

Because It's There



In preparation for our trip to Boulder, Colo. for a week's long "hiking vacation" – a term I found oxymoronic – we decided to practice on nearby Haycock Mountain. Of the single assault we made (yes, I said "assault"), I insisted on turning back about 30 yards from the top, because a few big rocks were in the way. "We're going to a city called Boulder," my husband reminded me. "There's a reason for that."

My husband is a runner, and I swim a mile every day: a laughable résumé when you go from sea level to almost 6,000 feet in a few hours. Still, we believed we were fit enough to first take on the Flatiron trails in the foothills of the Rockies. Our goal: to reach the Royal Arch, another 1,200 feet...up.

"We're...from Pennsylvania," I managed to exhale again and again, defending our pace to passersby, or, rather, passers-us-by, including two elderly sisters and a woman with a water pack strapped to her back and a baby strapped to her chest. After two-and-a-half hours, we finally got to the trailhead to find a photo of a group who'd completed this climb, circa 1910. Panting, I studied the women in their long dark skirts and pointy-toed boots. Yikes! But this was our second day there, and almost out of water, we turned back.

In the days that followed, we packed more water as we plotted more ambitious courses – none of which we finished – the last one being Rocky Mountain National Park's Bear Lake, still ringed with snow at an altitude of close to 10,000 feet. "It's getting late," I said, when I saw hikers who'd passed us heading up now passing us coming down – bringing the sun along with them. Again, and for the last time on this trip, we cried uncle. "Let's head back to Boulder and eat at Aji again," I said. Aji is a Peruvian restaurant, and, likely, the closest we will get to Machu Picchu.

Now home, I am even sadder. Because my husband managed to snap pictures along the way, I – so focused on pushing past the "rocks of Haycock" – barely remember the prairie dogs poking up out of the mesa or the massive bull elk wading into a pond a few feet away. A whole week in Colorado, and I didn't stop to smell...the columbine.

So here are the lessons I want to share when it come to having good outdoor fun this summer: **1)** don't be cocky; **2)** bring plenty of water; **3)** if a steep incline stops you, it's because you're supposed to stop to see... something. And most important, because the sun will set: **4)** don't stray far from a good restaurant. Happy trails. **dt**