



Rocky and Estes: Parks Superb

Ah, Rocky Mountain National Park and its primary gateway town, Estes Park....they're high on our list of places to visit in the American West. They feature spectacular scenery, great recreational opportunities, a nature study bonanza, and a very interesting history. That's why more than three million people visit the area each year.

The first day of your three-day itinerary will focus on the Estes Park valley, the second will find you enjoying the majestic scenery of Rocky Mountain National Park, and on the third day you'll have the choice of driving a Colorado Scenic and Historic Byway, hiking to three lakes at the very base of the Continental Divide, boating and biking at Lake Estes, or horseback riding through meadow and forest.

The best time to enjoy the area is from July 4, when Old Fall River Road opens, through the end of September when the aspen trees turn to gold.

There is much more to do here, if you have the time....or add days to just sit back, relax and soak-in your surroundings.

Pathfinder Newsletter

Summer 2010

Guided Tours of Cities, Towns, and National Parks in the American West

by the authors of *Seven Perfect Days in Colorado*,

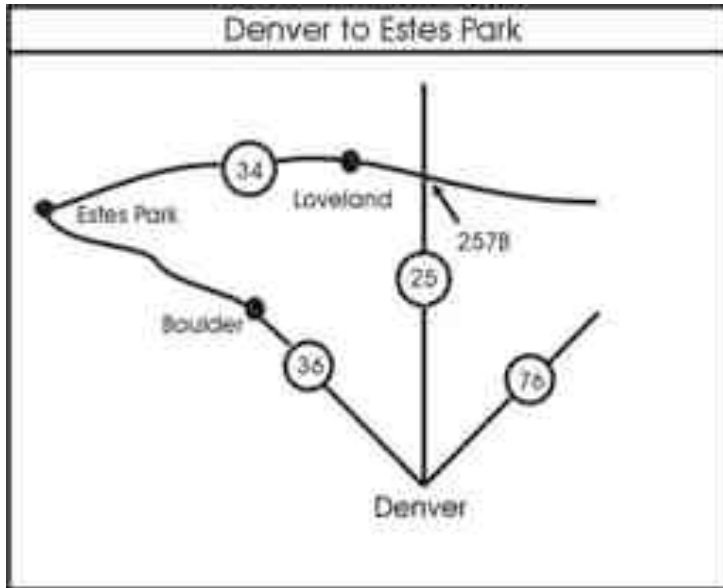
Seven Perfect Days in Northern California and *Seven Perfect Days in Arizona*

Day One

Today, we recommend that you focus on the physical and historical features of the Estes Park valley. There is a fine collection of shops in town, but so many that we offer recommendations on which ones to see.

What an Entrance to the Rockies!

There are several ways to get to Estes Park. Our personal preference, and strong recommendation, is to drive north from Denver on Interstate 25 for about 50 miles (80 km) and 40 minutes to Loveland exit 257B, and then travel west on US 34 through Big Thompson Canyon.



Nothing beats this dramatic entrance to the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains! Three miles from Loveland, you'll be abruptly greeted by 1,500 foot-high (460 m) sheer walls of gneiss and schist rocks that are nearly two billion years old. This part of the canyon is appropriately called The Narrows. You'll see a stunning example of how a rushing mountain river can cut through rock as it courses rapidly to lower elevations.

After The Narrows, the canyon begins to open up and you'll notice that the lower level rock now alternates with pink and dark red granite. By the time you reach Estes Park, at 7,522 feet (2,300 m) above sea level, you'll see mostly rolling hills and mountains of granite, many of which are covered by trees.

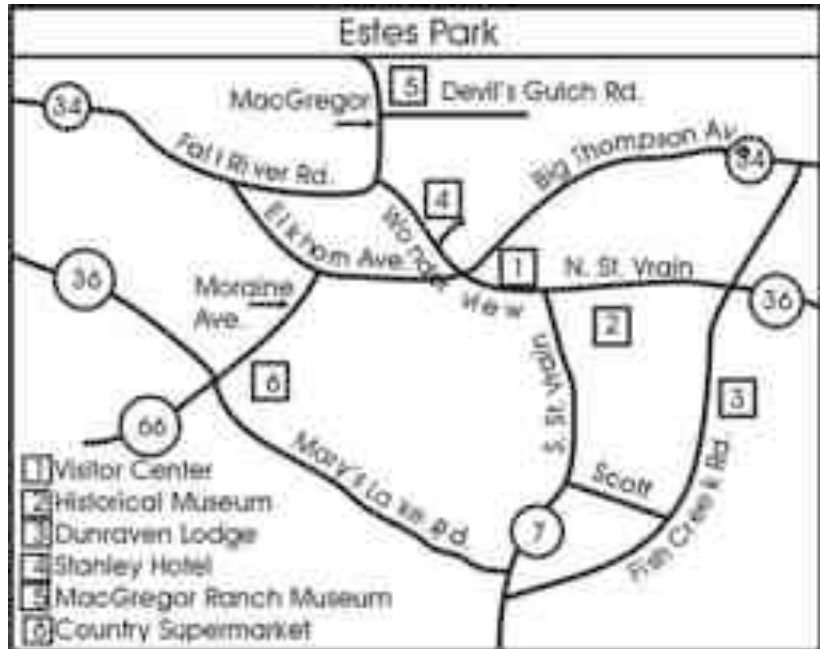
And what a magnificent view as you enter Estes Park valley and drive toward town! The full glory of Longs Peak (the highest mountain, on the left) and the Continental Divide is right there before you. Now you can see why Rocky Mountain National Park, which straddles the Divide, draws raves from people around the world. (See the photo on page one.)

Estes: A "Parc" Extraordinaire

There are several things about the Estes Park valley that will help you appreciate it even more. The name "Estes" belonged to the area's first white settlers, Joel and Patsy Estes, who came here in 1859.

The word "park" is synonymous with "mountain-enclosed meadow." First called that ("parc") by French trappers, it's nevertheless a very appropriate word for this valley because the main attraction here has always been scenery and recreation.

As you approach the west end of Lake Estes and the junction of US 34 and US 36, you'll see the Estes Park Information Center on your left. You may wish to stop there to pick up a few pamphlets and consider alternatives to what we've planned for you. We encourage you to pursue other activities whenever you find them to be more interesting or enjoyable. The Information Center is open 8 am to 8 pm during summer and 9 am to 5 pm during winter, 800-44-ESTES, www.estesparkcvb.com.



From the Information Center, continue to the traffic light and turn left onto N. St. Vrain/US 36. About 0.7 mile farther on, you'll see the Estes Park Area Historical Museum on your right at 200 Fourth St. If you have an interest in history, a brief stop here will enhance your appreciation of the area.

What you'll see in the Historical Museum are old photographs and displays about the early settlers, a 1909 Stanley Steamer automobile, a homestead cabin and the original headquarters building for Rocky Mountain National Park. Look especially for items connected with Joel and Patsy Estes, Isabella Bird, Rocky Mountain Jim Nugent, Griffith Evans, Alexander MacGregor, Lord Dunraven and F. O. Stanley. The museum is open May through October, Monday through Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm and Sunday 1 pm to 5 pm, and November through April, Friday-Saturday 10 am to 5 pm and Sunday 1-5 pm. 970-586-6256, www.estesnet.com/museum, admission is free.

After the Historical Museum, continue east on N. St. Vrain/36 about 0.7 mile and turn right on Fish Creek Road. This is the approximate site of the original Estes homestead. Look around; you can see why the Ohio farmer and prospector chose this place to settle!

About 0.7 mile south on Fish Creek Road, you'll see a driveway with three mailboxes and a wagon wheel on your left, and, largely hidden by the trees and tall pile of rocks, a low, brown-sided structure with green trim. This is an historic lodge that's unknown to most Estes Park visitors and even to many local residents. It's the privately-owned Dunraven Lodge, the original hunting lodge of the Fourth Earl of Dunraven.

Dunraven was an Irish nobleman who illegally acquired 15,000 acres of Estes Park land in the early 1870's as his private sporting preserve. Why "illegally"? Because non-citizens were not permitted to obtain land grants under the Homestead Act of 1862, Dunraven "purchased" the land from individuals, alive and dead, who held only temporary ownership. This became a major source of contention between Dunraven and the bona fide settlers, among whom were Alexander MacGregor (whose homestead we'll visit shortly) and "Rocky Mountain Jim" Nugent.

Nugent, a well known colorful character and mountain guide, was allegedly murdered in 1874 by his friend, Griff Evans, at the behest of the Dunraven interests, because he had become a thorn in their side. At least that's what Nugent claimed from his deathbed.

As we continue down Fish Creek Road, plan to turn right at the third street, which is Scott Avenue, but look ahead at the two mountains sitting shoulder-to-shoulder. The one on the left is Mount Meeker; the one on the right is 14,255-ft. (4,345 m) Longs Peak. We'll point them out again from the front deck of the Stanley Hotel in a little while.

When you reach the end of Scott Ave., turn right onto Colorado 7 and drive a mile and a half back to US 36. From there, turn left, drive through the US 34/US 36 Junction onto Wonder-view Drive, pass the side of the shopping center, and take the first right into the Stanley Hotel, www.stanleyhotel.com. If you're not staying at the Stanley tonight, you'll want to spend a few minutes looking over this beautiful, grand old hotel.

Stanley Steamer inventor, Freelan O. Stanley, who with his partner purchased about half of Lord Dunraven's land when it was sold in 1907, built the Stanley as a resort in 1909. Stanley's hotel became a major draw for visitors in the early 1900's, facilitated by the caravanning of twelve-passenger Stanley Steamers that traveled daily to the train depots in Loveland, Lyons and Longmont to pick up and deposit guests. Would you believe that the Steamers carried telephones that could be attached to telephone wires in the event a car broke down? (Car phones in 1920!)

After you've explored the first floor of the hotel (Dunraven's portrait is to the left of the front desk), walk outside to the parapet overlooking the swimming pool and simply soak in the exceptional view of the Continental Divide from here. Look closely at the left side of Longs Peak. Between Meeker and Longs, you'll see a rock formation that looks like a beaver climbing toward the summit. That natural monument to their trade must have amused the early trappers.

Next, return to Wonderview Drive, where you'll turn right and then right again, at the Devil's Gulch-Glenhaven sign, onto MacGregor Ave. Just before the road makes a sharp turn to the right, you'll see the entrance to the MacGregor Ranch Museum, www.macgregorranch.org. That ridge of lumpy-looking granite mountains in the background is called, appropriately, Lumpy Ridge. What a backdrop for a homestead that was begun in 1870!

MacGregor was a lawyer who helped lead the fight against Lord Dunraven. He also built a toll road connecting Lyons and Estes Park. The MacGregor place is rather unique, we think, because it's still a working cattle ranch that uses equipment from the late 1800's. You'll see some of that equipment, in the fields or around the barns, as well as furniture and other items in the house dating from the same period. The museum is open Tuesday through Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm during June, July and August.

Now, let's retrace our route and head back to town, where we'll have lunch and do some browsing in Estes Park's nice assortment of shops. They're touristy, though not junky, and probably crowded, but you're sure to find some that appeal to you.

Browsing Estes Park's Shops

First, we suggest that you have lunch at Poppy's Pizza and Grill on the river walk at 342 E. Elkhorn, 970-586-8282; see the Estes Park website (www.estesparkcvb.com, click on "Dining" and "All Cuisines" for details).

As for the shops, if you like to shop you could spend all day browsing. Our experience is that at least one person in every couple or group doesn't enjoy shopping all that much. So, we've gleaned those shops that will probably appeal—at least somewhat—to that one person. Here they are, in logical order; all are on Elkhorn Ave. (Highway 34) in the center of town, starting close to Poppy's Pizza and Grill:

Brownfield's Trading Post, 350 E. Elkhorn
MacDonald Book Shop, 152 E. Elkhorn
Trendz, 100 E. Elkhorn
Wild Spirits Gallery, 148 W. Elkhorn
The Gold Mine, 230 W. Elkhorn
Craftsmen in Leather, 135 W. Elkhorn
The Ore Cart Rock Shop, 119 W. Elkhorn
Rustic Mountain Charm, 135 E. Elkhorn
Granny Gingham, 137 E. Elkhorn
Earthwood Collections, 141 E. Elkhorn

Where to Eat and Sleep

Go straight to the Estes Park Convention and Visitor Center website at www.estesparkcvb.com. There, you'll find the details on 80 restaurants (by cuisine), 15 B&B's, 38 hotels and motels, 75 cabin/cottage establishments, 9 campgrounds/RV parks and 5 guest ranches. Most listings have photos, descriptions, features, addresses, telephone numbers, and links to websites and email addresses. *Most significantly, many lodging listings allow you to quickly check availability.*

For restaurants, we recommend the Bighorn Restaurant, Dunraven Inn, Grumpy Gringo, Molly B Restaurant (great breakfasts), Poppy's Pizza and Grill, Rock Inn Mountain Tavern, Smokin Dave's BBQ and Taphouse (a favorite of the locals) and Sweet Basilico Café (a favorite of ours). For lodging, we recommend Alpine Trail Ridge Inn, Romantic RiverSong Inn (a B&B) and the YMCA of the Rockies (particularly for families). Try www.tripadvisor.com for other traveler recommendations.

While on the Visitor Center website, you'll have the opportunity to request a Visitor Guide, which lists additional things to do in the area.

Day Two

This day is devoted to scenery and nature study. And it doesn't get any better or more interesting than this!

We suggest that you get made-to-order sandwiches for lunch from the Country Supermarket (behind the Conoco gas station) at Highway 36/Moraine Ave. and Mary's Lake Road, 1.6 miles (2.6 km) southwest of town. The only food in Rocky Mountain National Park is at the Alpine Visitor Center and it's often crowded. Your time is better spent in the open air enjoying the spectacular scenery.

Now, let's take a drive that will knock your socks off. Altogether, it's 53 miles long (85 km) and will take about four hours, including frequent stops for scenery gawking, picture taking

and close-up looks at the plant life and, hopefully, wildlife. Be sure to have rain gear and a coat or heavy sweater handy; sudden afternoon rain showers are common, and it can be cool at the higher elevations in the summer. Also, make sure you have enough gasoline in the car; there are no service stations in Rocky Mountain National Park.

If you're concerned about the weather, telephone 970-586-1333 for a recorded report about current conditions. The park's general information number is 970-586-1206. Dial 911 or 970-586-1203 for emergencies. The park's website is <http://nps.gov/romo>; it's a great source of additional information.

Old Fall River Road: Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Mountain Ecosystems But Didn't Know You Should Ask

From the Country Supermarket, continue west on US 36 to the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center, which is on the left, about three quarters of a mile past the junction of US 36 and Colorado 66. Here, we suggest that you purchase copies of two booklets that are very helpful if you want to fully appreciate the drive ahead. They are *Guide to Old Fall River Road* and *Bear Lake Nature Trail*.

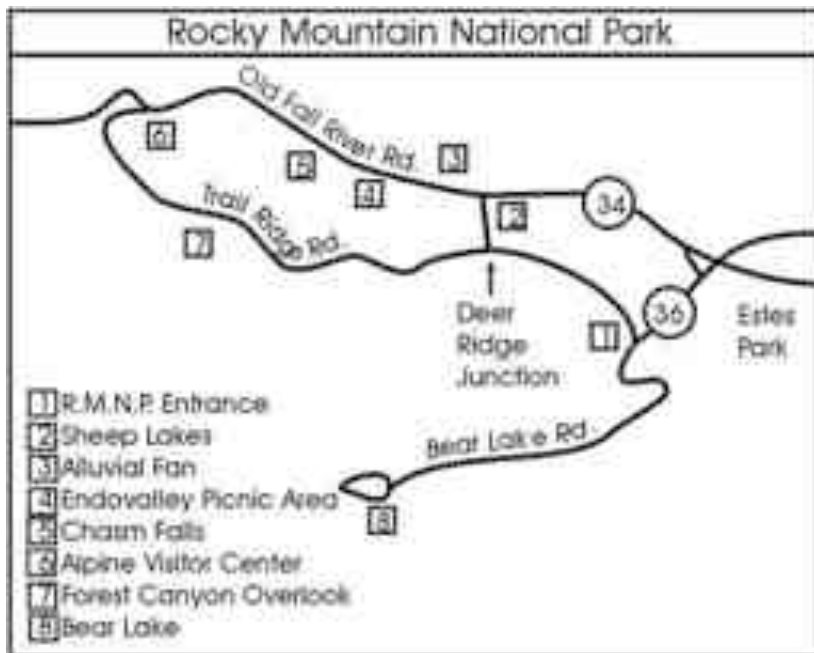
Be sure to see the excellent 23-minute movie about the park. Open daily 8:00am to 5:00pm (9:00pm, June 20 through August 28).

Then proceed to the Beaver Meadows Entrance to Rocky Mountain National Park. When you pay the entrance fee, you'll receive a copy of the Trail Ridge Road Guide, which will be helpful during your descent. (If you're over 62 and likely to visit more national parks, ask about the Golden Age Passport; this will also save you money this time.)

Then drive three miles (4.8 km) to Deer Ridge Junction, where you'll turn right and drive another two miles to the "T," which is the junction of US 34/Fall River Road and Old Fall River Road. Bear right on US 34 and drive a half-mile to the Sheep Lakes overlook, where it's common to see bighorn sheep or elk licking mineral salt in the mud.

Next, reverse your direction and drive past the "T" three-quarters of a mile on Old Fall River Road to the Alluvial Fan. It was here on July 15, 1982 that rocks and other debris were deposited—44 feet (13.4 m) deep!—in a delta shape after Lawn Lake Dam burst and a flash flood carried them in a 35-foot-high (11 m) wall of water down Roaring River.

(Old Fall River Road opens about July 4 every year. If you are touring before that date, you may need to return to Deer Ridge Junction and drive up Trail Ridge Road, instead.)



Continue two miles up Fall River Road to Endovalley Picnic Area. A very drivable gravel road, Old Fall River Road was dedicated in 1920 and made one-way after Trail Ridge Road was opened in 1932.

While in the Endovalley parking lot, let's consider some of the things you're going to see as you ascend Old Fall River Road.

Rocky Mountain National Park's geography, plants and animals are truly impressive. Here are some numbers on RMNP which should help convince you: 24-by-15 mile borders, encompassing 415 square miles of spectacular scenery; 113 named mountains; 68 mountains more than 12,000 feet (3,700 m) above sea level and 17 over 13,000 feet (4,000 m); an elevation range from 7,630 to 14,255 feet (2,300 to 4,345 m); 150 lakes; 355 miles of hiking trails; approximately 25 mammal and 250 bird species, and 900 species of plants.

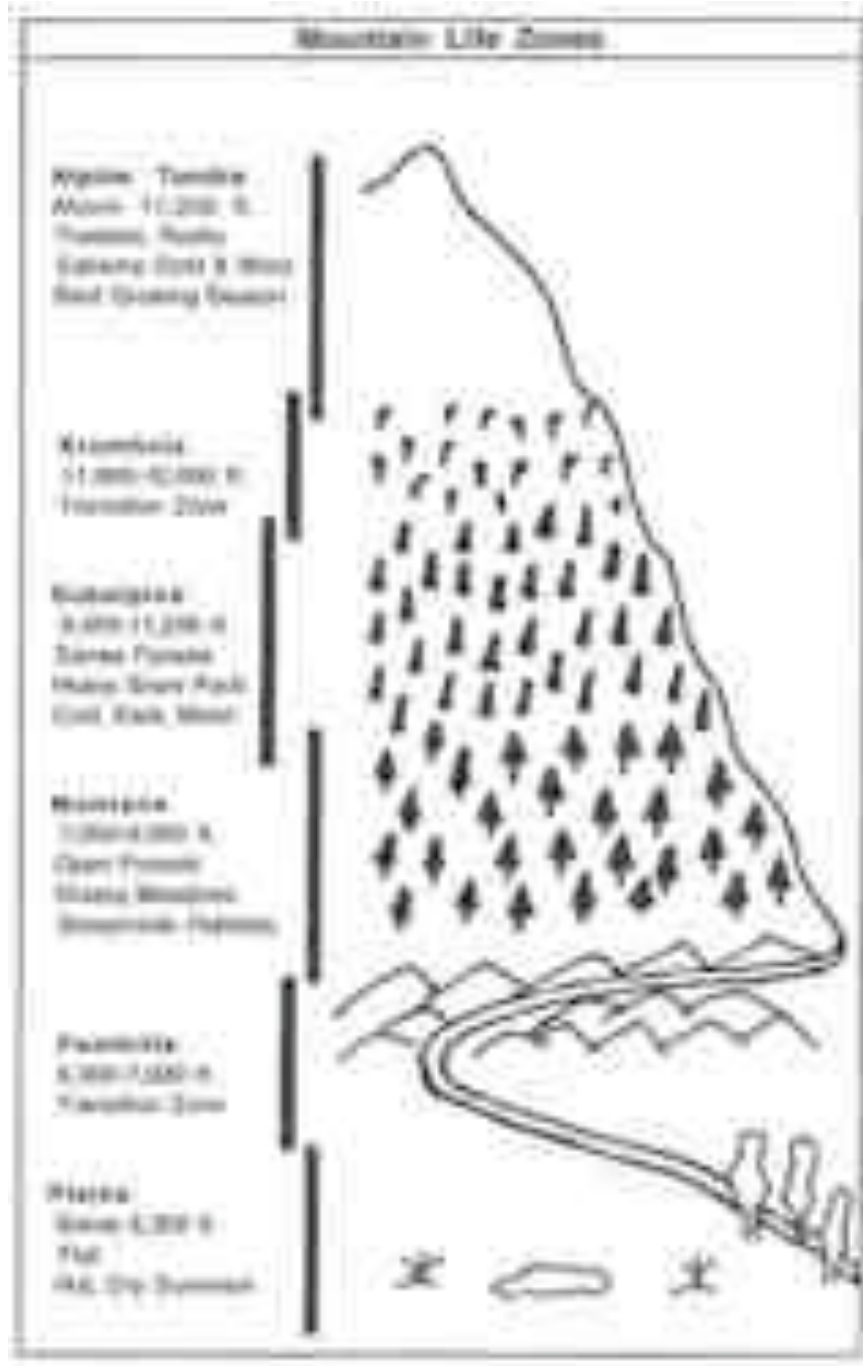
To us, the most interesting phenomenon about mountains in general, is that the life zones, or ecosystems, are stacked one upon the other, much like a layer cake. You'll begin your ascent here in Endovalley, which is in the upper montane at 8,558 feet (2,600 m, which is more than 1,000 feet/305 meters higher than Estes Park), and will finish at the Alpine Visitor Center, which is in the alpine tundra at 11,796 feet (3,695 m). In between, you'll drive through the subalpine life zone and an area of stunted and crooked trees called the "krummholz." The life zones, and the most common plants and animals found in each, are depicted on the following pages.

As you climb in elevation, you'll experience several changes that are fun to anticipate. The first is a change in climate. Scientists tell us that ascending 1,000 feet/305 meters in elevation is equivalent to driving 300 miles/480 kilometers) north. Since Denver is at 5,280 feet/1,610 meters, and the highest point we'll reach is 12,183 feet/3,713 meters, our total elevation gain for today's drive is 6,903 feet/2,104 meters. That's like driving 2,300 miles/3,700 kilometers to northern Canada...which would put you at the Arctic Circle! That explains the treeless environment, which you'll see when you get to the top of your drive.

The second change that you'll experience is a change in temperature. The air will become approximately 3.2 degrees cooler for every 1,000 feet you climb. That makes the Alpine Visitor Center about 22 degrees cooler than Denver.

The third change is in air density as you climb in elevation. It's almost twice as thin above timberline as it is at sea level. That's why you've been a little short of breath, and why you'll huff and puff and have a more rapid heartbeat if you exert yourself, especially during your hike up Huffer's Hill at the Alpine Visitor's Center—if you choose to take it.

[The following two graphics work best if you imagine them side-by-side.]





So, what do you think; should we take a look at this layer cake now?
 Not yet, you say? You want to know more about the trees and how to tell them apart?
 We're glad you asked!
 The first time we visited this picnic area, we asked the same question. We knew how to identify aspens, but the evergreen trees all looked alike; they were just a pretty green blur. So the next time we came, we brought along Vickey and Jim Trammell, botanists who teach at Arapaho Community College in Littleton, Colorado, and paid closer attention to the literature that we obtained at the Alpine Visitor Center.

The chart below summarizes what we learned. With it, you should be able to take a walk around the picnic area and identify most of the trees. That done, you'll be better prepared for the drive ahead.

**Ginnodo's Handy-Dandy, Rocky Mountain National
Park, Evergreen Tree Identification System**

Squarish top Trunk visible	Long, sharp needles	2 needles per bundle	Lodgepole pine (straight trunk)
		2-3 needles per bundle	Ponderosa pine (reddish-brown, scaly bark)
		5 needles per bundle	Limber pine (short, bushy form with long cones)
Pointed top	Short, squarish, stiff, sharp needles		Blue spruce (near streams; large cones)
			Engleman spruce (subalpine; smaller cones)
Branches grow to ground	Short, flat, flexible ("friendly") needles		Douglas fir (montane; cones hang)
			Subalpine fir (cones upright on top branches)

Then, take that drive, keeping a sharp lookout for the changes in life zones and the wild-life and plant life within them. With the help of the descriptions and drawings in the *Old Fall River Road* booklet and the *Trail Ridge Road Guide* (which you were given at the park's entrance), you should be able to recognize many of the animals and birds you'll see. Mountain wildflowers are a particular delight to us; there's a good chance you'll see red Indian paintbrush, golden banner, daisies, larkspur and Colorado blue columbine, which is the state flower.

We suggest you turn off your air conditioner so your car doesn't overheat. Take your time. Stop frequently. Let your eyes explore this wonderful, glacier-carved canyon. Discover its riches for yourself. Don't miss Chasm Falls. It's 1.4 miles (2.2 km) from Endovalley and is one of our favorite stops because it's there that we've seen the Water Ouzel, or American dipper, dive into the water to get its food from the bottom of the rushing stream.

On the “Roof of the Rockies”

The Alpine Visitor Center has an excellent exhibit explaining life on the tundra, which will help you better understand what you’ll experience first-hand during your walk in a few minutes. Look especially for the displays covering climate, landscape, plants, animals and birds. You’ll also see how several Ute Indian trails crossed through this area.

Outside the visitor center, you’ll want to look down into Fall River Canyon. There you’ll be standing on top of what’s known as a “cirque,” a bowl-like depression that was once the top of the Fall River Glacier. Elk are frequently seen feeding among the willow bushes in the cirque; we saw five there on our last visit.

If you turn around and look upward, you’ll see the “Huffer’s Hill” trail which begins at the edge of the parking lot. (See the photograph on page one.) The hill tops out at 12,003 ft. elevation and is a good vantage point for viewing elk in the near distance. *If you have a history of heart or respiratory problems, we recommend that you skip this climb.* Any exertion at this elevation brings shortness of breath and a more rapid heartbeat, even for completely healthy people. *No matter what your age or physical condition, walk slowly uphill and take frequent rests!*

As for the health of plant life, it’s extremely fragile and takes many years to repair itself; so for its sake, please stay on the path. If you’ve come during late June or early July, you’ll have the fun of seeing the great variety of miniature wildflowers that bloom during the tundra’s very short (six- to ten-week) growing season.

One thing that we found particularly interesting here was the rocks we saw lying randomly on top of the ground. You know they didn’t fall from the sky, and that they weren’t brought up here by visitors...right? When we asked the Trammells, they said the rocks were literally squeezed out of the earth by the constant freezing and thawing of the moist soil.

At the top of the rise, you can look around 360 degrees and say hereafter that you’ve truly been on top of a mountain.

Isn’t it amazing how much of the tops of these mountains are covered with plant life? The word “tundra” means treeless, not lifeless. One third of Rocky Mountain National Park is tundra, and was a major reason why these peaks and valleys were set aside in 1915 as a national park following a ten year campaign led by naturalist, writer and conservationist, Enos Mills.

From the Alpine Visitor Center, take Trail Ridge Road toward Estes Park, the first part of which is an 11-mile drive along the “Roof of the Rockies.” First opened in 1932, this is known as the highest continuous paved road in the United States. It’s open from about Memorial Day until heavy snowfalls, sometime between late September and mid-November. The highest point on the road is 12,183 feet (3,713 m).

Here’s something for you to consider if you haven’t driven much in the mountains: shifting to a lower gear as you descend will help you avoid burning out your car’s brakes.

Be sure to stop at the Forest Canyon Overlook where you’ll have an even better look into a glaciated valley than at Fall River Canyon (2,500 feet/760 meters down!). It’s hard to imagine, but the ice was about 1,500 feet thick (460 m) in these canyons when the glaciers were dominant until about 7,500 years ago. Yes, there are still glaciers in the park, five of them, but they’re small and inaccessible by road.

Before the glaciers, these canyons were V-shaped as a result of stream erosion. When the ice piled up and gravity pulled it downhill, the glaciers gouged the rock from the sides of the

canyons, making them U-shaped. The dislodged rock, which became embedded in the glaciers and contributed to the gouging action, was deposited in long, hill-like formations called “moraines” when the ice melted. You’ll have to look closely to see them because they’re now covered with trees and other vegetation. We’ll pass by a moraine in a little while when we drive up Bear Lake Road through Moraine Park.

The lakes you see below are home to several dozen of the park’s black bears, which generally stay hidden from humans.

How about that 20-mile-long view of the Continental Divide from here! Isn’t it spectacular? If you’d like to know the names of the peaks, you can consult the chart on the lookout platform.

Have you wondered how the Continental Divide got that name? It’s because moisture which falls on the western side eventually finds its way to the Pacific Ocean, and moisture deposited on the eastern side ends up in the Atlantic. This is where the Colorado River begins its 1,400-mile journey to the Gulf of California, which empties into the Pacific.

Another phenomenon that’s interesting and incredible to contemplate is that the tops of the mountains along the Divide, and the ground on which you now stand, were under the sea about 65 million years ago, and pushed up to their current elevations when the earth’s plates collided in this part of the continent.

Before we move on, look around carefully and listen. It’s common to see several species of birds and small animals in these locations. We’ve never failed to see a Clark’s nutcracker, a gray and white bird with black wings that begs for food wherever there are people. And we’ve frequently seen ravens, falcons and golden eagles flying nearby.

If you’re from the eastern part of the United States, you’ll probably recognize the yellow-bellied marmot, because it looks like a woodchuck. Its behavior is in sharp contrast to the little pika, whose squeak will lead you to the animal itself. A member of the rabbit family, with short, broad ears, the pika doesn’t hibernate and is constantly gathering hay for its winter food supply. The marmot does hibernate and seems to do nothing but eat and sunbathe all day.

OK, let’s continue down Trail Ridge Road. Be sure to stop for the vista at Many Parks Curve and the marshes at Beaver Ponds (there are no beaver or lodges). About three miles past Deer Ridge Junction, just before the park’s Beaver Meadows Entrance, you’ll find Bear Lake Road on the right. You can, of course, stop at more of the turnouts as you descend, but it’s probably mid- to late-afternoon and we don’t want you to miss the hike at Bear Lake.

Bear Lake: A Walk On the Sublime Side

Because of its accessibility, its beautiful natural setting and its outstanding half-mile nature trail, Bear Lake is one of the most popular places to visit in Rocky Mountain National Park. (See the photograph on page one.) The crowds can be a deterrent in the summer, but you’re arriving late in the day and traffic is heaviest between 10 am and 3 pm on summer days.

The drive to Bear Lake is 10 miles from Trail Ridge Road, through beautiful Moraine Park (you know how it got its name) and then upward into the transition area between the montane and subalpine life zones. Keep a sharp lookout for elk, which are frequently seen feeding in clearings between the trees.

If you have the time, stop at the very interesting Moraine Park Visitor Center/Moraine Park Museum (www.nps.gov/romo/historyculture/museum_objects.htm). The focus here is on the natural features and cultural history of the area. Open 9:00am through 4:30pm during summer and through October 8.

You'll find a shuttle bus parking area half way to Bear Lake at Glacier Basin. There will be a sign saying whether you need to stop and park there; if not, drive on to Bear Lake. Buses depart every 15 to 30 minutes, depending upon the time of day and year. The last bus leaves from Bear Lake at 6 pm.

When you arrive at the Bear Lake parking lot (9,475 feet/2,888 meters in elevation, and, yes, there are restrooms here), take out and use the copy of *Bear Lake Nature Trail* that you purchased and proceed around the lake. If the information booth is open, the pamphlet can be purchased there.

This hike is where it should all come together for you. We promised a day focused on scenery and nature; you'll get both here...in spades! What more can you ask for than a gorgeous alpine lake right up against the Continental Divide, and a guided tour of the park's flora and fauna? It's a fitting end to what we hope has been a beautiful, educational and memorable day...

...Unless, of course, it's still early and you want to take another hike. If that's the case, you're in the right place. You can go in almost any direction and any distance from here. The trailheads in the area are well marked, and your choices are shown on the map inside the *Bear Lake Nature Trail* booklet.

Day Three

There's so much to do in the area that we thought it best to focus on four choices to round out your visit. The last three will take less than a half-day each, the first will take a little longer, so you can probably do two of the four activities in one day. The choices include: a beautiful drive on the Peak to Peak Highway to historic Central City; a hike to three mountain lakes; boating and biking at Lake Estes; and horseback riding.

The Peak to Peak Highway and Central City

Stretching 50 miles on Highways 7, 72 and 119 between Estes Park and Central City, this drive has been designated by the State as one of Colorado's 21 Scenic and Historic Byways. Be careful to watch the highway signs; it would be easy to end up in Lyons or Boulder instead of your destination.

Winding through the gently rolling topography of the Roosevelt and Arapaho National Forests at about 8,000 to 9,000 feet elevation (2,440 to 2,740 m), with constant, beautiful vistas of forests, peaks and valleys, one gets the feeling of floating effortlessly through the mountains. Consequently, the hour and a half drive will go by quickly—unless you choose to make one stop that we're about to mention.

That stop is 10 miles south of Estes Park, on the left side of the road, just past the sign for the Boulder County Line. Eagle Plume's is part museum, part store and part tourist attraction. You can easily spend a half-hour examining the splendid collection of Native American artifacts and truly fine stock of high-quality, Native American-made goods. It's open daily from 9 am to 5

pm, April through September, and on weekends until Christmas Day, 303-747-2861, www.eagleplume.com.

Then, continue toward Ward on Highways 7 and 72, making sure you turn right and follow 72 when it diverges from Highway 7. (At this point, you'll be about 19 miles south of Estes Park.) From there, follow Highway 72 past Ward to Nederland, where you'll pick up Highway 119, which will take you to Black Hawk and Central City.

There are more than 500 known mineral veins in the state's richest region, the Central City-Idaho Springs mining district. Central City, known as "The Richest Square Mile on Earth," is the site of Colorado's first major gold strike by John H. Gregory in May of 1859.

When you arrive at Black Hawk on the Peak to Peak Highway, turn right and drive one mile up historic Gregory Gulch to Central City, which in its hey-day rivaled Denver in population and as the cultural center of Colorado. What you'll *see* are primarily brick and stone buildings dating from 1873 and 1874, when raging fires destroyed most of the original wooden buildings and homes. What you'll *hear* are slot machines and other gambling-related noises behind the building facades.

Central City and Black Hawk are two of the three towns in which limited stakes gambling was legalized in 1991 by Colorado voters. The third town is Cripple Creek.

If you're itching to belly-up to a slot machine, or to a blackjack or poker table, you'll do so, of course.

In Central City, we suggest that you spend about an hour or so walking around town and visiting at least two historical sites: the Teller House and the Opera House. They're conveniently next door to one another.

A Hike to Nymph, Dream and Emerald Lakes

If you like exercise and walking in a forested setting, this three and one-half-mile round trip hike is for you. There is only a 600-foot (185 m) elevation gain, so most of the hike is not strenuous. Along the way, you'll enjoy seeing diminutive Nymph Lake and beautiful, long-and-narrow Dream Lake. The trail ends at the very base of the Continental Divide where you'll find Emerald Lake surrounded on three sides by rugged mountains. Because of the mountains, the lake's size is deceiving; it has 12 miles of shoreline and is the third largest natural lake in Colorado. "Beautiful" doesn't do it justice.

To get to the trailhead, drive to the Bear Lake parking lot in Rocky Mountain National Park (or take the shuttle from the Glacier Basin parking area), and turn left immediately after crossing the bridge at the information booth. If you hike before July, there may be slushy or icy snow on the ground; we strongly suggest broken-in boots with plenty of tread, because tennis shoes and other footwear don't provide enough traction. Carry plenty of water and rain gear; rain showers are common, especially in the afternoon. And go slowly if you've just arrived in Colorado; the 9,500+ foot elevation (2,800 m) makes breathing difficult.

Boating and Biking at Lake Estes

Especially if you haven't spent much time on the water, you'll enjoy being in a boat on this small lake with the massive Continental Divide in the background. Or perhaps a leisurely bike ride around the Lake Estes Trail would be more to your liking...or fishing would be more

your speed. Whichever you choose, head to the Lake Estes Marina, which is located at the east end of Lake Estes, just off Highway 34.

There is a variety of boats for rent at the marina: fishing boats, pontoon boats, paddle boats, canoes, and one- and two-passenger kayaks. They are all available by the hour or half-hour, as are the mountain bikes, tandem bikes, pedal carts and child carriers or tag-a-longs.

The marina store rents the boats and bikes and sells snacks, beverages, sun products, and fishing licenses and supplies.

More information can be found at www.estesvalleyrecreation.com/marina.html, and rentals can be arranged in advance at 970-586-2011.

Horseback Riding

Whether you've ridden before or never, this can be a fun activity in a beautiful mountain setting. There are horses for any level of experience, most rides are guided on scenic trails, and some rides include breakfast or dinner.

The length of ride depends upon your level of interest and your potential saddle-soreness: one hour, two hours, three hours, half day, full day, and overnight pack trips.

As with food and lodging choices mentioned above, an excellent place to start is on the Estes Park Convention and Visitor Center website, www.estesparkcvb.com (click on "things to do" and "horseback riding"). There, you'll find addresses, telephone numbers, features of the six stables, and links to the stables' websites and email addresses.

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