

On Road and Rail to Trail

Posted on [June 17, 2014](#)

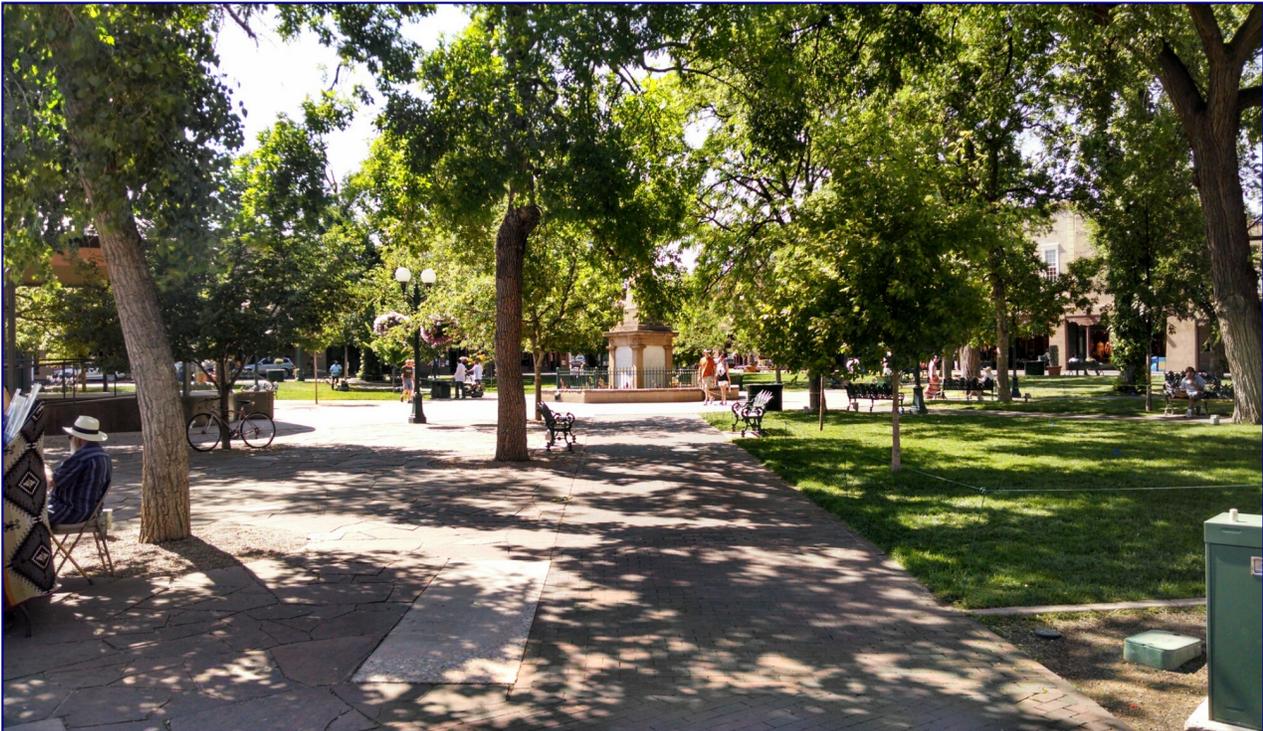
5:30AM Socorro NM shuttle departs to Belen train station, fare \$2.25

6:30 NM Rail Runner train departs Belen station for Santa Fe, fare \$10.00

Hit a cow just out of Kewa station, disconnected a couple of air hoses, paused several minutes for repair. Scheduled arrival 9:00, actual arrival 9:xx. Connecting shuttle to Espanola notified of delay, and asked to wait.

The shuttle did not wait. Now I have time to explore Santa Fe before next shuttle at 11:45. This shuttle does not leave from Capitol Station, so I have to go to Marcy Street bus stop near the plaza.

I could take a bus to the plaza, but there is a pleasant walking trail that nearly spans the distance from Capitol Station and Santa Fe Depot Station near the plaza.

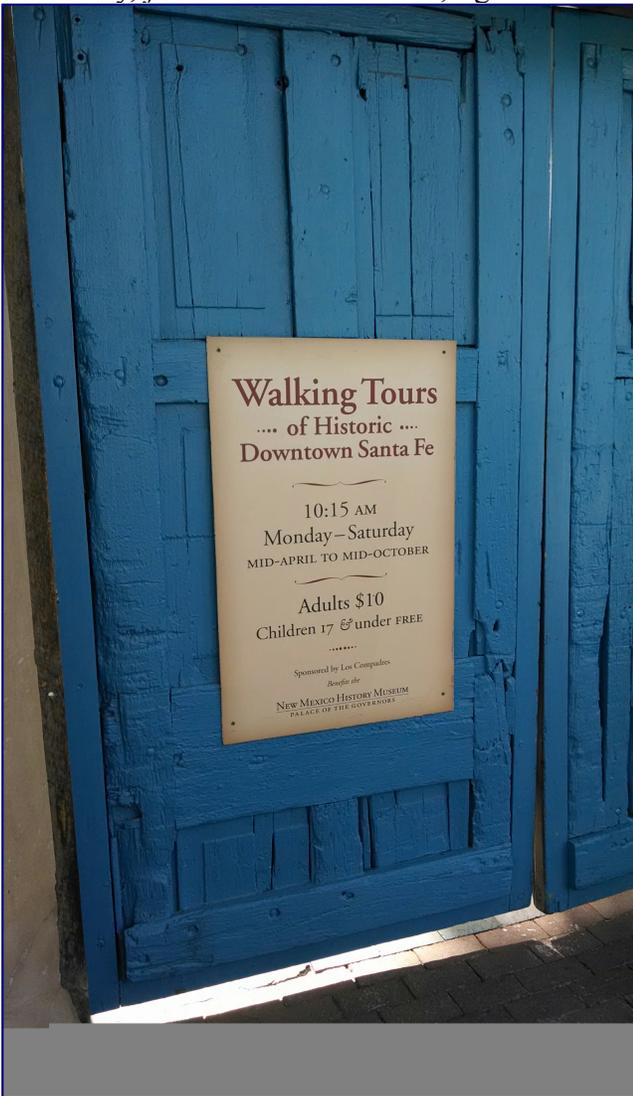


During the hike the Farmer's Market is in session, so I look for a cyclist buddy I met on last year's hike, who tells fortunes at the market. He is not there today.

I pass the train at depot station, and see evidence of the unfortunate collision earlier.



On the way to market street a sign displays a walking tour of the plaza area given by the NM Museum of History, just about to start. Sure, I go on the tour.



Blue bus departs 11:45, and arrives at Espanola at 12:30-ish. Fare is \$0.00.

The Blue Bus from Espanola leaves at 3:30 and arrives in Chama at 5:15, four hours later than my original plan. Fare is \$0.00.

I spend the night at Foster's, the same hotel where I ended my New Mexico hike. Tomorrow the plan is to take the train up to Cumbres Pass and begin the Colorado section of this challenging trail.



This post had been intended to highlight regional mass transit in NM, and it is fairly impressive that you can go from Socorro to Chama. But be prepared to turn a delay into an opportunity for adventure.

Starting Colorado

Posted on [June 18, 2014](#)

One may not purchase the "hiker special" tickets on the Cumbres Toltec narrow gauge coal-fired train up to Cumbres Pass the day before, so I showed up early when the ticket office opened and reserved my seat.

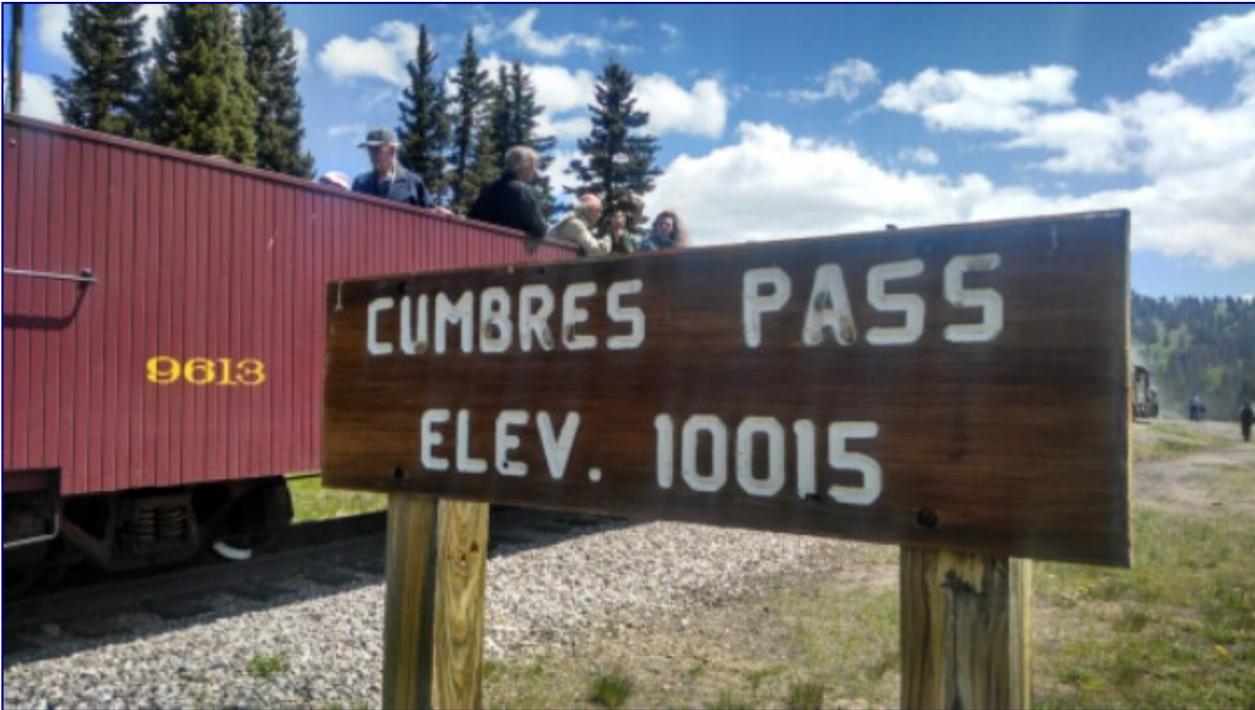




An amiable couple from Texas sat in front of me, and we had good conversation as I did some trail ambassador public relations work.



The train departed at 10 and reached the pass at 11:30.



The trail is well constructed here and easy to follow, with no disappearing sections. The climb began easy and gradual. Near the first peak was a large area of downed conifers {pine beetle?} with evidence of recent sawing to clear the path.



The first peak brought strong cold winds. A long exposed flat section along a ridge caused me to put on windbreaker, fuzzy hat, and finally gloves. Most through hikers are at least three weeks ahead of me, and hiked this part with much more snow and cold. I am hiking on the easiest skill setting with it being later in the season, but this might turn out to be the most challenging stretch of trail I will ever experience. Short sections of earlier hikes might come close to the elemental conditions, White Mountains or Pecos Wilderness, but this section goes on for weeks!



The views are awesome, stunning, beyond words. Note to myself: do not become too used to the scenery, and remember to be awed at least once a day.



The long ridge broadened into Flat Mountain, the start of south San Juan Wilderness.



A gentle descent to Three Lakes, and ice pellets begin falling, switching to rain. Only 5:30, but must erect the tent in fierce wind and precipitation. Hiking is over for the day.

Day 1, 6/18/2014

Start 11:30 Cumbres Pass, mile 780, elevation 9984

End 5:30, Three Lakes, mile 793, elevation 11786

Intro to Colorado

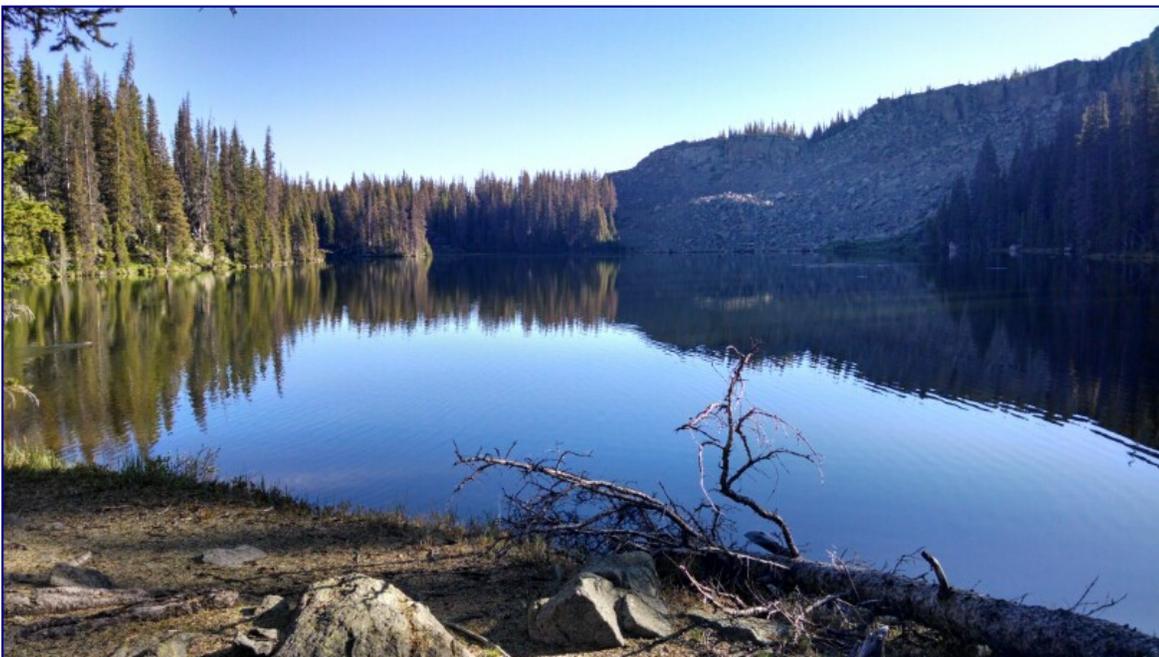
Posted on [June 19, 2014](#)

Water bottles froze overnight. A headache and nausea in middle of night were gone by morning. Does this have anything to do with the high altitude?

Climbed down to Dipping Lakes



Then switch-backs on scree and follow cairns to Trail Lake and a pass.



The trail has a few patches of snow, from ten to fifty feet across, with hard crust in the morning that supports my weight. Also, snow melt has converted a few stretches of pathway to creeks, often with swampy areas on both sides of the trail, tricky to step around. In early afternoon I met Brandon, a thru-hiker who completed NM but is finding Colorado a challenge. He has family in Colorado, so will not stop at Pagosa Springs.



We hike together for a while, until I have to stop for water and deal with an equipment issue.

I encounter larger areas of snow and swamp, and the snow is softer, so post-holing is common. (Post-holing means your foot breaks through the surface crust of snow and you sink up to your thigh.)

At Blue Lake I meet Dan, out for a week, near the end of his hike, going to try fishing in the lake.



After Blue Lake the snow crossings and swamp areas become frequent, and my shoes are no longer dry. Then several long snow traverses, hundreds of feet across, on very steep slope. I use Brandon's footprints as a guide on the best route to take. The snow is soft late in the day so traction is good—would be tricky on icy surface.



Wet shoes are likely for several days.

Day 2, 6/19/2014

Start Three Lakes mile 793., altitude 11786

End Middle Fork Conejos River, mile 813, altitude 11338

Snow Good

Posted on [June 20, 2014](#)

My shoes and socks are dry after hanging up all night in the cool dry breeze. That is a big morale boost, the chance to walk at least half a day with dry feet is a fine prospect.

After breaking camp I cross over the valley and start climbing the facing slope. There is not nearly as much snow on this side. Looking over to the other side where I hiked yesterday, one can see how often snow crossings were encountered.



So the direction the slope faces predicts how hard my hike will be, and I can use that to predict progress. At the top of the ridge a few steep snow fields are icy in the morning, so my traction devices (Yak Trax}) are used for the first time, these will not help in soft snow, so will be used in early mornings or highest altitudes, when the snow has a hard icy surface.



The trail crosses over the ridge to a slope facing the direction for frequent snow fields. It helps to step in the tracks of the hiker ahead of me, probably Brandon. At one point the tracks disappear from the trail. The earlier hiker must have realized it was impractical to do so many snow crossings, and went cross country down to lower elevation where there is less snow. I do the same, and trade snow for frequent swampy areas and thick brush.



The trail crosses over to another slope, also facing the wrong way. Here one can go off-trail in places to avoid snow, or at least cross snow where it is level and not steep.
Not much mileage today for a lot of effort.

Day 3 6/20/2014 Friday

Start Middle Fork Conejos River mile 813, elevation 11338

End San Juan Wilderness boundary, mile 827, elevation 12482

A Break From the Juans

Posted on [June 21, 2014](#)

Waking this morning, my body now feels acclimatized to high altitude. Happy, happy. Morning cloud cover hints at rain later in the day.

A large icy snow field in early morning needs shoe traction gadget.



As the trail leaves the San Juans, large stretches of icy snow disappear, replaced by frequent short stripes of deep wet snow athwart the trail, protected by tree cover at these lower altitudes.



The afternoon threatens rain several times, and I do see showers ahead, but nothing lands on me this day.

At these lower altitudes one sees many tall dead trees, often more than fifty per cent casualty rate. It feels like a punch to the gut. How do the locals get used to this?



I stop at the boundary to the Wolf Creek Ski Area. Tomorrow. Sunday will arrive in town, and Monday the post office will open and I can get a supply shipment..



Day 4, 6/21/2014

Start San Juan Wilderness boundary mile 827 altitude 12452

End Wolf Creek Ski Area boundary, mile 846 altitude 11388

[finished audiobook *Life On the Mississippi* by Mark Twain]

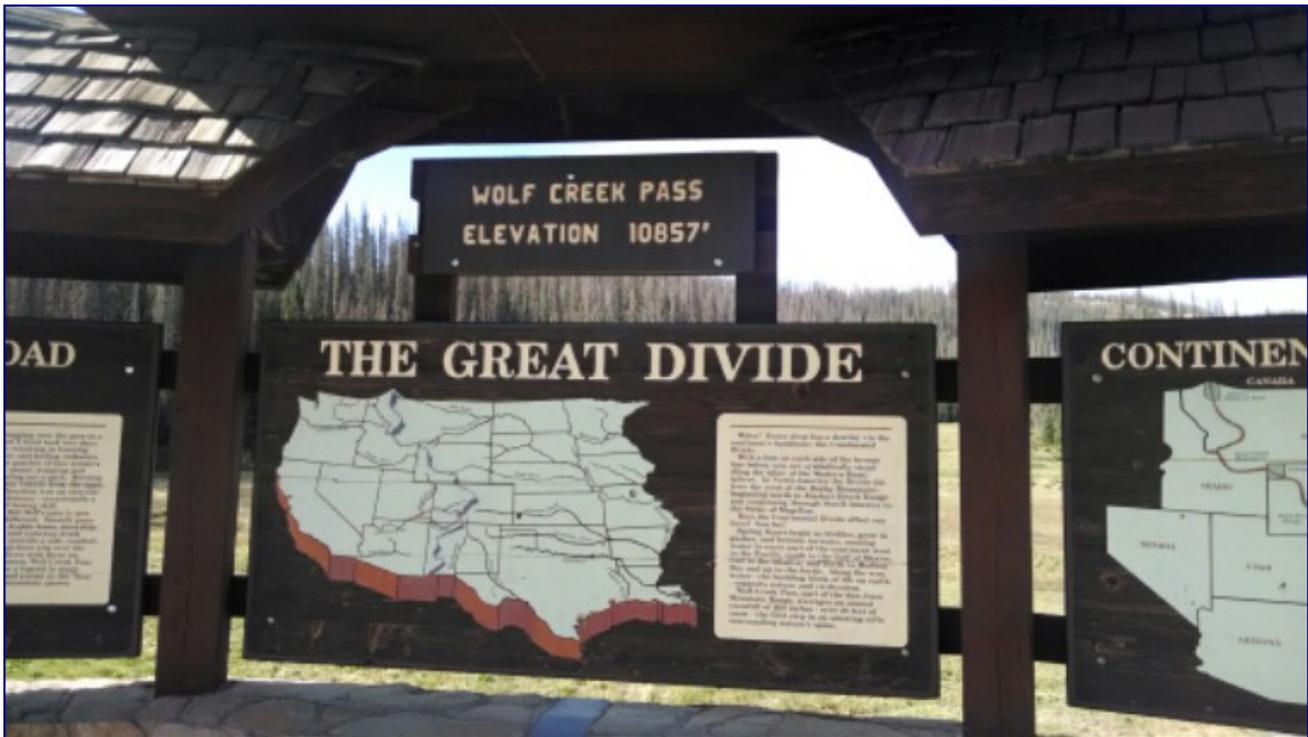
Nero Pagosa

Posted on [June 22, 2014](#)

The day starts with a crest trail into the Wolf Creek ski area.



On the way down to Wolf Creek Pass and US160, I meet a party of three on their way to Cumbres Pass, and another couple that camped at the ski area and were out for a short ramble.



At the road after holding up my sign °Hiker to Town°, the first vehicle passing stops and offers a ride! Bruce is on his way to pick up a stock trailer he purchased. “What kind of stock, cattle maybe?” No, he ran a wilderness outfitting company and guides backcountry trail rides. We talked about different style trail rides— go out and stay awhile in one location with heavier gear, versus longer distance rides that use lightweight backpacking equipment, versus hunting trips, that pay the best. Seems like a good guy, and I have his card if you want a memorable trail ride vacation.

The Pinewood Motel, recommended by my guidebook, gives a special hiker room rate and lets me check early even though it is only 9:30, allowing plenty of time for relaxation.



The woman at the office even offers to do my laundry, a service she has provided several years on behalf of hikers staying with her. Welcome news, since the nearest laundromat is 4.5 miles away on the other end of town.

Time to refuel.



Day 5, 6/22/2014 Sunday

Start Wolf Creek Ski Area boundary, mile 846 elevation 11388

End Wolf Creek Pass, mile 850, elevation 10859

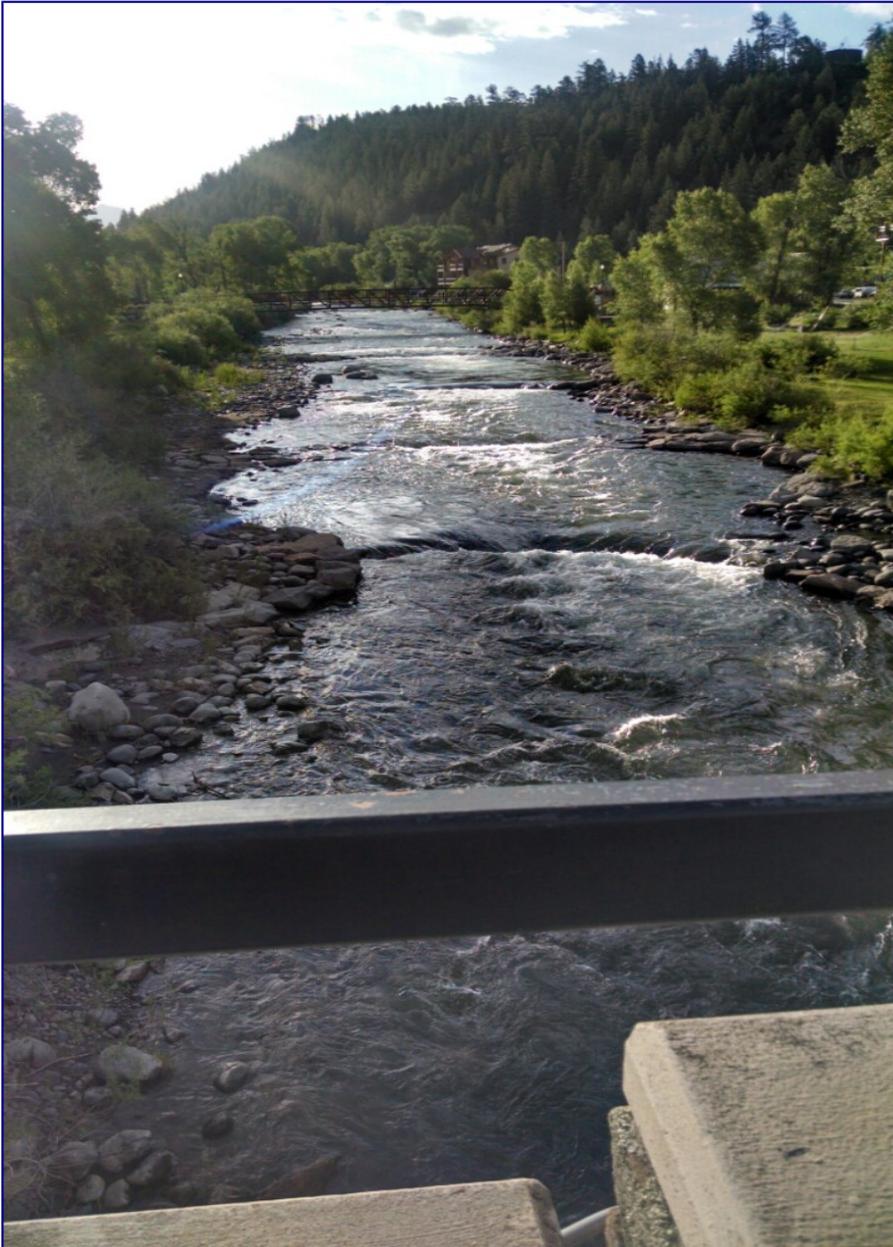
(and nero at Pagosa Springs 22 miles west, elevation 7041)

“Nero” is hiker jargon for “near-zero mileage day”.

What is a “pagosa”?

Sawtooth

Posted on [June 23, 2014](#)



San Juan River through Pagosa Springs, popular for tubing

After picking up my food box at the post office at 7:30 I stopped by the local camp gear place to see if they had some items I wanted {no}, packed up, and headed out. At a convenience store on the outskirts of town a guy introduced himself as a former local trail angel, before he lost his house, and he advised on the best place to hitch.

After holding up my “Hiker to Trail” sign for only 10 minutes, Travis stopped his van for me. He is doing some construction work now, but has an opportunity to teach outdoor skills at a tiny liberal arts college, Wyoming Catholic College, where he recently graduated. He got a backpacking instruction certificate at an outdoor skills school where he worked.

Near Wolf Creek Pass summit we saw some cyclists and marveled at the effort of their climb. After the road angel departed and I was readying my pack, a group of the cyclists reached the top, and each one in turn asked me to take a photo on their smart phones.



Started on the trail at 10:30, alternating dry sections of path with snow and swamp, depending on what side of the mountain the trail was using. In places the path was badly eroded, and one could see water bars and other trail engineering features that where not working properly to get water off the trail. This is no complaint, just interesting to see how some trail building techniques work. Colorado was early in getting their section of CDT established, and kudos to them.

At this lower elevation the beetle kill is extensive.

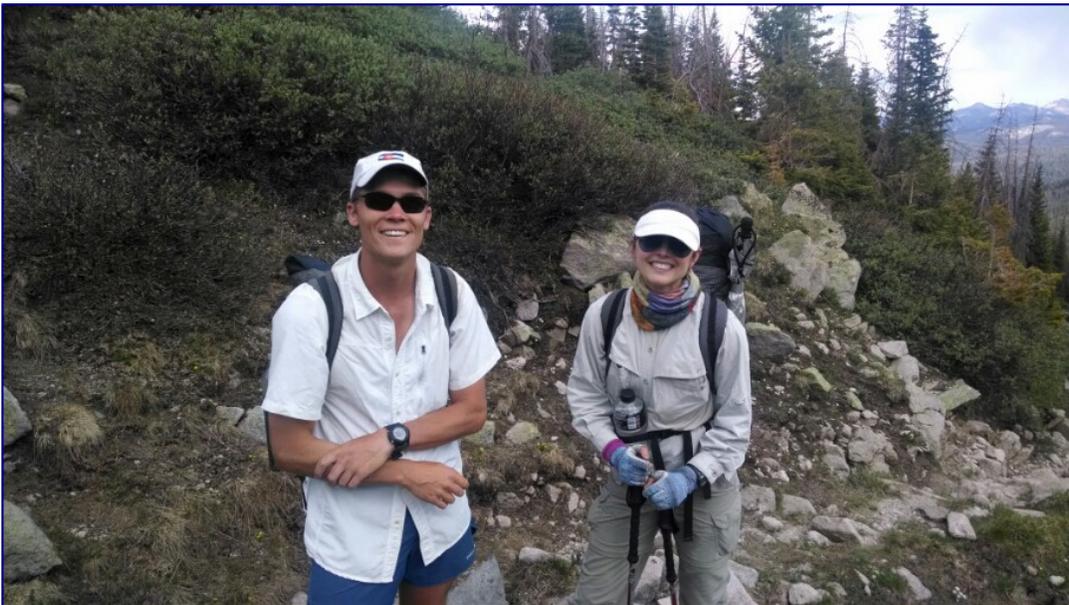


The color in the photo is not washed out, those are dead trees.

At Spotted Lake many trout played around the outlet.



In late afternoon Mouse and Flower passed me. Mouse is thru-hiking, and is going really fast, and will not stop in Lake City. He says the main group of hikers is at Salida, moving slow. Flower started in Grants, and is out for 9 weeks, however far that takes her.



As we were entering the Sawtooth Trail, on a ridge that goes up and down with great visibility, they were still visible in the distance for some time. Stopped at the end of the Sawtooth at 8:00, a late day for me.

Day 6, 6/23/2014 Monday

Start leave Pagosa Springs to Wolf Creek Pass mile 850, altitude 10859

End near terminus of Sawtooth Trail, mile 867, elevation 11680

High and Dry

Posted on [June 24, 2014](#)

This day followed along several ridges, and met very little snow or swamp all day.

The trail can often be seen far in the distance.



The final hike was along a high narrow crest, topped with snow but with room to walk along the white stuff.





Day 7, 3/24/2014 Tuesday

Start near terminus of Sawtooth Trail, mile 867, elevation 11680

End Spring mile 884, elevation 11838

Knife

Posted on [June 25, 2014](#)

The day starts with a narrow path high up mountain face, with fine views of the valley below.



The rock just off the path is loose, so going off-trail to avoid snow is not a good idea. Only one major snow traverse, and steps from earlier hikers were a help.



At the end of this famous section, known as the Knife Edge, I had to scramble over a snow-capped ridge.

In the afternoon the trail descended into a really pretty river valley.

A young man and two dogs were waiting there.



He asked me if I had seen two women. He was resupplying them on the trail, coming in from Cimmaron. One hiker was his girlfriend, out for a week to spend time with her friend, doing the Colorado section just like me. They would have taken the dogs, but were concerned how they would do on the Knife Edge.



Late in the day the path follows along a flat high meadow, and since no effort seems to have been made to divert water from the trail, it is badly eroded, like walking in a ditch for miles.



But the last mile into North Fork, the trail suddenly changes, with water diversions every ten or twenty feet, a pleasure to hike on, one could also see horseshoe prints, more recent than the footprints I have followed for several days.

Day 8, 6/25/2014, Wednesday

Start Spring mile 884, elevation 11838

End North Fork, mile 903, elevation 11458

Window

Posted on [June 26, 2014](#)

Walking along North Fork one discovers several beaver dams.



Later is a traverse across a huge meadow, where I lost the trail and the new dry path.
On the far side of the meadow and into the woods a man camping with three horses.



One horse was corralled and the other two free ranging, taking turns. That way the two free horses do not stray too far.

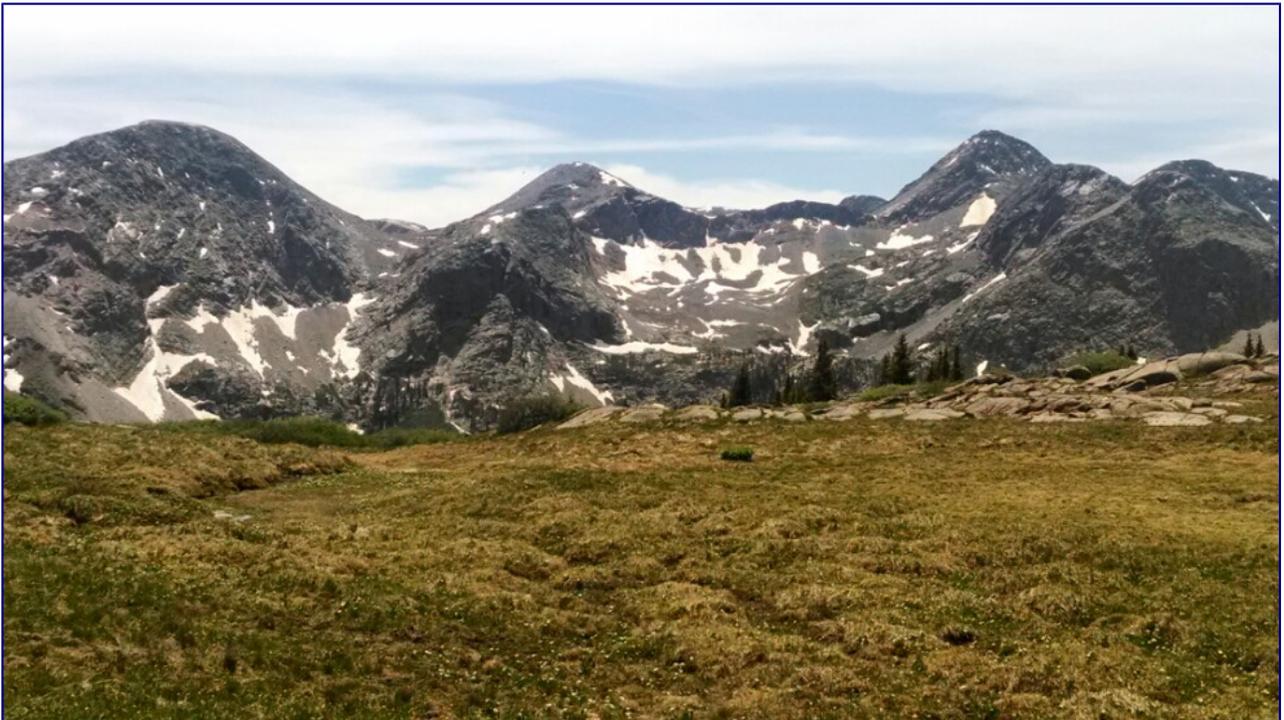
His Aussie is named Zena, not with an X.



A Steep climb brings you up to appreciate the Window rock formation.



From this trail the vista of several San Juan rocky peaks is magnificent, and impossible to hike, so lucky the trail does not lead there.



The wilderness area networks with other trails, and descends to Ute Lake.



Then the trail climbs to more beauty and West Ute Lake.



Day 9, 6/26/2014 Thursday

Start North Fork mile 903, elevation 11458

End near West Ute Lake, mile 920, elevation 11811

[finished audiobook *When Sysadmins Rule the Earth* by Cory Doctorow]

Start Colorado Trail

Posted on [June 28, 2014](#)

My trekking pole handle got chewed up in the middle of the night,



The first thought was that it was damage by heat from cooking dinner last night, so I was mad at myself for carelessness, but a mile down the road I understood the damage had to be from chewing by a small furry animal, most likely chipmunk. One pole is used as tent pole, and the other left just outside the shelter to avoid poking anything inside and remaining handy to poke anything outside. Oh well. At Bear Creek at the outskirts of the wilderness area I had been inside for days, my feet got soaked during the crossing. Looking back from the heights reveals a better place to cross.



This is a reminder to myself to check at least 100 feet upstream and downstream on difficult crossings to find an easier place.

The clouds looked ominous from early morning. Where the CDT joins the Colorado Trail, for days together, an emergency shelter is located, and one thought is to wait inside for an hour to see what the weather does.

A brief shower of snow, but no rain, so time to walk on, no time for lingering under a roof.

The Colorado Trail, CT, seems well maintained with good drainage features and good signs. The country is rounded grassy mountains with few trees or shrubs, and a meandering curving path. Near Stony Creek Pass and the remote dirt road to Silverton, I discover remains of rails, too small for any train, perhaps for mining.



At the pass a vehicle is parked with chicken wire surrounding the entire vehicle. what does this protect? Chipmunks like my pole? Probably not.

More climbing, and lovely grassland underneath threatening clouds.



Another shower of snow pellets pelts down, but nothing gets wet, so continue hiking.



Suddenly the snow turns to rain, and I am really high up a mountain. No time to dash down to lower altitude. In fierce winds and now pounding rain I set up the tent, placing my pack on top of the tent to prevent it blowing away while setting stakes. Quickly get inside and take stock. Outer clothes and shoes are drenched. My charger got wet and does not function. The tent flaps violently in high winds, like a ship sail not set properly. But I dry off and get in a warm bag and the rest of my gear stays dry. Still only 6:30, and the rain lets up briefly. Time to pack up and run down the mountain? No, the rain start again and I would have been soaked during the descent. Finally after dark the rain stops for good and clothes and shoes are set out in the wind to dry overnight. The wind is unremitting, the tent flapping loudly, and sleeps is difficult after my first Colorado storm.

Day 10, 6/27/2014, Friday

Start near West Ute Lake, mile 920, elevation 11811

End near Small Lake, mile 937, elevation 12817

Yurt

Posted on [June 28, 2014](#)

The night was loud with wind tearing at my high exposed campsite. My socks hanging outside the tent should have dried in that wind— instead they froze.

The day was spent on well-built Colorado Trail, meandering up and down rounded-top mountains, very green with grass, with few trees or shrubs. So quiet and with little wind, unlike last night.



Mid-day I met three thru-hikers who got to Colorado too early, skipped to Wyoming, then are southbound on this section of Colorado. Going south they have been able to meet 50 or so thru-hikers. We commented on our similar gear, with the same packs, one with the same hat as mine and same shoes and gaiters. I was somewhat fuzzy-headed today after a tough night, so forgot to ask them about the trail ahead, but did manage to ask their opinions on dealing with wet trails and wet shoes. Later the trail climbs up to Carson Saddle, a popular site for four-wheel vehicles, and my first bit of road for several days.



Several ATVs came by, with coolers strapped on to their machines. Nobody offered treats, so my yogi powers were weak this day.



Just after the Saddle is the high point for the Colorado Trail, at 13274.



Now I pick up my pace to get to my destination in time. On the way I admire this lake down below. On more than one snow field I boot ski down the slope. Near a rock outcropping a mountain lion bounds away, over 100 yards away and no time for a photo. As I write this I understand how many false cougar reports are made, and that this elevation is unlikely for such a creature.

After more long miles on grassland and woods, the yurt run by Friends of the Colorado Trail comes into view, situated on a hillside on a platform.



Inside is warm from the sun and superior insulation, with four bunks. A propane stove, sink (no running water), propane lantern, and wood stove are included amenities. No other hiker appears. After wiping off a week's worth of trail grime, and enjoying a hot meal, this traveler sinks into restful sleep in a building groaning gently to the wind.

Day 11, 6/28/2014 Saturday

Start near Small Lake, mile 937, elevation 12817

End yurt near 11-086RX, mile 959, elevation 11713

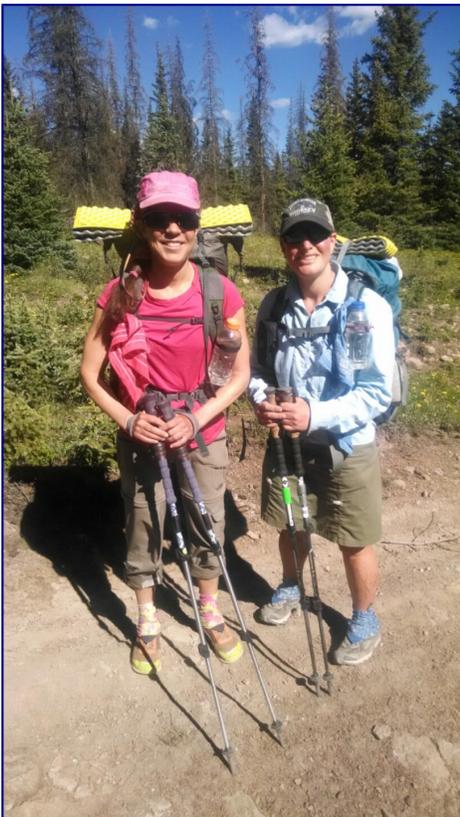
Lake City

Posted on [June 29, 2014](#)



Left the yurt refreshed, and hiked on rolling grassland, gradually lower in elevation. The trail moved on dirt road a few miles.

Near the pass I met Helicopter and Pounce, who flipped to Wyoming after encountering Colorado and were now southbound to the start of the section they skipped.



They had stayed at Ravens Roost Hostel, and gave me recommendations about town, and said I had just missed a ride back down. This time I remembered to ask about trail conditions ahead.

At the pass I arrived at the same time as a weekend backpacker. I went out to the road and started hitching, but she ended up giving me a ride to town. She guessed I lived in New Mexico, and tried to guess the part of state. She used to live in Albuquerque, and still had family in the state. We mostly talked about beetle kill.

Lake City is a cute little resort town where everything is close together.



Ravens Roost is familiar to anyone who has stayed at good comfortable well-managed hiker hostels.





The climbing footholds on the bunk beds are so cute!



NO2, a north-bound thru-hiker waiting for the post office to open tomorrow to get replacement gear, gave me the tour of the hostel.



NO2 is sponsored by Warrior Hike, an organization that promotes US military' vets hiking the three major trails.



He needs to give interviews and even take part in a parade as part of his duties with the group. Support staff and equipment sponsorship assist with his trip.

NO2 had hit Cumbres pass too early, with snowshoes still impractical, and skipped ahead to WY and flipped back..

Then comes the normal routine of shower, find a laundry, charge, get snacks, explore the town, buy some supplies, phone home.

NO2 and I had good conversation over dinner, but no food photos this time.

Later two short-trip hikers joined us at the hostel.

Day 12, 6/29/2014 Sunday

Start Yurt near 11-086RX, mile 959, elevation 11713

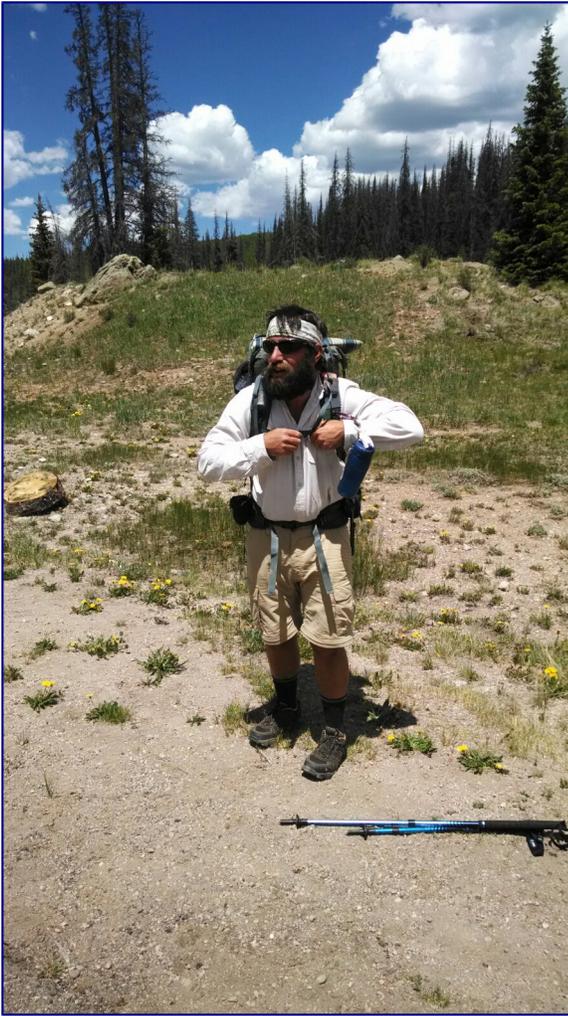
End Spring Creek Pass CO149, mile 968, elevation 10908, and hitch to Lake City

Leaving LC

Posted on [June 30, 2014](#)

The day start with prepping gear and going to the post office for shipments. NO2's box was delayed until after noon waiting for the next postal truck delivery. Lucky took us up to the pass and we got to the trail at 2PM.





A stiff initial climb brought us to the top of Snow Mesa, with broad flat high grassland.



The trail went down into trees briefly 12 miles out, before climbing high again. We camped at the low spot to be protected from the elements. My feet are complaining about the fast, though brief, pace of my hiking so I must go slower tomorrow.

Day 13, 6/30/2014 Monday

Start Lake City to Spring Creek Pass CO149, mile 968, elevation 10908

End 12-119xx near East Mineral Creek, mile 980, elevation 11797

Follow That Creek

Posted on [July 1, 2014](#)

My feet and shin took a beating yesterday, trying to keep up with another much faster hiker relatively early in my hike. I ran into this issue on a previous hike, and should know better. Lesson re-learned. The day starts with a climb up to San Luis Pass. My side-trip up San Luis Peak



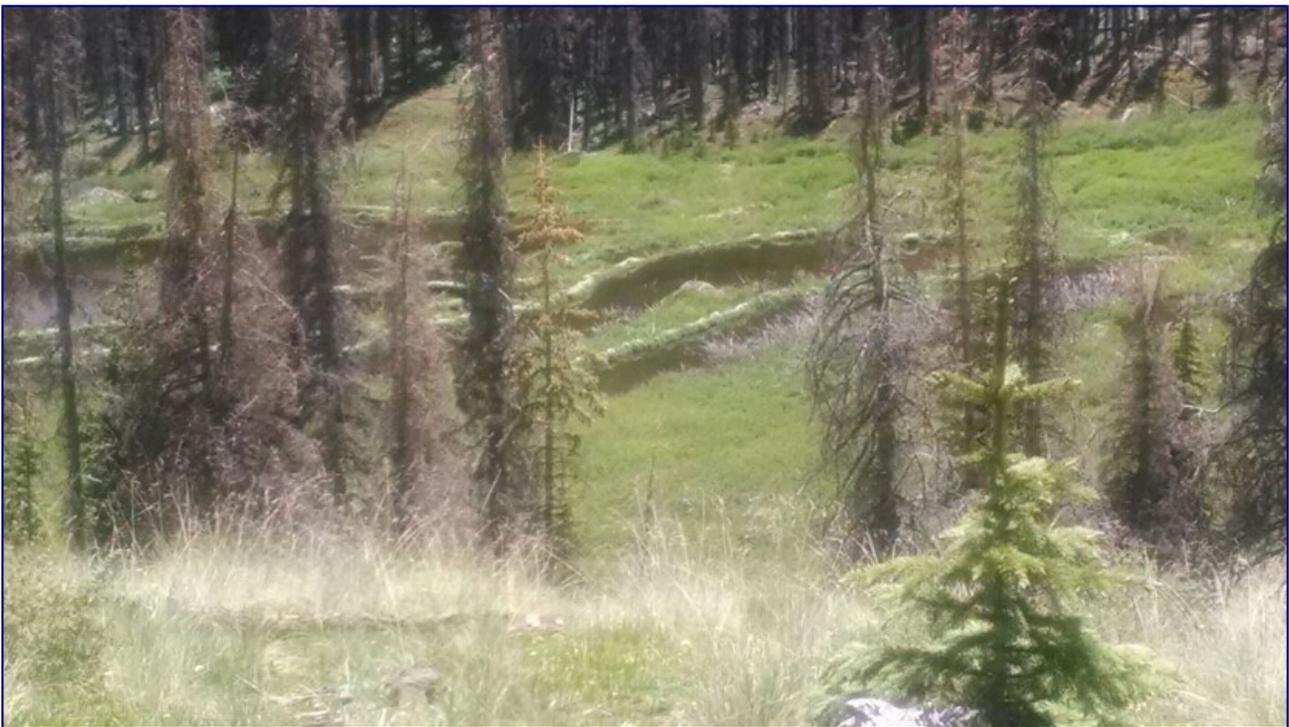
has the longest continuous span of trail over scree I have ever experienced, over half a mile of the stuff.



The trail descends into a river valley and follows near and along a creek, gently descending all day. This, and the fact that my shoes can stay dry, help my feet immensely, so after a few hours I can hike at normal speed, if carefully low impact. Our path passes numerous creeks joining as tributaries. The succession of beaver dams is the most I have ever seen.



It may be hard to make out, but flowers border these beaver dam terraces.





We are in the 9000s elevation, warm, surrounded by trees, even a few aspen.
A lone ranch is near the trail.



At a forest service trail-head is a special treat.



Sorry, but when you have been out in the wilderness for a while, these things matter.
At Cochetopa Bridge the water is too high.



and I have to wet-foot cross.



Only after across the water and up the hill does a possible dry foot crossing come into view. I need to keep looking, at even the most discouraging of crossings.

The camp is under aspen, warm, but no wind to help dry shoes.

Well, there is another way to dry out shoes:

Hike More Miles!

Day 14, 7/1/2014, Tuesday

Start 12-119xx near East Mineral Creek, mile 980, elevation 11797

End past Cochetopa "Bridge", mile 1000, elevation 9806

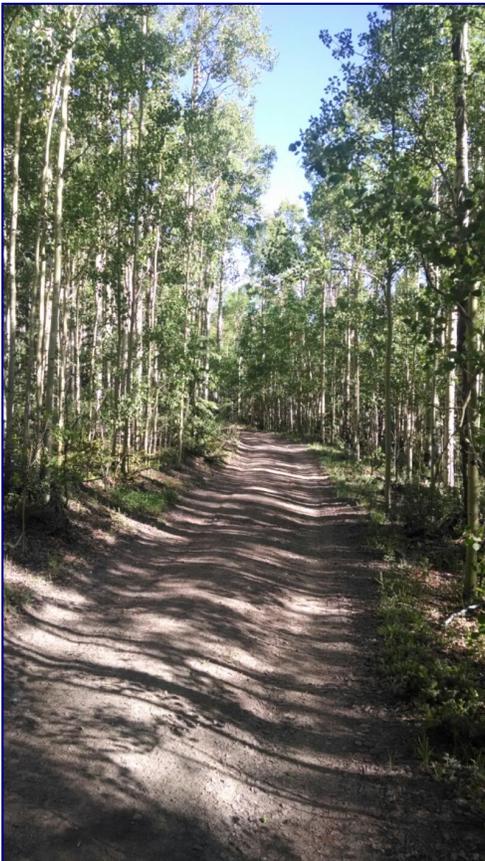
Road Hard

Posted on [July 2, 2014](#)

In the morning while passing a vaporous lake



the grass along the trail has dew, and in places even frost. This does not help my wet shoe situation. The path moves on dirt road through aspen forest.



For the rest of the day we stay on dirt road, gravel road, road-to-trail, some paved road, and gravel road, with a bit of pathway connecting it all. Elevation is in the 9000s, a hot day with clouds attempting to become thunder-clouds and start the monsoon season.

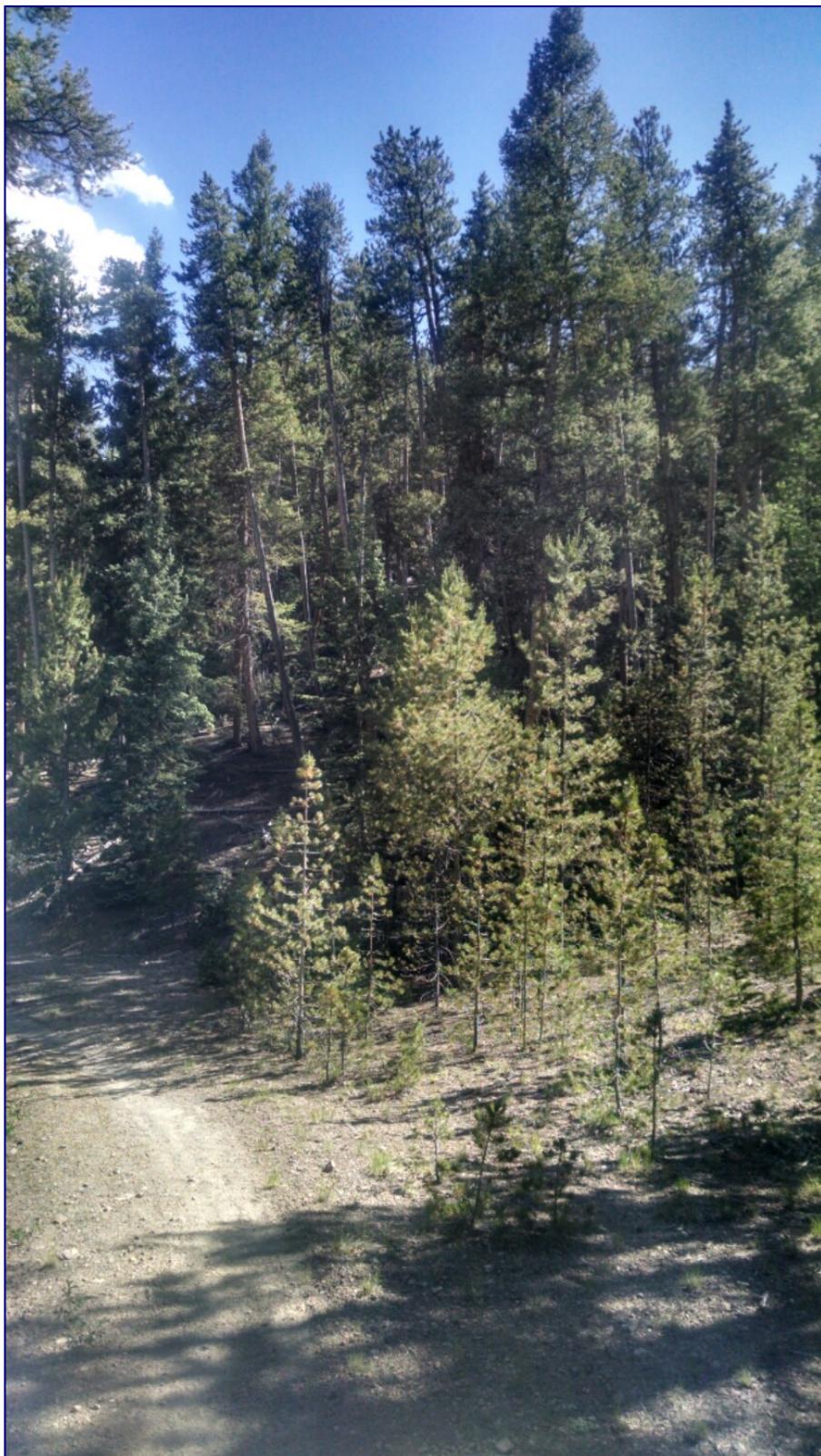
The road goes past a wide valley of ranches and grassy hills.



We pass broad-leaf mountain sagebrush. Yes!



We climb through hills, with stands of pine trees not affected by beetle kill yet.



In mid-afternoon I meet an older couple who live full-time in their van, enjoying a nomadic lifestyle.



Solar panels on the roof keep the Pepsi they offer me delightfully cold. They invite me to sit at their canopy “porch” and visit a while.

When hearing that I live near Socorro they mention staying at the Wal-Mart parking lot in that city when they go by on way to Arizona. “There’s always something going on in that lot. Last time some woman tried to run off with a full shopping cart, with security giving chase.”

I put in a long day of road miles, hoping to get close enough to take advantage of a cabin the next night, but it still may not be in range for tomorrow’s hike. My feet stayed wonderfully dry all day after the first wet shoes. Hope the long road miles do not cause them to ache in the morning.

Day 15. 7/2/2014. Wednesday

Start past Cochetopa “Bridge”, mile 1000, elevation 9806

End 2 miles past Lujan Trailhead, mile 1027, elevation 10345

Rock

Posted on [July 3, 2014](#)

Today was on a “Summit Trail” of connected high points, that involved much quick up-and-down, energy draining and morale busting. Usually enclosed by tree cover, strangely little beetle ravaged, no views of distant mountains are likely. Here is a representative view.



And here is a representative trail surface.



More likely used as an ATV path, not a footpath, don't you think?
We climb a high flat treeless mesa, though distant views are yet a distant memory.



Hike on, get to the next adventure...

Day 16, 6/3/2014, Thursday

Start 2 miles past Lujan Trailhead, mile 1027, elevation 10345

End 2 miles beyond 17-0821Xe mile 1053, elevation 10919

Return to Colorado

Posted on [July 4, 2014](#)

More winding down the collection of tree-enclosed rocky trails known as Summit Trail, then down to the pass. Following directions in my databook guide, the cabin appears.



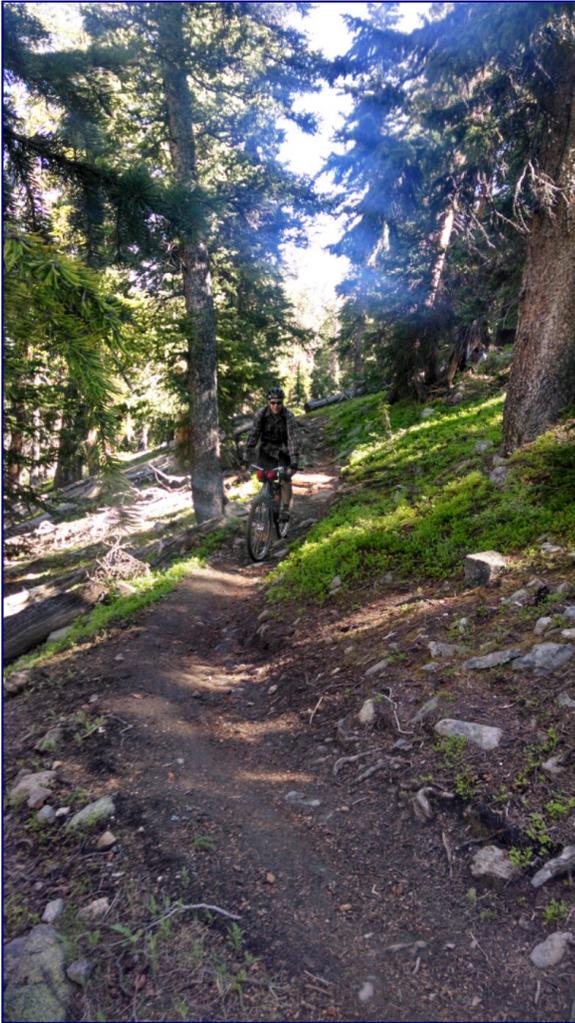
Just a few feet from the parking area, most people do not know it exists. Dark, only three bunks, no amenities such as a propane lantern, but free, first-come, first-served. Looks fun for snow-mobile season.

A group of five trail-runners, staying in a pack, started up the path. One, an older gentleman, paused to let me know this was a popular trail for mountain bikes, then ran on to join the group.

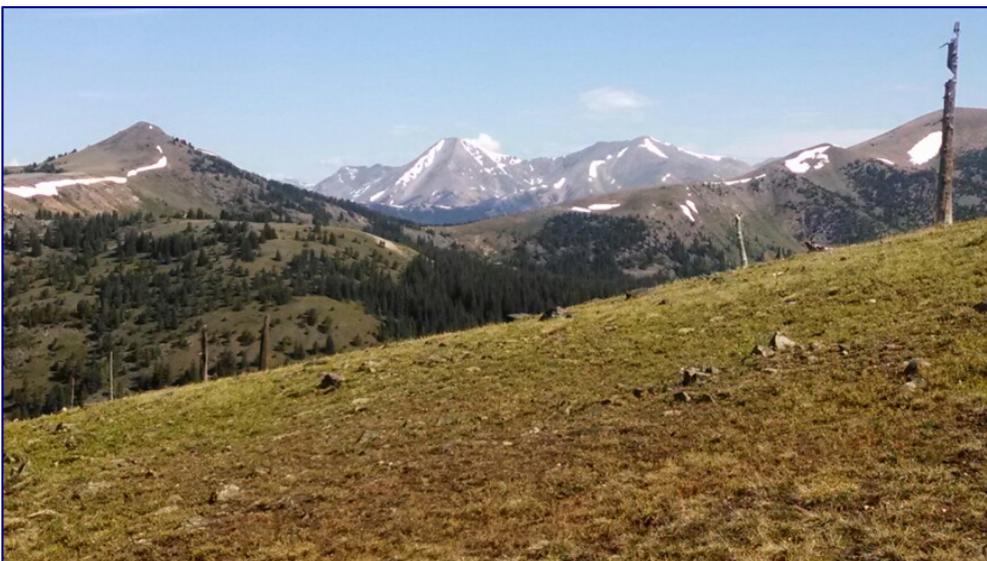
When the first bike arrived the path was enclosed by trees and winding, so you could not really see far ahead and had to step out of the way quickly to let her pass.



All riders were invariably polite and called out greetings and thanks for me stepping aside. I could usually see them before they saw me, since they had to concentrate on rocks and turns.



Toward the summit we leave the trees behind, and snow-kissed peaks are all around.



This is the Colorado I have missed for a few days! This is the hike I signed up for. (Well, it cannot all be San Juans, so this hiker should really prepare mentally for when future sections of the trail are more like other states.) So now here are some views that gave me such joy today.





One one snow field I had just walked the long way around, I saw a group of cyclists approach it from the other direction, where they met a really steep drop-off in their path.

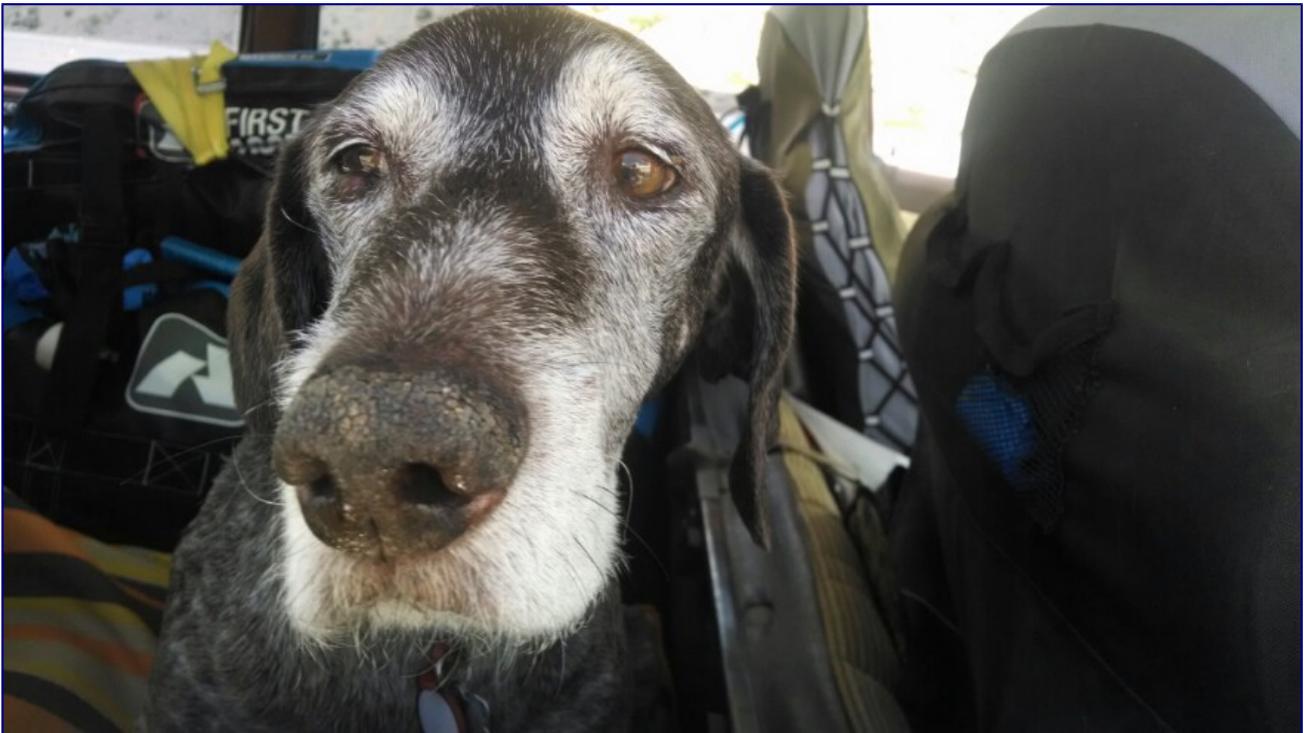


One cyclist had to climb down the snow and catch the bikes as they let them slide down, then the riders could slide down after them.



After a hundred riders had flown past I started calling out their number as they went by. Number 110 and friend must have been out for a quick jaunt, because they came back the other direction, called out their numbers, and asked if I give new numbers if they pass again. (Yes, I do.) He works at a bike shop in town, and knew that rangers stood sometimes with a clicker next to the trail, counting bikes, but he liked the idea of someone counting out numbers and wanted to know when I started up the path. The final count was 134.

The hitch down from Monarch Pass was easy, car number 4, after raising my sign. Alex was out with dog Grover on a camping trip, and since Grover was so old, thirteen, it would probably be his last camping trip.



My hitch had a hitch! My ride thought he was going my way, but it turned out he goes off highway 50 just before Salida. So he lets me out and I have to hitch again five miles outside of town, where drivers do not expect to see hikers. After 20 minutes, with rain threatening, a road angel comes along and drops me near the hostel.

Which has a “no vacancy” sign and no one is answering the door.



In sprinkling rain I hide under a tree and start dialing other hotels in town. Being July 4 weekend, everything appears full up. One hotel manager suggests I try the next town over, which really makes me nervous.

As a guest enters the front door of the hostel, I ask if she knows if the manager is around, since I had a package shipped there (to avoid long-weekend postal jail for general delivery packages that have to wait until the post office opens on Monday). she kindly fetches the manager, who shows me to my supply shipment– whew! She explains a small party has rented the entire hostel this weekend, so no hikers. She invites me to continue calling inside, out of the rain. Just as I had resigned myself to just grabbing a shower at an RV campsite and going right back up the pass without sleeping a night in town, I finally find a chain hotel with a room.

Complications are that the hotel laundry room is unavailable, so a trip to a nearby laundromat is necessary. By the time everything is clean enough for town, including myself, the parade has already started. I had hoped to attend, since NO2 was expected to be in the parade.

On the way to my hotel, I spot these two critters in a yard. Not statues.



Day 17, 7/4/2014, Friday

Start 2 miles beyond 17-082IXe mile 1053, elevation 10919

End Monarch Pass, mile 1068, elevation 11300, and hitch 22 miles into Salida

Chasing Blue

Posted on [July 5, 2014](#)

When I asked the hotel clerk where was the best place to hitch for Monarch Pass, some guys in the lobby overheard and offered me a ride. They come out to Colorado every year from Georgia to hike a week or so, and just completed a 14k peak. Tony, the driver, thru-hiked the AT in early eighties.

When we got to the pass I had to go into the store up there to help the economy.

On the trail by 9AM, quite good for coming out of town.



This sign at the Monarch ski area, “Great Divide– More Difficult”, denotes a ski trail that follows along the divide. But perhaps, on another level, it is a commentary on the CDT. (But some parts of southern Colorado might be “black diamond” early in the season.)

The path ascends out of the trees onto a high ridge. Oh good, I love this style of high trail that goes way up a ridge, then follows level along a mountainside for miles, offering panoramic views along the way.





Rain starts on way down



A tree near the bottom near a lake offers shelter for an hour while hail accumulates near my feet.

Wondering how much longer the rain will last, I peer towards the trail ahead and see a tiny patch of blue in the sky.



After walking towards the blue for a few hundred feet the rain decreases and then ceases. Several times during the day clouds threaten overhead, but I can see a bit of blue sky ahead in the distance, and keep hiking towards the blue.

The trail descends down to Boss Lake



The outlet to the lake is surging with water, just a huge flow rate.



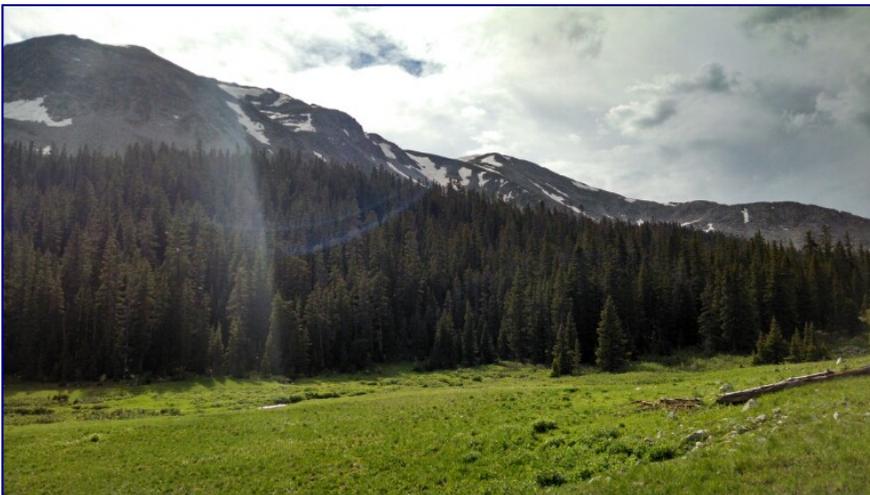
On the way down from the lake I meet people working on the trail, from the Southwest Conservation Corp. Young people sign up for a six month tour of duty.



Later I pass a really cute two-story cabin along the trail and talk to the couple inside coming out for a hike.

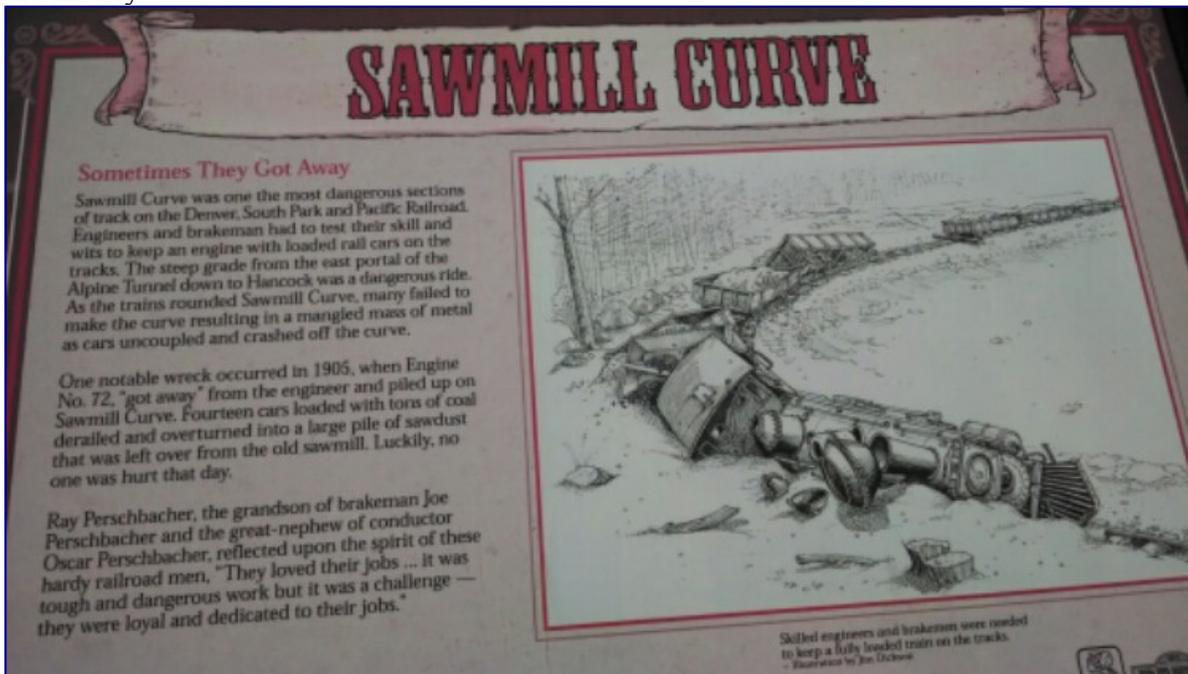


They were renting the cabin for the weekend. Is this a Forest Service cabin?



I ascend Chalky Pass, but never learn why it is called chalky. It may be hard to see in this photo.

A section of old railroad bed has been converted into the Alpine Tunnel Trail, with signage explaining the history.



Here is the site of a trail derailment. How do you remove trails in those days from such a steep narrow place?



I do not completely finish the narrow trail before darkness descends, and must search for a spot wide enough to place my tent and still be out of the way.

Day 18, 7/5/2014, Saturday

Start hitch 22 miles to Monarch Pass, mile 1068, elevation 11300

End 20-010MS mile 1087, elevation 11202

A Higher Path

Posted on [July 6, 2014](#)

On waking, I finish the Alpine Tunnel trail, reaching the spot where one end of the tunnel had collapsed.



Location of tunnel.



At mid-morning Toe Jam comes past, hiking the Colorado Trail.



But his story is much more complex. He started hiking the Appalachian Trail this year, finished about two-thirds, then went out and hiked a little PCT, then took a few weeks off because a foot issue. Then he asked himself what trail he would really like to finish this year. After completing the Colorado Trail he hopes to go back and finish the AT thru-hike this year. Wow.

He asked if I had decided which trail option to take coming up in a couple of miles. He did the newer trail, and found it to be up high. Well, high-altitude Colorado trail is a good thing in my book, so this would be considered a solid positive endorsement.

Still undecided upon arriving at the trail junction. The new trail is marked “Planned Summer 2014”, but the trail markings still had not switched over to the new. Looking at maps, both sections were similar lengths, spanning a couple of days hike, so mentally I flip a coin and go with the new section.



Oh, this is starting well. After climbing switchbacks away from the forest road trail junction, we get to high summits and ridges.



The views are quite rewarding.



Large scree fields and snow fields make things challenging.



Along a high ridge for some miles, I can make out Mirror Lake in the distance. This worries me a bit, since the older trail should have run right by the lake not long after the intersection. Hope my distance estimates are not far off.



Still, a good day of high-altitude trail. I ran out of daylight before reaching the start of descent to meet up with the older trail, so had to camp pretty high up.

Day 19, 7/6/2014, Sunday
Start 20-010MS mile 1087, elevation 11202
End 21-145M mile ???, elevation 12165

Rejoin

Posted on [July 7, 2014](#)

After a little more hiking along crest and ridge, the path descends to Cottonwood Pass, and goes down a bowl-shaped valley.



Then even further down, down to Texas Creek at elevation 10635, compared to 12000s where we started the morning.



I found a place to cross, but the log was wet and slippery toward the end— two wet feet.
We rejoin with the old section of trail.



At another water crossing, I am still figuring how to proceed, when three motorbikes show how it is done.



The trail named Timberline Trail has lots of timber in my line of sight, so no photos. Then the trail climbs, up above tree line, up, up, a 1500 foot climb.



And down the other side again toward Lake Ann and nearby waterfall, crossing snow fields and a boulder field on the way down.



The rain starts as the trail gets closer to the lake, so no risking the camera, so too bad no better photos. Finally, late in the day, I hike down below the lake and into tree cover, and set up camp for a deserved rest.

Day 20, 7/7/2014, Monday

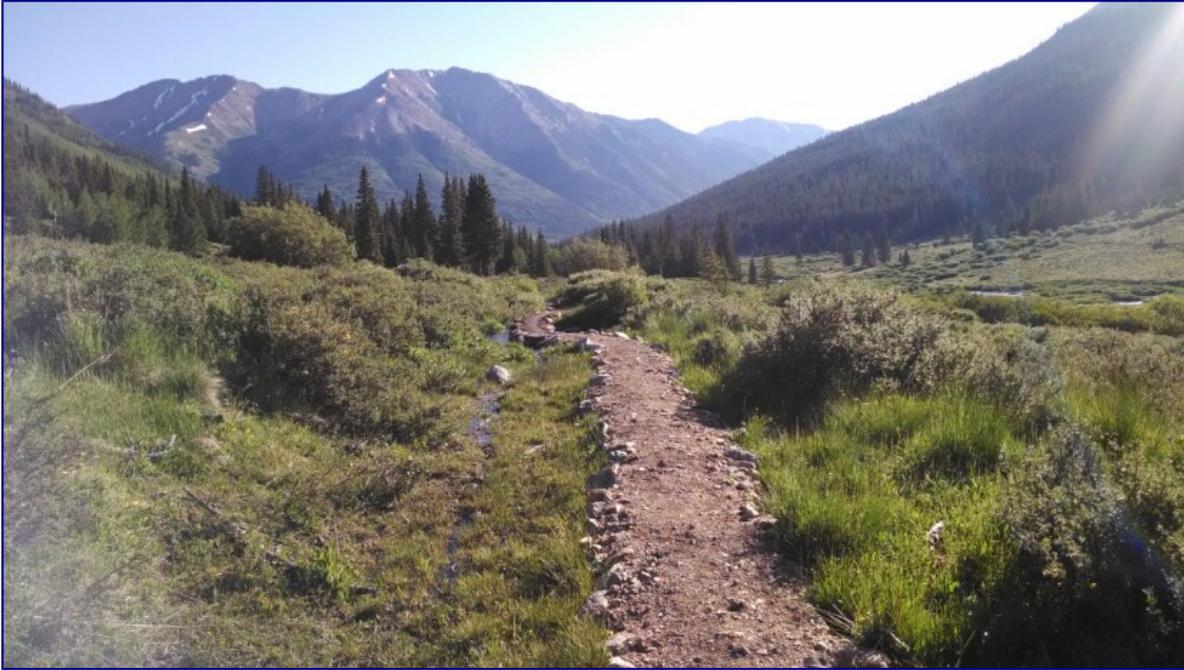
Start 21-145M mile ???, elevation 12165

End 22-175WT, down from Lake Ann, mile ???, elevation 11808

Twin Lakes

Posted on [July 8, 2014](#)

After climbing down from Lake Ann, the trail follows a river valley on good tread, part-way up the side of a ridge, since cabins and private land were in the bottom lands.



On this

section, a stand of sagebrush is competing for space with aspens.



Now it is time to climb Hope Pass. My map shows 2500 feet climb, very steep.



The map tells only part of the story. Extreme steep grade. No easy grade switchbacks as in recent days. Steep, really steep.



Finally the pass is climbed. One can see Twin Lakes in the distance. The rest of the day is downhill or flat.



On my way down a church youth group is struggling on an equally brutal climb from the other side. see if you can make out despondent faces.



The stream the trail follows, inlet for Twin Lakes is full of water and roaring down the mountain.



Down the mountain, one admires the first lake through the trees.



Here is the second lake, with sagebrush in the foreground.



The path goes by a historical site, Interlaken, a former resort on the lake.



In the afternoon, of course, rain starts.



I had hoped to get around the lake early enough to run into town and get some needed supplies (and snacks) at the tiny general store at the town Twin Lakes, but alas time ran out. Hiking out of Twin Lakes on the bluffs above, my camp enjoys a good view of the water.

Day 21, 7/8/2014, Tuesday

Start 22-175WT, down from Lake Ann, mile ???, elevation 11808

End near 23-165XX, with a view of Twin Lakes, mile 1152, elevation 9403

Next

Posted on [July 9, 2014](#)

My campsite, just beyond Lake View Campground, offers a morning view peering through the trees.



The trail climbs and winds to the approach trail for Mount Elbert, a 14k peak. The CDT does not climb the summit.



Some CT hikers who arrive at the approach trail just as I do try to convince me to try for the summit, and “bag a 14k”. Well, that would be a problem. Bag a 14k, and my obsessive personality will want to do more 14ks. And where would that lead? To entirely too much climbing up steep steep trails, that’s where.

Many people do take the challenge. I see people carrying totally nothing. A trail runner carries a small water bottle wrapped with a thin windbreaker in one hand. I see a young backpacker carrying a full pack, complete with a paperback book tucked in a side pocket. And earrings– you do not often notice earrings for an ascent.

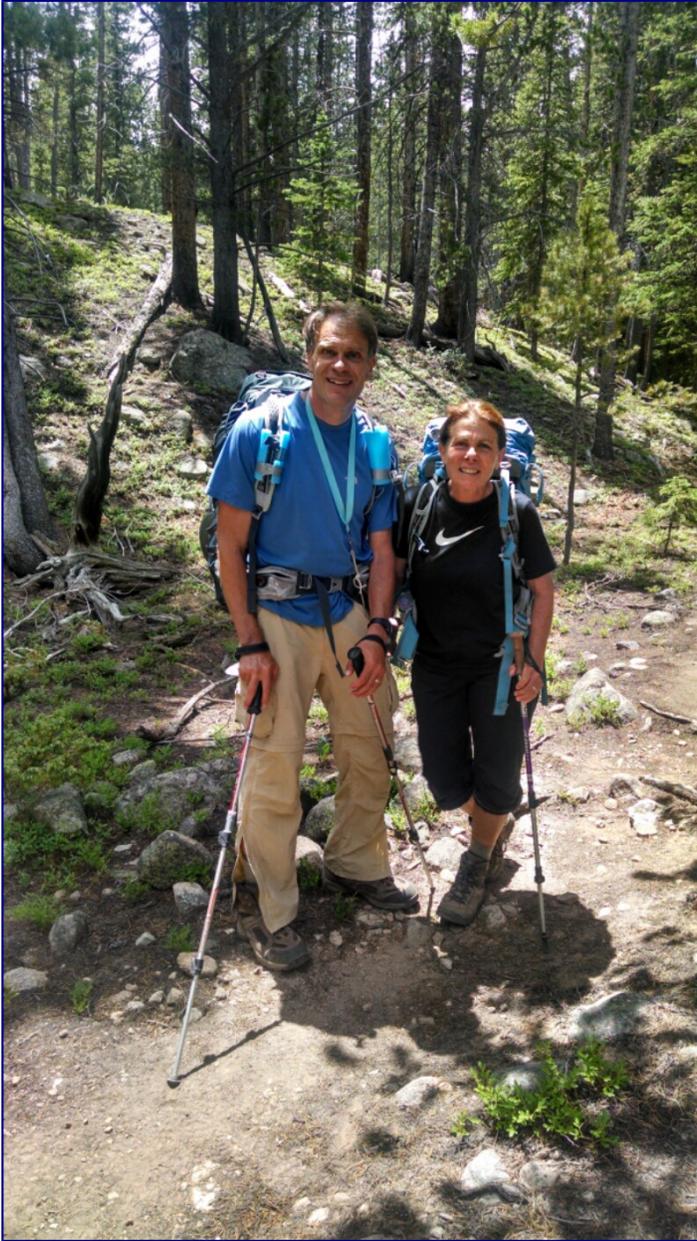
The trail goes around to intersect the summit trail for Mount Massive– great name, that, for another 14k peak just a few feet shorter than Elbert. Several groups of backpackers, often lead by a commercial expedition service, are on the trail today.

The trail is forested with few views most of the day. This does not bother me as much as the other day. Why? One subtle difference is that the forest is more open, with more average space between trees. And the trees are taller, with a more open understory.



Several CT (Colorado Trail) hikers are coming the other way, starting at Denver and expecting to end in Durango. At this point they are just a few days on the trail, with start-up problems as I invariably have a few days into beginning a long hike.

Kayak (AT2011) and Beth are from Ohio.



When I mentioned I had a family member going to a small school in their state, we compare notes: they have parents and a niece and nephew that went to that same school. Small world.

CT hikers ask me about the trail option ahead of them, and I tell my experience with the higher path.

Here is a view of Mount Massive.



Late in the day the trail enters Holy Cross Wilderness, and starts with a steep 1500 foot climb that is hard somehow to summon energy for. After gaining the saddle, one experiences truly wild country. Here is the first lake.



If this second pond does not have a moose munching on vegetation at dusk, they should really get one.



Since not much exciting happened today', here is a flower.



Day 22, 7/9/2014, Wednesday

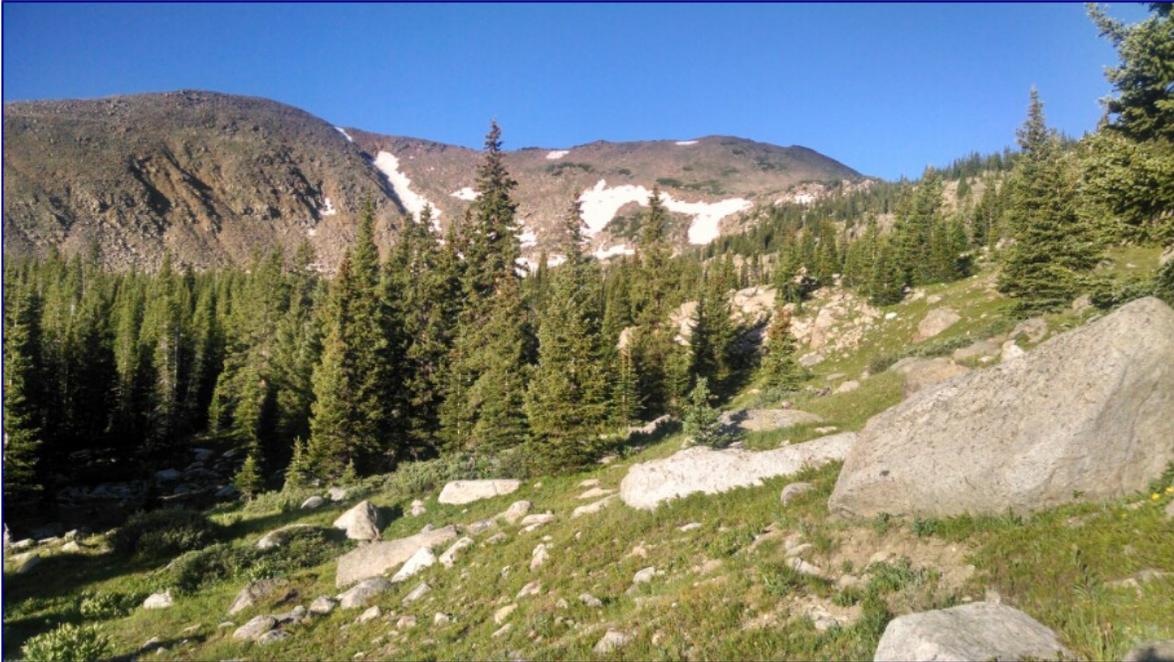
Start near 23-165XX, with a view of Twin Lakes, mile 1152, elevation 9403

End 25-030XX (near trail crossing in Holy Cross Wilderness) mile 1175, elevation 11126

Leadville

Posted on [July 10, 2014](#)

The morning brings more views of Holy Cross Wilderness, as the trail crosses over and down a ridge, and we are rewarded with small snow crossings and vistas of steep rocky mountainside.



Leaving the wilderness, a town day beckons. For some unknown reason, a swing appears at a trail junction.



Trail magic on the CDT? Who ever heard of such a thing?



Leadville Hostel provides the magic, and a cold soda and chips sure are a welcome treat.

Two day-hikers leaving the parking area see me hitching and offer a ride to Leadville.



The hostel is nearly full, but a bunk is found for me.



A big cycling and running event is scheduled for the weekend, so the hostel is full of cyclists. Several are repeat visitors, and do this Leadville event multiple years.

These runners and cyclists eat so healthy. Each of us have a tray in the fridge, and mine is full of soda and junk food, and all the others have salad fixings, juices, and all manner of healthy goodness.

Many gather around the dining room table to chat, surf, and eat their carefully crafted salads.



And I come to the table with my Hagen Daz and Doritos. Hikers only hit town every few days, so we binge on treats, while bikers and runners are in town each day, so must exert more self-control.

Day 23, 7/10/2014, Thursday

Start 25-030XX (near trail crossing in Holy Cross Wilderness) mile 1175, elevation 11126

End Tennessee Pass mile 1186, elevation 10125, and hitch 9 miles south to Leadville and hostel.

Zero Leadville

Posted on [July 11, 2014](#)

Zero (zero miles hiked in a day).

Zero blogging day as well.

Day 24, 7/11/2014, Friday
Start Leadville
End Leadville

Un-Leaded

Posted on [July 12, 2014](#)

The hostel has an air of excitement, for it is race day, and many residents are riding or staffing the event.



Wild Bill and Cathy, the hostel hosts, prepare breakfast for any who want it– quite good. Then a hostel staff worker shuttles Mademoiselle, Twin, and me up to Tennessee Pass.



These two hikers are southbound on the CT. Both have extensive long distance hiking experience, and we enjoyed picking each others brain while at the hostel, and I will miss their company.

The trail goes by an old bunker at Camp Hale.



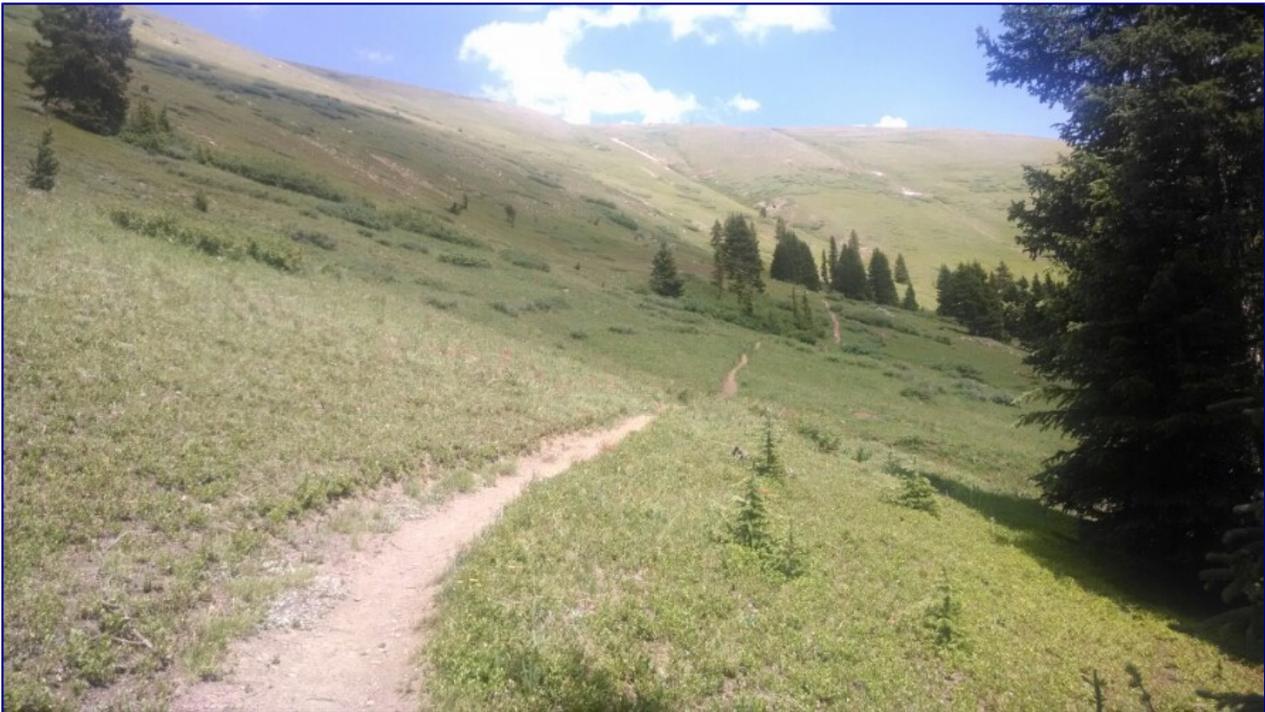
These rocks out in a field are actually sheep grazing.



Sheepies are crossing the road.



The 2500 foot climb to Kokomo Pass is not too difficult after a zero day rest in town.

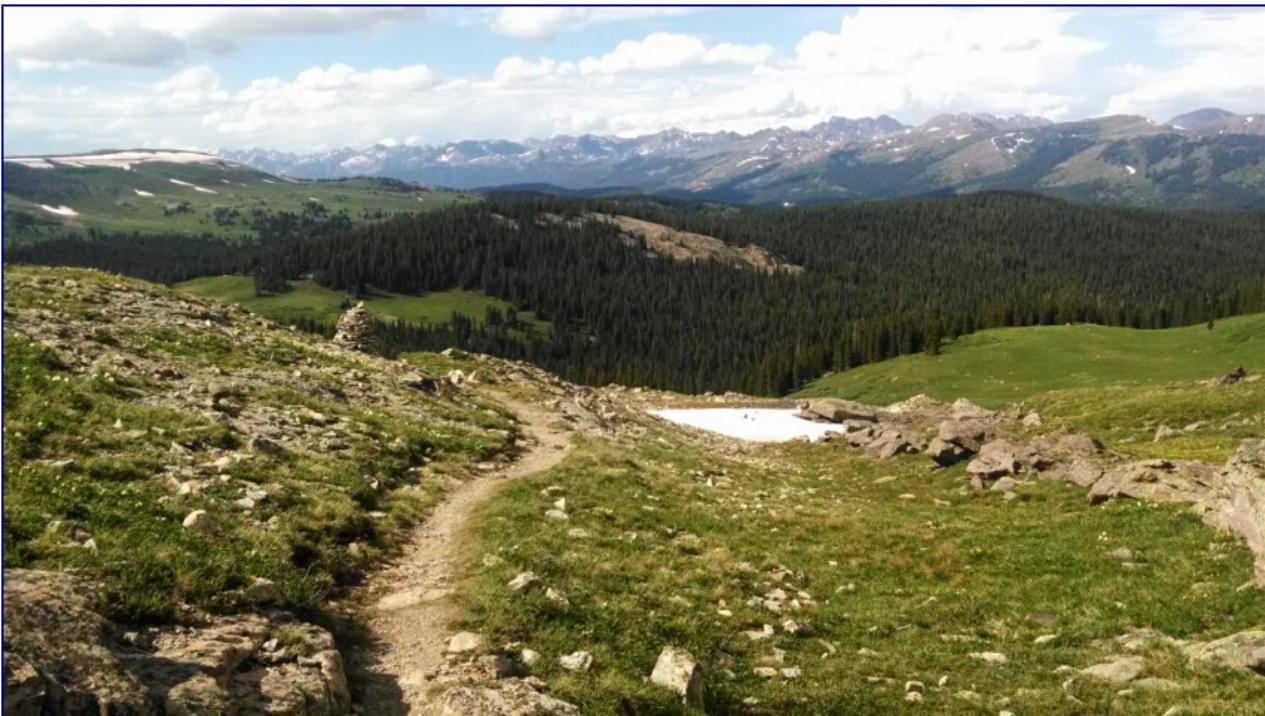


Several CT hikers pass the other way all day, over twenty. Many decided to delay their hike because of the extra snow this year, and their start happens to cluster together.

The trail continues on Elk Ridge with rewarding views. The weather threatens, and we are pretty exposed up here.



Leaving the heights via Searle Pass, we are still treated with good views of rocky peaks.



On the descent we pass by a fancy multi-story cabin– really a lodge.



I see someone inside. Is this a rental or private?

Some light intermittent showers fall.

After many more steps I reach Copper Mountain ski area, and stealth camp. Music from one of the taverns below plays late into the night.



The susurrantion of the nearby highway traffic helps send me to sleep.

Day 25, 7/12/2014, Saturday

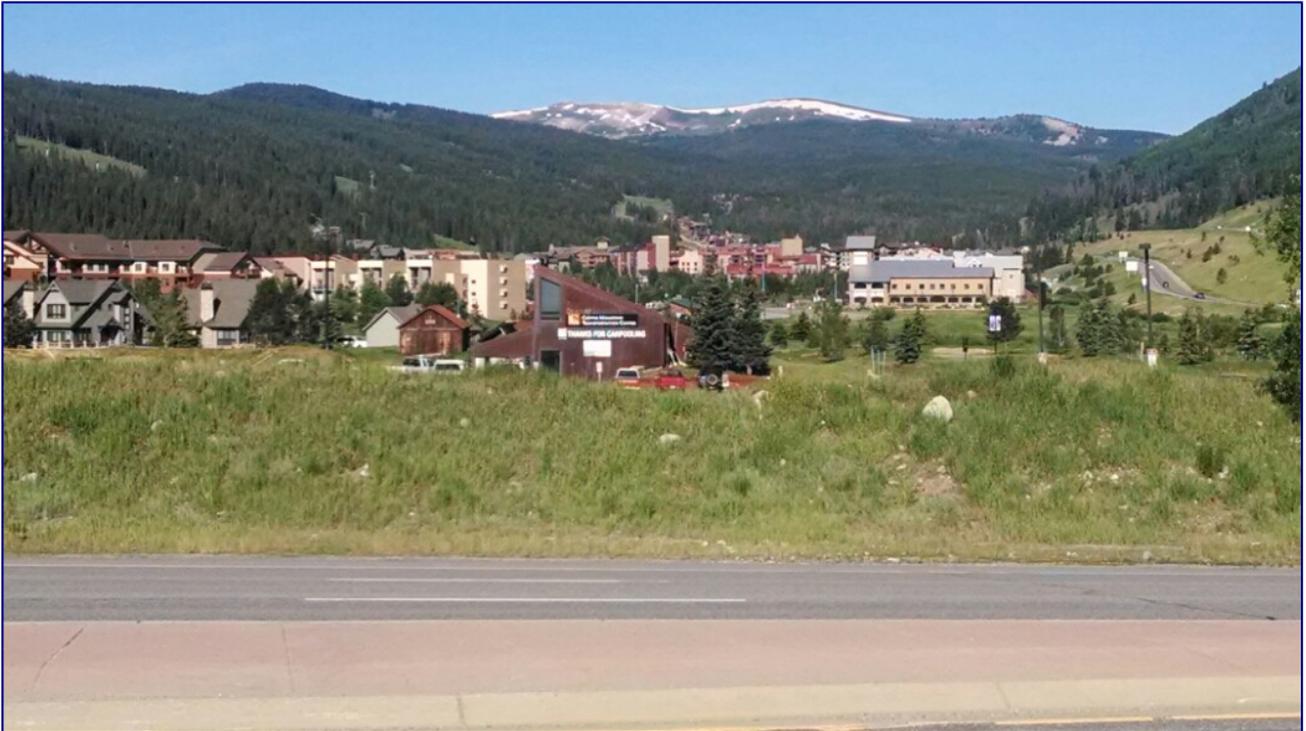
Start Leadville Hostel and 9 miles north to Tennessee Pass mile 1186, elevation 10125

End 26-218XL in Copper Mountain ski area mile 1207, elevation 10320

Fighting Beetle

Posted on [July 13, 2014](#)

The trail continues just above Copper Village shops and views of many condos.



Then close to 3000 feet climb, with the reward of walking along a ridge with a view of rocky peaks.



From the heights we can see the Copper Mountain complex below.



As the trail falls off the ridge we had walked along, that ridge becomes one of those steep rocky un-hikeable peaks like we often admire in the distance.



Some light rain falls, no big deal.

The path descends down to Gold Hill trail, with evidence of cutting along the path.

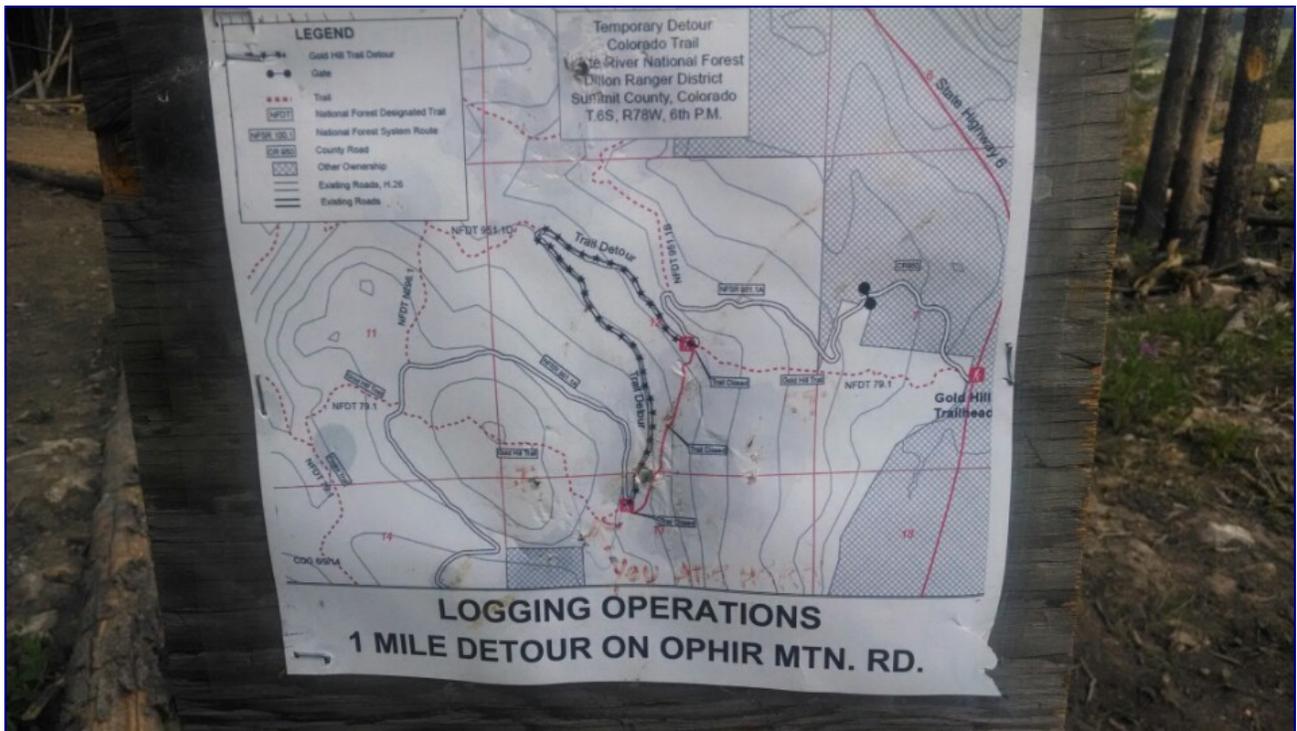


At first it is not obvious why these trees are down. Then we see an almost clear-cut area.





This must fight beetle infestation. Then the trail has a detour for logging operations.



The trail crosses CO9 and passes through a high-end trailer park development, similar to Surprise AZ.



The path gains 1000 feet of elevation and meanders through high forest, with continuing evidence of cutting to defend against beetle.



Somewhere after the high ridge after Copper Mountain, water sources along the trail are much less common. No frequent stream crossings, no streams from snow-melt. What has changed?

Day 26, 7/13/2014, Sunday

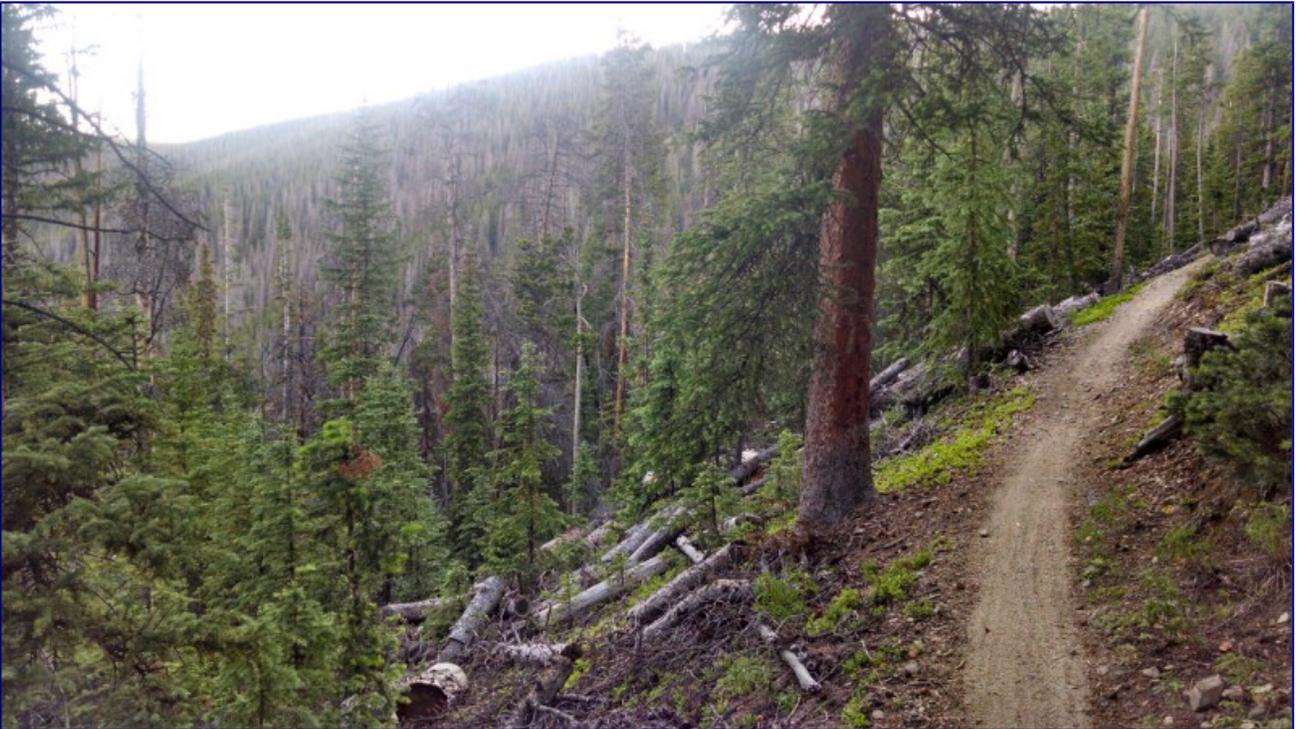
Start 26-218XL in Copper Mountain ski area mile 1207, elevation 10320

End 28-065XX, mile 1230, elevation 10038

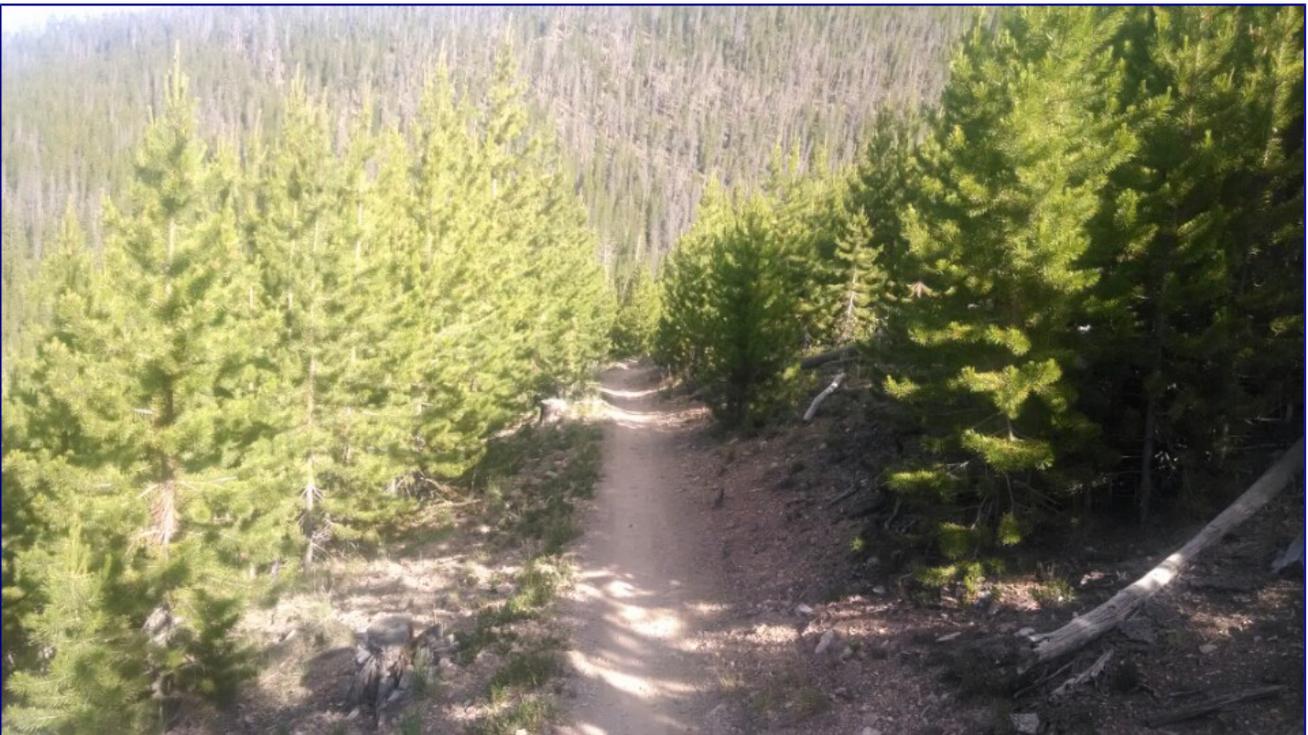
Fog

Posted on [July 14, 2014](#)

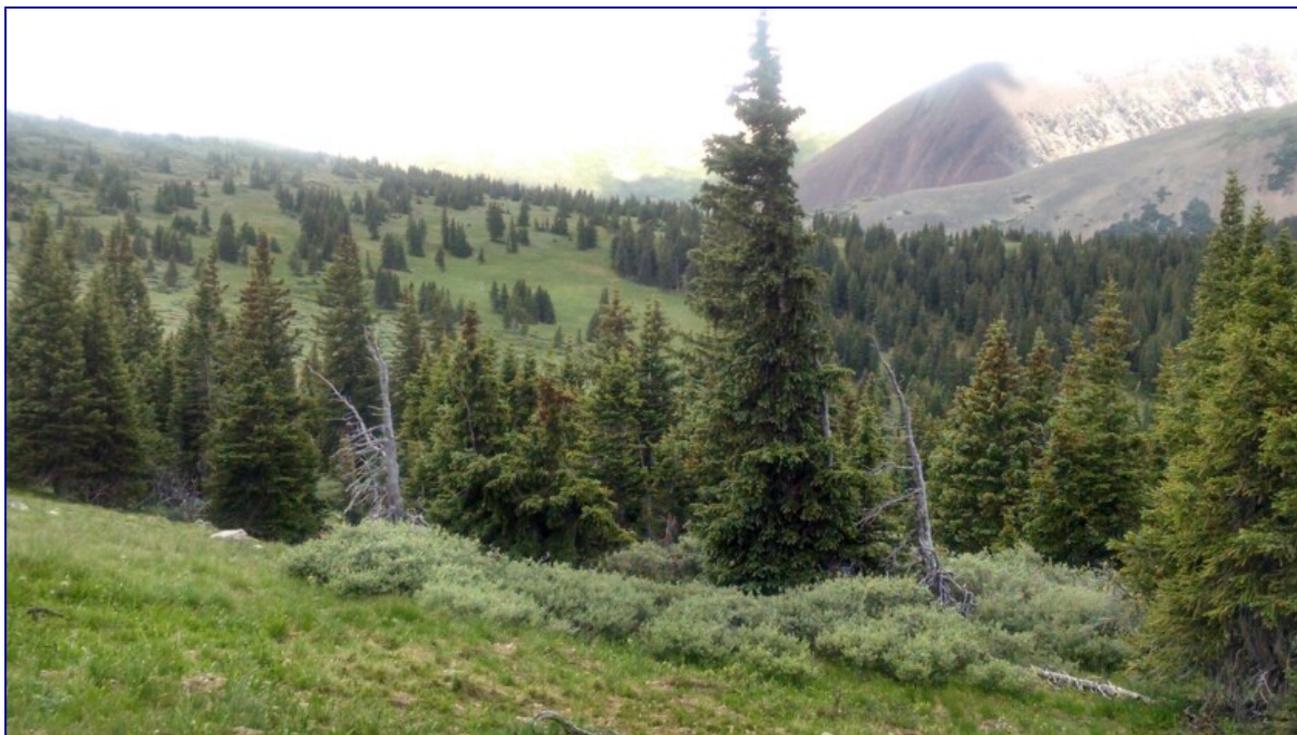
The path continues to climb, past trees cut down near the trail for beetle control.



Here are pines of a different variety, with longer needles, roughly all the same age.



Did the forest service plant these trees as part of a beetle control plan?
Eventually after a sustained even climb the country opens up.



Meet Smokey, a Colorado Trail hiker who started the Appalachian Trail this year, found it too crowded and social, and after 500 or so miles switched to this trail.



He hiked the PCT in 2004, or thereabouts, if my memory serves. We talked about the effect of two upcoming films about the AT and PCT on number of hikers on those trails.

The path to Glacier Peak along a rocky jeep road, with a light rain that soon passes, begins the high altitude part of the day.



Clouds come in just as we are getting to the best views and exciting hiking around Whale Peak. Oh, and the Colorado Trail separates and heads to Denver. The dozen or two fresh-faced hikers each day, early in their journey, are gone. The trail now seems remote, lonely, no fresh tracks to follow.



Completely enveloped by thick fog, I must make my way along a knife-edge ridge with disappearing tread and few cairns, relying on GPS waypoints.
Below a large herd of elk hide from me on a steep cliff in the clouds.



This picture represents visibility for the rest of the evening.



Melt from a snow field supplements my water supply in late evening. I am camping at high altitude, so brace for a cold night. While falling asleep lightning flashes illuminate the fog. At midnight a hard rain falls, with nearby lightning.

Day 27, 7/14/2014, Monday

Start 28-065XX, mile 1230, elevation 10038

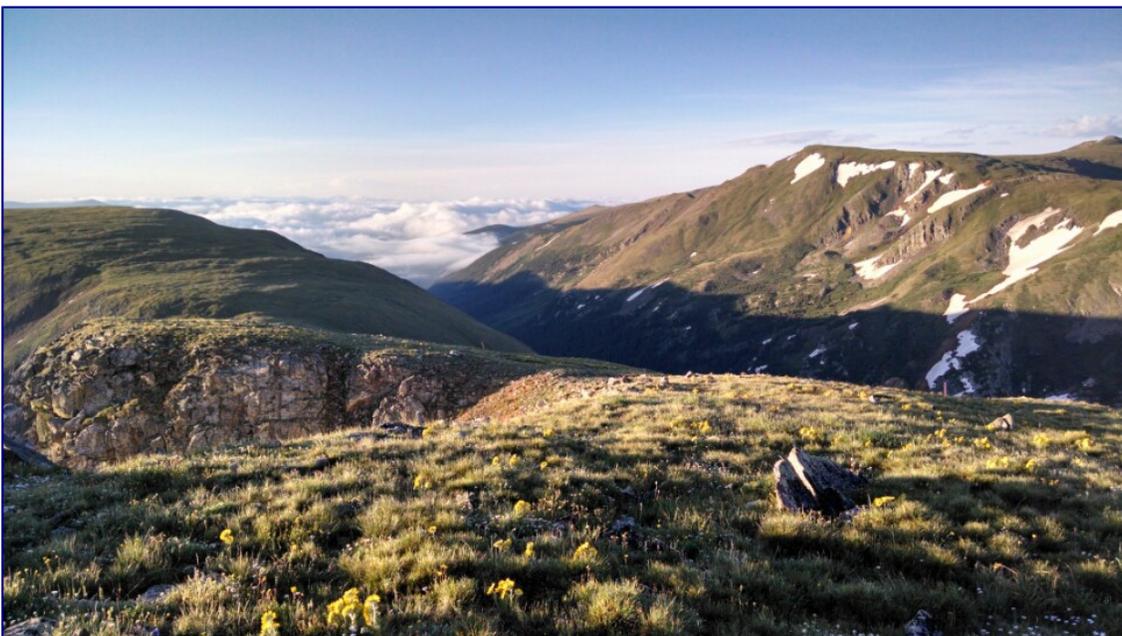
End 29-065RX, mile 1250, elevation 12242

Peaks and Pause

Posted on [July 15, 2014](#)



Now I can see the views hidden from clouds the evening before. The morning is occupied climbing a series of 13k peaks, then down along a knife-edge ridge, then back up to the next. Often there is no trail, perhaps cairns if you are lucky. The wind is blowing hard consistently at this altitude, and it is cold, with fleece gloves and down vest needed all morning. The views were amazing. The experience was amazing. Enjoy these photos which can capture only some small part of the reality.







Eventually the trail descends from the series of peaks, down to a forest road along several plots of private land.



It begins raining hard with hail in early afternoon, when I seek refuge under a tree until the worst passes. As I walk up the forest road, rain starts lightly about a dozen times, as a new rain cloud passes overhead.

Usually I hike late into the evening, but a 14k peak is ahead of me, and it would not be good to be caught at such high altitude with bad weather. Best to start the ascent first thing in the morning, before monsoon clouds begin to build. So camp is at 5PM, for a prudent low mileage day.

Rain off and on all night, until 4AM.

No CDT signs all day. What is up with that?

Day 28, 7/15/2014, Tuesday

Start 29-065RX, mile 1250, elevation 12242

End one mile beyond 30-014XR, mile 1264, elevation 11310

More Peaks More Pause

Posted on [July 16, 2014](#)

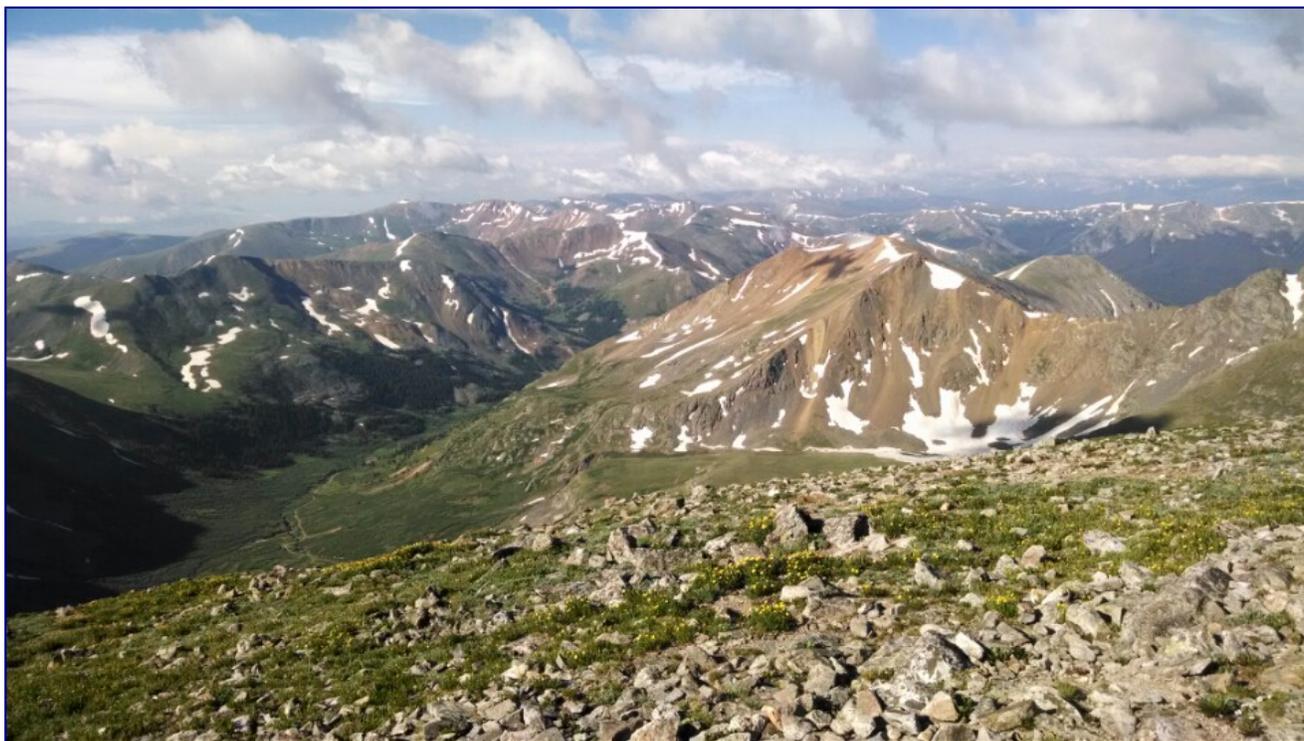
Climbing up Argentine Pass and looking back down, one sees a cluster of beaver ponds below.



Two big climbs this morning, before afternoon weather, Mount Edward (not shown here, 13k) and Grays Peak (14k) on the right.



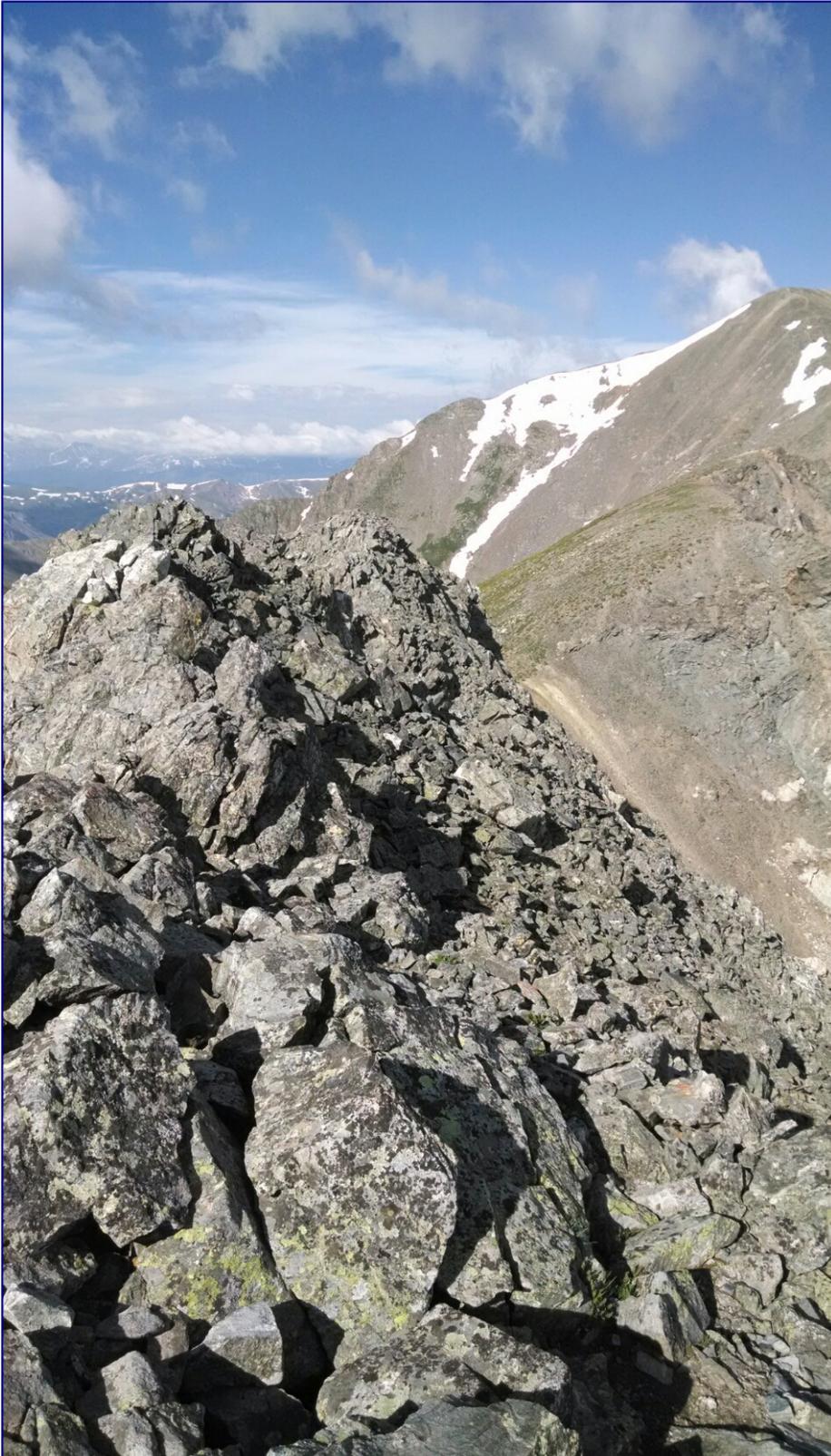
The climb to Grays Peak is on steady grade and good trail. Near the summit the trail vanishes and cairns suggest a way to the top. One can look down on many peaks at 13k.



A narrow ridge with a series of “dragons teeth” peaklets connect the mountain I am on to the mountain I am going.



No cairns or built trail, the way is a “choose your own adventure”. you can see faint trails of hikers before, sometimes, but nothing continuous. Do you stay on the rocky narrow ridge that might be impossibly steep on the other side, or drop from the ridge down a few feet on scree and boulder, risking rock slide.



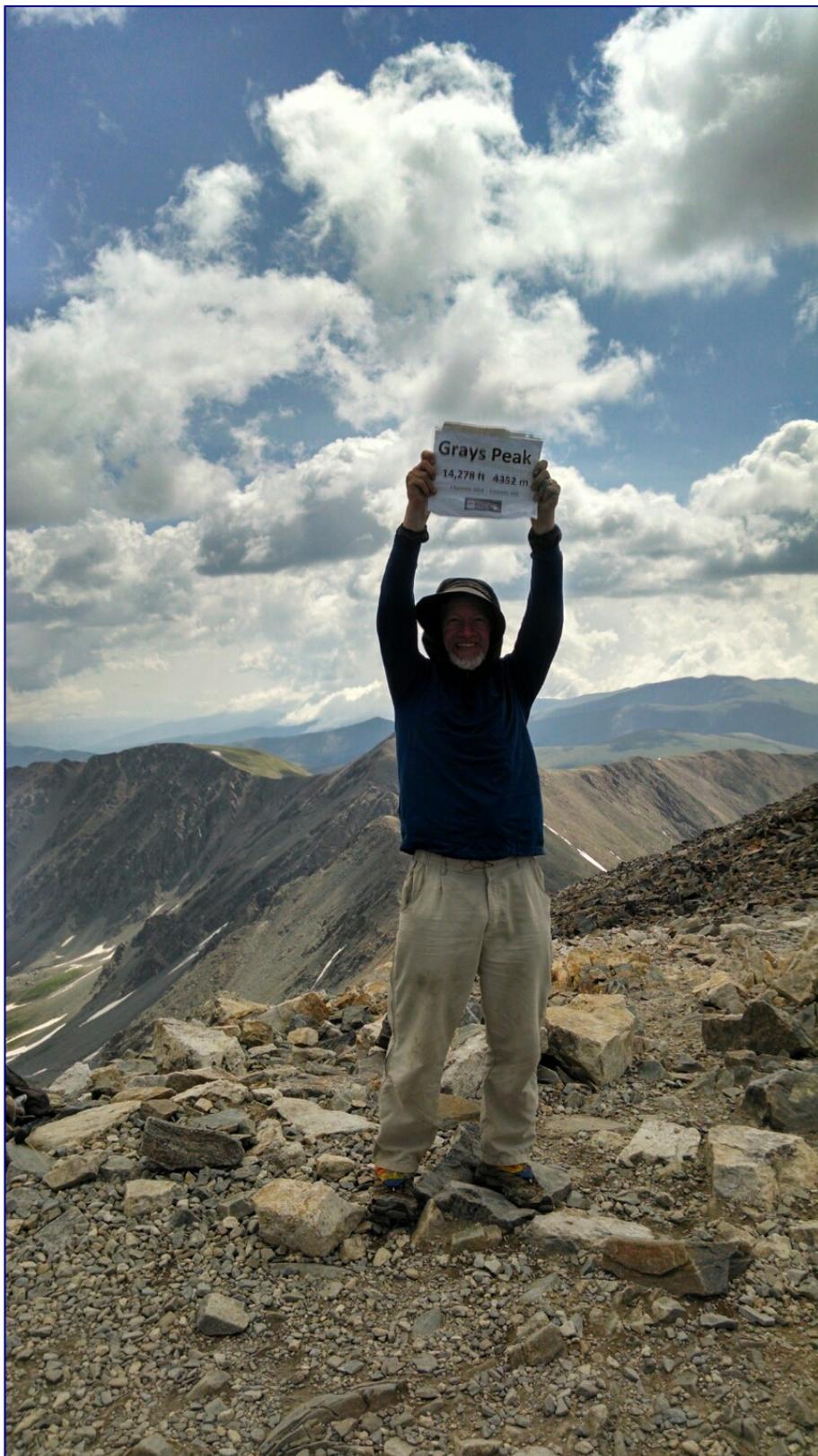
Finally, after careful work, terrifying and exhilarating, I struggle to the top of Grays Peak. Many day hikers are at the summit.



Someone brought a beagle, and I wanted a picture with it.



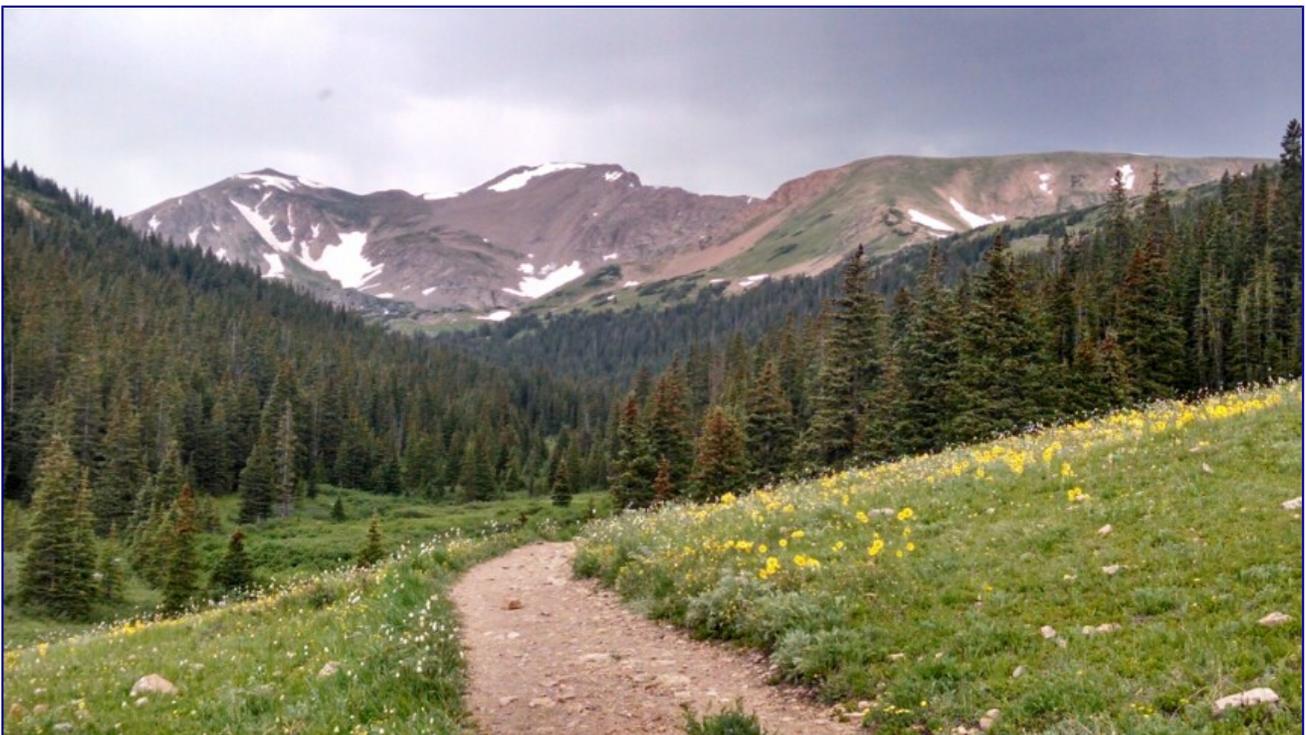
Someone else made a sign for the summit, and offered it for me to hold.



One the way down a mountain goat is practicing camouflage. Can you spot it?



After descending on switchbacks, rain starts just before reaching the trailhead. On a roadwalk on forest service road, rain starts again heavily, and I wait under a tree for the hardest to pass, and continue walking. Several cars pass by with people from the summit, offering a ride. A bike path connects to Herman Gulch trailhead, with intermittent rain and pretty views.



This couple has a bloodhound on the trail.



After a steady climb, I reach a good spot for camping, not too exposed to the ongoing electrical storm, close to the big climb in the morning, close to last water for 10 miles.



Like yesterday, I could have hiked longer, but weather and the prospect of a climb late in the day and camping in frigid heights limits my mileage. Now I may be too far to get to town tomorrow, depending on weather.

Rain again at night on and off, of course.

Day 29, 7/16/2014, Wednesday

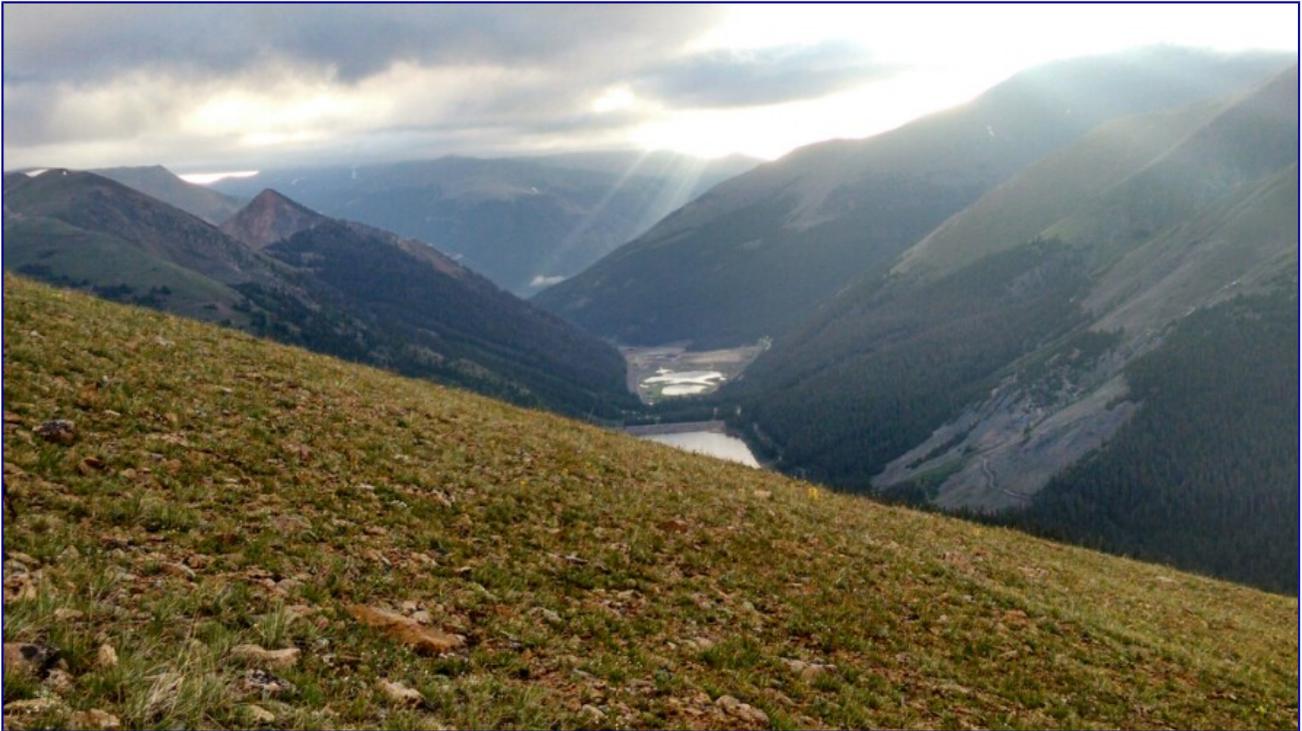
Start one mile beyond 30-014XR, mile 1264, elevation 11310

End 31-041WT near Woods Creek, mile 1283, elevation 11881

Berthoud

Posted on [July 17, 2014](#)

The morning reveals thick dark clouds overhead.



Typically mornings start clearer and take until noon to build to storm strength. What is this new pattern? These clouds are not moving, just floating in place.

The climb up to a ridge is in fog. The views must be great when clear.



Here is an artsy shot.



The fog clears some at Jones Pass jeep road crossing.



More high ridge walking is my favorite way to travel.



Then the trail drops down the side of a mountain for a while, and prepares to ascend Stanley Peak. Normally a climb this high after noon would be worrisome because of rain, but one of several day-hikers tells me the weather report says no rain today. What has changed?



The climb up Stanley Peak rewards with more high trail along a broad grassy ridge.



By mid-afternoon the descent into Berthoud Pass is complete.



(Berthoud Pass, Winters Park, and Fraser have special memories for my family, who used to vacation nearby at Snow Mountain Ranch.)

Road angel Bob and his ancient pick-up towing a trailer give me a lift after 15 minutes of hitching. He is an iron-worker in town, and we stop on the way at a fancy subdivision, Lakota, so he can discuss doing a job at a multi-million dollar home. While he talks I have cell signal and find an inexpensive room at The Sundowner. A day later and most rooms in town would be booked for the weekend. The simple pleasures of getting my box from the post office, getting a shower, and completing laundry are not to be missed:

Day 30, 7/17/2014, Thursday

Start 31-041WT near Woods Creek, mile 1283, elevation 11881

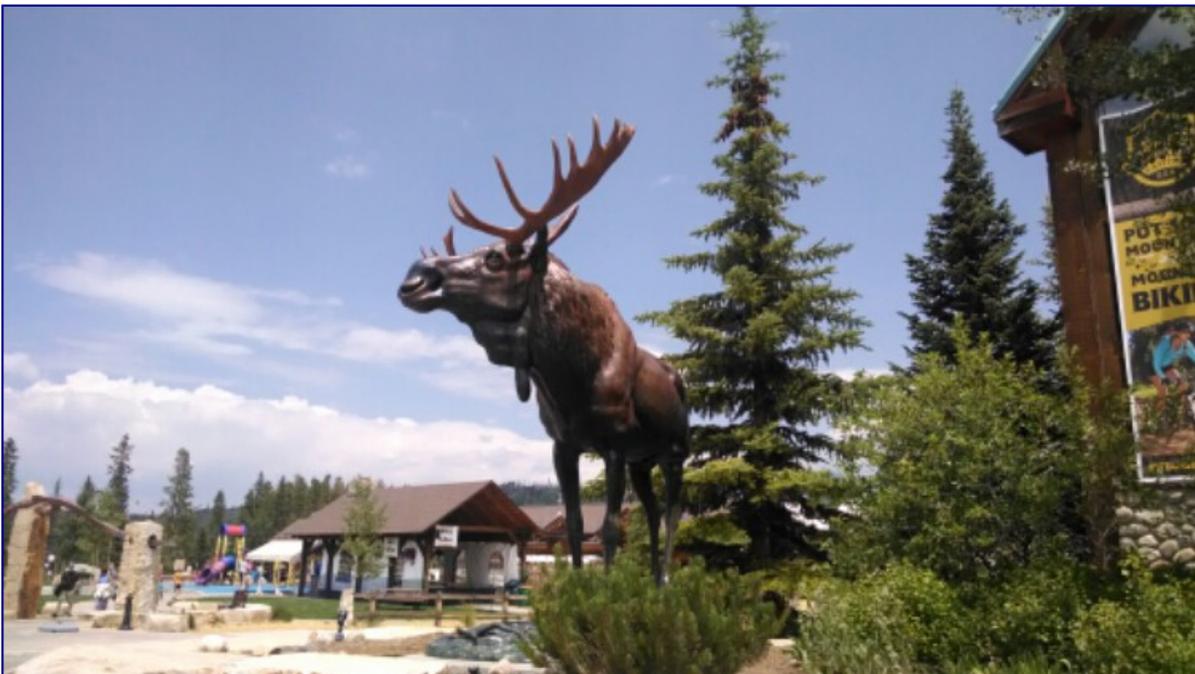
End Berthoud Pass, mile 1299, elevation 11301, and hitch 14 miles north to Winter Park

Winter Park Nero

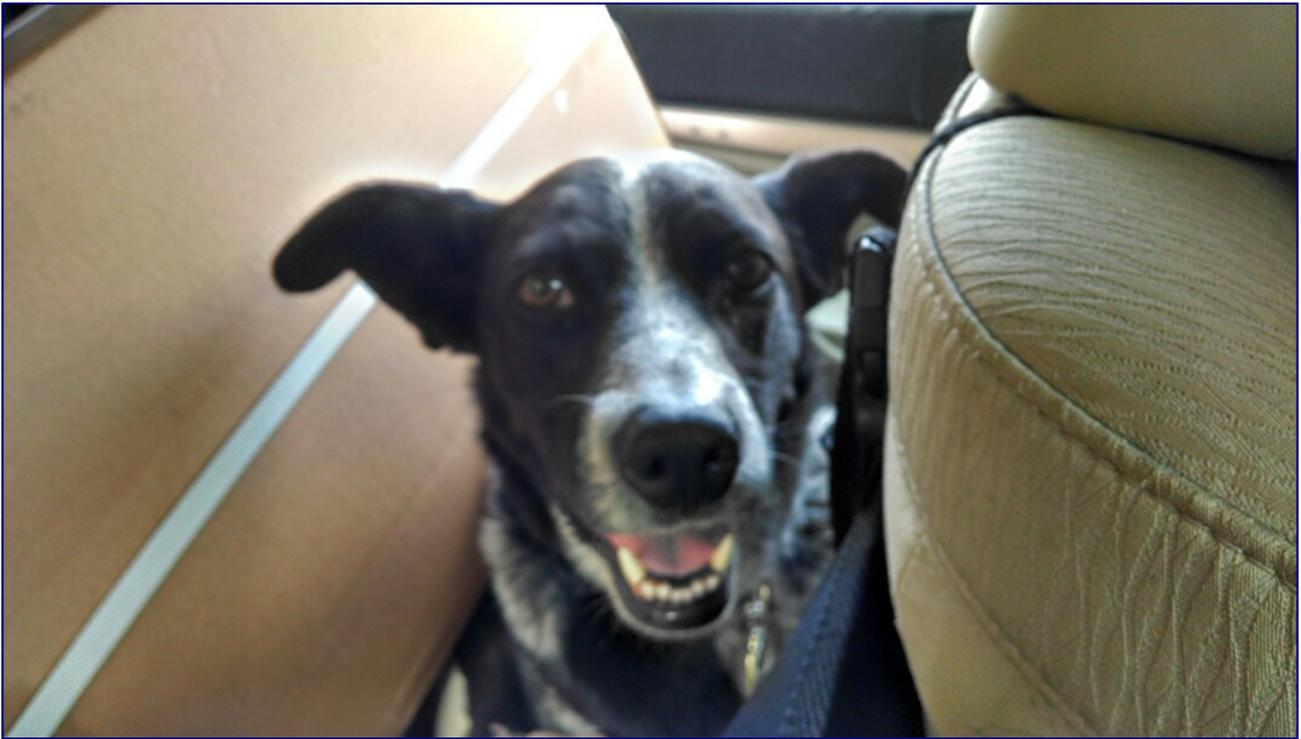
Posted on [July 18, 2014](#)

My plan is to not hike far today, for two reasons. The first is that my image in the mirror was looking a little skinny, so a chance to eat and rest more might be advisable. The second is that my supply box for this relatively short stretch was being mailed today, so I should not outrace it.

I found a nice spot at Hidden Park in Winter Park to hang out, with an electrical outlet to charge electronics.



Around 2PM I started hitching at the south end of the commercial strip, and took thirty minutes to get a ride with road angel Bill and dog Zia, a rescue.



My ride sold distilling equipment, and I learned that distilling for personal consumption is illegal in this country without a license that costs around \$1K per year, too expensive for home enthusiasts. A license to make ethanol for fuel is free, paradoxically.



Here is a view of the warming hut at Berthoud Pass...

...and this display talks about the wagon road that came this way.

and inside the warming hut, as well as enjoy the magnificent mountain vistas. The map will show you hiking trails from this location.

A Wagon Road Over the Pass

The earliest road over these mountains was first surveyed in 1861 by Captain Edward L. Berthoud. His job was to determine if the route was best made into a road or railway.



Subsequently, Empire and Middle Park Wagon Road was completed in 1869 and served as a privately owned toll road.



The State of Colorado purchased the rights for the Empire and Middle Park Wagon Road in 1891. Construction of a new auto road began in 1918. In 1938, a celebration of the first paved coast to coast road took place at the pass. It was called the Midland Trail/Victory Road.



The road now follows sections of the historic wagon road.



The climb for the day is Mount Flora, not the peak with antennas visible from the road, but a 13K peak next over.



Rain starts just before I emerge from the treeline, so I crouch under a pine for 30. Once at the top, we hikers are rewarded once again with going along a high broad ridge for some distance.



The way down is through a hidden maze in a talus field.



A footpath is meticulously constructed in the rock, but is not visible unless you are on it. The path switchbacks back and forth many times, and must have taken some time to build. Camp is the first water source, a stream that sings me to sleep.

Day 31, 7/18/2014 , Friday

Start Winter Park and hitch 14miles south to Berthoud Pass, mile 1299, elevation 11301

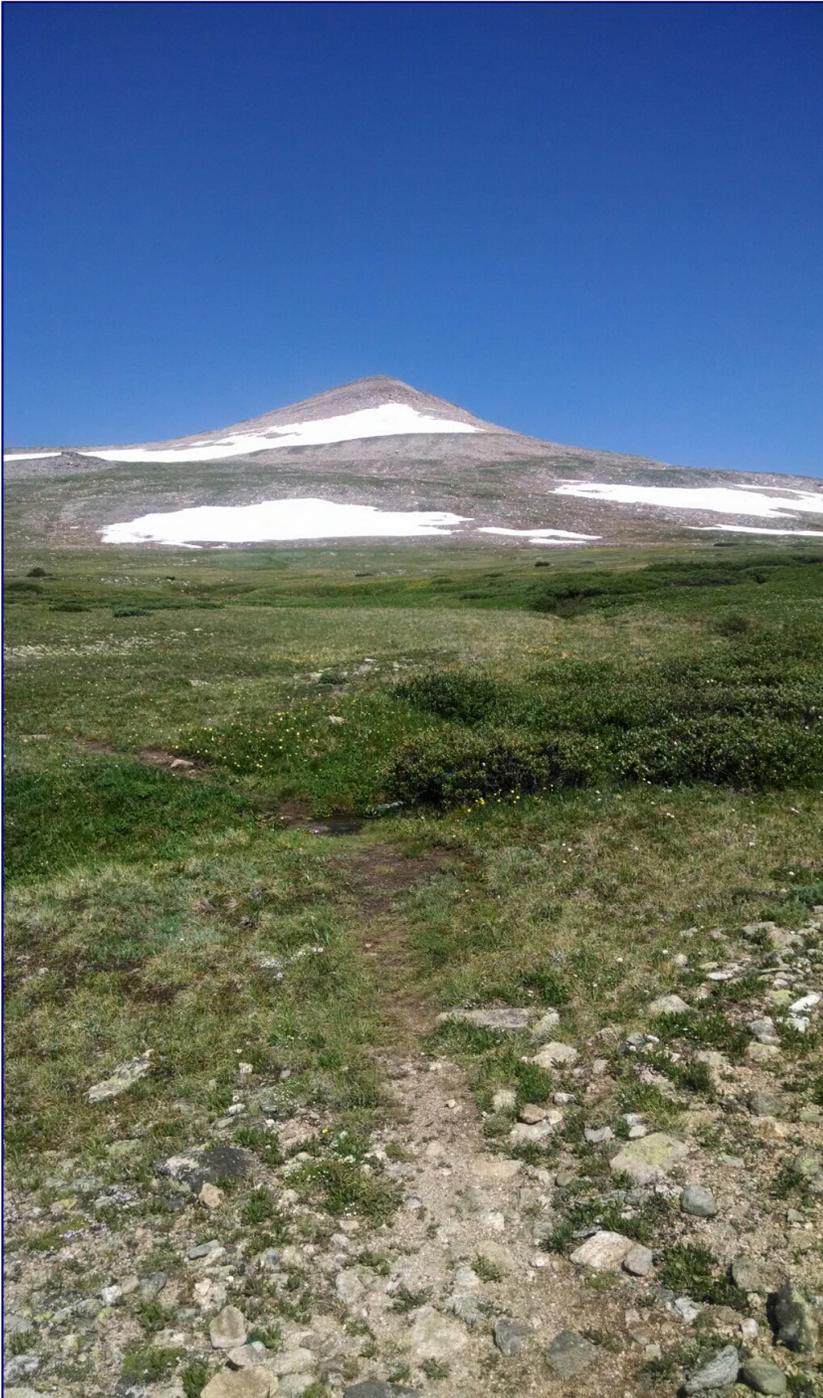
End first stream after Mount Flora, 32-064WT, mile 1305, elevation 11315

Wind and Ridge

Posted on [July 19, 2014](#)

The sky today starts out clear, and never gets cloudy enough for rain. That has not happened for many days.

The climb of the morning is James Peak (13k), and several weekend day hikers are climbing it the same time as me.



Here are some of the other hikers at the top. There is very little wind at top so I can shed my windbreaker, unusual at this high altitude.



On the way down, the wind picks up, and blows fiercely all day until Rollins Pass at around 5PM.



The trail after the peak is following a very long high ridge, with no footpath, just cairns marking the way. The left side of the ridge is grassy and gently sloped, and the right side exposes rock cliff with lakes below.



Here is a lake still iced over, with blue tinges to the ice.

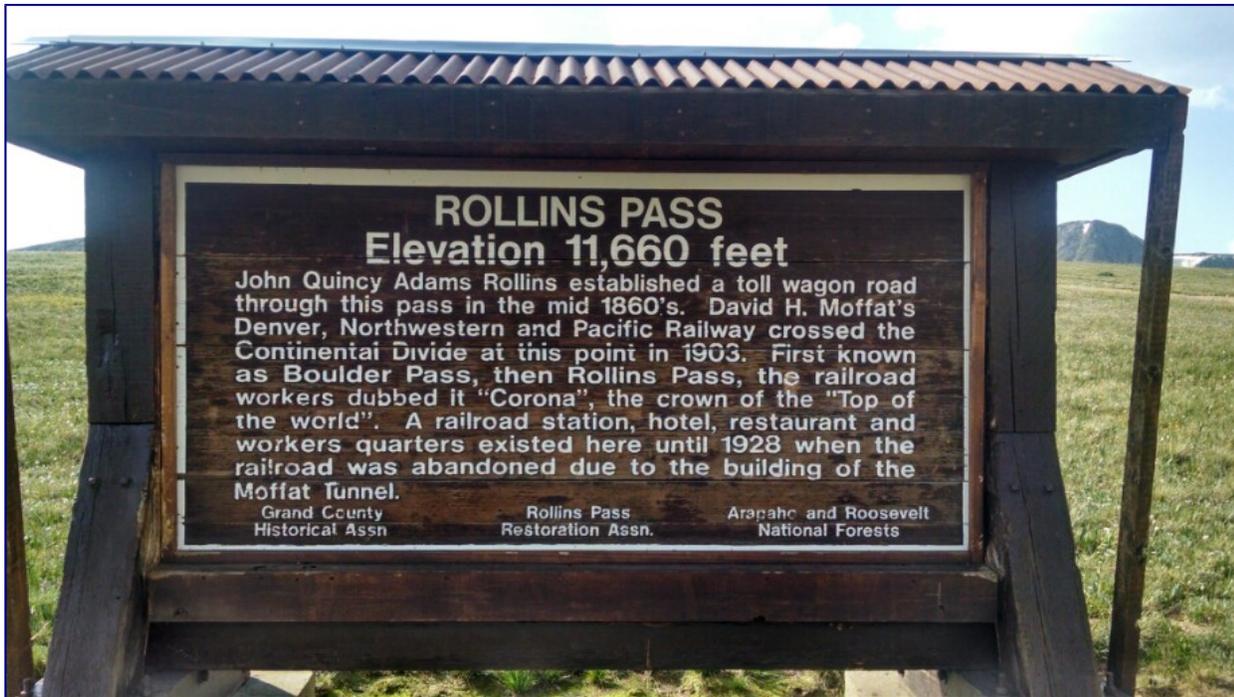


Another cool lake on the right side of the trail.

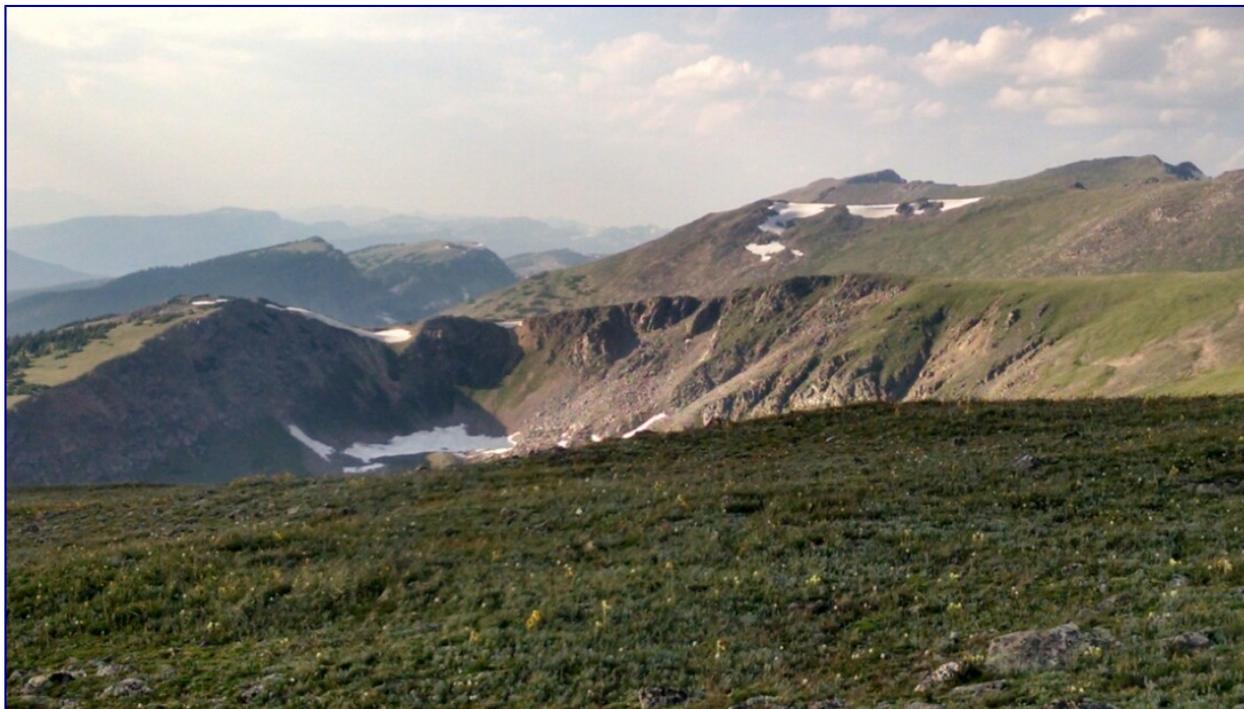


The ridge goes on for several miles, grassy with boulders and small rock. With no footpath, my feet are getting sore, and the incessant high wind is tiring.

Finally Rollins Pass, and the wind stops.



Though off the long ridge and the trail has changed direction, one can still notice the slopes are gentle and grassy on one side, and abrupt and rocky on the other.



Devils Thumb Pass is the final climb before descending along a creek to treeline.



A posted notice bans camping in Indian Peaks Wilderness without a permit, grrrrr, so I hike to a protection area that does not have this restriction. Tomorrow brings hiking in Rocky Mountain National Park, with even more camping restrictions.

Day 32, 7/19/2014, Saturday

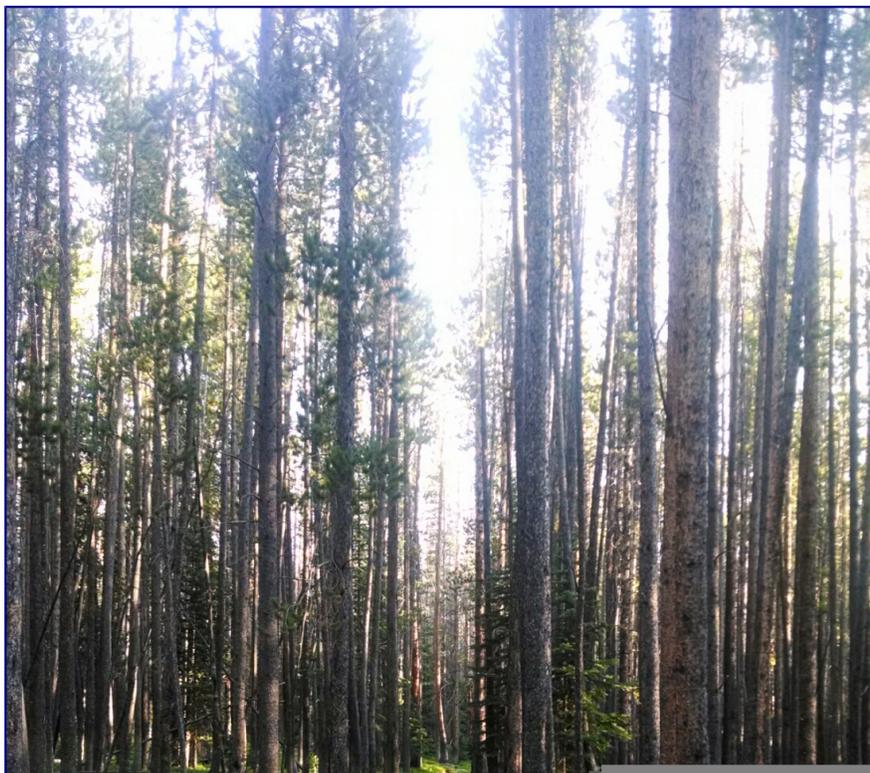
Start first stream after Mount Flora, 32-064WT, mile 1305, elevation 11315

End just inside James Peak Protection Area, 34-052WB, mile 1325, elevation 10076

Deadwood

Posted on [July 20, 2014](#)

The morning is spent walking the High Lonesome Trail, meandering through woods of pine, spruce, huckleberry, and skeeters. This is the representative view.

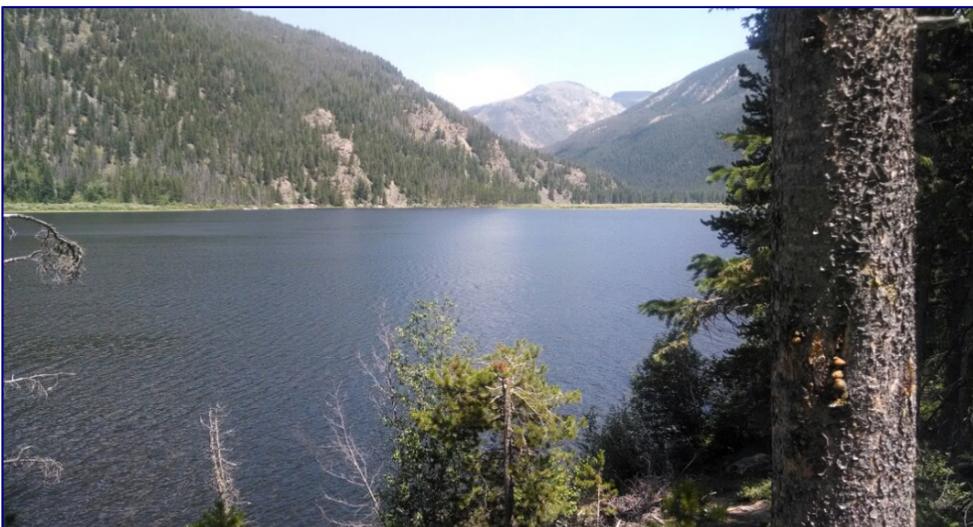


Sometimes we did pass through wetlands.



I met a trail maintenance volunteer who warned that a trail later in the day was not maintained, had a high degree of difficulty with deadfall, and the trail often disappeared. He said the forest service administrator would not permit his group to work on the trail, claiming it was too risky with beetle kill trees still standing.

Monarch Lake had plenty of visitors fishing and hiking.



An old steam engine is left abandoned by the lake. What was it used here for?



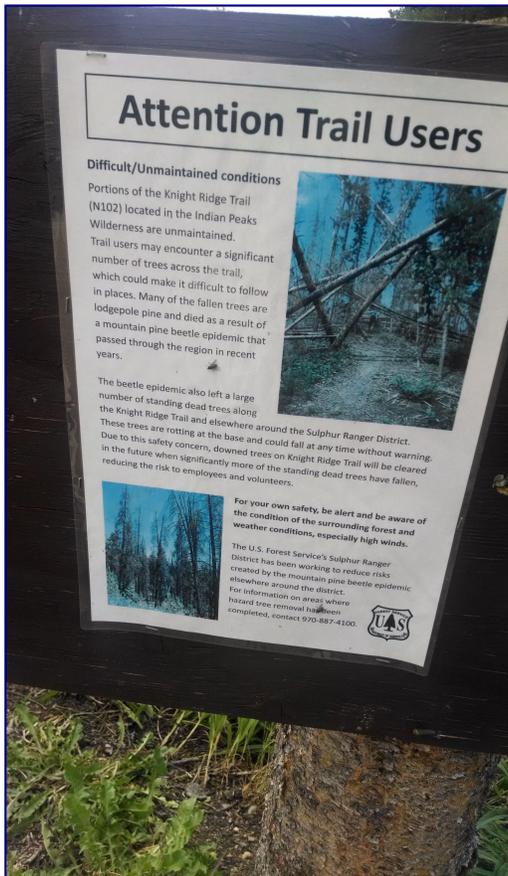
The trail follows along part of Lake Granby, which is huge.



Tent sites are right on the lake– pretty cool.



The Knight Ridge Trail begins with a warning that the trail is not maintained.



(Other Forest Service administrators have been able to safely maintain their sections of CDT trail even with beetle kill. Wonder what the difference is with this particular trail?)
Wild raspberries are an unexpected tasty treat.



This trail, only six miles long, is extremely difficult to walk. The amount of deadfall to cross must be seen to be believed.



Another example of deadfall near the beginning also has water hazard.



Diverting around the fallen trees causes me to lose the trail several times, and I have to cut cross-country for long distances before picking up the trail again. Since previous hikers also have to detour, any trail around downed trees is getting fainter and harder to find. This section takes hours longer than planned, my water is running low, and feet are weary from the climbing over limbs. Finally at 8PM the lake appears, near a boarded up forest service building and stream. A possible campsite comes into view, with a sailboat group camping nearby out of sight. The view from my tent is pretty sweet.



Day 33, 7/20/2014, Sunday

Start just inside James Peak Protection Area, 34-052WB, mile 1325, elevation 10076

End 35-075WT near Twin Creek Ranger Station, mile 1347, elevation 8291

(It was tricky picking a camping spot not on Rocky Mountain National Park land, with permit and bear canister required for camping, and Indian Peaks Wilderness, with permit required. I am just about to pass on RMNP land, but will be able to walk into town and not camp.)

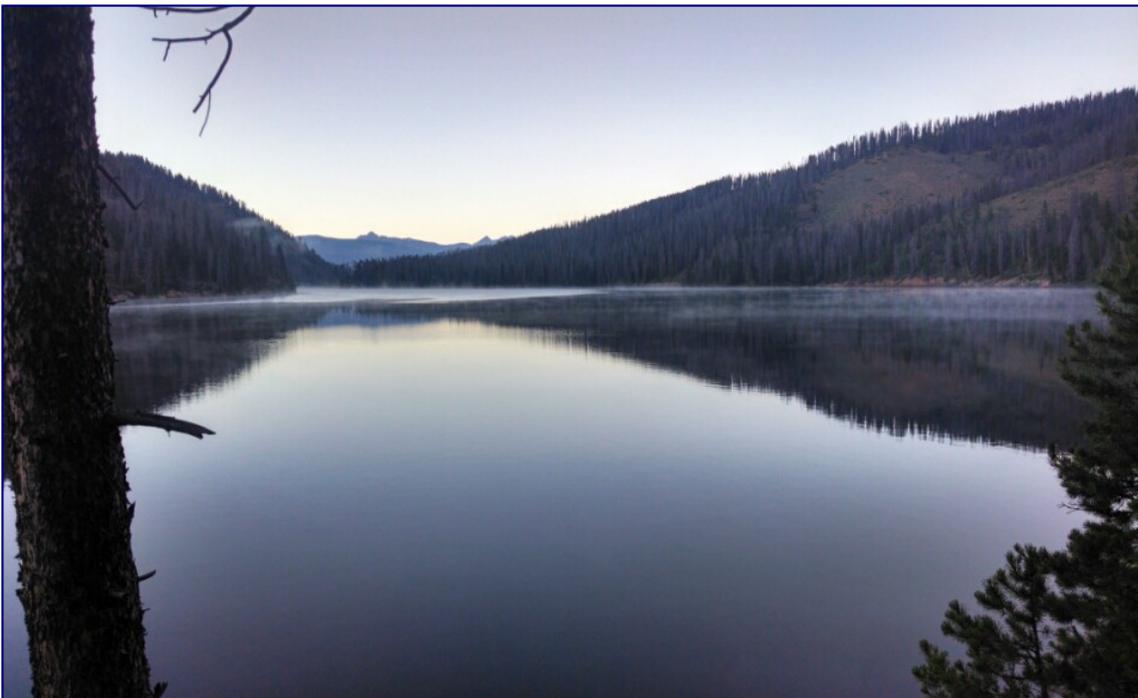
Lakes

Posted on [July 21, 2014](#)

Last night the sailboat that was around the bend anchored closer to my tent site, so this is what I saw when breaking camp.



Grand Bay part of Lake Granby looks so peaceful early in the morning.



The trail moves away from lakeside for a time, and goes through a really marshy area and my feet get soaked. Oh well, if I were a moose now I would be happy, since they seem to like standing in lakes and getting wet feet.

Suddenly I hear a loud stirring to my right. Because of downfalls and thick undergrowth It is not possible to get over there to find out what large critter made that noise, so I say aloud, "Here, moosie moosie moosiee." Silence.

After a few more steps I see this to my left.



He regards me for a moment, then moves on. Hard to see in this photo, but he was huge. The next lake is Shadow Mountain Lake, which is developed on the side not within RMNB borders.



Getting closer to town, the trail passes through this development where garage doors in the back of houses open right on the water, for storing boats.



The community of Grand Lake is cute and touristy. Sidewalks downtown are built of wood.



Here is a view of downtown shops.



I meet Inspector Gadget, a thru-hiker just leaving Shadowcliff Hostel. He was the only person in the men's hostel bunks last night, and expected the same for me.



Too bad we could not meet for longer. He was off trail for a couple of weeks to tend to an injury, so is a ways behind the main group of thru-hikers.
The hostel and related cabins are on top of a high rock cliff, really quite striking.



A view of Grand Lake from the hostel common area window completes my tour of lakes for the day.





Day 34, 7/21/2014, Monday

Start 35-075WT near Twin Creek Ranger Station, mile 1347, elevation 8291

End 36-020XR Shadowcliff Hostel, mile 1356, elevation 8519

Leaving Park

Posted on [July 22, 2014](#)

A last look around the hostel common area.



I am leaving before other people are stirring.



The night before, I arranged with the staff what to do to check out.



And a last look at Grand Lake.



The CDT makes a 27 mile bight into RMBD from the hostel. I do not have a back-country camping permit, and the ranger office is not on the route, and 27 miles is too long to hike in one day. RMBD also has a network of trails, Tonahutu Creek Trail makes a shortcut, an option often taken by CDT hikers.



Park trail is wide, solidly engineered, and well-marked. I meet a guy hiking with an antenna.



He normally looks for elk, but this morning he may be tracking a dead elk. The transponder signal is suggesting ex-elk. He works for the park service, Biological Services Division, out of Fort Collins.

The trail goes past a big meadow.



Later I meet several day-hikers asking if I had seen moose, and later realized they were probably headed for this meadow.
Finally out of the park, and headed up Bowen Pass.



Climbing is tough after being bloated with town food. The pass is not even 12k, but it is nice to emerge above tree-line for a while.

The other side of the pass looks thusly.



The high meadows are really showing off with the flowers lately.



Day 35, 7/22/2014, Tuesday

Start 36-020XR Shadowcliff Hostel, mile 1356, elevation 8519

End 37-088WT, mile 1390, elevation 10983

(Took shortcut through RMBD, so miles walked is different)

Parkview

Posted on [July 23, 2014](#)

Gradual downhill, forested, no views. Mid-morning I met a south-bound long-distance section hiker that really did not like the new route up Parkview Mountain (12.3k) as being way too steep and complicated with a snow-covered ridge. She urged me in strongest terms to drag out my Ley map and take the older route up the mountain. Later on I looked at the map and tried to understand the issue. Close to Willow Creek Pass, the trail takes on a characteristic V-notch shape that indicates motorcycles use the path.



At the pass the trees part enough to get a view of Parkview Mountain.



Here is beetle kill in two lines in the trees. How did that come to be?



On the ascent to Parkview, I did manage to take the older route, though it meant going without GPS waypoints for a while. The climb was tough but not unreasonable.



At the summit is a tiny radio hut.



Over to the east one can view Rocky Mountain National Park.



To the north is a large area with no mountains. We are heading west to get to more mountains.



Coming down from the summit we follow damped-oscillation ridges.



We follow along another ridge for miles, cross-country with no path, marked by cairns and posts, with steep drop-off on the left and gentle grassy slope on the right. Some rain showers fell after threatening for some time.

Finally, after a long evening walk, I reach Troublesome Pass. Good name— need to research how that name happened.

Day 35, 7/24/2014, Wednesday

Start 37-088WT, mile 1390, elevation 10983

End Troublesome Pass 38-118BAP plus one mile, mile 1414, elevation 10005

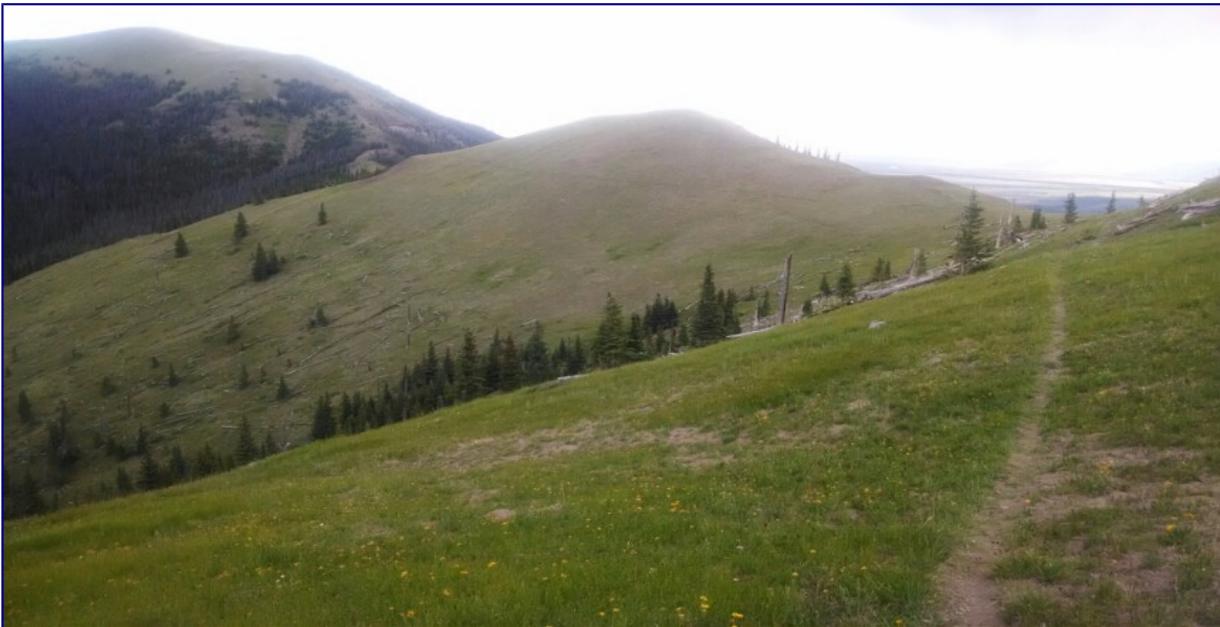
Going Low

Posted on [July 24, 2014](#)

Climbing out of Troublesome Pass into a morning already having dark clouds portending rain.



The trail follows a rolling ridge, then joins a logging road for several miles.



Flowers.

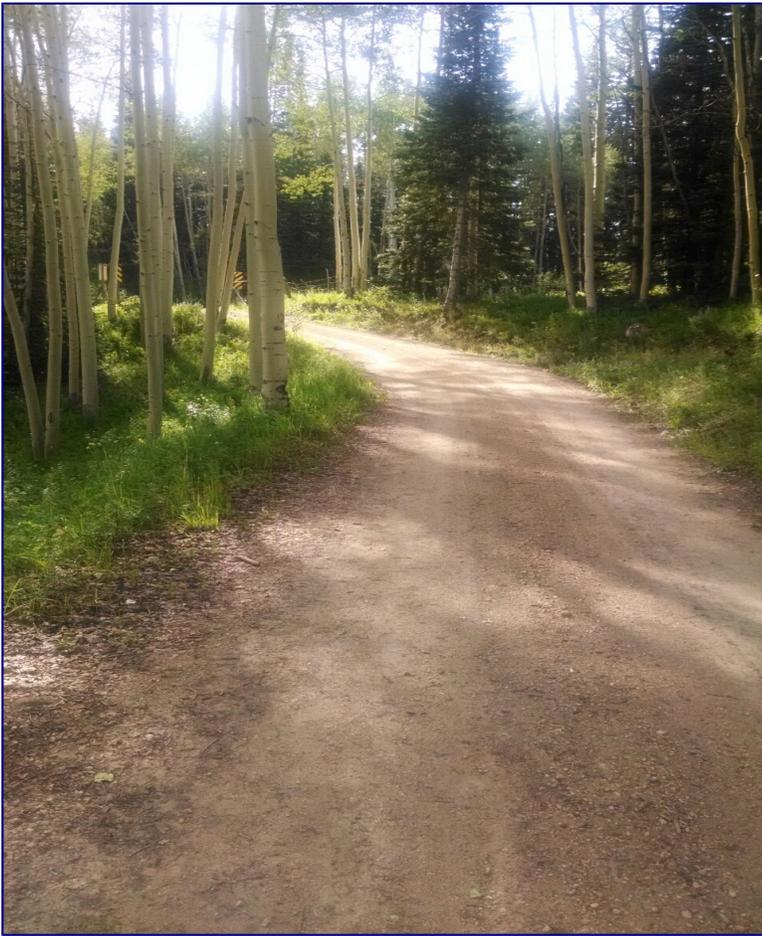


Rain begins in early afternoon, starting and stopping a dozen times.

Not a sign you see every day.



Walking along the logging road allows the legs to stretch out and run up some miles. We gradually lose altitude and run out of tall mountains. Skeeters become fierce.



Still following roadbed, eventually we are really in lowlands, on BLM land that allows cattle.



We are in sagebrush and grassland, grazing country, less than 9000 feet altitude, with scattered private lands.



I stop at the intersection with highway CO 14 where I still know where BLM land exists. Tomorrow the plan is to get to Rabbit Ears Pass, an all road-walk day, then hitch to Steamboat Springs as early as possible to arrange transportation.

Day 37, 7/24/2014, Thursday

Start Troublesome Pass 38-118BAP plus one mile, mile 1414, elevation 10005

End 40-172RL just before road CO14, still barely on BLM land, mile 1441, elevation 8529

Close Enough

Posted on [July 25, 2014](#)

I started ultra-early this morning, on the trail at 5AM at dawn.

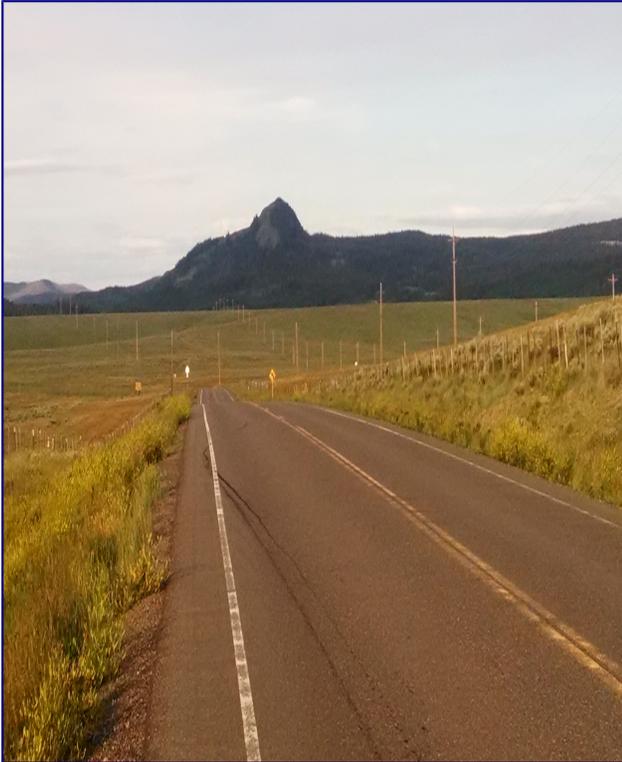


The plan is to zip through today's long paved road-walk as early as possible, to give me time to get to Steamboat Springs, reserve and print out a bus ticket, and still have time to do laundry and clean up and get town food before the bus leaves at 3:30PM.



Following along CO 14, my guess was correct to stop last night where I did. Most land along both sides of the road was on ranches posted as no-trespassing, aside from some state trust land that prohibited camping.

In the distance the pass becomes visible.



Finally reaching US40, and after a quick change to a less smelly shirt, road angel Carrie picks me up after only 10 minutes hitching. She recently was living in Alaska, then was doing a physician assistant program in New York State, but today is helping her brother move.

Rabbit Ears Pass is still a couple of days hiking from the Wyoming border, but since town has a few transportation options and easy to get back to next year... close enough. Done hiking for this year! I mentioned to Carrie that if for some reason I could not get a bus ticket today I might be forced to get an expensive hotel room in Steamboat, and she pointed out that the town bus went to Spring Creek trail-head, and that after only a couple of miles I would be on Forest Service land and free to camp. Clever idea!

The woman at the visitors center was very helpful explaining the town free bus system, and recommended using the bus to get to the library to print my bus ticket.

Unfortunately Greyhound would not let me buy and print a ticket so close to my departure time. And the town's Greyhound office closed, so I cannot buy a ticket there or buy one over the phone. Their system, believe it or not, is to take the bus to the next town that has a working Greyhound office, Granby, and buy there, and if my bus to Denver or the next bus to Albuquerque is full already, then too bad for me. What a messy, really messed up system, and do not get me started on their phone support. A quick trip on the free bus allowed me to complete laundry, a wet-wipe bath in the restroom, and procure snacks at the grocery.

Here is the Greyhound depot at Steamboat.



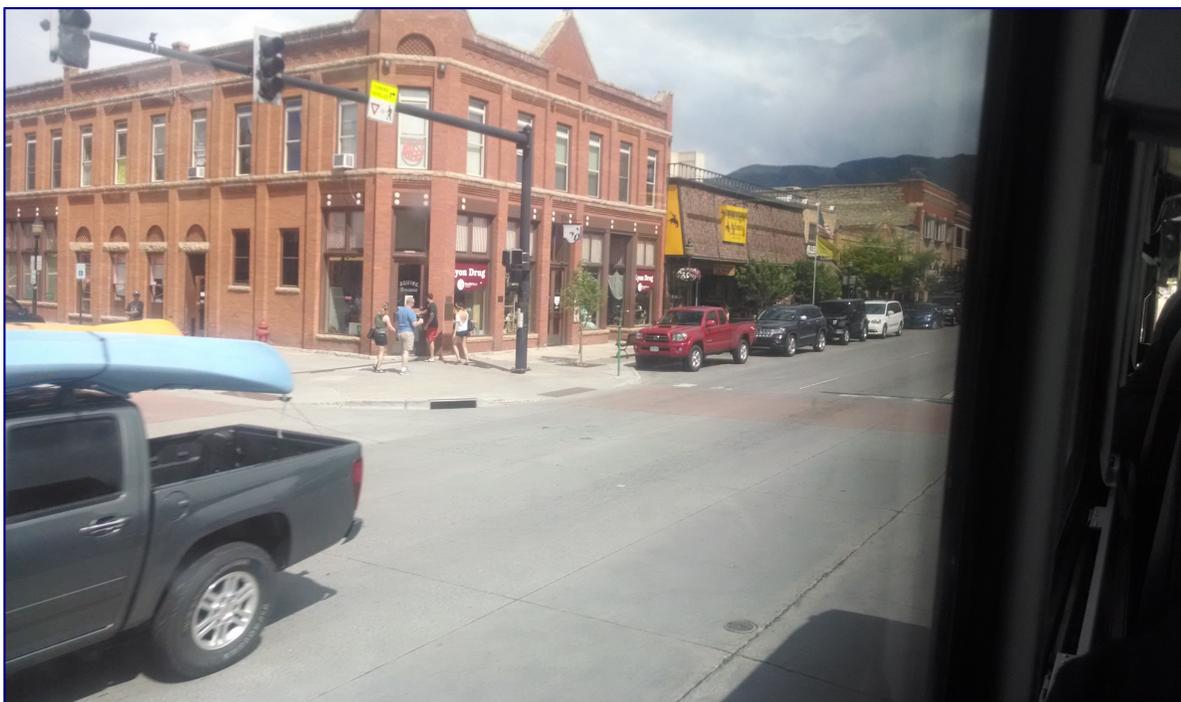
And behold the notice waiting to comfort customers.



While waiting for the bus, I noticed tubers in the parking lot riding the stream through town, including some taking advantage of the free bus.



I really did not get a chance to explore and photo the town of Steamboat, so here are a couple of pictures taken from the window of my bus.





I was able to buy a ticket through to Albuquerque in Granby, and watched Kremmling, Fraser, Winter Park, , and Berthoud Pass flow by, all familiar to me from past family vacations into Colorado. After arriving at the Denver bus depot at 7:30PM, all I have to do is catch my next bus just after midnight.



Day 38, 7/25/2014, Friday
Start barely on BLM land, mile 1441, elevation 8529
End Rabbit Ears Pass, mile 1454, elevation 9554, and hitch 22 miles to Steamboat Springs, and Greyhound bus pointed towards home

Wheels on the Bus

Posted on [July 26, 2014](#)

After lining up to board the bus, and no vehicle arriving, and staying lined up for an hour with no bus appearing, we were finally told the driver was “sick” and no replacement driver could be found. Well past midnight, finding a hotel room is impractical, so most of us were forced to spend the night in the bus station.



The bus terminal management perceived a problem with downtown transients, so every couple of hours a loud intercom announcement told us to get our bus tickets out for inspection, and anyone without a ticket was thrown out of the building. If you got up to stretch your legs, also expect to be challenged by a security guard demanding to see your ticket.



After a loong night in the station, the next bus leaves at 8AM. On past Colorado Springs, Pueblo, Trinidad, Santa Fe, and into Albuquerque, and my ride home.



Day 39, 7/26/2014, Saturday
Start Denver Greyhound depot
End Albuquerque and then finally home