

## Pikes Peak – Northwest Slopes (Craggs Trail)

**Difficulty:** Class 2 walkup  
**Trailhead:** Craggs Campground  
**Start:** 10,000 feet  
**Summit:** 14,110 feet  
**Total Gain:** 4,300 feet  
**To Summit:** 7 miles

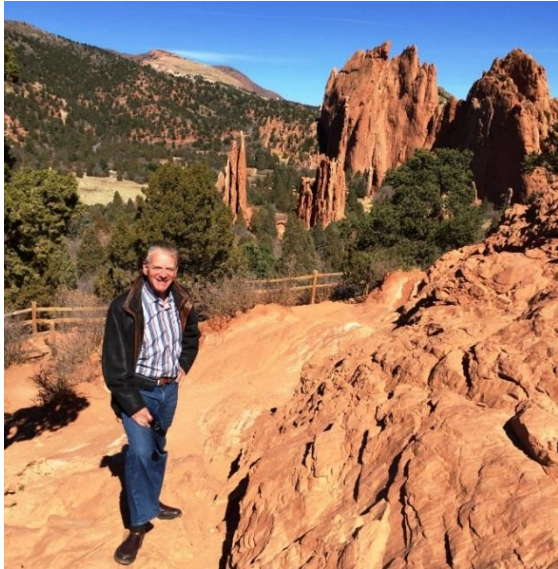
**Climbers:** Rick Crandall, Donna Slade, Andy Mishmash; Susan Muenchen;  
Clif and Chongsung Slade; Mike Ives; Willy and Lileana Vargas

**Met at Summit:** Elliott Slade; Larry and Lorrie Winnerman; Pam Ives; Dennis and Dexter Cirillo  
September 16, 2017

On my quest to climb all of the Rocky Mountain's 58 "fourteeners," I'd saved Pikes Peak for last. It has a road to the top which had the possibility of friends riding to the top to meet me in the eventuality that I'd actually get to the 58<sup>th</sup>. And now on September 16, 2017 that time had actually arrived.

### Pikes Peak

Pikes Peak is the most visited mountain in North America and the second most-visited mountain in the world behind Japan's Mount Fuji! Pikes Peak forms a stunning backdrop for Colorado Springs and the Garden of the Gods Park nearby. This "must-see" park has outstanding geologic features formed by the ancient sedimentary beds of deep-red, pink and white sandstones, conglomerates, and limestone that were deposited horizontally, and then tilted vertically and faulted into fins by the immense mountain-building forces caused by the uplift of the Rocky Mountains and the Pikes Peak massif. It attracts more than two million visitors a year.

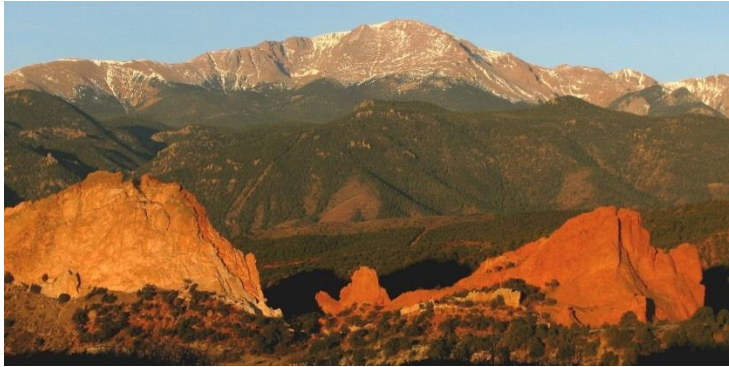


*Rick at the Garden of the Gods. Towards the end of this story you'll see a more amazing perspective on the park.*

Zebulon Montgomery Pike was one of the first white men to explore what is now Colorado. As a 22 year-old Lieutenant, Pike and a party of soldiers were sent to explore the area to find where the Arkansas River began. Pike spotted "a small blue cloud," which turned out to be what would later be renamed Pike's Peak from its prior name, El Capitan. Pike set out with a

party through bitter cold and waist-deep snow to climb the mountain, but conditions forced them to abandon the attempt. Pike never climbed the mountain named in his honor.

Later in July, 1820, Stephan Long of the newly-formed Topographical Bureau, was first to record summiting the peak.



The Ute Indians, also known as the Blue Sky People, referred to the mountain as Tava, meaning the Sun Mountain Sitting Big. Tava was the most sacred of all the Shining Mountains, for the Ute believe the Creator allows the day to start there first.

The Ute believed that the entire world was created at this location by the Great Spirit who poured ice and snow through a hole in the sky to make the mountain.

Pikes Peak is also known for having a road and a cog-train to the summit. The creation of the Pikes Peak Highway is credited Spencer Penrose, an engineer-turned-enterprising businessman. Penrose left the East Coast at the turn of the 20th century for Colorado, where he rapidly amassed a fortune in the copper-mining business. So taken by the beauty of the Colorado Springs area, Penrose petitioned the state for a contract to refine the unimproved 19-mile road to the summit of Pikes Peak. It was completed in 1915.

### **Colorado Springs**

Colorado Springs, was founded by General William Jackson Palmer as a resort town in 1871. The climate and mountain setting made it a popular tourist destination and health resort. The dry climate supported resorts for people with weak lungs or tuberculosis.

Modern-day Colorado Springs, with a population of 465,101 in 2016, ranks as the second most populous city in the state of Colorado, behind Denver, and the 40<sup>th</sup> in the United States.

The Pikes Peak region became one of the most popular U.S. travel destinations in the late 19th century. The town saw an influx of writers, artists and people from England in the late 1870s. Some key attractions were and are the Garden of the Gods, Pikes Peak and Cheyenne Canyon.

The city purchased land at its southern border and donated it to the U. S. War Department. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. Army established Camp Carson, named for General Kit Carson, as a training facility in preparation for World War II. In 1954 Camp Carson became Fort Carson. Also in that year the United States Air Force Academy was established.

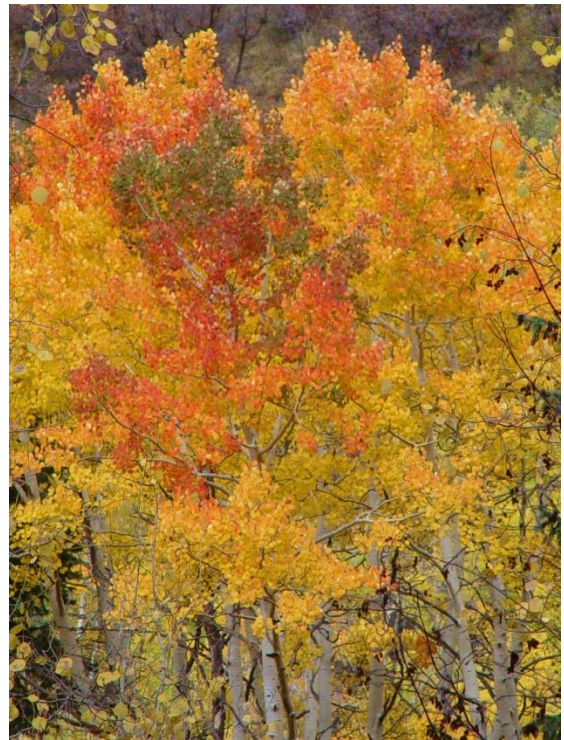
NORAD's main facility was built in Cheyenne Mountain in 1966, which permanently secured the city's military presence.

## Aspen to Colorado Springs

The fall color changes in the Rockies are legendary, mainly due to Aspen trees turning blazing yellows and some oranges. Driving from Aspen to Colorado Springs in mid-September includes going over Independence Pass which tops out at 12,100'. The colors were spectacular.



The road over Independence Pass



I'd heard from friends who had climbed some of the 14ers with me that they were coming to do this climb with me. Others headed towards "the Springs" to drive up and meet us at summit.

The weather was forecasting clear but windy (but what a wind it turned out to be!). We figured my hiking speed would be 5 ½ to 6 hours to summit the 4300' vertical and 7 mile journey, so we decided to meet at trailhead at 6:30 am. We chose the Craggs Trail on the backside of the mountain – steeper but shorter, better for me. Mike Ives, a friend and strong climbing partner from several of these stories, made the recommendation and was to lead this one. Mike and Clif Slade actually hiked 2/3<sup>rd</sup> the way up a few weeks earlier to make sure they knew the route. It would be the first one of the 57 prior mountains I would bring no briefing notes with me.



## The Climb



We actually got going at 6:45am. What a great bunch of friends who chose to climb with me. From the left: Mike Ives, Chongsun Slade, Donna Slade, Clif Slade, me, Andy Mishmash, Susan Meunchen (holding Peanut), Lileana and Willy Vargas.



Susan Meunchen with Peanut, their Chihuahua who was going for her first 14er.



So we set about our quest. Starting at the 10,000' trailhead, we hiked up a well-prepared trail that is fairly steep, for 2,000' to just past tree line. At that point we lost the protection of the trees and faced head-on wind that was a steady 35 mph gusting to 40 mph. For me that was an extra opposing force I didn't need. After another 500' up Andy stopped us to consume some protein and sugar for energy boost.

Well, the protein came from a peanut butter & jelly sandwich, but Andy had another idea for the sugar. He's always got surprises lurking in his large backpack and this time his goodies were off the charts. He proceeded to produce 6 half bottles of champagne and a whole watermelon, complete with knife and cutting board!!



Now for someone like me who tweaks every ounce out of a backpack to go the extra distance – that is unbelievable – but it's not the first time he's produced major heavy stuff out of his pack.

Here Clif Slade is enjoying some of the "sugar" by eating a wedge of watermelon. Happily, I ate three pieces.



The wind was incessant, I'd never experienced 35-40 mph winds for 3 hours non-stop. And it was cold – about 37 degrees before taking wind chill into effect.



Here's some of our crew taking shelter under a rock. They all look frozen but Mike Ives (standing) was merrily dancing up and down the mountain connecting some of us to the others. He had a big pack and I wondered why. I was to find out at summit.

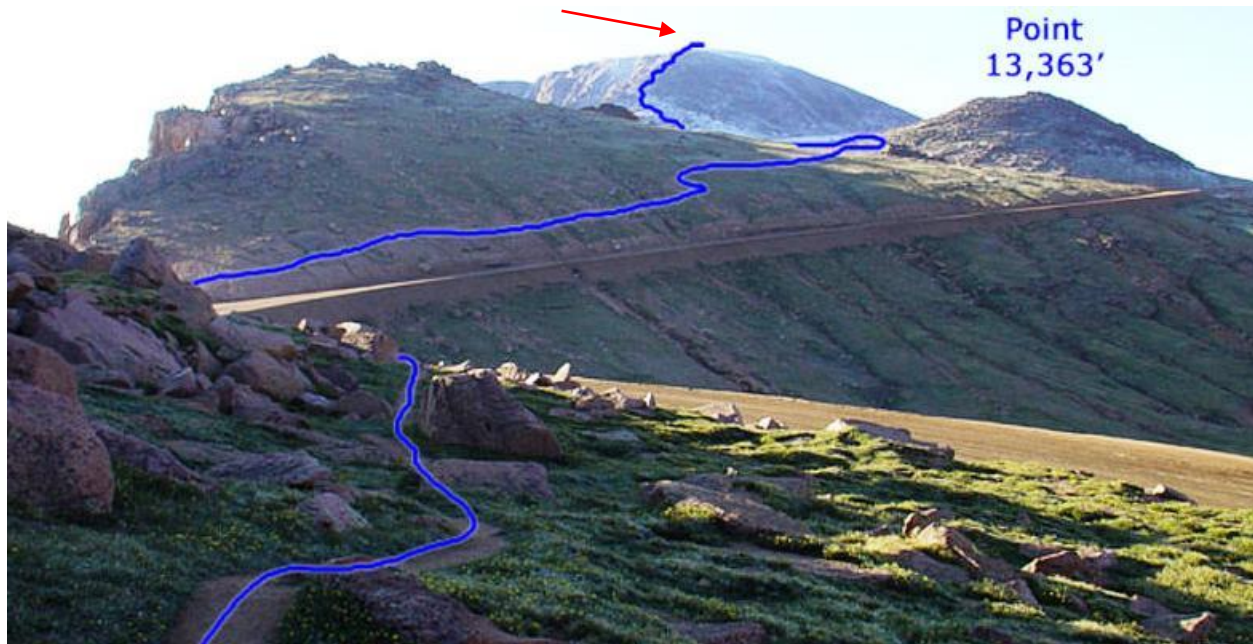


We made it up to a rocky area at 13,000' called Devil's Playground. See the rock formations behind us in this photo – for whatever reason, these rocks are so positioned that lightning jumps from rock to rock. It's not a place to be in a thunderstorm.





We were still 1200' and 2.3 miles from summit.



Just above Devil's Playground we met up with the paved road. The Craggs Trail crosses the road here, parallels it for a while and then heads up the final boulder-field to the summit.



The boulder field is steep but better than most. It has been well prepared – solid, sticky and lots of good foot-placement. It is not anywhere near as difficult as other boulder fields such as on the approach to Mt. Wilson or Pyramid. In this photo, Donna thinks she sees our “party limo” that Elliott had masterfully commandeered despite all the weddings and fireman’s events that happened to be in town for the weekend.





And indeed, there it was (yellow arrow), with our friends the Cirillos and Winnermans inside, plus Mike Ives wife and mother and Elliott Slade.



Then after nearly six hours, still cold and still in the high wind, we sensed we were near the summit.



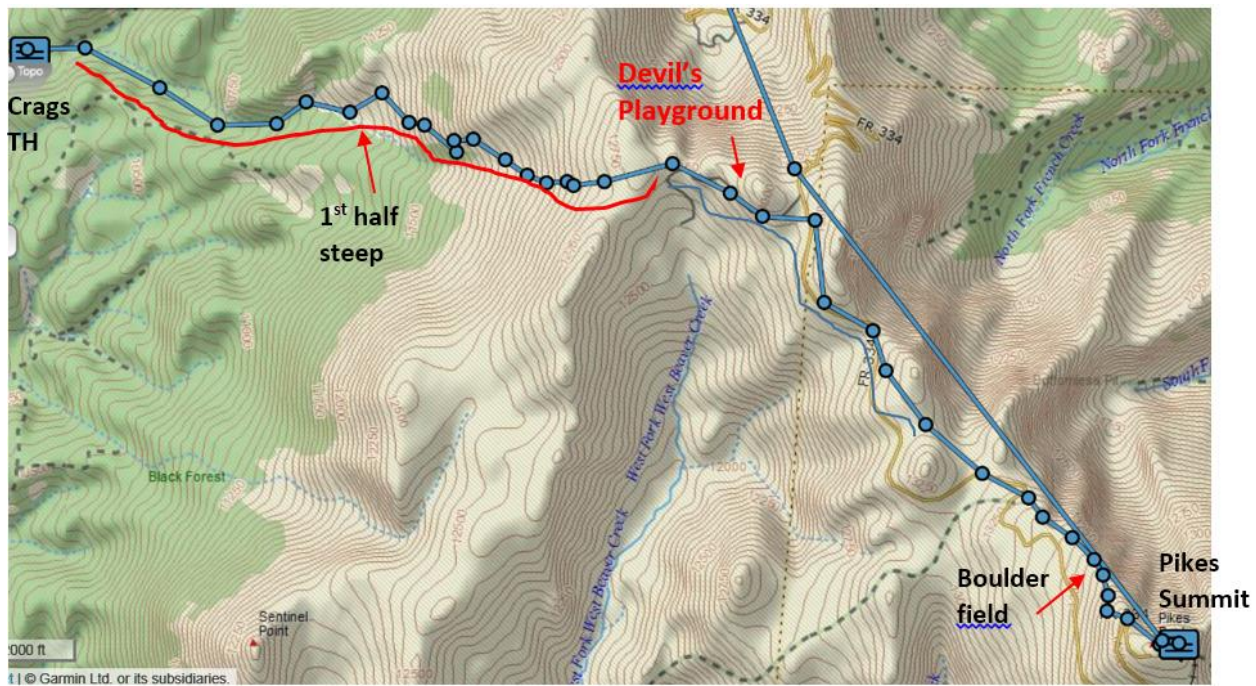


Then we saw Elliott coming from the parking lot, with a crown I was happy to wear.



Summit Pikes Peak, 14,110', at 12:45pm, six hours and 4300' from trailhead. My 58<sup>th</sup> and final.





From: John Hickenlooper - GovOffice [Governor of Colorado]

To: Rick Crandall <rick@aspenventure.com>

Subject: Re: fourteeners

An amazing journey. Congratulations. My Lt Gov started when she was 55, and did them all in 6 years, but your feat dwarfs that (and you're spending a lot of time out of state, no less!). Your book will sell without question (and promote our state :-).

I will be in Lander WY ... but I will make sure we all drink a ceremonial toast toward your achievement.

Congrats again,

All best,  
John

From: Suthers, John Private [Mayor of Colorado Springs]

To: Rick Crandall <rick@aspenventure.com>

Subject: Re: fourteeners

You've saved the best for last!

Sent from my iPhone



On July 22, 1893, Katharine Lee Bates set on a horse-drawn wagon for the summit of Pike's Peak after a summer of adventuring across the U.S. to Colorado. Her trip to Pikes Peak was what she called the "*supreme day*" of her summer's adventures, offering "*the most glorious scenery*" she had ever beheld. And something else made the day memorable: "*It was there, as I was looking out over the sea-like expanse of fertile country spreading away so far under those ample skies that the opening lines of the hymn floated into my mind.*"

That became "America the Beautiful" and its opening stanza:

*O beautiful for halcyon skies  
For amber waves of grain,  
For purple mountain majesties  
Above the enameled plain.  
America! America!  
God shed his grace on thee,  
Till souls wax fair as earth and air  
And music hearted sea.*



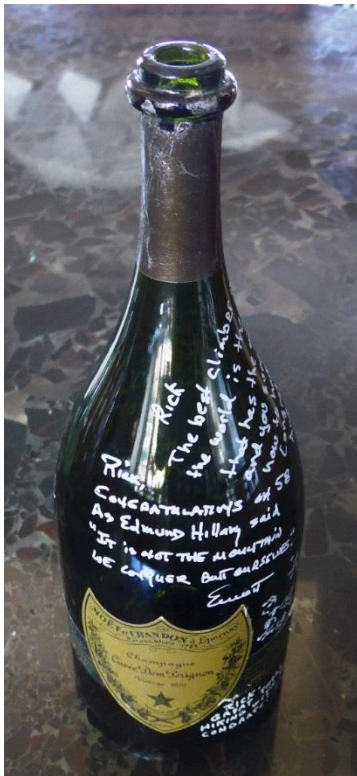
It was published July 4, 1895 in a Boston religious magazine, the Congregationalist. Later when put to music, some of the phrasing was changed, e.g. "halcyon" to "spacious" and "enameled" to "fruited."

A plaque commemorating the words to the song is at the summit





Oh, yes, it's party time. Here is the whole group of friends in the "party van" at summit at 14,110'! That was just the beginning of the surprises and festivities. Elliott opened a magnum of Dom Perignon champagne, vintage 1970. Later he had everyone annotate the bottle:



- Rick – congratulations on 58. As Edmund Hillary said: "It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves." Elliott
- Rick – the best climber in the world is the one that has the most fun, and you sure know how to have fun. Congratulations. Andy and Susan
- Dear Rick – Hiking with you has been a blast! Now it's time to take up needlepoint ... NOT!! Donna
- Rick – great times hiking with you. Congrats! Clif
- What next? The Centennials? Mike
- We were the stalwarts who got you ready!!! Dexter and Dennis.
- Rick – Gracias por invitarnos a tus aventuras. Willy & Lileana

What happened next reduced me to speechless tears.



Recall I'd noticed that Mike Ives had a very full backpack all the way up. Now in the van, he pulled out a wrapped gift – which when unwrapped was a real shock. Pam Ives had made a quilt that incorporated photos, transferred to cloth, carefully selected by Mike to depict some of the signature moves I'd done on the harder 14ers plus making sure to include many of the climbing friends that made the 58 possible ... including my son Brett and my dog Emme.



The quilt pattern throughout is clusters of aspen leaves and the border is custom-selected images of bighorn sheep, goats, pine trees, marmots – all the great contributors to the super camping and climbing experiences I've had the joy to have on these mountains with my friends.

He selected "the Leap of Faith" move on Pyramid, glissading down from Snowmass Peak, crossing the dihedral on Crestone Needle, rappelling down the "hourglass" gully on Little Bear and climbing the Class 4 pitch on Capitol Peak. The medallion in the center is what you see at each summit – this one was from Windom Peak that took me four attempts, finally succeeding just weeks ago. Mike knew what he was doing and Pam created an artistic masterpiece.

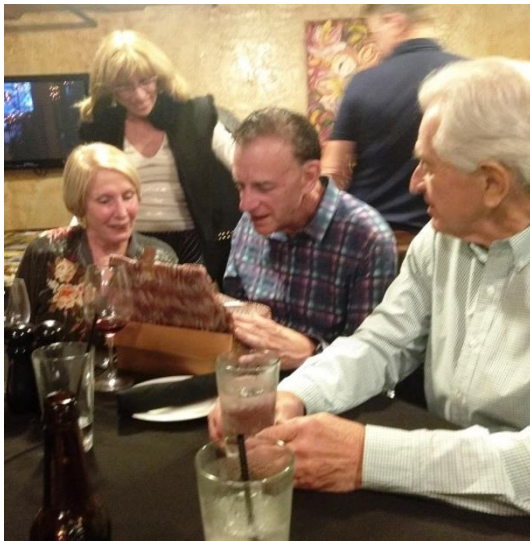




There's just no denying or hiding – With quilt in hand, I was speechless, breathless, tearful and overwhelmed with the combination of realizing that a 9-year difficult challenge had been achieved, even though later in life, and memorialized by such an amazing artistic and thoughtful creation.

I'm still processing it all even as I write this story.

Even more unbelievably, the festivities had only just begun! We headed down that 8000' nineteen mile road from 14,000' to the Mining Exchange Hotel in Colorado Springs.



There the party really got in gear with more Dom brought by the Cirillos.

Awaiting there were even more surprises.



Party time at the Mining Exchange Hotel, Colorado Springs



A cake, designed by Clif and Chongsun Slade, was not to be believed.

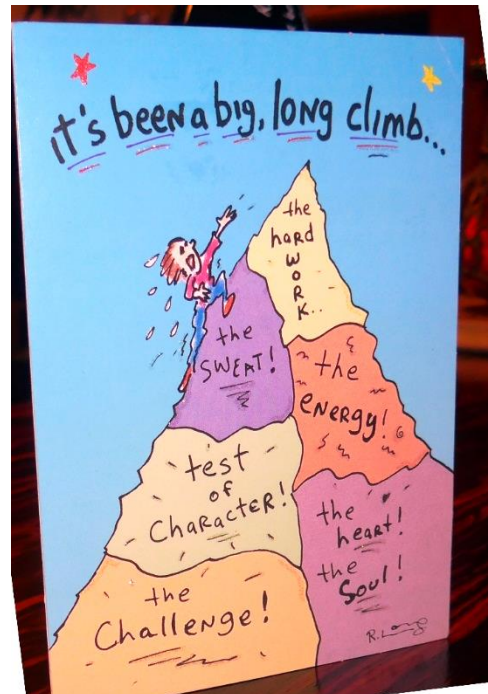


It had all the elements of our camping before climbs including a Big-horn Sheep, Rocky Mountain Goat, two orange tents (Big Agnes if you want the brand), a well-prepared fire and prepped campsite with log and tree stump for sitting (signatures of Rick Peckham's site prep) ...





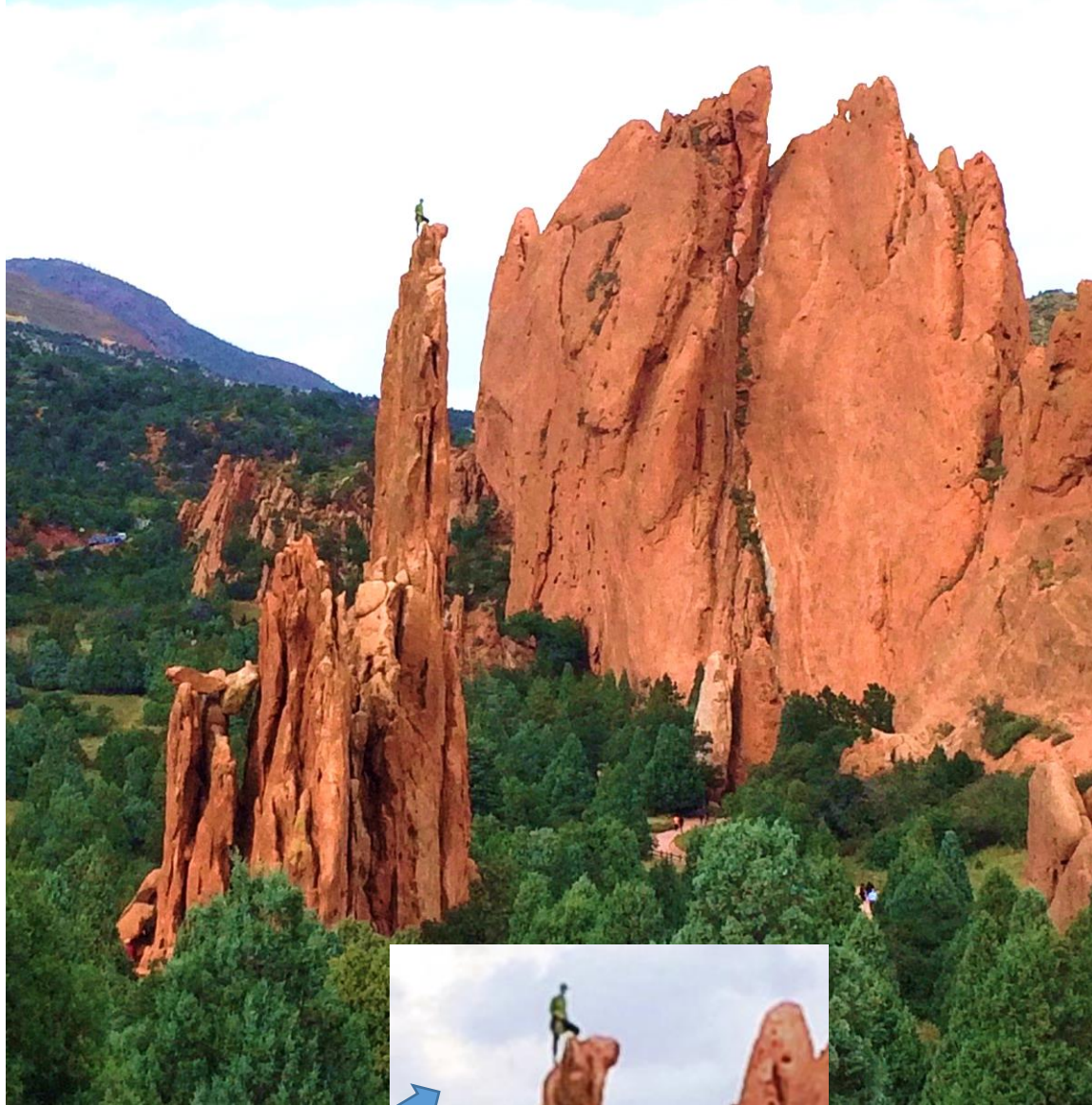
... and a younger-looking version of me with my dog Emme, the 20 lb. Australian Terrier that got me going on these 14ers and did 16 of them with me (see: <http://www.rickcrandall.net/emmy-levy-crandall-january-31-2001-to-august-27-2015/> )



Andy and Susan designed a special T-shirt they handed out to all the climbers.

“A great time was had by all” is truly an understatement – there’s no better experience than one achieved with friends and then sharing the joy with friends.

At the outset of this story the Garden of the Gods was mentioned as a major attraction in the Colorado Springs area. Andy Mishmash, my master-climber friend who got me up the four most difficult of all the 14ers (Capitol Peak, Little Bear, North Maroon and Pyramid) couldn't resist checking out the Park in his own way as he left town the next morning. So here's our version of "Where is Waldo?" Where is Andy?



Yeah, that's our Andy!

