

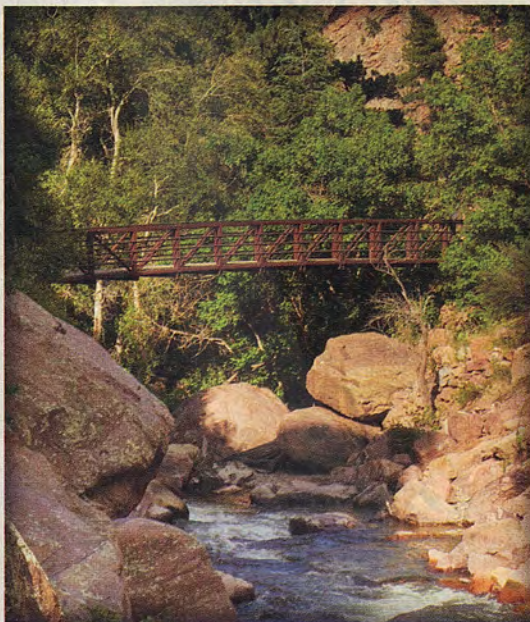
Day Trips off the Beaten Path

By Bette Erickson

Colorado's mountains are so daunting that the state was settled much later than surrounding territories – the harsh winters and steep inclines dissuaded potential homesteaders. However, today these same peaks draw thousands of visitors each year. Tourists seek out these slopes to ski, hike, recreate and enjoy our vast vistas stretching in all directions.

If you're looking for a hiking and sight-seeing destination a bit off the beaten path, look no further. Following are some unique and memory-worthy experiences to put on your to-do list.

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» Boulder's Eldorado Canyon

Early in the 20th century, tightrope walker and all-around daredevil Ivy Baldwin made 86 trips on a tightrope suspended some 580-feet above Eldorado Canyon in the southern part of Boulder's Eldorado Canyon. He made his last walk (and survived!) at the age of 82-years old in 1948.

While parking at Eldorado Canyon bustles with activity each weekend, on weekdays the canyon tends to see far less traffic. For rock climbers and sight-seers, this is the preferred way to experience Eldorado appeal.

Most of the rock climbing done in Eldorado Canyon falls under the definition of traditional climbing, meaning that climbers place and remove much of the protection equipment they use on any given climb. More recently, "sport climbing" has taken off in a variety of locations including in and around Boulder.

In sport climbing, outdoor enthusiasts hook devices called quick draws into preplaced expansion bolts that are fairly permanent fixtures to the rock face, meaning that the bolts remain in the stone for use of future climbers.

Picnic tables, a large Visitor's Center, and rushing, icy creek are just some of the amenities at Eldorado Canyon State Park.

Located at 9 Kneale Rd., the fee is \$8/day per car. Information: eldorado.park@state.co.us or (303) 494-3943



» Highway of the Fourteeners

Accessed via US 24 out of Buena Vista, this lovely 19-mile stretch along the Collegiate Peaks Scenic Byway showcases dramatic, close-up views of ten of Colorado's 14,000+ foot mountains. (A fourteener is defined as a mountain taller than 14,000-feet above sea level.)

Nowhere else in the United States will you see so many high peaks in one location. Allow about thirty minutes to drive, of course more time if you stop for photos. There are several scenic Byways originating from Buena Vista – for more information, visit www.buenavistacolorado.org or call (719) 395-6612.



» St. Elmo in Chaffee County

Far up a dirt road, deep in the mountain of Chaffee County, lies the ghost of St. Elmo. This weathered ghost town, founded in 1880, lies in the heart of the Sawatch Range, 20 miles southwest of Buena Vista.

With creaking wooden sidewalks meandering past splintered false-fronted wooden buildings, St. Elmo is among Colorado's best-preserved mining towns. At an elevation of 9,961-feet above sea level, the ghost town sits in a quiet wooded valley, now home to hummingbirds and chipmunks.

From Buena Vista take US 24 south for eight miles to Nathrop, then CR 162 west for 16 miles.



» Lookout Mountain and Buffalo Bill's Grave

William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody died in 1917. Even today, some 100 years later, the name Buffalo Bill is still synonymous with our perception of the Old West.

As a young man, Cody trapped beaver in the Rocky Mountains, searched for gold in Colorado, delivered for the Pony Express, scouted with the US Army and earned his nom de guerre by hunting thousands of buffalo for crews building the Kansas Pacific Railroad to Denver. Following Cody's death, a *Denver Post* eulogy noted the "passing of the great West."

A day trip to Lookout Mountain Nature Center and Preserve, including Cody's grave site, near Golden is worthwhile. Information: (303) 526-0594 or www.buffalobill.org.

Indeed, Colorado's landscape is spellbinding, and it's easy to see why tourism and recreation have become leading industries.

Mark Twain called one Colorado community he visited "the wickedest city in the west." In 1889, Butch Cassidy robbed his first bank in Telluride. Billy the Kid is another well-known resident. The state remains steeped in memories of a wild frontier heritage. From the dilapidated mines scattered through state forests to long abandoned ghost towns, Colorado's sense of adventure still lingers.

» Hiking Castlewood Canyon State Park

An ideal all-season hike, enjoy this State Park for its history (the Castlewood Canyon Dam) and other rugged landmark features. The routes offered here are suitable for most hikers who enjoy being out in nature and are good with distance (3.6+ miles) and elevation gain (500 feet).

An added bonus: The amphitheater and the Bridge Canyon Overlook gazebo nestled along the edge of the canyon is a much sought-after spot for weddings and other outdoor events. The area is open from sunrise to sunset and dogs are welcome on leash. Daily fee is \$8.

Getting there: Take I-25 south to exit 182, following the signs for Hwy. 86 and Franktown. Turn right toward Castle Rock and take a left on Fifth Ave. onto Hwy. 86, following the signs to Franktown. After 6.5 miles turn right on Castlewood Canyon Rd. and go about 2.5 miles to park at the Westside Trailhead.

