

Have you made it to the top she asked me: Yes, it is beautiful, I replied.

Thanks she said; there is hope!!!!!!!!!!!! July 07



My goal was to hike a 14, 000+ mountain for my 56th birthday. I arranged to go on August 26th with a friend. So naturally having a massive case of impatient-idus, I just had to see if I could up the mountain on my own before the 26th.

A couple of weeks ago, I was doing a training run in Meyers Open Space Park and happened to meet a real nice local guy. I told him I was interested in 14 teeners. He replied rather sternly there was a huge law against that and if I acted on my impulse I would have to register with the officials and maybe have a hard time finding a place to live. So I cleared up the confusion and told him I was interested 14 teener mountains, not 14 year olds; he instantly became more friendly. Glad to clear up that confusion.

He said there is a 14+ mountain a lot of locals hike because it is wheel chair accessible and complies with the American with Disabilities Act. Hmmm that sounds real good to me. I found my mountain, it was [Mount Bierstadt](#).

Mount Bierstadt is the 38th tallest mountain in Colorado at 14,060 feet. The hike is 9.62 miles with 4300 feet of elevation gain. The last 400 yards are in a boulder field which slowed down some of the less skilled wheelchairs, but did nothing to slow me down. You can see in the picture above with the snow a portion of the boulder access to the summit. But I get ahead of myself.

Now that I had my mountain nailed down it was time to get on with it. I normally am not nervous before stuff like this but for some reason I was a bit apprehensive. The night before the hike I packed my backpack with water, M&M's with nuts, more nuts, fruit, rain gear, an extra shirt, a crap camera, my cell phone and some lead shot just for good measure. It was my heaviest pack yet. That took about an hour, then I laid out my clothes on the floor in alphabetical order and decided it was time for bed. As I was nervous I decided it would be a good idea to read a little before I hit the hay. I had the latest edition of Outdoor and promptly read a few stories that got me so jazzed I could not sleep. But sleep finally came until 3:00AM, when I awoke ready to pee and go. Too early.

I set the alarm for 6:00 so I had three solid hours to roll around and think about how I would die on the hike tomorrow next to a wheelchair. I gave up trying to sleep and climbed out of bed around 5:30, ate my breakfast of champions which consist of three arthritis Tylenol, put the coffee on, got dressed and made a bunch of noise in order to make sure Ron could not sleep all the way to the jointly agreed upon 6:00 am wake up time. It worked, he was up and off we went. He is real good about that. Real light sleeper.

First stop, gas and a juicy two week old sausage biscuit to oil the joints for the trip. NOTE, I am still off caffeine, so no real coffee was allowed. We headed out on 285 south on a beautiful Colorado crisp 46 degree morning. Spectacular. Woo Hoo, on our way.

We are cruising down 285 doing 50-55 mph with Ron driving. I was looking down at my sausage biscuit wondering exactly what kind of grease was running down the side of the bun, when HOLY CRAP, the truck swerves real hard to the right, then left. I look at Ron and see Ron's profile

and the window with a deer head coming at him. Then suddenly the deer turns around, I see the deer's torso sideways as he runs away. We avoid a huge problem in a matter of maybe one or two seconds. WOW, now my adrenal is totally depleted due to a damn deer scaring the crap out of me. No adrenal left for the Rocky Balboa for the push to the summit.

Deer are a real problem out here but I believe some of them are starting to evolve with a instinct to turn rather than run smack dab into whatever they see coming. Lucky for us, we got one of the newly genetically mutated versions.

OK we are both unhurt and on to the show. We head down a dirt road headed to the pass and trail head. The road is the quintessential mountain road with unlimited views of horse pastures, snow covered peaks, wild animals, alpine lakes. We arrive at the parking lot and of course all handicapped spots are taken for the wheelchairs. We had hoped to cheat and get a few free steps on the hike. We parked in the physically normal spaces. I put on my overweight pack, and off we go!!!

Ron is planning on going out for 35-40 minutes and then turning around then headed to Georgetown for the morning. You now know why Ron is the general partner of this outfit!!! His plan sounded very reasonable. We hike a smooth soft dirt path thru willows and short wooden bridges over bogs until we get to a small stream. We both navigate the stream successfully and keep on hiking. It is real nice because it is going downhill and soft as a new composite running track. The temp is still cool, maybe 50 degrees with a cloudless blue sky, it could not be better.

Ron decides to turn around to go back. After waiting about 15 minutes for traffic to clear, he heads back to the car announcing to all oncoming hikers that the summit is really cool and they should get there in around four hours. Being the mountain man, he did not need to carry water etc. Pretty darn funny guy.

Did I mention there were a lot of folks on the trail. Actually it was not that bad because most of them were so out of breath they could not possible carry on a conversation, thus their presence was much less noticeable.

I am walking this great soft path thru the willows and look straight up and can see the summit. Which meant the trail went from being this nice hike to a trail that was so steep I could not put my heels down to walk. I had to

walk on the balls of my feet in order to keep moving forward. This went on for an hour or so, then I decided I would take a sip from my camelback. In the time it took to stop breathing to take a sip of water, I thought I had died. My brain said, do not under any circumstance stop breathing for anything, or you will regret it. I tried to breath and drink at the same time but it did not work out so well. I did manage to drink, but breathing became the priority.

The trail went up thru rocks, gravel and non technical stuff. I hooked up with a group of 4 young folks and we stayed together most of the way to the top. At the very top, we hiked up a snow shoot, see pic, and then scrambled over big boulders to the top. A scramble may be a technical climbing term, so I don't know if that is correct but anyway we negotiated our way to the top.

The press had not been alerted to our summit attempt so they missed the event, but about 35 other summiteers were there to cheer us on. Well actually they were just there first, no press.

The view from the top was impossible to describe. We could see over to Mt Evans and the road that takes cars to the top for automated peak baggers, alpine lakes, you know the usual mountain stuff you see at that altitude. Once on top, it was quite easy to breath, eat M&M,s with no guilt, drink water and celebrate.

After about 30 minutes on top, we did the above in reverse at about twice the speed. No problems on the way down, just a thigh hammering, knee aching, muscle twitching darn good time.

I got to the bottom and my buddy Ron was there to take a picture of me and the mountain, it didn't turn out, ha ha, and off to lunch we went. Two tired guys ready for some bean sprouts and a tofu sandwich. Well maybe not, but we did have a great lunch. It took three almost nonstop hours to get to the summit and about two coming down. NOTE if you hike this in the summer and drink too much water, you just well have to hold it until you get back to the bottom; there are just too many hikers to heed natures call in nature.

In summary, it was just what I was looking for. One of the most enjoyable days I have had on the planet. My wish is that all could experience such a thrill.

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