

A Guide for New
COLORADO HIKERS

JEFFREY ROBERTS

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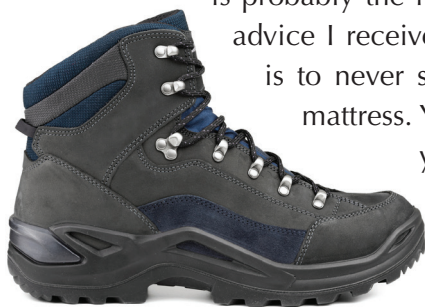
Clothing and Equipment



As with any sport or activity, having the proper equipment makes your experience more enjoyable. Hiking in the mountains differs greatly from hiking a trail in your local state park or the woods out your back door. Trust me, you don't want to be miles from the trailhead and have an equipment failure or mishap. For example, a group of us were hiking St. Mary's Glacier. We started up the glacier when my friend's sole of his boot started flapping like a hound dog's ear. He made it to the top with that flip-flop of a boot, only to have the other boot do the same thing on the way down. Trying to hike and slide (not glissading, in this case) down the glacier is difficult when the soles of your boots are flopping around. The hike was only 2.4 miles round trip, but imagine walking in those boots for 1.2 miles with the soles barely hanging on. I asked him if he paid a lot for those boots, and he said no; they were free. The point is, he needed to buy a good pair of hiking boots instead of relying on a cheaper pair, or, in this case, a free pair.

Footwear

That little tale is a nice segue to discuss the type of footwear you will need to consider for your hiking adventures. There are hundreds of options to choose from when looking at hiking shoes and boots. It will be up to you to decide the brand and style you want to wear. I will state again, don't be cheap in this area. Wearing proper footwear is probably the number one factor for hiking. A piece of advice I received early in life, and continue to live by, is to never spare expenses when buying shoes or a mattress. You spend more time on your feet and in your bed than anything else, so buy quality items for these areas of your life. Your back and feet will thank you for it. Since I will not be discussing mattresses, let's get on with your feet.



When you walk into an outdoor store and make your way to the shoe area, it may overwhelm you at first. Knowing a little bit before going there to narrow down your selection and the time it will take you to pick something out. Below is a list of the shoes and boots you will see:

- trail runners
- cross trainers
- low-rise heel hiking shoes
- mid-rise heel shoes
- high-rise boots
- large lug sole
- wide lug sole
- flex sole
- waterproof
- lightweight
- midweight

Brands are a personal choice. You may end up with several different brands as you determine which ones suit you best. Figure out your rise, weight, lug size of shoe or boot. I hike in a low-rise, mid-weight, wide lug sole shoe most of the year. I only wear lightweight,

waterproof, large lug sole boots in the winter. For most Colorado hiking, you will not need waterproof or heavy weight most of the year. The lighter the better, especially on those long, climbing hikes.

After you have selected your shoe or boot, consider buying a better insole right away. Some manufacturers have improved their insoles, but I have found that most are of inferior quality and wear out quickly. Again, this is personal preference, but I believe your feet will thank you for the extra support. Along with shoes and boots, there are options for sandals. I recommend you don't hike in sandals, no matter the brand, even if designed for it. Sandals are a fine choice for walking the city trails or flat trails, but not for mountain trails. It is too easy to stub your toe, get grit between your feet and sandal, or twist an ankle in sandals.

The other part of footwear often overlooked is socks. Socks are just as important as the shoe that covers them. And like the shoes, there are many options. I go for a 70% or more merino wool /lycra spandex blend sock with plenty of padding. They come in different thicknesses, and I go for the thicker ones. They are pricey, but some have lifetime replacement guarantees. Let me reiterate, do not be cheap when it comes to your feet!

There is an expression you need to learn and live by for hiking: "Cotton is rotten." This is true for socks and other clothing. Cotton stretches out and doesn't snap back; it takes forever to dry; and it sticks to your body, making it uncomfortable while sweating. With that sage advice imparted, let's discuss proper clothing.

Pants

I will not ask you to do as I did and get rid of all your jeans, blue or any other color, but you will not need them for hiking. Put them





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Before You Go

OK, I KNOW I said we would explore the trails, but we mustn't put the cart before the horse. Hiking in the Colorado Mountains differs from walking around your subdivision, traipsing around the woods, or hiking in the eastern mountains. Many of you may hail from the "flatlands" or areas where you are at sea level. Some of you may have experienced trails along the Appalachian chain: Blue Ridge, Cherokee, Great Smoky, Green and White Mountains, and the Shenandoah Mountain. The highest point along this chain is Mt. Mitchell, at 6,684 feet. For some perspective, of the trails discussed in this book, only two start below 6,000 feet. The majority will start in the 6,000 - 7,000 foot range, and others will start at much higher elevations. Therefore, you will start at higher points than you can even reach back east. The elevation takes a toll on your breathing, stamina, and can even affect your brain.

Altitude sickness

Altitude sickness is the number one consideration when hiking "at elevation." You will hear the term "at elevation" a few times throughout this book. If you are not acclimated to the thin air when you hike, you may fall susceptible to this malady. This is usually experienced at higher elevations greater than 8,000 feet. However, it can happen at lower elevations too.

Altitude sickness creeps upon you slowly, like a leopard stalking its prey. You normally start with a mild headache, may become dizzy, and then



nauseated. If you feel any of these symptoms, stop immediately. Drink water and sit down for a moment before heading back down the mountain. The only way to relieve the symptoms is to go back to lower elevations. Are you familiar with the expression, “Pride goeth before a fall?” Well, a fall is exactly what you will experience if you allow pride to get in your way. Don’t fall prey to the thinking that you can work your way through it or that it will pass. You must, and should, turn around and come back down. Damn the pride! (and the torpedoes).

Altitude sickness is rarely fatal, but those with existing heart or lung conditions could experience more severe symptoms. Some of you may require more conditioning to become acclimated, while others will acclimate quickly. Choose some of the many trails at lower elevations to hike first. After you have adjusted, then you can tackle the higher elevations.

Dehydration

Hardly any of us drink enough water daily, right? Drinking plenty of water keeps those mild headaches at bay. It helps keep your muscles





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Trails

THIS SECTION OF the book will review some of the trails I have hiked over the last six years. I have hiked some of them multiple times. These will be good ones to start with for newcomers to Colorado. Hold off on the 14er, Mt Bierstadt, until you are more acclimated to the elevation. That will take a good six months.

I have broken down the trails by region, so you have a sense of their location to help you plan your outing appropriately. The trails in the Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) are the farthest from Denver. Even with that distance, practically all these are within a two-and-a-half hour's drive, including going into the park. The other trails are all within one and a half hours' drive or less.

Again, I recommend you download the Alltrails app on your phone, the Hiking Project app, created by REI, or the COTrex app. COTrex is an app specifically for Colorado State Park trails. I have all three on my phone. The statistical data for the trails in this book was collected from these apps. You can quickly get directions to the trailhead from the apps, as well. For those who want to mountain bike, download the MTB app.

Before I review each trail, I have supplied statistical data such as, elevation gain, round trip distance, type of trail, and the rating (based on

the region). Not all moderate hikes are created equal. I will explain that more in the trail review section.

Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP)

RMNP ranks fourth on the list of most national park visits. Only the Great Smokies, Yellowstone, and Zion surpass it. You need to arrive early and you will need to take a shuttle to the trailhead. I discussed the main reason for arriving early in the weather section, but if you wait until mid-morning to enter the park, expect at least a one-hour wait, on a good day. If you try to enter around noon or later, fugettaboutit. Try to be at the trailhead by eight or eight-thirty. Access the first three trails discussed here from the Bear Lake parking lot, where the shuttle will drop you off.



THREE LAKES TRAIL (EMERALD LAKE)

Round Trip Miles: 3.2

Starting Elevation: 9,491 ft.

Elevation gain: 699 ft.

Type: Out & Back

Rating: Moderate

I have aptly named this trail ‘Three Lakes’ because you hike up to three different lakes ending at Emerald Lake. I agree with the listing of this trail as moderate. However, that is relative to other hikes in