



NOVEMBER 2014

THE MOUNTAIN EAR

The Monthly Newsletter of the Rocky Mountaineers



Climb. Hike. Ski. Bike. Paddle. Dedicated to the Enjoyment and Promotion of Responsible Outdoor Adventure.

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The Mountain Ear is the club newsletter of The Rocky Mountaineers and is published at the end of every month. Anyone wishing to contribute articles of interest are welcomed and encouraged to do so - contact the editor.

Membership application can be found at the end of the newsletter.

ABOUT THE CLUB:

Mission Statement:

The Rocky Mountaineers is a non-profit club dedicated to the enjoyment and promotion of responsible outdoor adventures.

Meetings and Presentations: Meetings are held the second Tuesday, September through May, at 6:00 PM at the Trail Head. Each meeting is followed by a featured presentation or speaker at 7:00 PM.

Please be sure to check out our **Facebook group** to receive the latest up-to-date news and post short-notice trip proposals:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/rockymountaineers/>

Cover Photo: Fall's snow coats the upper part of the trail to Ward Mountain, Bitterroots. Photo by Dan Saxton.

TRIP REPORTS

Saturday, November 8, 2014 - Bass Creek

A few of us set out for this hike on a perfect blue sky day. Remember how warm it was less than a week ago? Participants were Lois C., Fred S., Julia K., me (Steve), and wife Cathy Bee. The Bass Creek Day Use area is confusing, with many trails and loops. For instance, we started up a loop sometimes called the Fire Ecology Trail, and sometimes called the Ecology Trail, bypassing the Nature Trail and the Bass Creek Fitness Trail (which I don't think was ever developed).



A nice time in the woods! Photo by Steve Schombel.

I had an old brochure for the Ecology Trail, so we found several numbered stations and Julie read out the reports. Then we reached a junction called O. Apparently the Bass Creek Day loop trail is also called the Larry Creek Loop Trail #128, and in the beginning follows the same tread as the Ecology Trail. Or maybe not. Anyhow, we were following red and yellow diamonds, one of which was for the Larry Creek Loop, but was called by the other name. The other color of diamonds was for the shorter Ecology Trail, but I didn't know which color was for which. To add to the confusion, there were some blue diamonds at junction O on a trail heading uphill, so I guessed this was the trail to take. Wrong, but not a serious mistake. We ended hiking over a mile on the Larry Creek Loop Road, which was closed to traffic this

time of year, to another junction on the map. Here we found the trail we wanted to take back to the car. Even this trail had unexpected branches coming in and out, perhaps user trails. We never did get to the loop that goes to the northern edge of the area, but we got back to the car with no trouble.



Little waterfall along the way. Photo by Steve Schombel.

Actually we had a very nice day, despite taking a wrong turn. It was perfect weather with pretty fall colors and so clear we could see mountains far away. Back at the parking lot there was a large sign which showed the current trails with corresponding numbers and letters for junctions. It would be wise to see if you can get a brochure with this newest map before hiking in the area. Or just go out and explore, I'm glad I did. *Steve Schombel*

UPCOMING TRIPS AND ADVENTURES

Trip Notes:

Please contact the trip leader for more information regarding any listed trips. Mileage listed is round trip mileage. Elevation listed is gain only. For information on Class Rating see below:

Class Rating System

CLASS 1 – HIKING Mostly on trails, but may also include some easy cross country travel.

CLASS 2 – EASY SCRAMBLING Rugged off trail hiking, no hands required.

CLASS 3 – SCRAMBLING Use of hand to ascend some sections of rock. Little to no exposure; a fall would not likely cause serious injury.

CLASS 4 – CLIMBING Easy climbing, great exposure; a fall would quite possibly cause serious injury. Use of a rope and protection at times possible.

CLASS 5 – TECHNICAL CLIMBING Use of rope, protection and belay are a must.

CLASS 6 – AID CLIMBING Use of equipment to support your weight as you climb.

Saturday, December 20, 2014 - CHIEF JOSEPH XC SKI

Description: I will be going to the classic XC ski race at the Chief Joseph ski area. If others want to join me to race or just to ski, we can car pool.

Leader: Alden Wright - ahwright@rockymountaineers.com

Saturday, December 27, 2014 - SKI TRIP (Location TBD)

Description: I'd like to do a ski trip on Saturday, 12-27. I'd lean toward Lubrecht, there should be enough snow then, and you can bring your dogs. If conditions look better at Lolo Pass we could go there. I will have a better idea of the particulars of the trip in a couple of weeks - check Facebook and the website or contact me by email.

Leader: Steve Schombel - ssbell@rockymountaineers.com

The Rocky Mountains: Making Sense of Them All



Valhalla Range, Selkirk Mountains, British Columbia.

To occupy us through the darkest days of winter, I thought it would be a great idea to give a three-part presentation on the geographical organization of the Rocky Mountains, so that we can better understand this marvelous, complicated, and diverse range that we live in. First, some introductory remarks.....

The Rocky Mountains form part of the backbone of the North American cordillera. They provide some of the most striking scenery in America and Canada - who can forget the Maroon Bells, the Tetons, Glacier National Park, or the Canadian Rockies? The Rockies have stunning diversity - from island ranges to rolling hills to stupefying, craggy peaks to lush, vegetated heights. Ironically, this very diversity makes deciphering the Rocky Mountains' organization somewhat problematic. This series of three installments will give an overview of the magnificent Rockies, showcasing their most important peaks as well as providing some sense of the Rockies' complex geography. I have spent most of my life studying the Rocky Mountains, and to some extent the way into which I divide the Rockies reflects my own personal opinion but an opinion that is well-informed by studying and pondering the various classifications that geographers have offered. I have minimized political boundaries in my consideration since they often present distorted perspectives of the unity of a mountain range, especially by how they affect naming conventions.

The Rocky Mountains are generally considered to go from northern New Mexico (around Santa Fe) to the Liard River in northern British Columbia. Some extend them all the way down to Texas and the Big Bend, but these belong more properly to the desert ranges/Sierra

Madre Oriental cordillera. On the other end, some classify the Mackenzie Mountains and all the remote ranges of the Yukon and Alaska as the Rockies, but this clearly stretches the name too far and ignores a major break in the mountain geography.



North Raker, Sawtooth Mountains, Idaho.

I feel that the Rocky Mountains can be subdivided into three main areas: Southern, Central, and Northern Rockies. Here is a simple breakdown:

1. Southern Rockies - New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho

- A. Southern Colorado/Northern New Mexico - San Juans, Sangre de Cristos
- B. Northern Colorado/Southern Wyoming - Sawatch, Front Ranges
- C. Utah/Southern Idaho - Uinta & Wasatch Ranges

2. Central Rockies - Idaho, Wyoming, Montana

- A. Greater Yellowstone - Wind Rivers, Tetons, Absarokas, Beartooths, Bighorns
- B. Island Ranges - Plains Ranges, Montana Ranges (Tobacco Roots, Pioneers, Pintlers), Idaho Ranges (Beaverheads, Lemhis, Lost Rivers)
- C. Interior Ranges - Pioneers, Sawtooths, Salmon River Country, Bitterroots

3. Northern Rockies - Montana, Idaho, eastern Washington, Canada

- A. Interior Ranges (Columbia Mountains) - Cabinets, Purcells, Selkirks, Monashees, Cariboos
- B. Great Rockies - The Bob/Glacier Country, Banff, Kootenay, Yoho, Jasper, Robson, Kakwa Parks
- C. Far Northern Rockies - Pine Pass northward to Liard River - Muskwa Ranges



I will cover each of these areas in separate newsletters; the Southern Rockies will be displayed in this issue, the Central Rockies in the December newsletter, and the Northern Rockies in the January newsletter.

One interesting thing about the Rockies is that even though they are highest in the south, the vertical relief of the peaks increases the further you go north due to increased glaciation and deeper valleys - a striking illustration is shown by the following list of the 20 most prominent peaks in the Rockies (**USA summits in bold**):

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Mount Robson | (12,972', P = 9,281') |
| 2. Mount Elbert | (14,433', P = 9,093') |
| 3. Mount Sir Wilfrid Laurier | (11,535', P = 8,950') |
| 4. Mount Sir Sandford | (11,545', P = 8,881') |
| 5. Mount Odin | (9,744', P = 7,900') |
| 6. Mount Monashee | (10,741', P = 7,887') |
| 7. Mount Columbia | (12,273', P = 7,818') |
| 8. Mount Cooper | (10,151', P = 7,608') |

9. Mount Ulysses	(9,921', P = 7,510')
10. Gannett Peak	(13,804', P = 7,079')
11. Cloud Peak	(13,167', P = 7,077')
12. Mount Farnham	(11,460', P = 6,965')
13. Mount Assiniboine	(11,863', P = 6,844')
14. Gladsheim Peak	(9,285', P = 6,745')
15. Mount Dawson	(11,079', P = 6,709')
16. Mount Edith Cavell	(11,033', P = 6,585')
17. Grand Teton	(13,770', P = 6,550')
18. Kings Peak	(13,528', P = 6,348')
19. Mount Goodsir	(11,703', P = 6,191')
20. Borah Peak	(12,662', P = 5,982')

Topographic prominence, simply stated, is the rise of a peak above the saddle connecting it to the next higher peak (more details at www.peaklist.org). Note especially that only one Colorado peak is on this list (the apex of the Rockies, of course) and that a lot of much lower peaks in Canada have quite impressive prominences. Mount Robson, in my opinion, very much deserves the top spot as it is *the single most dominant mountain in the Rockies*, the only one among them all with a single 10,000-foot drop to the valley below.



Mount Robson, the most prominent peak in the Rocky Mountains.



Mount Elbert, highest peak in the Rocky Mountains.

I'm sure many of you are curious about these impressive Canadian peaks which are not as well-known, but further details will have to wait until Part 3 in January! (Or you can go to www.bivouac.com to check them out early)

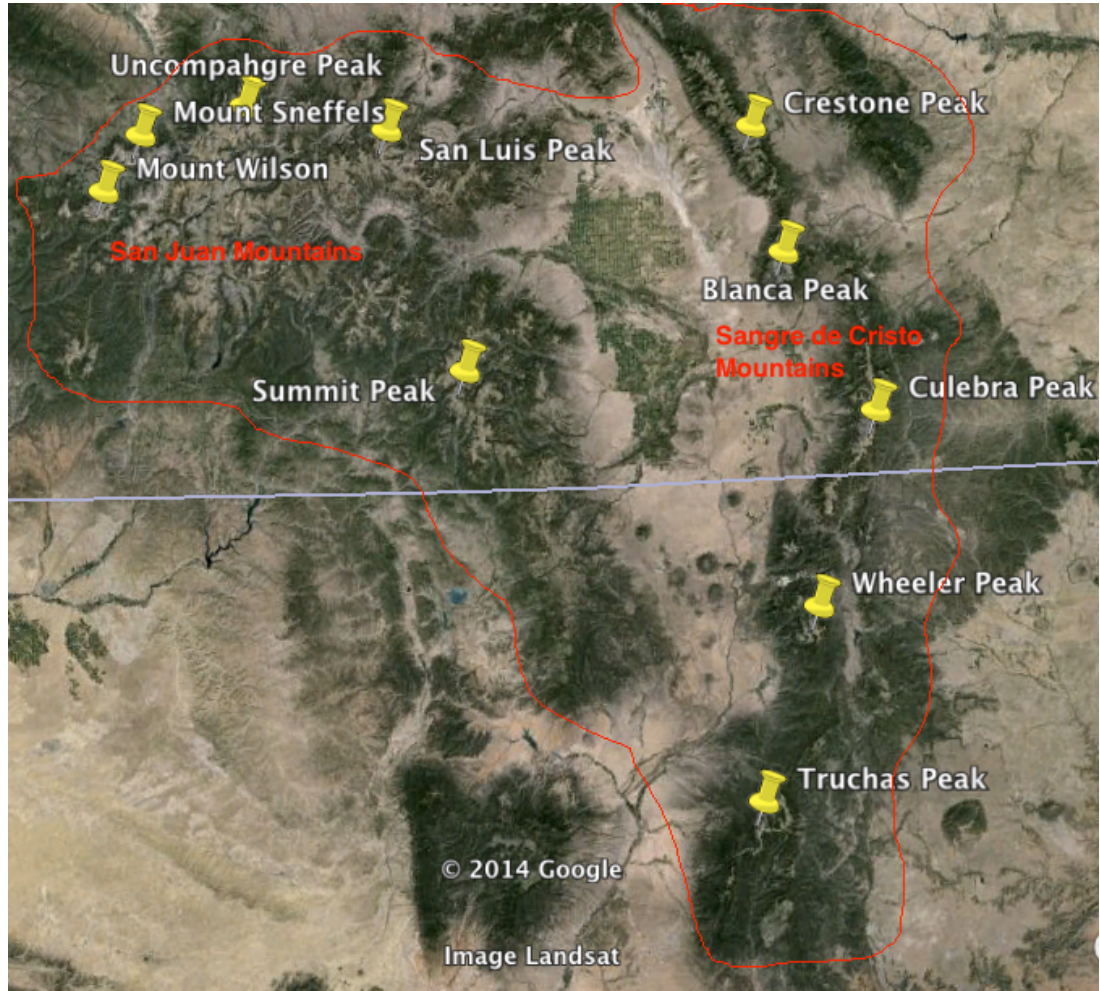
I realize that many of you have much more personal experience exploring the Rockies than me, so I definitely welcome any additional observations, expression of concerns about how I may have categorized things, or outright corrections to errors. But the main purpose of this presentation is simple: how may we have a better idea of how to explore and enjoy the majestic Rockies? It'll be a great ride.....

Southern Rockies



This section of the Rocky Mountains is the highest and most popular area, with two major metropolitan areas (Denver and Salt Lake City) providing great numbers of climbers and explorers. The mountainous country is rather extensive and interconnected all the way from New Mexico to Wyoming, while the Uintas and the Wasatch of Utah are visibly separated from their higher Colorado brothers. All of the Rockies' 14,000-footers are located in Colorado, and Colorado also boasts the greatest amount of land above treeline in the USA Rockies. In all, this is a fabulous area to climb in with no shortage of excellent peaks and routes; about the only major detraction is a lack of widespread wilderness feeling, since these mountains have been so extensively explored and documented both in print and online, and many routes and paths have been worn into the landscape. But for those who enjoy having company, this may very well be the part of the Rockies you find your ideal home in.

A. Northern New Mexico/Southern Colorado



The Rockies rise from the desert country of New Mexico just north of Albuquerque and Santa Fe, in two main ranges: the San Juans and the Sangre de Cristos.



Southern San Juan Mountains.

The San Juans provide some of the most diverse country in Colorado, from sweeping, open tundra expanses to jagged heights, mainly composed of volcanic rock, with some quartzite (especially in the Grenadiers area near Silverton). They are generally considered to begin just north of Cumbres Pass on the CO/NM border, although I've extended the Rockies down a bit into northern New Mexico since that area is still somewhat connected to the higher San Juan country. But the true alpine country indeed begins north of Cumbres Pass.

Your best bet for wilderness is the southern San Juans south of Wolf Creek Pass (<http://www.summitpost.org/south-san-juan-range-colorado/405344>). The highest point there is **Summit Peak (13,300', P = 2,760')**. Another good place to go to is the remote corners of the Weminuche Wilderness, especially in the Grenadiers and Needles areas. The major summits of the San Juans tend to be positioned around the edges of the range, such as **Mount Wilson (14,242', P = 4,026')**, **Mount Sneffels (14,150', 3,050')**, **Uncompahgre Peak (14,309', P = 4,249)**, and **San Luis Peak (14,014', P = 3,114')**. See <http://www.summitpost.org/san-juan-range/171122>. Attractive old mining/tourist towns such as Telluride, Ouray, and Silverton are well-known.



Mount Sneffels.



Truchas Peak.

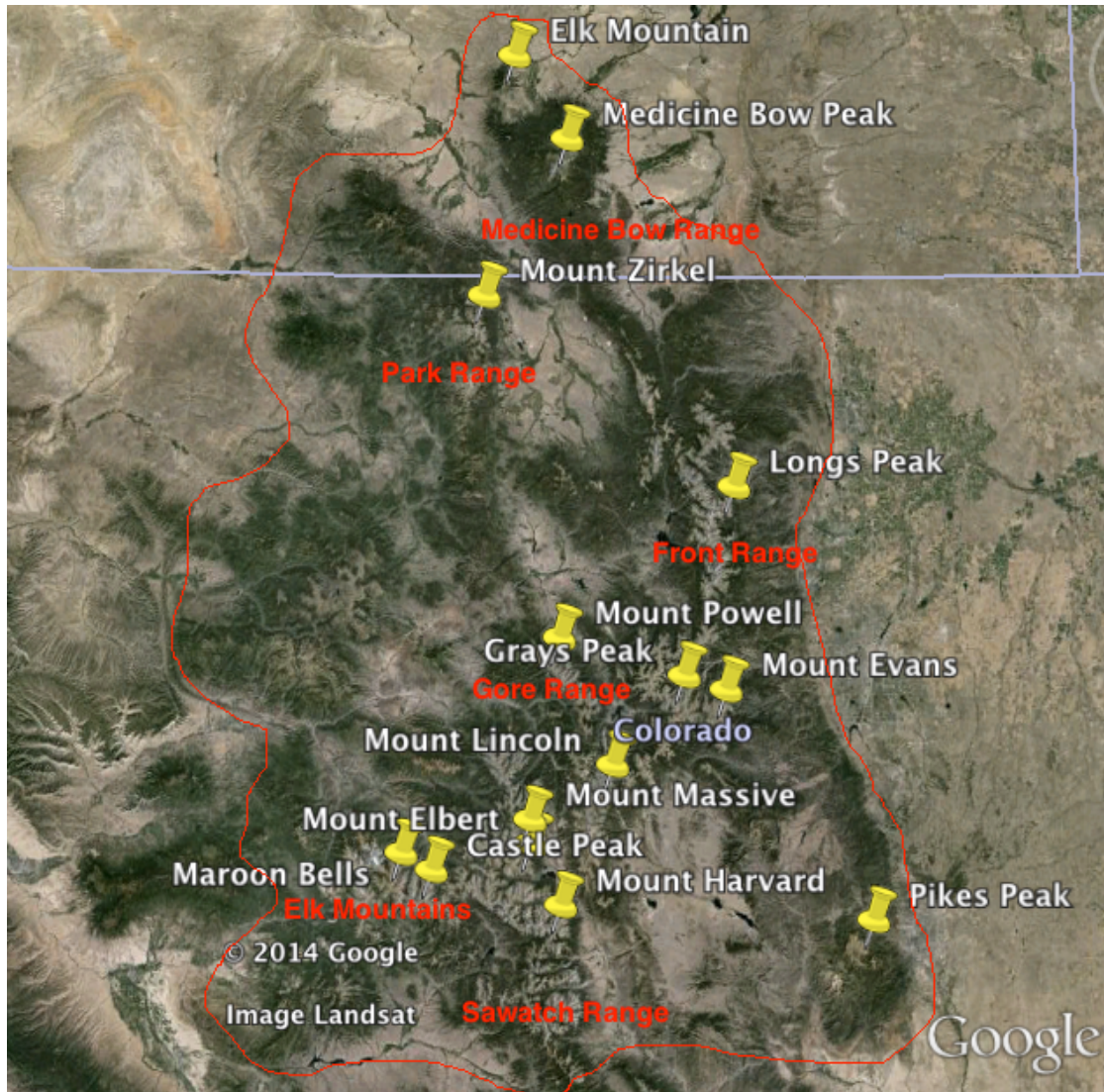
The Sangre de Cristo Mountains (<http://www.summitpost.org/sangre-de-cristo-mountains/171124>), in contrast with the San Juans' cluttered mass, tend to present one long narrow fault-block spine snaking from Santa Fe to just south of Salida, CO, where they link up with the Sawatchs. The most important New Mexico summits are **Truchas Peak (13,102', P = 4,002')** and **Wheeler Peak (13,161', P = 3,421')**. Once the Sangres enter Colorado, they rear up to even higher heights, starting with **Culebra Peak (14,047', P = 4,827')**, the Fourteener most notorious for elusive public access (at least more so in the past). The Sangres

culminate in **Blanca Peak (14,345', P = 5,325')**, and their most dizzying ramparts are topped by **Crestone Peak (14,294', 4,554')**. They are among Colorado's steepest mountains, and the Crestone Peaks are just a shade below technical rock climbing. In all, the San Juans and Sangres have some of Colorado's most difficult Fourteeners. They are a worthy beginning for the great Rockies.



The Crestone Peaks.

B. Northern Colorado/Southern Wyoming



The Sawatch Range (<http://www.summitpost.org/sawatch-range/171834>). is the highest mountain mass in the Rockies, and yet not especially rugged, many of its peaks being rather rounded. Its highest peaks, **Mount Harvard (14,420', P = 2,360')**, **Mount Elbert (14,433', P = 9,093')**, and **Mount Massive (14,429', P = 1,959')** all have well-traveled paths to their summits. This, however, makes them great peaks for beginners just starting out.



Huron Peak view south.



Across the valley from the Maroon Bells, the much less-photographed but still stunning Pyramid Peak.

Just west of the Sawatchs are the Elk Mountains, which are at the other extreme of difficulty level - they host some of Colorado's most rotten and difficult Fourteeners overall, yet the striking sedimentary beauty of the Maroon Bells (**South Maroon Peak, 14,156', P = 2,336'**) is unsurpassed. **Castle Peak (14,265', P = 2,365')**, the highest summit, is an easy climb by Elks standards. <http://www.summitpost.org/elk-mountains/171580>.

In between the Sawatch and Front Ranges are the Mosquito/Tenmile/Gore Ranges, which also host some fourteeners, most notably **Mount Lincoln (14,286', P = 3,866')**. The Gore Range merits special mention as one of Colorado's most spectacular and wild ranges. It has no Fourteeners, but is full of wonderful, challenging peaks - most of which are actually officially unnamed but have been dubbed by climbers with the letters of the alphabet ("Peak C," "Peak Z," etc.). Their highest summit is **Mount Powell (13,580', P = 3,000')**. <http://www.summitpost.org/gore-range/170958>.



The majestic Gore Range.

The Front Range (<http://www.summitpost.org/front-range-co/170949>) rises from the Great Plains, mostly first in foothills for about 5,000 feet and then to the high crests in another 5,000 feet. The famous **Pikes Peak (14,110', P = 5,330')** is one of the few exceptions, towering 8,000 vertical feet abruptly above Colorado Springs. Take your pick of three ways up there - by trail, by railroad, or by auto road. But it is actually **Mount Evans (14,264', P = 2,764')** some distance further north which has the highest road in America. **Grays Peak (14,270', P = 2,770')** is notable for being the highest point atop the Continental Divide in the USA. The Front Range reaches its scenic apex in the Indian Peaks area and Rocky Mountain National Park, where Trail Ridge Road provides easy access to the high country. The most distinguished and classic mountain in Colorado is located in the Park - **Longs Peak (14,255', P = 2,955')**, renowned for its unique Keyhole scramble route which traverses along sheer vertical sides in an almost complete spiral to the plateau summit.



The Narrows along the Keyhole Route on Longs Peak.



Medicine Bow Peak, Snowy Range, WY.

In northernmost Colorado, the main spine of the Rockies splits into two and continues into Wyoming - as the Park and Medicine Bow Ranges. The Continental Divide runs along the Park Range, reaching its apex in **Mount Zirkel (12,180', P = 3,470'; some people consider this Colorado')**. The Medicine Bows' most notable (although not highest) summit is **Medicine Bow Peak (12,013', P = 3,243')** in Wyoming, and the main heap of the Southern Rockies come to an abrupt end in the massive hulk of **Elk Mountain (11,156', P = 3,306')** above I-80 west of Laramie, WY. <http://www.summitpost.org/medicine-bow-mountains/616371>.

This area of the Rockies, thanks to its close proximity to the Denver area, is the most traveled section of all, yet it has so many excellent opportunities that anyone who lives in the area must consider themselves blessed.

C. Utah/Southern Idaho



Between the main mass of the Colorado Ranges and the Uintas, there is a “break” in the Rockies where the lowlands of the Colorado and Green Rivers intervene. It is difficult to demarcate a definite line between the “Colorado Plateau” and the Rockies in this area (note especially where I have drawn the line in western Colorado, excluding the big mesas and plateaus; I consider Utah’s La Sal Mountains to be part of the Colorado Plateau area proper), but the universal general consensus has the Uinta Mountains and the Wasatch Mountains (at least as far south as Mount Nebo) firmly in Rockies territory.

The Uinta Mountains are the only major Rocky Mountain range that run east-west. They present a fantastic array of beautiful high country that takes time to get into, and are what people think least of when they consider Utah (such is the incredible diversity of that state, from canyons and desert to snowcapped peaks!). **Kings Peak (13,528’, P = 6,348’)**, the highest summit in Utah, is firmly in the center of the Uintas and can be done in a long dayhike, but most people camp for it. There are still some corners of the Uintas that have not been well-traveled, so there’s several great opportunities for solitude! <http://www.summitpost.org/uinta-mountains/171192>



A classic slice of High Uinta country.

The Wasatch Mountains are the “western front” of the Rockies, and dramatically so. For much of their length, they abruptly rise 6,000-7,000 feet above the salt flats to the west, dry and barren save for the thin strip of fertile country at the base of the mountains that the Mormon pioneers found to be their Promised Land. **Mount Nebo (11,928', P = 5,488')** at the southern end is the monarch of the Wasatch, but **Mount Timpanogos (11,750', P = 5,269')** is its most famous and impressive massif, even harboring glacier remnants in its north cirque. The solid granitic high country of the Cottonwood Canyon peaks (**American Fork**



Twin Peaks, 11,489', P = 3,649'; but Lone Peak, 11,253', is the most notable) rising immediately above Salt Lake City is one of the best mountain playgrounds in the USA for urban dwellers, and the excellent dry snow they harbor is prime base for some of the most famous ski areas in the country.

Dramatic scene of Lone Peak.

The northern Wasatch (highest summit, **Willard Peak, 9,764', P = 3,244'**) continues on into Idaho (as the Bear River Range), and is accompanied by several other subranges, most notably the Wellsville Mountains, the Bannock Range, and the Portneuf Range. It is difficult to demarcate exactly which of these subranges might be the Rockies, and which properly belong to the Great Basin ranges. But I think it makes sense to end the Southern Rockies around Pocatello, before the Greater Yellowstone country begins. The most important summits in this area are **Oxford Peak (9,300', P = 4,030')**, **Bonneville Peak (9,271', P = 3,401')**, and **Naomi Peak (9,979', P = 3,159)**. SummitPost's pages on the Wasatch are magnificent: <http://www.summitpost.org/wasatch-range-south/171211>, <http://www.summitpost.org/wasatch-range-central/171209>, <http://www.summitpost.org/wasatch-range-north/171210>.



The Wellsville Mountains.

Looking ahead.....

On Tuesday, December 9th, the Rocky Mountaineers will have their monthly meeting at 7pm at the Trail Head, 221 E. Front St, Missoula. Steve Karkanen of the West Central Montana Avalanche Foundation will give his annual talk on dangers to be aware of in the winter, and not just in the backcountry. He has a good slide show mainly on the Mt. Jumbo avalanche and the two fatalities in the Flint Creek Range. There will be lots of valuable information. The show lasts about an hour, so there will be time for questions, comments and socializing.

If you want to see the latest conditions, or general information, or to see some avalanche photos, go to the website missoulaavalanche.org, or call 406-329-3752.

Rocky Mountaineers' Meeting Minutes 11/11/2014

We did not have a slate of items for the agenda this month, other than following up on presentation possibilities for upcoming meetings, so we canceled the business meeting. The December meeting with Steve Karkanen is all confirmed, and future presentation possibilities are with Aaron Teasdale, Paul Jensen, Forest Dean, Michael Hoyt, Steve Sherriff, and some others. We will see how things are with this at the next meeting this upcoming month.

THE ROCKY MOUNTAINEERS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Annual Membership Fee: \$10.00

Note: Membership includes all members of a family or household.

Make checks payable to 'The Rocky Mountaineers' and send to: The Rocky Mountaineers, PO Box 4262, Missoula, MT 59806

Name: _____

Additional Family Members' Names:

Address: _____

Home Phone: _____

Cell Phone (optional): _____

Email: _____

Additional Email (optional):

Joining or maintaining your Rocky Mountaineers membership has never been easier!

PayPal is now available on the Rocky Mountaineers website. Click on the membership link on the main page.

