



returned home to Minnesota from my road trip out West. All those miles put on the pavement only to be hired an hour and a half from where I started. Colorado was my first choice, but it was just not meant to be at that time.

Fast-forward almost two decades. After changing careers from TV reporter to publisher of multiple Twin City family and senior publications, I now find myself back in the role of reporter and back in Colorado! I feel so fortunate to have been able to combine my passion for travel with my publishing interests and a return to reporting that has led me to another, albeit more relaxed, trip to this magnificent state.

So, I am proud to present in this issue's Travel Times column – the stunning state of Colorado!

Colorado is divided into 7 regions. My trip this past spring took me to the Southwest and South Central Regions of this spectacular state. Flying into the town of Telluride is an experience like no other. Words cannot describe the beauty of landing in the San Juan Mountains. My first night was spent in the small and charming town of Ouray. As you approach this darling town you pass over 8 miles of land owned none other than the King of Clothing—Ralph Lauren.

The town of Ouray was incorporated in 1876 and is known as “The Gem of the Rockies” This area is also described as the “Switzerland of America.” The crown jewel of this

breathtaking. Bring your camera fully loaded!

The next destination, on my second day, was the town of Montrose to visit the Ute Indian Museum. The museum is small in size, but chocked full with rich historical collections, artifacts and stories about the most noted Ute figures. The devoted staff is so eager to share their proud heritage and culture with every visitor that walks through the doors.

From Montrose I then started to work my way to the town of Durango. Approximately 35 miles northeast of Durango I spent the evening and following day at the Wilderness Trails Ranch. This unbelievable Dude Ranch is located at 7800 feet in the secluded Pine River Valley in the heart of the San Juan Mountains. The Roberts family has owned WTR since 1970 and the moment you arrive each guest is treated like one of their own! My stay here was truly one of the most memorable experiences of the trip. “A Blend of the Past and the Present” best describes this ranch that retains the charm of the Old West, while offering every modern amenity. Exceptional children's programs, that include fun, games and horsemanship training for ages 3-17, with an experienced and eager staff, ranks this ranch at the top of the “A” list!

My third day was spent in the town of Durango. Founded in 1880, it captures the true essence of Colorado. This particular part of Southwestern Colorado is one of the most scenic areas in the Rocky Mountains. The main attraction to experience here is the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad Ride, established in 1881 with

DISCOVER THE TIMELESS BEAUTY OF COLORADO

By Marci Mannis, Travel Editor

There are certain destinations in one's life that represent transition, change and growth. There are also times in an individual's life when the present matches up so perfectly with the past.

For me, Colorado was the destination and the time was college graduation. I was in hot pursuit of my first paid job as a reporter in the television news industry. Coming off a long stint at WCCO-TV, I packed up a car full of

demo tapes (carefully designed with the help of Dave Moore himself!) and headed west on Hwy 40. Eventually I lost count of all the small towns that I dashed in and out of for interviews and to plead for work. It didn't matter, Colorado was where I wanted to reside. Being surrounded by the magnificent mountains every day seemed very decadent to a young adult who grew up in the flat lands of the Midwest.

As fate would have it, I landed my initial TV reporting job shortly after I

town, when it comes to lodging, is the beautifully restored Beaumont Hotel dating back to 1887. After being closed for 30 years, this site has now been restored to its original elegance and luster. Put on the map for its mining of silver and gold, Ouray boasts small quaint shops, family run restaurants, mining tours and an amazing historical museum. The Ouray Box Canon Falls Park is simply

WEBSITES & NUMBERS TO PLAN YOUR COLORADO EXPERIENCE:

Colorado Tourism Office
www.colorado.com

Ouray Chamber Resort Association
www.ouraycolorado.com 800-228-1876

Montrose Visitors & Convention Bureau
www.visitmontrose.com 1-800-873-0244

Durango Area Tourism Department
www.durango.org 1-800-525-8855

Mesa Verde Country Visitor Info. Bureau
www.mesaverdecountry.com 800-530-2998

Pagosa Springs Chamber-of Commerce
www.pagosasprings.com 1-800-252-2204

Colorado Springs
www.coloradosprings.com 1-877-pikespeak

routes to either the Cascade Canyon or Silverton. A fun break in the day is touring Steamworks to taste some of Colorado's best brewed beer. I have to admit my favorite meal of the entire trip was in this bustling town. Dinner at Season's Rotisserie & Grill, with its exquisite flavors and beautiful presentation, is worth making reservations for before you leave home! Durango is known for their award-winning chefs who relocate to live here and show off their talents. You will not leave Durango hungry, only frustrated that you couldn't fit all the places into your itinerary!

Well rested from a lovely stay at the beautiful Strater Hotel, I was ready for a day of walking in the stunning Mesa Verde National Park. Gearing up to celebrate their centennial year, this park, established in 1906 to protect & preserve the dwellings of the Ancestral Pueblo people, is an internationally renowned World Heritage Site of both national and international importance. My fourth day in Colorado would not have been complete without witnessing these sacred archeological sites at Mesa Verde. The comical Ranger tour guide made this educational experience truly a memorable one.

Making good time and mileage in the mountains of Colorado, my next stop was Pagosa Springs. This little town stole my heart. It was there that I decided this article was meant for *Senior Times*. Every spot up to this point certainly catered to the family, but it was the seniors in each and every town that warmed my soul. I repeatedly heard stories from the engaging elderly locals about how long they have lived in the area after re-locating and how they have never looked back. "I have lived here all my life and have still

not seen it all," was a phrase commonly used by these active seniors. Clearly, this is a destination I wanted to share with the readers of *Senior Times*.

Pagosa Springs is a town with a proud heritage. It is named after The Great Pagosa Hot Spring which draws its name from the Native American tribes who discovered early on the spring's therapeutic and healing qualities. For me, staying at The Springs Resort was an ideal opportunity to experience every ounce of soaking in those therapeutic waters that I could get in before I headed to bed.

This town truly seems to be a happy town. Their active seniors are skiing past 80, hiking like college students and anxious to make anyone that passes the age test a member of the "Gray Wolves." Nearby Wolf Creek is one of Colorado's oldest ski resorts and it happens to have the most snow anywhere in the State. Another must stop near this charming town is Chimney Rock. The twin pinnacles and surrounding archaeological area were home to ancient people as well as serving as a landmark for European explorers and the area is still considered to be of spiritual significance. It offers visitors both beauty and a look into the past.

Just when I thought one more area couldn't possibly top the past few days, I entered into the Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve. This was a sight to be seen! On snowy days in Minnesota I will revisit the memory of this exquisite location nestled against the rugged Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The dunes are the magnificent centerpiece of a natural system whose age has been estimated anywhere from 12,000 years to more than a million years. After a glorious day of hiking the dunes, I was

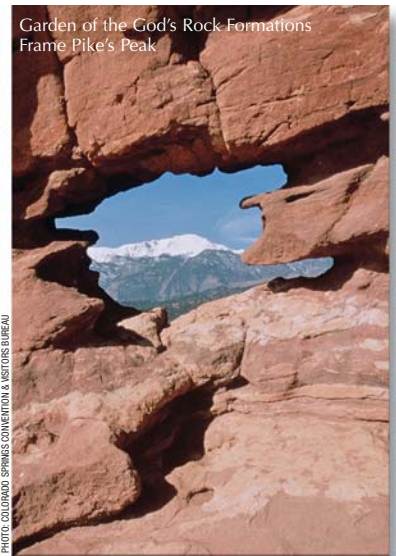
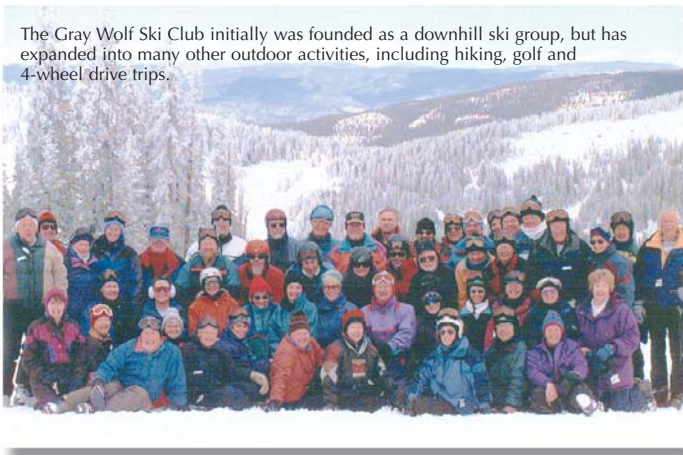


PHOTO: KELL MITCHELL
PHOTO: ARAMARK MESA VERDE COMPANY
PHOTO: COLORADO SPRINGS CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU



The Gray Wolf Ski Club initially was founded as a downhill ski group, but has expanded into many other outdoor activities, including hiking, golf and 4-wheel drive trips.

tired and parched. Once I drove into the bustling town of Colorado Springs, my energy came right back into my system. I quickly freshened up at the lovely Cheyenne Mountain Resort and headed out to dinner at the famous Broadmoor hotel that is steeped in timeless elegance. It was a wonderful last night in Colorado.

The day of my departure was topped off at Pike's Peak and the Garden of the Gods. These final two excursions summed up my phenomenal trip through Southwest and South Central Colorado. Pike's Peak is the inspiration for the song "America the Beautiful" and Garden of the Gods, with its remarkable rock formations, is a city park like no other. The natural beauty of these locations is simply stunning. Not only did I feel like I was in God's country throughout the week but I felt like the lyrics to "America the Beautiful" could have been rewritten as "Colorado the Beautiful."

There is no question that Colorado has not seen the last of this roaming Minnesota travel reporter. I am in love with this state. There is so much to offer for families and empty nesters. Whether you choose to fly or drive you will be assured one thing—a lifetime of travel in these parts will still not guarantee complete coverage. Just ask any one of the many enthusiastic natives and transplants around.

Finally, there is one big incentive to visit this area as a senior that I can't close this column without mentioning – significant ski lift ticket discounts for anyone that can show a driver's license proving their proud golden years. Now that is a reason to eat your vegetables and live a happy and healthy active life!

TIPS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

1. Hydrate, Hydrate, Hydrate! The high altitude can ruin a trip if you are not conscious of the significant change. The key is to hydrate before, during and after your trip.
2. Bring an abundance of sunscreen. The power of these rays are not to be tested even with the strongest of skin types.
3. Bring at least 2 pair of durable shoes. The hiking in rough terrain can put your tennis shoes to the test.
4. Dress in layers when you head out each day. It starts off very cool in the mountains, but the heat increases throughout the day. Comfort is key in Colorado!
5. No need to pack too fancy. Fashion is in the eye of the beholder. No one cares what you look like; they are too busy admiring the mountains.
6. Be prepared to extend your plane ticket. If you are like me, I almost intentionally missed my flight home!