sangre de Cristo
Jagged Mountain	94	13,824'	San Juan
Lackawanna Peak	95	13,823'	Sawatch
Mount Silverheels	96	13,822'	Front
Rio Grande Pyramid (Hike 52)	97	13,821'	San Juan
Teakettle Mountain	98	13,819'	San Juan
Unnamed Peak 13,811	99	13,811'	San Juan
Dallas Peak	100	13,809'	San Juan

APPENDIX D: Resources

Works Consulted/Recommended Reading

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14ers.com A thorough and active community all about Colorado's 14,000-foot peaks. Maps, route descriptions, and thousands of trip accounts, not to mention lively message boards (I post there from time to time as well).

Mountainous Words (mountainouswords.com) My personal writing site that features additional hikes, trip reports, and more.

SummitPost.org This website is made up of user-contributed information about mountains, hikes, routes, and trailheads. Most of it is very reliable, though there are occasional inaccuracies and misinformation.

Wikipedia (wikipedia.org) Another user-contributed site, I found it useful as a starting point for a lot of information on the natural world, such as wildlife, the Laramide Orogeny, plant life, the Colorado Mineral Belt, and mining history. It's not perfect, but it's a great place to begin your research.

National Park Service (nps.gov) This is the official (if rather dry) website of America's national parks.

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3rd Edition
Travel / Colorado / Outdoor Recreation
ISBN 978-1-64359-070-7



9 781643 590707



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