



THIN AIR

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CLIMBING CRESTONE PEAK AT 60

By Steve Nypaver III

Did you ever dread the thought that you were going to be sixty years old? And that you would not be able to climb some of the 14ers? I did, and so the thought of climbing Crestone Peak, as I lay awake in our tent with my wife Robin at South Colony Lakes, worried me. Crestone Peak, 14, 294 feet, in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, is not one of the “easy” 14ers.

I, Robin, and a 60 plus friend, Gordon Denison, left on Friday, August 22, 2008, from Colorado Springs to drive to the South Colony Lakes Road. This road is a rough dirt road, about six miles long. Gordon drove his Jeep Cherokee, because we hoped that we could drive all the way to the end of the road. If we could, we would only have to hike 1.5 to 2 miles with our packs to get to the camp site. When you are sixty, you look for every advantage that you can use. Last year I and Robin drove halfway up the road in an Explorer, but then we had to stop because the road

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HAMS Seminar Finishes Its 20th Year

The HAMS Seminar ended its 20th year with another successful series of lectures and presentations on the skills of high altitude mountaineering. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of Co-Seminar Directors Michele Graves and Margaret Turner the seminar sported an all star cast of world class mountaineers and expert lecturers instructing on the subjects of high altitude nutrition, medical issues, group dynamics, fitness, equipment and organization. Many thanks go out to Mike Teger, Dave Pelligrini, Steve Billig, Gary Neptune, Steve Bonowski, Skeet Glatterer, Debbie Welle-Powell, Todd Bublitz and Cleve Armstrong for doing an incredible job. The success of the HAMS Seminar, the HAMS Section and the HAMS School has been due to the tremendous efforts of volunteers like these who have given so many countless hours encouraging and promoting the arts, skills, knowledge and love of High Altitude Mountaineering. Our hats are off to all of you.



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was too rough. When we read recent trip reports on 14ers.com about the road, the reports seemed to say that the road was improved all the way to the end. As we drove up, we were glad to see that we could go all the way to the end. Lots of cars parked at the lot at the end of the road. The weather was beautiful for climbing, and others came to take advantage of it.

We put on our packs. Gordon said that his pack weighed 45 pounds. Robin and I usually keep our pack weight at 35 pounds, but we added more this time because we knew that we would not have to go far. When we came to the campsite area, Robin met Jo, a 71 year old woman who was on a CMC trip to Inca Trail with us. She and her nephew were in our favorite tent site, so we looked for another. We found one not far away, but noticed that lots of others were camped all around. Robin put up her tent while I went to pump clean water for our supper and for the next day. When you are sixty, you do not want to pack in water if you can pump it at your camp. I ate a MRE spaghetti with meatballs with a blueberry cobbler for dessert. The cobbler was delicious. Robin had a freeze-dried spaghetti, her favorite meal. You need your carbohydrates no matter what you age. Since it got dark at 8:00 pm, we went to sleep then too. When you are sixty, you tend to go to sleep earlier in the evening. And we wanted to get up early tomorrow to start our climb.

We were up at 4.30 am. I always have a packet of oatmeal, hot cider, and an energy bar for breakfast. I also ate some

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sport bean jelly beans for an extra boost. Paul, Gordon’s young son-in-law, had slept in Gordon’s jeep after he rode up with us from the lower parking lot. He came up to us around 5:15 am. We started at 5:38 am in the dark, using our headlamps to light the trail ahead of us. When you are sixty, you need to get an early start, since you move a little slower. A wooden sign marked the trail to Crestone Needle, which led to Broken Hand Pass. This was also the way we would go. The trail went up gradually, and then became steeper as we approached the top of the pass. Large cairns marked the lower part of the trail. Near the top, the trail has a lot of scree, so it is easy to slid and fall. (Robin, who came up later, slipped and fell and got scratches all over her legs and arms. Stumbles happen to you when you are over sixty!) Paul was in front, and hugged the rock wall on the right side of the couloir. We had read that a group improved the upper part of the trail, but we could not find the improved trail. Not finding the right trail - another possible problem of being sixty? As we got closer to the top at 12,900 feet, the wind started to blow unto us from the other side. From the top of the pass, we had a beautiful view of the west side, seeing the trail go down to Cottonwood Lake at 12,310 feet. It was nice to be able to go down, but we realized that we would have to hike back up the pass after we finished our climb of Crestone Peak. We certainly did not look forward to that ascent on our return.

So, we went down rapidly. We could walk quickly along the east side of Cottonwood Lake. We were looking for the “red gully” or “red couloir” on the Peak. We would climb up this gully to get close to the top of the Peak. We stopped when we reached the lower base of the gully, which seemed to go up endlessly to the sky. The summit of the Peak was off to the left, out of view. Gordon was going slowly, and I told him that I did not think that he could make it up and back in a reasonable amount of time. So we talked. I would go on, and Paul would stay with Gordon, rest a bit, and then they would go up. When you are sixty, you like to take rest breaks. Gordon wanted to see how it was and how he felt. The trail was good, marked with cairns, at the start. However, the cairns ended and the route was now to just keep going up. I radioed back to Paul, and then started up a smooth stretch of sloping Crestone conglomerate, using the friction of the boot sole to stay on the hard rock. Now there was a lot of enjoyable scrambling, going up the gully using your hands a lot to hold on, and some more friction climbing up a red slab of rock. Paul joined me, as he left Gordon, who stopped at the last part of the trail. We just kept going up. We could see the sand dunes far below to the southwest. Paul thought that we could summit by 11:00 am. But it seemed that the gully became steeper as we approached its top, and we went slower. Finally, we got there. Paul radioed to Gordon, and he thought that he could see us from his vantage point at the bottom of the gully.

Now we had to go along a ridge to reach the summit of the Peak. The footholds and handholds were good, so we moved confidently upwards. After about ten minutes, we went down a small cut and back up to reach the small summit of the Peak. Jo, the 71 year old woman, was there, along with a few others. From the summit, it seemed to be straight down on the north and east. The ridge to Crestone Needle looked to be truly formidable. I said, to myself, that I would never even think about using the ridge to go from the Peak to the Needle. The big lump of Humboldt was to the east. Kit Carson Peak loomed to the northwest. It was about 11:15 am on Saturday, August 23, 2008. I really felt good to be able to climb to the top of this challenging Peak in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Even though I was sixty years old, I could still climb a challenging 14er! And since Jo, at 71 years old, could make it, I believed that there were more good years of hiking and climbing in the Rockies left in me.

It was a long way down, and Gordon was already at the top of Broken Hand Pass when we started down. But we moved fairly quickly, sometimes doing a crabwalk as we faced out, other times facing into the rock to downclimb. Somehow the friction walking on the slabs of the lower part of the gully seemed more daunting, but we continued down. We felt relieved to reach the cairns that marked the beginning of the trail. Now we could move faster. We swiftly hiked along Cottonwood Lake to go to the trail leading back up Broken Hand Pass. I was really dehydrated and moved slowly going up. I had stashed some water about halfway up, and hoped that it would help. Paul, ahead of me, added some of his water to my stashed bottle. I drank half as soon as I reached it, but was still very thirsty. I saved the rest to drink with a gu when I reached the top of the pass, to give me some energy to go down. I always remember that Bill Houghton, who is also over sixty, would suck down a gu for an added boost on one of our ascents of an Andean peak in Bolivia.

At the top of Broken Hand Pass, Paul called Gordon, who was just reaching our camp. We asked Robin to bring up some water, and we would meet her as we descended. We went down, finding the improved trail that went down the middle of the couloir. Going down, and not needing to use as much energy, we moved well, but carefully. I meet Robin at one of the big

Call for Submissions for the 2008 HAMS "Climbers List"

HAMS is accepting submissions of names and climbs for the fourth annual list of higher or "exotic" peaks climbed by HAMS members.

Submit your climbs to HAMS.Expeditions@cmc.org (or mail to the CMC, attention: HAMS), please include, as a minimum: Your name, peak name, summit elevation, location, & date climbed.

This is similar to "The 14'ers List" and "Beyond the 14'ers," published annually in the Trail and Timberline, but a bit more -- well -- arbitrary. The rules, such as they are, include:

- 1) Climbs must be submitted by January 31 2009.
- 2) Only climbs during calendar year 2008 will be listed.
- 3) An effort will be made to recognize valiant attempts that failed to reach the summit. If this describes your climb, please also indicate the approximate elevation reached, and reason for turning back.
- 4) For all climbs, commentary and/or photographs are appreciated, and may be published at the discretion of the editor as space permits.
- 5) Finally, what constitutes a "higher or 'exotic' peak"? This is where it really gets arbitrary:
 - a) No Colorado peaks. Colorado has lots of peaks and routes which clearly deserve to be called "exotic," but HAMS doesn't want to be in the position of deciding which are, and which are not. If you've climbed one of these, you are invited to write an article for *Thin Air*.
 - b) Any peak outside of Colorado of 14,000 feet or more.
 - c) Lower peaks outside of Colorado that present a degree of difficulty, either in climbing or access. For example, Granite Peak (12,745) Montana, counts, Mount Sunflower (4,039) Kansas, probably doesn't. Unnamed 3,353, the highest point in Gabon, does.

SUBMIT YOUR OWN TRIP REPORT.

If you would like to submit your own trip report to be published in *Thin Air*, please send to Darin Spykerman at: spykerd@comcast.net. I'm sure others would love to read your story.

WANT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT HAMS?

VISIT THE RECENTLY UPDATED HAMS WEBSITE AT: WWW.CMCHAMS.ORG

INTERESTED IN LEADING YOUR OWN TRIP, TREK, OR EXPEDITION??

If interested, contact Jim Rickard [HAMS.Expeditions@cmc.org]

Upcoming Trips

Upcoming trips approved by the ExCom, as well as tentative trips in the planning stage are listed below. For more information, and for other trips offered by Adventure Travel, be sure to check listings on the CMC website at www.cmc.org/events/events.

To request an application for approved trips, or for even more information, contact the leader at the phone number or email shown.

Don't forget to submit your story to Thin Air!

You do not have to climb an exotic peak in a foreign country to be eligible for a submission! Please submit your latest adventure or other article to

spykerd@comcast.net

APPROVED HAMS TRIPS

Kilimanjaro, 19,340' Feb 7-21, 2009 \$5250, Including air,



Leader: Steve Bonowski (TRIP IS FULL)

SPECIAL SAFETY NOTE: as this is written on Feb. 1, '08, the present political violence in East Africa is confined to Kenya. Tanzania is not affected, and due to different tribes and government philosophy, likely will not be. We will offer the optional 3rd week extension to Mt. Kenya again if the situation in Kenya stabilizes.

We're back with the 7th Kilimanjaro trip sponsored by the Club's High Altitude Mountaineering Section. Kili is the world's largest free-standing mountain and is one of the fabled Seven Summits. We again will do the Machame Route and stay at the famous Marangu Hotel, first visited by Club members in the 1950s. The trip includes a four day budget safari to Serengeti, Lake Manyara, and Ngorongoro Crater. A series of training & get-acquainted hikes will be offered beginning in October. Nights are a mixture of a rustic hotel with full amenities, travelers camps, and tent camping. Excellent physical conditioning is required, and a high comfort level with 3rd world travel. Posted price includes air fare, lodging, ground transport, visa costs, Park fees, most meals, leader expenses, and CMC fee. Cost does not include shots, medications, travel insurance, bar tab, excess baggage fees, and a few meals. Final cost may vary slightly depending on air fares and currency exchange. Trip packets are available by regular mail only after March 15 from the trip leader, Steve Bonowski, at nztrekker@earthlink.net, or P.O. Box 280286, Lakewood CO 80228. No phone calls please.

Trip is approved and is now accepting applications



Parinacota (20,801'), Nevado Sajama (21,484')

Trek the Cordillera Real, June 17-June 29, 2009; \$3445

Here is your chance to climb in the spectacular Cordillera Real of western Bolivia as we tune up and adjust to the altitude. After a three day trek and some time in La Paz, we then head to the southwest corner of the country for climbs of two beautiful extinct volcanoes, including Sajama, the highest in the country. As we drive to the peaks, the high altiplano slowly gives way to the fringe of the Atacama Desert, the driest on the planet.

We will camp out in tents, with meals provided by a La Paz based outfitter. The outfitter provides all transportation, guides for the trek and mountains, and logistics support from porters and mules. Our four nights in La Paz will be in a comfortable two star hotel. In addition to the outfitter and hotel, the posted trip cost also includes air fare (currently running about \$1,500 round trip Denver- La Paz), Bolivian visa, most meals, gratuities, leader expenses, and CMC fee.

Cost does not include shots (yellow fever vaccination is required to enter Bolivia), personal medications, personal gear & equipment, meals in La Paz, travel/evacuation insurance, bar tab, and airline baggage fees. Final trip cost may vary slightly depending on air fares and currency exchange rates.

Participants will be asked to attend a planning meeting in January, 2009 as well as a number of conditioning hikes and climbs next spring.

Trip packets are available by regular mail from the trip leader:

Steve Bonowski, P.O. Box 280286, Lakewood CO 80228 or nztrekker@earthlink.net. No phone calls please.

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cairns, and drank a liter of water. I felt better, but was still thirsty. We descended to our campsite, arriving back around 4:15 pm. When you are sixty, it seems to take longer to climb a 14er. Back at camp, I just rested inside the tent while Robin and Gordon, who had napped in his tent, went to pump some more clean water from the stream below. Naps are also good to take when you are sixty.

After drinking some hot cider, Robin and I shared a yummy freeze-dried pasta primavera, and were inside the tent to rest and try to sleep at 7:00 pm. We did sleep, but not all the night. At daylight, at 6:00 am, we got up to eat breakfast and pack up. I met Jo, who said that it took her over thirteen hours to climb and come back; she thought that this would be her last 14er. Maybe when you are over seventy you should cross climbing 14ers off of your bucket list. But we felt great. We knew that our hike back to Gordon's jeep would be fairly easy, since we were going down and our packs would be lighter.

At the parking lot, Gordon's gas gauge showed empty, and he thought that he had knocked a hole in his gas line when we were driving up. We were really concerned about whether we would have enough gas to get down. When we reached the lower parking lot, we inspected the bottom of the jeep. Marmots had chewed the coating and some of the wire off of two or three of the lines under the Jeep. When we reached a gas station, and put in more gas, we found out that Gordon had plenty of gas. The marmots had just chewed the sensor line, and that made the gas gauge read empty.

After eating a six million dollar burger at a Carl's Jr., we arrived back home at 12:45 pm. We were really sore. We were sore the next day too. Though we could still climb a 14er at sixty, we would have to pay for it with sore bodies. But I soon started thinking of the next 14er.



**The High-Altitude Section of the Colorado
Mountain Club**

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