

Mountain Park NEWS

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Emphatically Silent

Lookout Point. I don't know why, but when I set aside the afternoon of this day to be out in the park, Lookout Point kept coming up as where I needed to be. So, here I am, on this lichen covered hunk of granite that looks out over Devil's Canyon, and a thousand trees climbing the ridge to the southwest, and the meadows that surround the old rodeo arena. Attached to the rock is a pipe railing, dark brown with age. A small patch of cement has the date Oct. 17, 1934 carved into it, indicating a date when this railing was worked on up here.

All alone on this ancient rock under a gentle sky, I can't help but notice just how quiet this place is. I pause to listen, and I hear no sounds at all for long stretches. Except for the very occasional call of a mountain chickadee, a Stellar's jay, and a Townsend's solitaire, Lookout Point is bathed in complete silence. And so am I!

The sound of my pen moving across the page of my journal is even an intrusion, so I stop writing. Minutes go by. The silence continues. The weak sun becomes a bit stronger as a thin cloud slips past it. More silence. Thoreau wrote in his journal that "The longest silence is the most pertinent question most pertinently put. Emphatically silent. The most important questions, whose answers concern us more than any, are never put in any other way."

Hmm. Might this long silence be something more than just silence? Might it contain a question that I need to hear? I pause again and listen. Silence. The sun is getting stronger while it inches closer to the ridge line. I ponder just what such a question might be. Another long pause. More silence. Profound silence. How long must I sit here before a "most pertinent question" reveals itself? Then a few squawks of a flicker. Is the bird trying to tell me something? I am beginning to feel that I am thinking way too hard as I try to figure out what this important question is.

In an instant, the thought occurs to me that, although I don't know what the question is, maybe the answers are all around me. The ancient granite. The birds and the lichens. The sky and the clouds and the sun. The weathered railing and the thought that 80 years, 1 month, and 15 days ago, someone worked up here, probably sat right where I am now sitting with a few others. He enjoyed lunch while looking out at these same mountains, and maybe heard some



"I WONDER IF
THE SNOW LOVES
THE TREES AND
FIELDS, THAT IT
KISSES THEM SO
GENTLY? AND
THEN IT COVERS
THEM UP SNUG,
YOU KNOW, WITH
A WHITE QUILT;
AND PERHAPS
IT SAYS, 'GO TO
SLEEP, DARLINGS,
TILL THE SUMMER
COMES AGAIN'.
~ LEWIS CARROLL



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Executive Director / Founder

Audra Goodsell,

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Maintenance Director

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Rayleen Aguirre,

Business Operations Administrator

Located in Pueblo

Mountain Park in Beulah.

719-485-4444 • Fax 866-808-2484

E-mail: mpec@hikeandlearn.org

Website: www.hikeandlearn.org

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unless otherwise noted.

MPEC's Mission is to provide environmental education for the community in order to create a citizenry that understands, respects, enjoys, and cares for themselves, their families, their community and the natural world.

Mountain Park

Environmental Center

PO Box 99, Beulah, CO 81023

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of the same kinds of birds I've been hearing, and carved that date in some wet cement.

I imagine them as skinny young men, thankful to have the job of installing this railing, to do something worthwhile in the middle of the Great Depression. And suddenly they are right here with me. I can feel their presence. I can hear the sounds as they drilled holes into this hard rock and mixed the cement and cut the pipes. Their lives are long gone, yet they are still here in the fruits of their work that remain firmly cemented into this solid rock. I think of the hundreds of people I have brought here on countless guided hikes, and thousands of hikers before me, that leaned on this railing, that marveled at the view and the beauty and the peace of this place. I am filled with a feeling of immense gratitude for what those young men left here on this rocky point. They may be gone, but their good work remains.

Gratitude now becomes a part of my late afternoon experience at Lookout Point. And not only for the men that built this railing, but for the granite that I am perched upon, and the birds that punctuate the silence, and the sun that warms me, and my legs that brought me here, and for my ears that noticed the emphatic silence. And for the silence itself.

A small breeze is making me just cool enough to think about heading back down the trail. I can't say that the question hiding in the silence is any closer to being discovered. But it no longer matters. I put on my pack, and as I scramble up the rock towards the trail, I turn back and take another look where I've been the last couple of hours. The sentiments of John Muir come to mind, "In every walk with Nature one receives far more than he seeks." Such a perfect summary of my afternoon walk to Lookout Point.

~ Dave Van Manen

December 2, 2014

Clown Birds

By Dave Van Manen

As fall was working its way towards winter, I was looking for indications that our beary neighbors had finally decided to call it a year and slip into their dens for the cold season. The reason was my desire to put some seed out for the birds – I enjoy watching the juncos, chickadees and other winter birds at my feeders. I don't feed the birds when the bears are around, and so as November got closer to December, and I hadn't seen any bear sign for awhile, I figured it was time.

It wasn't ten minutes after filling a platform feeder with black oil sunflower seeds that an acorn woodpecker was at the feeder. And then another. These black chinned, red capped woodpeckers with white eyes, cheeks and forehead are rather odd looking at my feeders, and not only because they look like clowns. It was odd to see them because, up until a couple of years ago, one had only been seen once in this part of Colorado, fleetingly, on a MPEC Guided Hike by Paul Hurtado, over a decade ago.

Common in New Mexico and Arizona, it appears that they are working their way north, possibly coinciding with climate changes. They were positively identified in Pueblo Mountain Park a couple of summers ago, on a June Birding Hike, and have been around ever since. It is believed that they may have begun breeding in the park, although I don't know if that has been officially confirmed. The next time you are in the park, check out the large snag just west of the main parking lot in front of the Lodge – you just may get a look of these funny-looking birds.



This photo was taken by a hiker on an MPEC Birding Hike in June 2014 of an acorn woodpecker at the snag referred to in the article.

Reflecting as MPEC Turns Fifteen

By Dave Van Manen

It will be fifteen years this February since MPEC first opened its doors in Pueblo Mountain Park's caretaker house. Anniversaries always bring with them opportunities to compare where we are and what we've become to where we were when things were just getting started. I recently found a document that I had written in the year prior to that February day in 2000 when MPEC officially opened its doors. It provides a look at the thinking that ultimately led to the creation of MPEC. Here are some excerpts from that document:

"The vision for why there is a Mountain Park Environmental Center is a citizenry that understands the basic components of a healthy natural environment, including the need for wild areas, places where ecological integrity is the primary management objective...a society where people enjoy and respect Nature, and take pride in living in a manner that is sustainable and compatible with a healthy natural environment. This vision is a society that considers the health of the natural environment (other species, all peoples, ecological relationships) in all its decisions."

"The creation of such a citizenry is going to require many facets. Educating for such an ecologically literate society must be the foundation of such a societal change. In essence, such a society must be educated into existence. A vital component of such an education must involve providing opportunities for hands-on experiences in "wild Nature."

"We see MPEC's primary role in this process as providing programs where the community can access some of this education, with Pueblo Mountain Park as an ideal site for such experiential environmental education. Additionally, MPEC will reach less mobile members of the community through other kinds of programs (i.e. lectures, workshops), occurring primarily in Pueblo Mountain Park."

"Among those adults who have committed to advocating and working for the environment, it has been found that a common thread is very often childhood experiences where they could explore and "be" in Nature. Hence, an important part of MPEC programming will be providing such Nature-based experiences for children."

At this fifteen year juncture, it is clear to me that MPEC has stayed very much on course with this original vision. Sure, we have a lot more on our plate – we now manage and steward the 611-acre park, and we now run an overnight retreat center with our headquarters in the fully renovated Horseshoe Lodge. But, at the heart of why MPEC exists remains Nature education. The Lodge, the Park, the meals we serve in Arthur's Kitchen (named after the original visionary for Pueblo Mountain Park, Arthur Carhart), the buses and vans – it all rests on the foundation of connecting people with the natural world. If I was off, it was an under-estimation of just how much focus our programs would have on serving children. Bringing young people to Nature was always a fundamental part of MPEC's vision, but I did not envision just how many children we would get to work with each year!

Through the years, we have at times asked ourselves if this course is still the right one to be on? Is there still a need for Nature education? Are our programs relevant? Are we making a difference? Although it is clear – and sad – that we have not yet become *"a society that considers the health of the natural environment in all its decisions"*, it also seems very clear that the need for such a societal mindset has probably never been greater. As for the value of connecting children to Nature, such discussions always lead me to the same answer: bringing children to Nature is definitely good for the children, and it is counterintuitive to think that these children will have a better chance of caring for Nature if they do not have the experiences they have through our programs and which they would likely not have without MPEC.

A MPEC member recently sent this note: "My husband just went to a foundation conference and the keynote speaker was Philippe Cousteau Jr. (who is carrying on the conservation work and legacy of his grandfather Jacques Cousteau). He said you would have enjoyed hearing him because he talked all about the kind of work MPEC is doing, and that the only way to make environmental changes is to educate children in outdoor education."

Thanks Philippe!



Thank you Pam Kubly, Elaine Sartoris, Helen Philipsen, and Cindy Galvin for putting the autumn newsletter mailing together; Steve Douglas for the on-going mitigation work in the park's forests; Shannon McGarraugh, Lisa Vigil, Frosty & Sam Frostman, Jane Rawlings, Lamar Trant, David King & Nancy Harris King, Anne Johnson and all of those who we don't know your names for donating gloves and hats for our students; Shawna Shoaf for all the amazing graphic work; Mary Twinem, Elaine Lopez Pacheco, Warren Nolan and Rosalie Vigna, Jim and Paulette Stuart, and Mike Spahr for helping out at the Collegiate West program; Pueblo Diversified Industries for donating all sorts of things; Dale Alber at CSU-P for donating all the printed materials; Pam Kubly, Anne Whitfield, Elaine Sartoris, Helene Philipsen, Anne Moulton, Jan Myers, Carol Kyte & Becky Brown for putting the end-of-year letter mailing together;

Correction: In the Autumn newsletter, it was brought to our attention that the poem entitled My Help is in the Mountain, attributed to Nancy Wood, is actually a Ute Prayer.

MPEC's Amazing Rangers

By Audra Godsell

HERE ARE SOME QUOTES THAT RANGER SANDY HAS HEARD FROM SOME OF HER EARTH STUDIES STUDENTS RECENTLY:

"I WANT TO BE A RANGER WHEN I GROW UP!"

SAID BY A YOUNG MAN WITH HIS ARMS SPREAD WIDE AS THE GROUP CAME UP A HILL INTO A SUNNY MEADOW:
"IT'S LIKE NOTHING COULD GO WRONG TODAY."



SAID WHILE LYING ON THEIR BACKS UNDER THE PINES:
"I WISH I COULD SLEEP HERE ALL NIGHT."

"I'VE NEVER LAID DOWN ON THE GROUND AND JUST LOOKED AT THE SKY BEFORE. THIS IS SO COOL!"

Here at MPEC, employees are continuously encouraged to focus on and articulate the things we are thankful for. One of the things I am most thankful for, and I would like to tell you about, is MPEC's dedicated outdoor educators, who we refer to as Rangers. MPEC's Rangers do an amazing job teaching and investing in the 5th graders who come up to the park for our Earth Studies Program. This past fall I have had the privilege of shadowing some of our Rangers – I am consistently grateful for the individuals who work at MPEC. From teaching to all the behind-the-scenes tasks, it is evident that MPEC's Rangers believe in what they are doing. The Earth Studies Program in itself is a well put together program, but

without the right team of people making it happen it would not be as outstanding as it is.

Our Rangers come from a variety of backgrounds, from retired teachers to outdoor leaders, and each has his or her own style. It is obvious that Ranger Sandy enjoys teaching, and it is equally

evident that 5th graders easily engage with her and enjoy being with her. She works with her students in each activity and takes extra time to help students with their reading and writing. Ranger Marty spends his entire bus ride up to Beulah, which is unpaid, working with kids on their vocabulary and checking to make sure that they understand what they are reading, which in turn helps to make the teaching that will take place later in the day more effective for all of the Rangers. By the time we arrive at the park, the students are eager to be in Ranger Marty's group for the rest of the day. All of our Rangers are able to teach in all kinds of weather, they are able to handle and work with the many distractions that can come from teaching in the outdoors, and they are flexible, easy going, and quick to learn from, and help, each other.

Besides teaching, there are a million little ways that this team goes out of their way to

"GREAT THINGS ARE BROUGHT ABOUT AND BURDENS ARE LIGHTENED THROUGH THE EFFORTS OF MANY HANDS ANXIOUSLY ENGAGED IN A GOOD CAUSE."

~ ELDER M. RUSSEL BALLARD

invest in these children. Even though she might see hundreds of different faces each month, Ranger Taylor begins each day by having the students introduce themselves and share a little about who they are. She then remembers, and uses, their names throughout the day – a small thing that makes a huge difference in the day of a child. Ranger Grant loves to focus on building the kids up, starting with reminding them all that they are a team and there shouldn't be any negative talk or put downs throughout the day. He reminds kids to drink water by having them all raise their water bottles together several times as they "toast" the things they are grateful for, be it a kind act from a fellow student or the beautiful forest. Students love Ranger Tania; she plays her small flute for the students out in the field as a way to encourage the students to focus and listen. Tania finds joy in teaching and the kids love the enthusiasm she shares with them as she encourages them to ask questions and share ideas.

Not only are these children learning about the natural world, they are also spending time with amazing role models who care about and encourage them to care for the Earth and each other. When a child got sick on the bus, Rangers Penny and Grant were at her side at an instant to help out. They then stayed late to clean up the mess so their pregnant Program Director wouldn't have to – what a gift! If Ranger Pete jumps on the bus first, he is quick to sweep and help clean out the bus on his own time. The Rangers are always picking up trash on the bus and throughout the park, they bring treats for their coworkers, and help each other in numerous ways. They come in early on cold days to help get boots and hats ready for the students, they give each other rides, and they give of themselves to bless those around them.

The list of things I am thankful for about my job is a long one, but at the top of my list would have to be these individuals that I have the privilege of working with. The Earth Studies Program is amazing only because of the people who care about the program and are making it happen day in and day out – MPEC's team of Rangers.

Guided Hikes - Winter

Yes, get on your way to Beulah and participate in a Guided Hike in Pueblo Mountain Park. An MPEC Guided Hike is a great way to get outside and enjoy a winter's day. Snow cover is hard to predict – it may be snowy (in which case we'll

snowshoe) or it may not. Either way, it is best to dress in layers and wear good hiking shoes. Also, bring along plenty of water, and maybe a snack on these moderately strenuous hikes that are educational and fun. Unless otherwise noted, most hikes last from two to three hours and are appropriate for adults and children over 12. MPEC members free, non-members \$5. **Note:** If snow conditions are right during a scheduled hike, the hike may become a snowshoe outing. **Registration required: www.hikeandlearn.org**

"TODAY IS YOUR DAY! YOUR MOUNTAIN IS WAITING. SO... GET ON YOUR WAY." ~ DR. SEUSS

- **Sun, Jan 4, 1pm, First Hike of 2015** A great way to begin the New Year -- be outside, get some exercise, meet some new friends, learn some things about Nature - start the new year off right!
- **Sat, Jan 18, 1pm, "Zuke's" January Winter Walk Your Dog Hike** Your dog will enjoy some delicious, healthy Zuke's Dog Treats while we all enjoy a winter saunter in Colorado's southern foothills. Dogs must be leashed.
- **Sun, Feb 1, 10am, A Winter Morning Hike** Maybe there will be snow on the ground, maybe there won't. Either way, we'll be out along the trails, seeing what the land looks like in mid-winter.
- **Sun, Feb 15, 1pm, "Zuke's" February Walk Your Dog Hike** This is about the halfway point of winter... a perfect excuse to take a hike with your pup (or a snowshoe hike, weather permitting – and we have the snowshoes if you don't). Dress warm and be ready for fun and exercise. Dogs must be leashed.
- **Sat, Feb 28 1pm, Winter Wildflower Hike** By this time each year, the park's first species of wildflower, spring beauty, is sometimes blooming (sometimes as early as late January), so we'll be looking for them! Flowers or no flowers, it will be a terrific early afternoon hike.
- **Sat, Mar 7, 1pm, "Zuke's" March Walk Your Dog Hike** Another opportunity to enjoy a winter saunter with your dog(s), guided by Ranger Sandy. Dress warm and be ready for fun and exercise. Dogs must be leashed.
- **Sun, Mar 22, 10am, Spring Equinox Nature Quotes Saunter** The sun is halfway on its sky-climbing journey between its December low point on the winter solstice and its June high point on the summer solstice. We'll be searching for signs of spring as we acknowledge the equinox on this hike, inspired by the words of some terrific Nature writers (bring along a quote to share or not, we'll have several ready to inspire).

Yes!!! I want to join the Mountain Park Environmental Center and be a part of an organization that helps folks of all ages connect with Nature! Members receive the *Mountain Park News*, a discount on bookshop items and program fees, and the satisfaction of supporting an organization dedicated to the promotion of ecological literacy. Your Support is tax-deductible!

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MPEC's 2015 Summer Camps



It may be eighteen degrees outside, but we are getting excited about our 2015 summer camps. We love how MPEC provides so many children with precious summer days filled with Nature fun and life-long memories through our summer camps. We have camps available for children in Kindergarten, starting with our Little Kids Camps, all the way through 12th grade with the addition of our new Ultimate Mission: Wolf Camp (check it out below!).

Transportation from Pueblo is included in all of our camps, and through our amazing scholarship program we are able to send many children to camp at a reduced rate. Registration for camps will be opening on January 1st, 2015; many camps fill quickly so do not hesitate to sign up before spots are filled. Prices listed are MPEC member price (non-member price in parentheses). Please visit hikeandlearn.org for more information and to register for camp.

Little Kids Camp (Children entering K through 1st Grade): One of our most popular camps, children will participate in gentle hikes, music, Nature games, Nature exploration and stories. What a great way to introduce your children to the outdoors! Parents are welcome to attend as well! Camp runs 8:00 am – 3:00 pm daily. **Dates: June 8th – 12th or July 27th – 31st** **Cost: \$140.00 (\$150.00)**

Wonders of Nature Day Camps (2nd-3rd grade, and 4th-5th grade): Campers hike, explore, play Nature games, and participate in a variety of other activities with MPEC Rangers. Camp runs 8:00 am - 3:00 pm daily. **Dates: June 15th – 19th (for 4th -5th graders), or July 6th-10th (2nd-3rd graders).** **Cost: \$140.00 (\$150.00)**

Mountain Adventure Camp (4th-6th graders): During this five-day residential camp campers get to stay in the beautiful Horseshoe Lodge and participate in a variety of fun outdoor activities including hiking, challenge course activities, rock climbing, Nature games, arts and crafts and so much more. Campers also get to participate in a one night backpacking adventure within the Mountain Park where they will get to sleep under the stars. All meals are included. **Dates: July 13th-17th.** **Cost: \$370.00 (\$395.00)**

Survival Camp (5th-6th graders): This 3-day/2-night camp is perfect for any child who loves the outdoors. Campers gain knowledge of the basics of surviving in the woods using minimal tools and technology while spending their days out in the back country! **Dates: June 9th-11th or July 7th-9th.** **Cost: \$260 (\$280)**

Camp Mission: Wolf (6th-9th graders): A very popular MPEC summer camp; join us for this 3-day/ 2-night service learning camp where participants spend time with the resident wolves of the Mission: Wolf Sanctuary, volunteering their time and learning about the wolves. Hear the Wolves Howl!! **Dates: June 16th-18th or August 5th-7th.** **Cost: \$280 (\$300)**

Greenhorn Wilderness Camp (6th-9th graders): This 3-day/ 2-night camp is designed for young people with a love for Nature and physical activity. Participants will carry the food and gear they need up the Greenhorn trail through some of the wildest country in the area. **Dates: June 24th – 26th.** **Cost: \$280.00 (\$300.00)**

Ultimate Mission: Wolf!! (9th-12th graders): During our newest five-day camp, campers spend a day at the MPEC before heading over to Mission Wolf near Westcliffe to spend three days volunteering and learning about the resident wolves. The week is finished out by a rafting trip down the Arkansas River! **Dates: July 20th-24th.** **Cost: \$390.00 (\$420.00)**

Last fall, Nancy Sawtelle, who traveled to MPEC from Oregon to participate in Helene Van Manen's Retreat Leader Training at the Horseshoe Lodge, was very much inspired by her time here in Pueblo Mountain Park. Of course, this is no surprise to any of us at MPEC, as we all know how this place is so full of Nature's wonder and beauty. Here is a lovely piece that Nancy wrote:



Devil's Canyon

Solitary tree standing bold along the canyon rim, talk to me!
How did you emerge from such hardened places to stand alone in such beauty? You must be so old and wise and hold secrets that I need to know! In drought did you inch yourself along through the dust and when the rains came did you dance with the sunlight between the clouds until your arms held the sweet song of the chickadee? You are grander than you know as you stand there thriving in adversity and finding sustenance in all the dark places beneath you. I long to be like you – tall, strong and confident, embracing fear in any season.

~ Nancy Sawtelle, inspired at Retreat
Leader Training, Oct, 2014



We send a huge THANK YOU to all who have donated through new memberships, membership renewals, grants, memorials, donations to Ranger Dave's Hike, and other donations – your generosity keeps MPEC alive: Jill Moring & Howard Hayden, Mark Porter & Tristen Faith, (City &) County of Pueblo, Bernie & Mary Jean Abrahams, Tonia & Christopher Allen, Ron & Sandy Anderson, Kathleen Baiocchi, Phillip Barber, P.C., Marcia Beachy, Julie Birschbach, Barbara Blake, Kate Booth, Phil & Debbie Borchers, Mark & Brenda Brooks, Mari & Chris Burand, Beatrice Butler, Dave Van Manen, David & Carla Cackovic, Jim & Cori Cameron, Evan & Robin Cantor, Richard & Mary Cerveney, Sandy Christensen, Nancy Cipriani, Linda Clark, Jenna Kuzmiak, Pete & Polly Conlon, Barring & Anne Coughlin, Anne C. Courtright, Sheila Cover, Sandra Cunningham, Julie Dalton, Maria & Daniel Davis, Darryl & Barbara Della Rossa, Charmian Dickerson, Diana DiMara, Jim & Edith Edson, Carol Elkins, Barbara Faber, Royal & A. Jan Fausnaugh, Susan Finzel, Juanita Flanigan, Lynnae & Matthew Flora, Robert & Katryna Fredregill, Frosty & Sam Frostman, Gina Gallegos, Denise Garth-Evans, Carol Genova, Gail Gerig, Ann Goddard, Barbara Gohike, Betsy & Matt Goodwin, Mary Gradishar, Cathy Graf, Christopher Greene, Tom Gribben, Barbara Hadley, Dolores Hamilton, Holly Hanson, Gina & Shane Harmon, Cyndi & Dale Hart, Mike & Jan Hausman, Kathryn Higgins, Howard & Evelyn Hilt, Dorothy Holloran, Jacquie Huffaker, Marjorie Joy, Maureen Kelly, Doris Kester, Kathryn Kettler, Mark & Yvonne Klune, John & Laurie Knapp, Douglas Knepper, Abby Koehler, Carol Kronwitter, JoAnn Kuzmiak, Judith LaFollette, David & Linda Lambert, Jack Hunter & Lana Woodruff, Carol Loats, Elaine Lopez Pacheco, Patricia Lopez, Sally & Pat Mara, Joyce & Jack Markusfeld, Alex & Kathy Martinez, Barbara McCaslin Becker, Bill & Pok-Hui McKinney, Margaret McMenimen, Mike & Linda McMulkin, Lee & Wilbur Miller, Kathy & Larry Moore, Darwin & Laurie Mosier, Elaine Mubaidin, Lori Mugasis, Sergio & Megan Murillo, Luther Skeels & Nancy Sawtelle, Shirleen Neu, Dr. Christine Nevin-Woods, Patricia O'Brien, Naoma O'Neill, Maralyn Oestrich, Paul & Dermot McCarthy Orla O'Callaghan, David & Linda Overlin, Alysia & Mark Perry, Gary & Helen Philipsen, Marc & Sarah Pratarelli, Lou & Rosa Pratt, Jim & Jeanie Ray, Fran Reed, Rich Rhoades, Rev. Christine & Wilbur Richardson, Berna Rizer, Peg Rooney, Warren Nolan & Rosalie Vigna, Tim Sandsmark, Bryan & Julia Sanford, John & Elaine Sartoris, Jean Schloss, Dr. Jack & Donna Seilheimer, Maribeth & Pete Sisnroy, Fred & Clareann Smith, Jean Smith, Mike & Sanoy Spahr, Jack & Linda Stachler, Judy Staples, Barbara Stevens, Scott & Diane Stevenson, Anne Stokes-Hochberg, Stephanie Stowell, Jim & Paulette Stuart, Steve Hannon & Susan Steinway, Kerry & Derrill Swearingen, Carolyn & Ken Temple, Patrick Hyatt, Debbie & Douglas Tihonovich, Maria Tucker, Mary Twinem, United Way of Pueblo County, Joseph & Rhonda Violi, Regina Weber, Michael Wenzl, Brad & Michelle Whitney, Genevieve Willas, Carol Wright, Laraine H. Wright, Ann Zielinski, John Zondlo

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Walking in Winter

By Dave Van Manen

Charles Dickens wrote that "Nature gives to every time and season some beauties of its own."

My observations tell me that most folks experience less of Nature's beauties in the winter, because they do not get out as much during the cold months. Sure, going for a long walk when the skies are gray and the thermometer is hovering in the teens may not be as appealing as when the sky is blue, the flowers are blooming, and the air is warm. Sure, we all have our favorite seasons, and according to my unscientific surveys, few folks



consider winter their favorite. But missing out on so many of the joys and benefits that come with walking for the entire cold season, which is quite a bit longer than what is officially called winter, does not have to be. Here are five tips that just may help you get out the door to enjoy Nature's winter beauties.

1. Have the right clothes and have them ready to go. In Scandinavia it is said that there is no such thing as bad weather, just the wrong gear (Det finns inget dåligt väder, bara dåliga kläder). Layering is key, so you can peel when you warm up, and put back on when you cool down. A base layer – long underwear; one or more insulating layers – fleece, wool sweater; and a shell for wind or moisture. If you don't like to wear a hat for what it does to your hair, I suggest you get over it – hats are great and, in my book, essential winter wear. As are gloves or mittens – mittens are warmer if you are prone to cold fingers

2. Have the right footwear, and have them accessible and ready to go. You don't

need fancy, expensive mountaineering boots... just a good walking shoe with good tread. If it is wet or snowy, I like to wear gaiters, which are garments worn over the shoe and lower pant legs. They keep snow and other things out of your shoes. After your walk, if your shoes are wet, put them where they will dry so they are ready to go the next time you are.

3. Slippery conditions are one good reason for being hesitant about winter walking, but there are devices you can easily strap to the bottom of your shoes that reduce the chances of falling. I am not talking about heavy mountaineering crampons, but lighter and simpler versions that increase traction on snow and ice. Yaktrax (www.yaktrax.com) is one company that offer

several different models...I keep a pair of these ready to go whenever the conditions warrant them.

4. Get to know your walking routes and what they look like in the winter. Are there routes or sections of routes that are sunny only in the morning? Or a section that is in the shade and stays icy long after the last snow? Knowing what to expect can help you make the right choices to make your walk as good as it can be.

5. If you have the mindset that a short walk, of say only ten minutes, is not really a walk, then lose that mindset. Sure, you will get less exercise and see less on a ten-minute walk than on a 90 minute walk, but a short walk is better than no walk at all. Along these same lines, don't think that it's not a real walk unless you are in the mountains, or on the riverwalk, or in a park – Pueblo Mountain Park or any other park. A walk – being outside, moving your body, feeling the sun or the wind or the snow on your face, breathing fresh air – is a walk, regardless of where it is.

WINTER CLASSES, PROGRAMS & RETREATS AT MPEC

For all the details, pricing, and to register for these programs, go to MPEC's website at www.hikeandlearn.org and click on PROGRAMS. If you need assistance with registering on-line, or if you do not have access to a computer, please call 719-485-4444.



- **Winter Solstice Drum Circle** Weather permitting, we'll drum in the winter season around the fire circle. Sat, Dec 20, 6:30-8pm
- **Winter Break Day Camp** A great opportunity for 3rd-5th graders to have some outdoor fun! Mon, Dec 29 – Wed, Dec 31, 9am-3pm each day.
- **Nature Toddlers** Little ones get to experience the wonders of Nature with music, exploration, fun! Fridays at 10am: Jan 9, Feb 13, & Mar 13.
- **Homeschool in the Park** A perfect way to enrich the homeschooler's educational experience. Needle Felting; Leave No Trace Outdoor Skills: Fri, Jan 16, 8am-3pm. Outdoor Cooking; Weather and Watersheds: Fri, Feb 13, 8am-3pm.
- **Yoga in Nature Retreat for Women** One of MPEC's most popular programs – for all levels of yoga experience. Sat, Jan 24, 11am – Sun, Jan 25, 2pm
- **Ranger Dave's Collegiate West Colorado Trail Fund-Raising Concert / Slide Show** Lots of folks said they missed this in November, so one more time: Stories and photos from this summer's 90-mile trek, accompanied by live music! Fri, Mar 6, 7pm
- **Spring Equinox Drum Circle** Drum in the spring around the fire circle! Fri, Mar 20, 6:30 – 8pm
- **Wise Women Walking Retreat** Designed for women to walk, connect and experience the natural world with other women. Sat, Mar 21, 9:30am – 2pm

Details, costs and registration information on all of these programs (and other programs not listed here) are found at MPEC's website, www.hikenadlearn.org.



"WILDERNESS
ITSELF IS
THE BASIS
OF ALL OUR
CIVILIZATION.
I WONDER
IF WE HAVE
ENOUGH
REVERENCE
FOR LIFE TO
CONCEDE TO
WILDERNESS
THE RIGHT
TO LIVE ON?"
~ MARGARET
(MARDY)
MURIE

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RANGER DAVE'S COLORADO TRAIL SLIDE SHOW/ CONCERT

Over the summer of 2014, MPEC Executive Director Dave Van Manen backpacked the new 80-mile Collegiate West section of the Colorado Trail as a fund-raiser for MPEC's Nature Education programs. He is available to bring his popular, informative and entertaining program to your gathering, living room, or meeting.

- History of the Colorado Trail.
- Slideshow of gorgeous scenery.
- Hiking stories from the trail!
- Live music by Ranger Dave, performing some of the songs he kept himself company with along his many solo miles through Colorado's high country

Call 719-485-4444 or email mpec@hikeandlearn.org to schedule a program!

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