Colorado Trail 2023



- Waterton? June 30
- Quiet and Fast
- Wetland Gulch
- <u>Social</u>
- Breck
- <u>Cu</u> July 5
- <u>Triple Pass</u>
- <u>Lakes, Ups, Downs</u>
- <u>Twins</u>
- <u>CT Zero</u>
- <u>Hope Ann</u> July 10
- Cottonwood?
- Passes Lakes Trains
- Monarch and Merge
- Dry and Different
- Graze and Water July 15
- Range to Ridge
- Ridge and Town
- Nearly Nero
- <u>Up and Over</u>
- Switchback, Train, Layers July 20
- Passes and Not
- Last Summit
- <u>Terminus CT</u>
- Post CT July 24



Waterton?

• CT day 1, June 30, Friday

• Start: Abq to Denver, then 3 light rails and rideshare to Waterton Canyon Trailhead

• End: Section 2 (S2) mile 0.5

• Miles walked: 17.3

The route from Denver Airport went quickly, thanks to the city's has a well-developed light-rail system. The trains could only get me to within 10 miles of the trailhead so I used a ride-share app. Due to some glitch, we actually ended up at a Lockheed facility. The driver, whose English was not 100%, misinterpreted the reaction at the guard house and thought it was okay to proceed to the main building, And I was having trouble conveying my panicking concerns about the situation and that we are definitely at the wrong location. We got things straightened out and went to the correct location, but not before huge angry men with guns appeared and had a polite discussion with us. I did not take photos.

Rain and lightning started just as I began the trail, but was brief.



Waterton Canyon Trail is a broad multi-use dirt road starting at a reservoir and running along the West Platte River, with several explanatory displays and picnic tables, run by Denver Water.



Mile 2.5 was temporarily closed to visitors because of a bear situation: a mamma had gotten separated from her cubs. By the time I had gotten to that place the situation had been resolved with a happy reunion, and I was permitted to continue.

Several dams and diversions and pipes were on display for civil engineering fans.







Past a reservoir the route, climbs from 5.5k up through mixed conifer and oak to 7.5k, and eventually goes along a ridge, and descends to a bridge along the South Platte at 6.5k, with about a dozen CT hikers camping on its banks.



I continued up a bit to a dry camp, and a mountain biker stop by for a nice chat



A good first day.

Finished audiobook Red Team Blues, by Cory Doctorow, read by Wil Wheaton.

Quiet and Fast

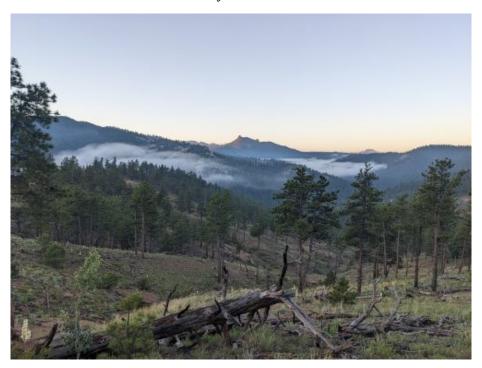
• CT Day 2, July 1, Saturday

• Start: Section 2 (S2) mile 0.5

• End: S4 mile 1.0, CT mile 41.5

• Miles walked: 24.2

Mist over the Platte starts the day.



Section 2 had areas that used to be forest, but fire or clear-cut had transformed to high grassland.



I had never seen an inflatable wildlife drinker before. Section 2 had no other water source.



Little Scraggy Trailhead at the beginning of section 4 is popular with mountain bikers on the weekend. Up to 200 bikes passed me during the day, I am just not used to that number of bikers, but I will have to be by the end of the CT. That is a lot of stepping off trail to let them go by. Mountain bike transmissions have gotten quieter over the years, and it is hard to hear them come from behind. Many bikers are reluctant to say anything when approaching hikers from behind because they do not want to startle them.

Scraggy has many large boulders.







I am ending the day early, completely tired.

Finished audiobook <u>A Wodehouse Miscellany</u>, by P G Wodehouse. (No listening during the day with bikes nearby!)

Wetland Gulch

• CT Day 3, July 2, Sunday

• Start: S4 mile 1, CT mile 41.5

• End: S5 mile 10.6, CT mile 67.7

• Miles walked: 26.2

The day started with a walk along an old roadbed, entering into Lost Creek Wilderness.



Diverting from the road to single-track in a brisk climb, we arrive at a wetland, where the ground is too moist to allow tree growth.



Continuing, the wetland turns into a long valley, or gulch, with a creek mostly hidden from view with heavy shrub growth, except when beavers built dams.





The valley goes on for many miles, with the trail near the tree-line. Finally, the trail exits the wilderness and starts the approach to Kenosha Pass.



Finished audiobook The Thirty-Nine Steps, by John Buchan.

Hikers start to introduce themselves, as we keep meeting and passing each other: *Jackrabbit* from Texas, *Chopper* from Atlanta, and *Jen the Rock Lady*.

Social

• CT Hike Day 4, July 3, Monday

• Start: S5 mile 10.6, CT mile 67.7

• End: S6 mile 14.3, CT mile 86

• Miles walked: 18.3

During a short descent into Kenosha Pass, I could see snow-capped mountains ahead. I was told later that the pass is famous for its aspens during fall colors, quite busy with visitors.



My hitch 5 miles into Jefferson for a resupply box took 20 minutes of gentle persuasion to strangers. Here is the trail angel who helped me out.



Jefferson Market is friendly to hikers, with booths available for charging and packs allowed inside, and free wifi. They also operate a short-order grill, which brings in a lot of customers. With charging and organizing and updating, and chatting with hikers *Flaps* and *GoodCat*, I spend the whole morning there, treating myself to breakfast and early lunch. They have green chile!



Jackrabbit comes in with trail angel Crystal, who offers me a ride back to the pass—a problem solved. *Jackrabbit* calls a place in Breckenridge to reserve a room with a good rate, a triple, and asks if I want to join. When along the trail, say "yes" to opportunities, and I do.



We hike a little together, and meet *Jen the Rock Lady* again, who is in search of a better trail name, and we discuss ideas.



Jackrabbit soon outpaces me, but I walk with *Jen* a bit. *Jackrabbit* needs a long break near a creek, so I go on.

The human of this golden-doodle hiked the CT back in 2009, and proposed to his wife at San Luis pass. (As a hiker, he considered the weight of the ring as they hiked up the pass, but knew she would have to carry the weight the rest of the hike.)



I ascend up to Georgia Pass solo, 11.9k and fine views.







Just beyond the pass the trail joins up with the Continental Divide Trail.



I start the descent, eager to find a campsite at a lower altitude for a warmer night, and to get low enough that I do not disturb fragile sub-alpine growth.



I get to a good spot as rain starts, and *Jackrabbit* passes by, determined to go lower.

Breck

• CT Day 5, July 4, Tuesday

• Start: S6 mile 14.3, CT mile 86

• End: S6 mile 32.7, CT mile 104.2, then bus into Breckenridge

• Miles walked: 18.2

Heading down, I pass a pond and a walkway over a river.



Climbing up a while, I start to gain views of ski runs and mountains.





Past a small creek, I see "100" in rocks. Can we already be more than 1/5 finished?



A big climb and then down again. Considering it is July 4, not many mountain bikes, maybe 30, and not so scary fast. Before long I can see the outskirts of Breckenridge.



Jackrabbit gets to the bus stop just a few minutes before the hourly free bus arrives to take us into downtown Breckenridge and our hostel. *Goodcat* is leaving on a bus as we arrive, just in town for the day. *Flaps* is our roommate in the triple, in a really fine hiker-oriented hostel with all amenities a hiker can appreciate, Fireside Inn.





Laundry, shower, and sharing a meal with trail friends. Wow.

Cu

• CT Day 6, July 5, Wednesday

• Start: S6 mile 32.7, CT mile 104.2

• End: S8 mile 7.0, CT mile 124.2

• Miles walked: 20.0

Most of the 6:45 bus from Breckenridge were hikers, returning to Gold Hill to resume the trail, including *Jackrabbit* and myself. *J* zoomed ahead, and I never saw him the rest of the day.

We start at 9.8k, climbing and starting to see a line of mountains.

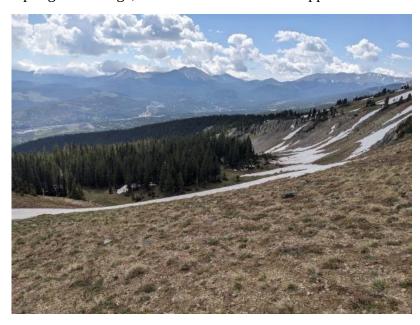




As we get higher, we have to traverse some snow fields.



Up high on a ridge, some of the ski runs of Copper Mountain start to appear.



I meet *Chopper* coming the other way, slack-packing from Copper.



But we still keep climbing. About 7 of us keep passing each other as we pause for breaks or to adjust equipment, including *Sunflower*, *Chair Guy*, *Stella*, and the *Wes's*.

Rain begins at the ridge summit at 12.5k, but does not last long.



Coasting down long switchbacks for hours, finally I reach Copper Mountain ski area. A big detour due to construction takes me off the mapped route.





At Center Village, I chat with *GoodCat*, who is about to head up. I see no other hikers. After a midafternoon junk food snack, I start up the mountain bike trail area.



After a few miles, the trail follows along the Guller River, and a series of beaver ponds.



I stop for the night at 11.1k, not wanting to sleep at higher elevation to stay warm at night. The sound of the river nearby brings sleep quickly.

Triple Pass

• CT Day 7, July 6, Thursday

• Start: S8 mile 7.0, CT mile 124.2

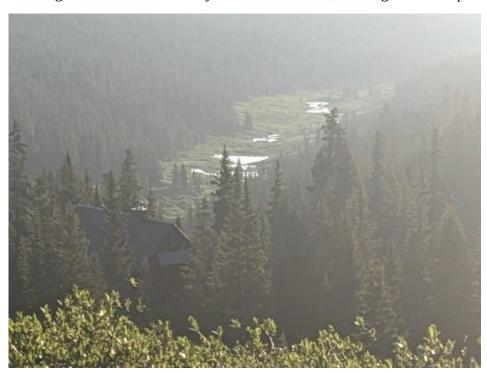
• End: S9 mile 4.9, CT mile 147.5

• Miles walked: 23.3

Above treeline in the early morning, a herd of elk regards me with caution.



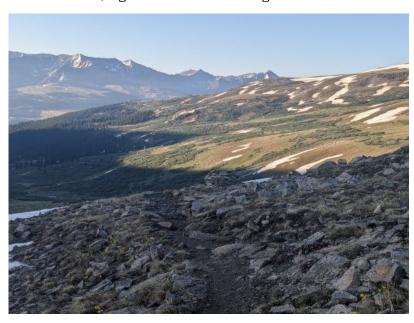
Looking back at the river valley we climbed out of, a string of beaver ponds glint in the sun.



Several snow fields must be traversed, and melting snow makes mud on trail.



At Searle Pass, I get a view of more heights to climb.



Marmots like to hang out on trail until hikers come. Notice that two are in the photo. The nearest was licking dew off of plants, instead of drinking nearby snow melt.





Reaching Kokomo Pass signals a long descent.





Later, down below, the route passes broadleaf sagebrush, and I approve.



A bridge crosses next to a waterfall.



The trail goes by Camp Hale, a decommissioned military base, with risk of unexploded shells, and asbestos.



It may be hard to make out in the photo, but a moose is grazing in a marsh.



Tennessee Pass looks different from my memories—old mining artifacts have been removed, and a hiking/skiing hut system has been added.



My campsite is a few miles from the wilderness boundary, near a river. I am in a hiker bubble, not seeing any other CT southbound hikers since Copper.

Lakes, Ups, Downs

• CT Day 8, July 7, Friday

• Start: S9 mile 4.9, CT mile 147.5

• End: S11 mile 2 2, CT mile 171.5

• Miles walked: 24.0

The trail enters the Holy Cross Wilderness, and climbs upwards.



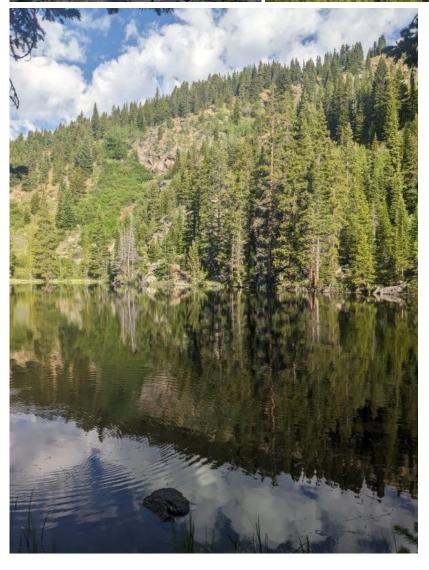
We ascend to a ridge with good views of the rugged next ridge that goes above treeline, but we are not headed that way.



The route passes a series of mountain lakes.







After going down, and up and down, I pass by a former lake, filled in.



Most of the day is along trail through tall mixed conifer and aspen, with no views, and multiple climbs and descents.

Twins

- CT Day 9, July 8, Saturday
- Start: S11 mile 2 2, CT mile 171.5
- End: S11 mile 11.9, CT mile 181.2
- Miles walked: 13.0 (includes off-trail)

The morning starts with a passage through an aspen grove. If you like climbing 14k peaks, turn off to the Mount Ebert trail. (Personally, I try to avoid 14ks so I am not tempted to do more of them.)



A nearby pond features a beaver lodge.



Ouch, someone lost their Garmin.



Twin Lakes come into view through the trees.



A 2-mile detour takes me to Twin Lake Village. The crazy-busy General Store serves as resupply for the next few days.



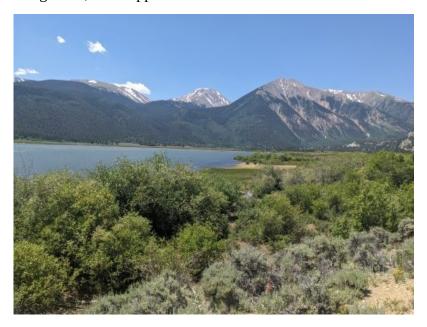
I see CT hiker *Kris* again at the store, last seen near Breckenridge, and also *Charlotte*, *Phantom*, and *Blaine*.



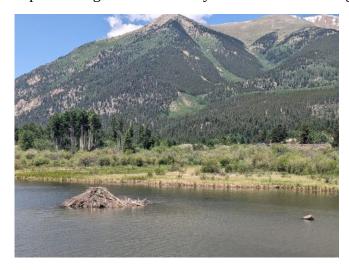
This visitor center building has a second-floor door that opens into space. Perhaps an exterior stairs used to be attached, but I suspect the door was an exit for winters with heavy snow.



The trail continues around the north sides of the lakes, with mountains as backdrop. Sagebrush is in the foreground, and I approve.



A pond along the lake shows yet another beaver lodge.



All manner of people are out enjoying the lake at several pull-outs, bring kayaks and paddle boards to the water, or biking or trail-running or camping Yurt are located near one parking area.



I divert off the trail 1.4 miles to a hiker hostel, where I will rest up for a couple of nights.



A friendly colorful group of folks operating a lake tour business out the same location makes tacos in the hostel kitchen, and treat me to dinner. I am the only hiker in the bunk house, and sleep comes fast.

CT Zero

• CT Day 10, July 9, Sunday

• Start: S11 mile 11.9, CT mile 181.2

• End: S11 mile 11.9, CT mile 181.2

• Miles walked: ZERO

I am taking a rest day. Here is a photo of nearby mountains.



Hope Ann

• CT Day 11, July 10, Monday

• Start: S11 mile 11.9, CT mile 181.2

• End: Collegiate West mile 21.4

• Miles walked: 23.7

Leaving the bunkhouse early, I rejoin the CT, ready for a big day.

The trail splits into Collegiate East and Collegiate West for about 75 miles before rejoining. I take the more challenging West, to spend more time above tree-line. Days will involve climbing up to a pass and then back down again to sleep at lower altitudes.



Soon the route follows along the south side of the Twin Lakes and passes by the Inter-Laken historic site, which used to be a resort in the late 1800's.







The climb up to tree-line was rather easy, following along a gulch with steady controlled grade. *Shannon*, who I met briefly at the cabins, and *Eric* pass me going uphill, and we pass each other for most of the day.



Coming out of the trees, we climb up to Hope Pass at 12.5k, from staring at 9.7k at the lakes.







The climb down was rather steeper. The mountainside was narrow and putting in switchbacks would be difficult.

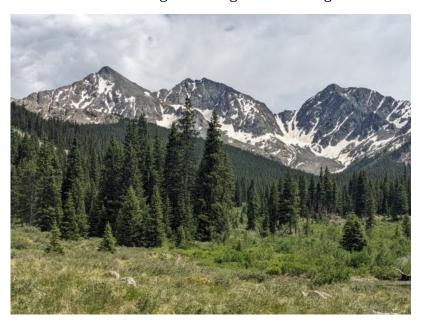
We see *GoodCat* down below getting water.



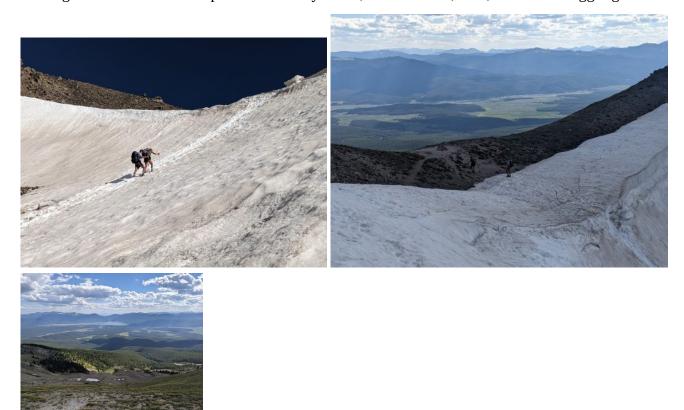
Back in the trees at 10.5k, groves of aspen tower above.



Soon comes the approach to Hope Lake Pass. Do I camp early near the approach to the pass, or go ahead and climb it and get down again? You can guess what I did.



The highest snow field to the pass was a tricky climb, and *Shannon*, *Eric*, and I are struggling.



Descending intro tree-line, the couple takes the first flat camping spot they can find, and I grab the next. What a day.

Cottonwood?

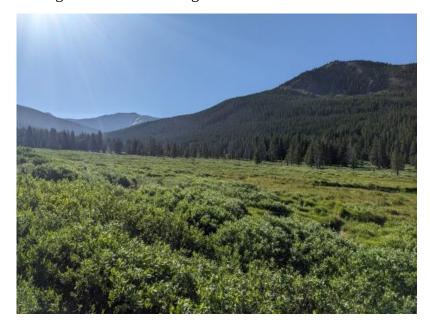
• CT day 12, July 11, Tuesday

• Start: Collegiate West mile 21.4

• End: Collegiate West mile 43.5

• Miles walked: 22.1

Taking a good while to descend off the mountain, the trail finally arrives at a trailhead and proceeds at the edge of a wetlands along Texas Creek.



I hear a soft animal call and see a group of four moose grazing nearby— a bull, two cows, and a calf, their dark coats blending with forest shadow.



I pass *Eric* and *Shannon*, who had gotten an early start, and we keep passing each other during the day. The route leaves the creek and climbs steadily towards a pass.





A patch of snow at the very top has to be traversed.



We descend down to a highway and a parking area where several day hikers are exploring the pass.



I do not see any cottonwoods at Cottonwood Pass, nor can I imagine any every growing at this altitude.



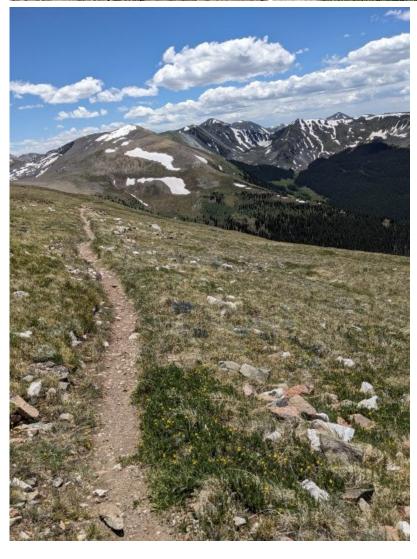
The wind is bitterly strong, and my sun hat is too floppy. In a rock shelter we configure our gear.



The route stays above tree-line the rest of the day, and it feels like walking on top of the world.







Several patches of snow must be traversed, including one very large one covering several switchbacks, that takes our three minds working together to find a route past.





I had hoped to get further today, even get below treeline, but that would have been a 30 mile day. The snow slows us down, and we must camp at high altitude, 12k, with limited protection from the wind among a few trees.



Passes Lakes Trains

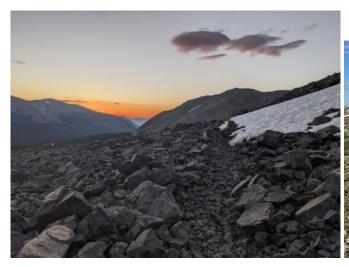
• CT Day 13, July 12, Wednesday

• Start: Collegiate West mile 43.5

• End: Collegiate West mile 69.6

• Miles walked: 26.1

The day starts with a climb to some unnamed pass.





... and down and up to another pass.



I do meet up with *Shannon* and *Eric* again. They get started on trail even earlier than I do, hiking with headlamps at dawn. We pass a few times, and walk together a bit and chat.



The trail finally descends down into treeline. I have been up above trees for more than 24 hours. Note the number of dead trees. Perhaps this was an old bark beetle kill.



The route follows along an old railroad grade converted to trail, and railroad ties are still visible in places. An old train tunnel is nearby.





Someone left their snowmobile on trail, recently with a 2023 permit sticker. Malfunction or out of gas?



The route passes several lakes now. Count the lakes and ponds in this photo.



On a final climb I can see a town in the distance. Resupply tomorrow.



Monarch and Merge

• CT Day 14, July 13, Thursday

• Start: Collegiate West mile 69.6

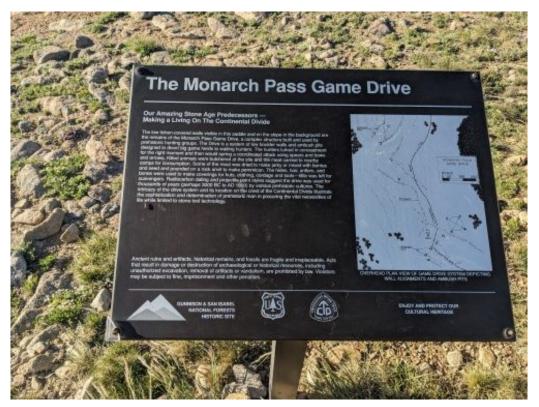
• End: S15 mile 9.8, CT mile 262.3

• Miles walked: 14.3

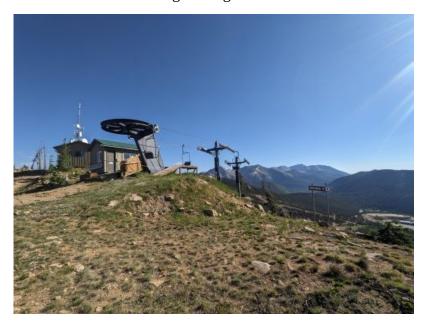
The morning begins with a climb up to a ridge.



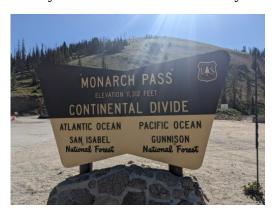
The trail passes by the remains of some rock walls that were thought to be used by prehistoric man to hunt large animals in groups.



The route continues along the edge of Monarch Mountain Ski area.



Finally the trail winds down to Hwy 50 and Monarch Pass.



I am pleased and surprised to discover that the store at Monarch Pass has reopened, and been refurbished, and even has a hiker room, with a rather nice hiker box. *Shannon* and *Eric* arrive, and we enjoy burgers at the snack bar.



We all all headed to Monarch Mountain Lodge to pick up our supply boxes, about 5 miles away. We hitch together, and soon get picked up by a small RV. The couple has three adorable young children seated at the table, all with lollipops.



The lodge does not have anyone at the desk to help us until 3PM. *S* and *E* go across the road to the new hostel, and I can still use a day pass at the lodge to shower and do laundry and recharge. At 3 I get my box, enjoy a last snack, and hitch back up to the pass.

The trail resumes past a gondola ride, on level trail.



Later the trail climbs gradually to a ridge, and Collegiate East and Collegiate West Trails merge back to one Colorado Trail.



I find the first likely campsite shielded from wind among trees, still rather high up at $11.8 \mathrm{k}$.

Dry and Different

• CT day 15, July 14, Friday

• Start: S15 mile 9.8, CT mile 262.3

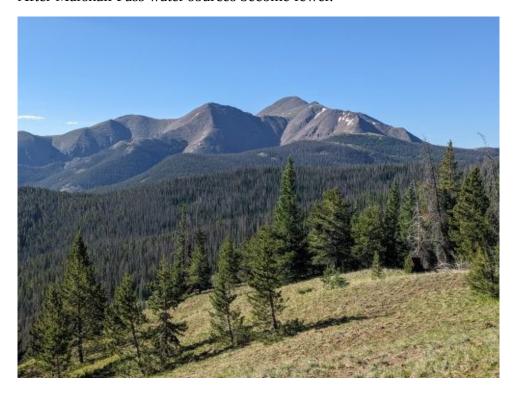
• End: S17 mile 4.1, CT mile 286.1

• Miles walked: 23.8

A shelter cabin is along the trail, with no wooden floor like AT shelters regularly have.



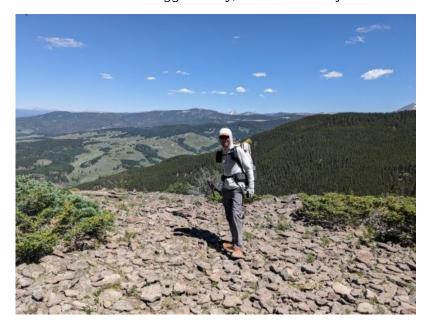
After Marshall Pass water sources become fewer.



The route is often on old road, often very rocky. Single-track is primitive with usually no drainage features. Dirt bikes are allowed in this section, and I saw several. It seemed like rock was added to two-track, but surely they didn't do that, right?



Jackrabbit passed by and chatted. He had done the East Collegiates, and had spent a few nights in Leadville. I also saw *Tigger* today, who I had met just before Monarch.



Cattle were grazing on a series of open meadows surrounded by trees (parks)



Gone are the magnificent vistas of the Western Collegiates, and my brain is slow to adjust. Finished audiobook <u>The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel</u>, by Baroness Orczy

Graze and Water

CT Day 16, July 15. Saturday

Start: S17 mile 4.1, CT mile 286.1

• End: S18 mile 9.7, CT mile 312.1

• Miles walked: 26.0

The route continues along a broad ridge that dips up and down many times in forest with beetle-kill trees, and sometimes goes through broad meadows





Diverting from the ridge line, the trail plunges down the mountainside to Razor Creek, with water tasting of cow, but the last water was 12 miles ago and I am empty. *Jackrabbit* is there, boiling his water for safety, and perhaps better taste. He is maybe heading to Gunnison today, jackrabbiting around.

The trail climbs back to ridge, then down again, to better water and the highway CO 118. I meet hikers *Noah* and *Moon Doggie*.





Past the highway the route goes along recently-graded dirt road, up a canyon along a creek, with cattle and rancher RVs.



The easy road walk continues past forested areas, with several huge piles of trees, perhaps related to beetle-kill mitigation.



After an easy climb along road, the route continues in forest on old road bed converted to trail.



Back to dirt road again, the route passes into grazing land, with cattle lurking nearby.



A trail magic station turned out to be empty, but had a nice chair.



Los Creek has good water, and the next good water is likely 12 miles away, so a half-dozen hikers camp here. I cowboy-camp. We are at 9.6k, the lowest for a while.

Finished audiobook A Magician Among the Spirits, by Houdini.

Range to Ridge

• CT day 17, July 16, Sunday

• Start: S18 mile 9.7, CT mile 312.0

• End: S20 mile 12.1, CT mile 342.0

• Miles walked: 30.0

I am accidentally driving cattle along a road on the range.





The route stays on easy dirt road for some miles, on grassland near tree cover, and eventually stands of sagebrush become frequent.



The cloudless day is getting rather hot, but the temperature instantly drops in an aspen grove.



A fellow New Mexican is out hiking the CDT, *Whistletooth* from La Union. ("Whistletooth" is an elk hunting term, <u>look it up</u>.)



The trail follows a wetlands for a time, with several beaver dams.



I meet another CT hiker, *Phil*, and we pass each other a few times during the day.

After wet-foot crossing the Cochetopa River, the route follows it some miles from the heights.



As the trail gradually climbs, following the river, aspen and standing dead trees, killed by bark beetle, make patterns on the opposite ridge.



The trail heads towards mountains. Climbing is in my future.



Still following the Cochetopa, the route becomes rugged and brushy, hiking along dead trees, with several small streams crossing the trail.



I meet *Phil* and a couple setting up camp, *Mark* and *Mary*, *M&M*. We discuss the practicality of reaching the road tomorrow for the noon shuttle to Lake City. I am hiking long today, but still do not think I can get there in time, so may have to make a difficult 17 mile hitch.

I climb over a saddle at about 12.5k.



Instead of heading down again on the other side, the trail goes along a ridge past a bowl-shaped valley to another saddle.



Past the second saddle, the trail gradually descends, and I can make camp at 11.9k, not far from San Luis Pass, just at treeline, but without any wind, and temperatures remaining moderate.



Ridge and Town

• CT Day 18, July 17, Monday

• Start:: S20 mile 12.1, CT mile 342.0

• End: Spring Creek Pass, S21 mile 14.8, CT mile 357.8, then to Lake City

• Miles walked: 15.8

The morning starts with a short hike to San Luis Pass, where a trail splits off to trailhead access.



The route climbs another four or five ridges and down again, tough going, but resplendent views.



A creek in shadow had frozen last night.



More of those ridges I mentioned climbing...









Past the ridges, the trail goes on Snowy Mesa for several miles of gently rolling grassy terrain, with wildflowers at their peak.



I meet a CT hiker going northbound, *Garrett* (aka *Chicken*), a fellow New Mexican, who recognized me! It turns out we have worked on a trail project together down in the Gila.



At the edge of the mesa, the trail plunges down into talus, requiring fancy footwork.



Finally at Snowy Pass, it only takes 20 minutes to hitch a 17 mile ride into Lake City.



I stay at the Ravens Rest hiker hostel, owned by *Lucky*, where I had also stayed on my CDT Colorado trip back in 2014. *Tigger*, *Phil*, and *Jackrabbit* are also there, and *Eric* and *Shannon* stop by to visit before heading to the RV Park.

We get dinner at a Southern cooking place. Left-to-right: *Jackrabbit*, *Tigger*, and *Phil*.



Next to the hostel is a playground, and I enjoy hearing the joyful noises of playing kids.



I get a chance to chat with fellow hikers about their jobs and lives. Another hiker who joins us at the hostel is *Wolf Food*, who works in construction diving, and he describes building scaffolding under water. Cool!



A good day, for sure.

Nearly Nero

- CT day 19, July 18, Tuesday
- Start: Spring Creek Pass, S21 mile 14.8, CT mile 357.8, from Lake City
- End: S22 mile 10, CT mile 367.8, 12.2k
- Miles walked: 10

After going to the grocery for supplies for three days, I returned to the hostel to pack. A hiking couple walked in, the *Noodleheads*!



I met the *Noodleheads*, *Angel Hair* and *Rigatoni*, on my Appalachian Trail hike way back in 2012. What serendipity! What a pleasant surprise! We have a chance to chat and reminisce.

(I consider the *Noodleheads* trail-famous, because they have been on several episodes of <u>The Trail Show podcast</u>.)

The hostel closes for cleaning at 10, and the free shuttle back to the trail does not leave until 12, so I walk over to the Hiker Center, a space for hikers created by a local church, with assistance from the town. On the way, a cabin with sod roof catches my attention.



The Hiker Space is a pleasant large room, with charging station and hot water for tea, and wifi. Today it is filled with CDT and CT hikers waiting for the shuttle.



They had to round up more volunteers with vehicles to bring us up. The CT group includes *Jackrabbit*, *Phil*, *M&M*, *Eric*, *Shannon*, and more.



The trail starts off on a sort of mesa again, and later climbs into trees.



Now there is a problem. At 8 miles in, we go above treeline in a huge climb, and do not return down to warmer altitudes until 10 miles later. That would mean hiking until 9PM. Most hikers camp early, planning to make the climb tomorrow. I camp a little higher, in the bushes, ready for a big day of hiking tomorrow.

Finished audiobook **Chokepoint Capitalism**, by Cory Doctorow.

Up and Over

- CT Day 20, July 19, Wednesday
- Start: S22 mile 10, CT mile 367.8, 12.2k
- End CT mile 397, Weminuche Wilderness, where the CT and CDT split, 12.4k
- Miles walked: 29.2

I start early, and can see the headlamps of *Eric* and *Shannon* approaching from below. The first climb of the day is to the CT high point.



The day is filled with a series of climbs over resplendent ridges, and then back down again. These are just a few.



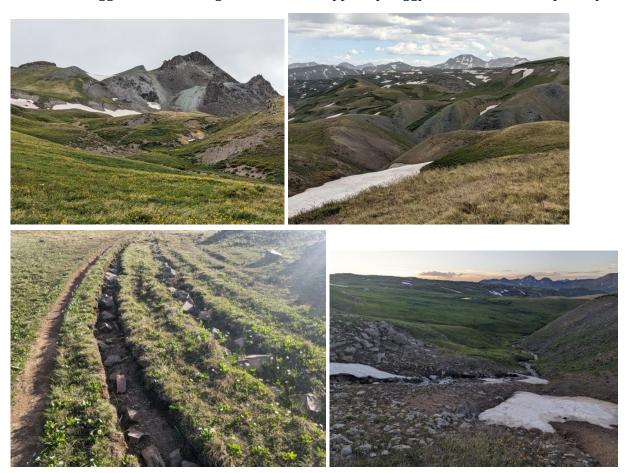
I meet *Gumby* and *One-Mile*, who camped last night ever higher than I did.



Later I meet Extra Credit and Nine Lives, from Denver.



Past Stony Pass is the Weminuche Wilderness, which I remember rather well from my 2014 CDT trip. The area is rugged, beautiful, high elevation, and typically soggy from snow melt, especially the trails.



I miss my ambitious hiking goal, running out of daylight, not energy, and am forced to camp at high elevation at the junction where the CT and CDT diverge.



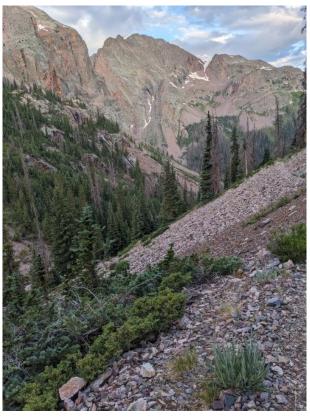
Switchback, Train, Layers

- CT Day 21, July 20. Thursday
- Start: CT mile 397, Weminuche Wilderness, where the CT and CDT split, 12.4k
- End: S25 mile 8.2, CT mile 418.9
- Miles walked: 21.9

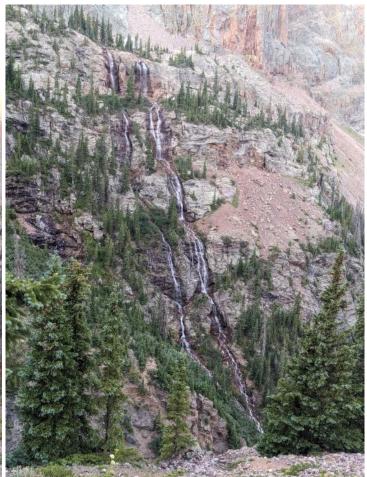
After a short climb, the trail plunges down Elk Creek Canyon on well-constructed tread, a remarkable descent with many views, going from 10.3k to 8.9k.















Finally, the trail flattens out a bit. Ducks frolic.



Hikers can flag down the Durango-Silverton Railroad for a ride. I consider it, but not today.



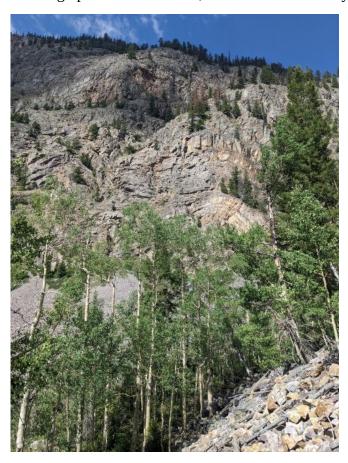
Maybe worn railroad ties are perfectly fine, but I worry about maintenance.



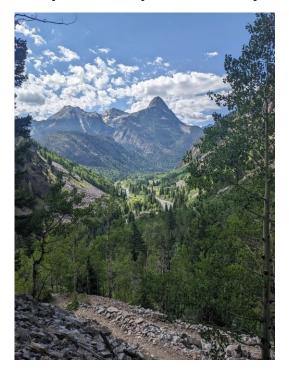
After a bridge crossing, farewell to Elk Creek.



Looking up at a tall rock face, switchbacks are in my future.



Lovely views are my reward at the top.



At the Molas Lake camp store, I pick up my final resupply box. They have a table with canopy set up for hikers.



Hiking out to the highway, I meet *Jackrabbit*, who wondered where I had gotten to. He is hitching to Silverton.

The mountainsides in this area are layered, probably natural processes.



Finished audiobook <u>PSmith</u>, <u>Journalist</u>, by P G Wodehouse.

Passes and Not

• CT Day 22, July 21, Friday

• Start: S25 mile 8.2, CT mile 418.9

• End: S26 mile 10.8, CT mile 443.9

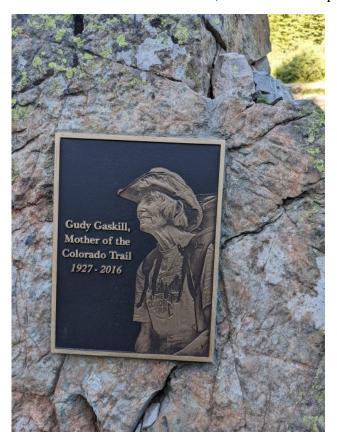
• Miles walked: 25.0

The day starts with a climb to a pass at 12.5k.





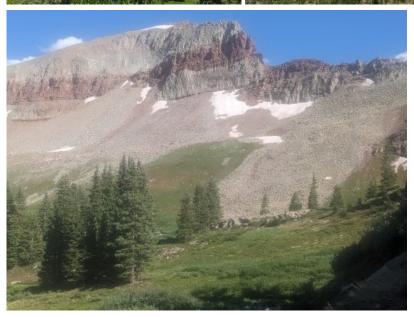
Then comes a descent into trees, and a memorial plaque.



The route feints towards several peaks, but does not climb them. We get a good view of mountainsides almost entirely covered in talus and skree.







Late in the day, the route goes up Blackhawk Pass, at 12k.





Some flowers attract bees, but others attract flies, if you can zoom in.



I am mostly hiking in a bubble today.

Finished audiobook <u>The Incredulity of Father Brown</u>, by G K Chesterton.

Last Summit

CT Day 23, July 22, Saturday

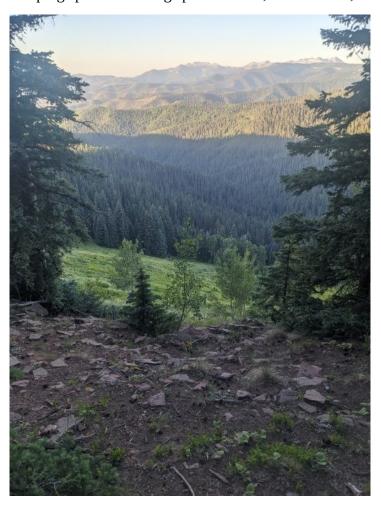
• Start: S26 mile 10.8, CT mile 443.9

End: CT mile 472.9Miles walked: 29.0

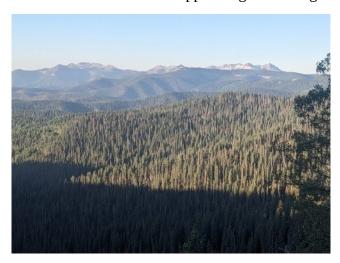
My alarm sounds at its regular 4:45AM. At the beginning of the trip, this was exactly right, getting me on the trail at 5:30, just late enough to be able to walk and see without a headlamp, but still way early in the morning, so I get the most walking during cool temperatures. After almost a month of hiking, sunrise time has changed so that I would need to adjust my alarm, if I were not finishing soon.

I am cowboy camping (sleeping out under the stars, with no tent). Colorado has been so dry this trip that I cowboy camped the last ten nights. Waking up at 3AM, the Milky Way is clearly visible. Just before dawn, several satellites are visible. Shooting starts streak past every night. The weather is quite a change from my trip through Colorado in 2014, with regular monsoon thunderstorms each afternoon.

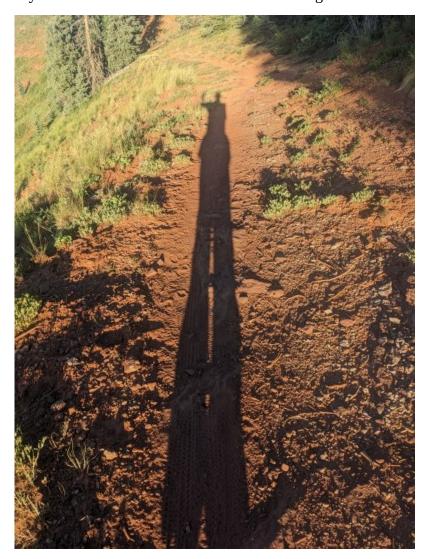
Some critter is nearby, making small noises. I don't bother it, and it doesn't bother me. Last night's camping spot was among spruce and fir, at about 10k, too high for pines.



In the distance are snow-capped ridges. We might make some final visits to these peaks today.

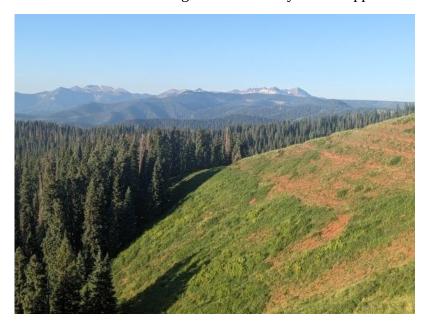


My shadow waves to me as we start off walking.



The trail continues on a ridge, and one can see far below. Mostly the ridge is in trees, but sometimes the route passes out of trees and into views.

I hear few birds at morning chorus. One my Merlin app identifies is a hermit thrush.



My phone timer sounds, signaling I must eat more food. I have set my timer to sound every hour during the day, and I eat a single food item each hour, without stopping—either a granola bar, tortilla with cheese, premium bar, or otherwise. I do not stop for lunch or any other break. Lately in the trip I do stop for 30 minutes around 4PM for first dinner and a half-hour break, and this allows me enough energy to continue hiking late in the day if I want to—perhaps until 8PM or so. I do not hike fast like younger hikers, but I can hike a long time, "relentless", so I am told.

A haze cover mountains in the morning. I do not smell any smoke from distant forest fires. Perhaps morning moisture and angle of the sun are factors.



This latest section of trail is really well maintained, with superior drainage structures. A sign was left by trail maintainers, proud of their work.



The trail seems to be ready to climb some ridges, but just goes near for views. Then comes the climb to Indian Ridge Trail at 12.3k.







Finally comes the last high summit A few mountain bikers come by, riding on difficult rocky trails that I did not imagine they would be able to handle.





From high above, one can see Taylor Lake. The trail will climb down 1k feet to pass near the lake, for water at a nearby stream.





The trail passes along a really long talus traverse, perhaps one of the longest I have experienced.



The route climbs down to Junction Creek at 8.5k and a bridge, where more than a half-dozen hikers and bikers are camped. I start climbing late in the day along narrow short switchbacks along very steep mountainside with few prospects for camping. Suddenly a good wide campsite appears near dark at 9.0k. Cowboy camping again, for a last night.

Finished audiobook <u>Frankenstein</u> (dramatic reading), by Mary Shelley.

Terminus CT

- CT Day 24, July 23, Sunday
- Start. CT mile 472.9
- End: CT mile 486.0, The End, and hitch to Durango
- Miles walked: 13.1

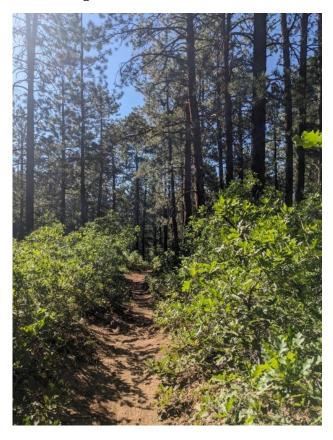
I had camped halfway up a mountainside, so the morning starts with a climb to 9.6k . Someone had recently come by with a weed-whacker to knock down brush along the trail.



I chatted with *Goldie*, a CT hiker who would also finish today.



During a long descent, I finally get to altitudes where pine and Gambel oak are dominant, and spruce and fir are gone.



A bench marks the overlook Gudy's Rest at 8k.



Many many day hikers are out this morning, enjoying the trail. A trail angel comes by who is handing out pastries, and I enjoy an apple empañada.



A huge bear scat is filled with half-digested cherries. Where is the hidden cherry tree? I want some! Later I walk behind a 5-year-old who has a lengthy discussion with me about the bear poo.



I finish the CT around noon, close to thru-hikers *Ghost* and *Goldie*. 7k elevation seems pretty low, after being at 12.3k yesterday.



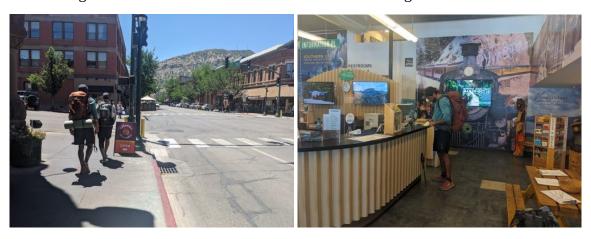


The three of us hitch a ride together into Durango, and our first stop is the brewpub Carvers, which gives out a free beer to CT finishers. I donate mine to my new comrades, and enjoy a green chile cheeseburger and root beer float.

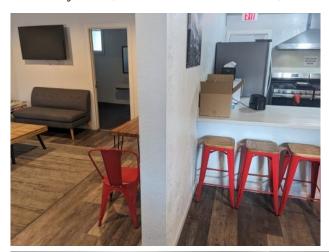




We hike together down to the visitor center for some free swag for CT hikers.



Afterwards I take the free trolley to a laundry that has a shower, and later check into the hostel. *Ghost* shares my room, with several other hikers, and *Goldie* is nearby in the hotel section.





Hanging out in a hostel with hikers is a fine way to end a long trail.

Post CT

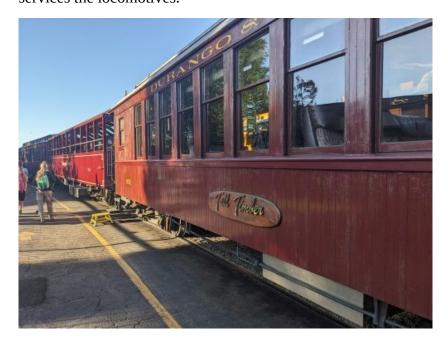
CT Day 25, July 24, Monday

Start: Durango COEnd: Lemitar NM

Departing the hostel, I took a trolley (free this month) to the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad (D&SNGRR) train depot, where historic steam engine excursions depart and arrive daily. My son arrived to give me a ride back to New Mexico.



But first we spent some time browsing the (free) museum housed in the roundhouse building that services the locomotives.









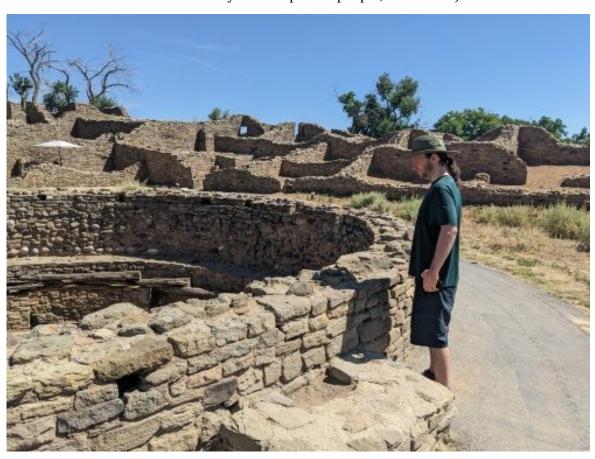
Outside the museum one can see the train turntable, used for turning around locomotives and train cars when necessary.



The display on track maintenance tools included several 2-person crosscut saws, that I could put to good use if given the opportunity.



Soon after entering NM, my son and I took a break at Aztec Ruins National Monument (misnamed, because the structures were built by ancient pueblo people, not Aztecs).







After arriving in Albuquerque, and a rest, my son dropped me off at the NM Rail Runner train station, and *Cairn* picked me up in Belen and gave me a ride home, at last.