



Pikes Peak, Colorado

For 200 years, Pikes Peak has been a symbol of America's Western Frontier—a beacon that drew prospectors during the great 1859–60 Gold Rush to the “Pikes Peak country,” the scenic destination for hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, and an enduring source of pride for cities in the region, the State of Colorado, and the Nation.

200th Anniversary of Pikes Peak, Colorado

November 2006 marks the 200th anniversary of the Zebulon M. Pike expedition's first sighting of what has become one of the world's most famous mountains—Pikes Peak. In the decades following that sighting, Pikes Peak became symbolic of America's Western Frontier, embodying the spirit of Native Americans, early explorers, trappers, and traders who traversed the vast uncharted wilderness of the Western Great Plains and the Southern Rocky Mountains.

Portrait of Zebulon M. Pike, leader of the 1805–06 U.S. Army expedition to explore the southwestern part of the Louisiana Territory. The expedition afforded the United States' first view of the mountain that now bears Pike's name. The Louisiana Territory was purchased from France in 1803, and the newly acquired land doubled the size of our young country.

W.H. Holmes' 1874 drawing of Pikes Peak and surrounding mountains of the southern Front Range and Rampart Range. Colorado Springs, founded just three years before this drawing was made, is at the left, and Monument Creek valley and Austin Bluffs are in the foreground. Holmes was a geologist and artist employed by the F.V. Hayden survey. (Image courtesy of Pikes Peak Lithographing Company.)

Henry W. Elliott's 1869 drawing of Colorado City and Pikes Peak. Elliott was an artist employed by the F.V. Hayden survey. The Hayden survey was combined with the King, Powell, and Wheeler surveys in 1879 to form the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), which is still in existence and has become a modern multi-disciplinary science agency.

Gold Rush

In 1859, gold was discovered in several places in the mountains west of the future city of Denver. News of those discoveries spread like wildfire. The great Gold Rush was on! Pikes Peak was by far the best-known feature in the region, and it became a beacon that drew as many as 100,000 prospectors, many bearing the slogan, “Pikes Peak or Bust,” to the goldfields in 1859–60.

Over dusty trails on horseback and in wagons and stagecoaches, prospectors and early settlers came to the Pikes Peak region. At the foot of the mountain, Colorado Springs was founded in 1871 and Manitou Springs in 1872. Both communities have become two of Colorado's most beautiful cities, drawing thousands of visitors each year.

But Pikes Peak's golden allure was not finished with the 1859–60 Gold Rush. In 1891, gold was discovered less than 10 miles southwest of the mountain, and the ensuing Gold Rush to the Cripple Creek District drew prospectors from all over the world. Merchants and families followed the prospectors, and the towns of Cripple Creek and Victor grew into the major cities of the “World's Greatest Gold Camp,” which has produced over \$500 million in gold.

Pikes Peak Highway and Pikes Peak Hill Climb

A carriage road was built from the city of Cascade to the top of the mountain in 1889; horses pulled the carriages part of the way up, and mules finished the long haul to the summit. In 1916, the carriage road was widened and improved, allowing automobiles to travel the 19 miles of scenic alpine roadway up the peak. To promote the new road, in 1916, the first Pikes Peak Hill Climb automobile race was run. Each year since 1916, the 12.42-mile race to the lofty summit attracts motorcycle and car racers from all over the world who navigate the challenging course's 156 turns at dizzying speeds. The road up the mountain is called the Pikes Peak Highway, and the city of Colorado Springs manages and maintains the road for the more than 200,000 visitors each year who enjoy the spectacular vistas the road affords.

Duesenberg car number 12 races up the mountain during the early years of the Pikes Peak Hill Climb. (Sometime during the 1920s; photograph by H.M. Rhoads)

A woman in a Kissel convertible near the stone entrance gate to the Pikes Peak Highway, near the city of Cascade, about 10 miles west of Colorado Springs. (About 1918; photograph by H.M. Rhoads)

A dashing 1920s couple pose by an automobile that proclaims the car's prowess in some of the early automobile races in Colorado, including the Pikes Peak Hill Climb. (Photograph by H.M. Rhoads)

Pikes Peak Cog Railway

In 1890, the Manitou and Pikes Peak Railway (the “Pikes Peak Cog Railway”) was built from Manitou Springs to the summit, enabling visitors to travel in comfort and enjoy the beautiful views along the 8.9-mile journey. In the early days, steam locomotives were used to push passenger cars up the mountain. Today, more than 200,000 passengers a year ride in modern Swiss-made railcars.

Steam locomotive and passenger car of the Manitou and Pikes Peak Railway on a steep grade along the route to the top of the peak. (Sometime between 1890 and 1901; photograph by Rose and Hopkins)

Manitou and Pikes Peak Railway (the “Pikes Peak Cog Railway”) steam engine and passenger car near the summit house and lookout tower at the top of the peak. Note the “cogs” in the center of the tracks. (Sometime between 1895 and 1910; photograph by L.C. McClure)

Steam locomotive no. 4 on an uphill grade of the Manitou and Pikes Peak Railway. (Sometime between 1892 and 1896; photograph by Rose and Hopkins)

Alfred E. Matthews' 1866 drawing of Colorado City and Pikes Peak. Founded in 1859, Colorado City became the first capital of the newly created Colorado Territory in 1861, which became the State of Colorado in 1876. Matthews was a well-known artist whose subjects included the Civil War and the American West.

Barr Trail

The peak was probably climbed by Native Americans long before the Pike expedition first saw the mountain. Spanish expeditions and French trappers and traders undoubtedly saw the mountain during their explorations and travels in the region before 1800. The first recorded ascent was on July 13–15, 1820. The climb took 3 days and was accomplished by three men, including Dr. Edwin James, a botanist with the Stephen H. Long expedition, which was exploring the region. Dr. James' study of the plants he encountered during his ascent of Pikes Peak was noteworthy, because it was the first study of alpine plants in the Rocky Mountains. Today, thousands of visitors each year make the strenuous hike up Barr Trail, which was constructed from 1914 to 1918 by Fred Barr, one of the founding members of the Pikes Peak AdAmAn Club. The trail twists and turns 13+ miles from the trailhead in Manitou Springs at an altitude of 6,300 feet to the summit at 14,115 feet. Each summer, runners from all over the world converge on the Barr Trail to run the 13.32-mile Pikes Peak Ascent, the 12-mile Barr Trail Mountain Race, and the tough 26.21-mile Pikes Peak Marathon.

AdAmAn Club

Starting in 1922 and continuing to the present, each December 30 and 31, the Pikes Peak AdAmAn Club hikes up the Barr Trail to the top of the peak. Along the way, during daylight hours on December 31, they flash mirrors to signal delighted residents of Colorado Springs who eagerly flash mirrors to signal back to the climbers. At midnight on New Year's Eve, they set off a spectacular fireworks display from the summit, and on clear nights the colorful display is visible from Colorado Springs, Pueblo, and Denver. The name of the organization is derived from their tradition of adding a man or woman to the club each year.

Seven members of the AdAmAn Club endure winter winds as they make their way up the peak to set off fireworks on New Year's Eve. (Sometime before 1941; photograph by H.L. Standley)

AdAmAn Club members make their way up Pikes Peak, braving the cold temperatures and blowing snow. (December 30 or 31, 1959; photograph by James Bates)

Geology

The orange-pink granite that makes up the peak formed when a large mass of molten magma solidified deep beneath the surface of the Earth about 1.1 billion years ago. Part of that granite mass was uplifted starting about 15 million years ago and especially about 7–4 million years ago. Such geologically recent uplift is responsible for the great height of the peak (the summit is 14,115 feet above sea level). Millions of years of erosion by wind, running water from rainfall and melting snow, and Ice Age glaciers have helped sculpt the mountain into its current form.

Today, the U.S. Forest Service and the city of Colorado Springs (in cooperation with other cities and counties in the region and with other government agencies) are co-stewards of the

mountain, balancing the demands for recreation, clean watersheds, and protection of the scenic forests, fragile alpine tundra, and diverse animal life on the mountain.

Except as noted, all photographs and images are courtesy of the Denver Public Library Western History and Genealogy Department and the U.S. Geological Survey.

Some of the historical photographs, sketches, and engravings have enhancements that are meant to complement the overall publication design. We are careful not to alter the context of these wonderful visions of an era but, rather, to use them to evoke a sense of time and place.

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GIP 32

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