

THE EAGLE AND THE GOAT

By Ron WalkingInBeauty Johnson

A Mountain Adventure in the Colorado Rockies



Left to right: Linda Singing Waters, Ron Walking In Beauty, and Dee.

My wife, Linda SingingWaters and I live in Grand Junction, Colorado, a high desert town at 4,700 feet elevation in what is known as the "Grand Valley" in western Colorado. The desert canyons of western Colorado and eastern Utah are full of fascinating plants, animals, and ancient Indian ruins, cliff dwellings, and rock art from 700 to 1,100 years ago. Although this is high desert, summer temperatures often exceed 100 degrees which makes the mountains the preferred place to experience the peace and beauty of the Creator's hand.

So we spent the first week in September in friend Dees's Breckenridge, Colorado condominium, at 10,000 feet elevation in the Rocky Mountains. We climbed 14,000-foot-high mountain peaks, Mt. Democrat and Mt. Sherman. That is, Linda and Dee climbed both peaks. I only reached the top of Mt. Sherman having suffered from altitude sickness at 13,000 feet on Mt. Democrat and had to descend. Both days were nose-freezing cold with a 65 mph steady wind, resulting in a wind chill below freezing. Parkas, hats, and gloves were necessary as well as UV dark glasses to protect against the strong sun rays in the thin mountain air.

This is Bald Eagle country and the wilderness area near here is named Eagle's Nest. Today the eagles aren't flying – smarter that we are on such a blustery day. Though we ascended over 2,000 feet in elevation, we were mostly hiking, not technically climbing, having to use our hands only occasionally. Of Colorado's fifty-four 14,000-foot or higher peaks, only about a half-dozen or so require technical climbing for safety. We stay off of those and leave them to the brave, the eagles, the pikas, and the marmots (high elevation woodchucks).

After hiking the mountain peaks, we bounced along for several miles in Dee's Jeep Wrangler up a steep, narrow trail to the top of Teller Mountain. On a 12,000-foot ridge above tree line, we looked over wave after wave of deep valleys and high peaks clear to the horizon in all directions. We were blessed to

see 2 groups of Rocky Mountain Goats. A family of four grazed and rested without fear on the ridge top 50 feet from the Jeep, unaffected by our presence. A gift from the Creator. After leaving the mountain goats, it started to rain and hail. We quickly drove down to tree line since the roads here become even more treacherous when wet. In this area, earlier in the year, a woman died when the Jeep her husband was driving went off the road over the side of the mountain. She stayed in the Jeep and was killed; he was thrown out and survived.



After climbing peaks and navigating four-wheel drive trails, we spent several days hiking up valleys to alpine lakes near tree line at 12,000 feet elevation. The mountain valley trails along the creeks and through the evergreen and aspen forests are some of our favorite hikes. We hiked to 2 lakes located in bowls encircled by 13 and 14-thousand-foot peaks with last winter's snow still in the north-facing couloirs and ice forming on the edges of the puddles along the trail. The spring flowers still brightly cover the meadows lasting out the short summer season. Our third valley hike lead upwards through a pine forest alongside a creek which alternated between rocky waterfalls and quiet meadows full of active beaver ponds. It is here that we listen to the breeze and breathe in the fragrance of the pine needles which brings healing to the body and the spirit. And we listen to the voice of the Great Spirit who guides us along our individual life pathways. Only in the quiet can we clearly hear His voice.



"It is a good thing to quietly hope,

Quietly hope for help from the Creator God.

When life is heavy and hard to take,

Go off by yourself. Enter the silence.

Bow in prayer. Don't ask questions:

Wait for hope to appear."

~Lamentations 3:27-29 (The Message)