

Quandary Peak – East Ridge

Difficulty: Class 1 / 2

June 28, 2013

Exposure: 

Summit Elev.: 14,265 feet

Trailhead Elev.: 10,850 feet

Elevation Gain: 3,450 feet

Roundtrip: 6.75 miles

Hikers: Shan Stuart, Rick Crandall and Rocky the Australian Terrier

Quandary Peak is the highest peak and the only fourteener in the Tenmile Range. The trailhead is about 9 miles from Breckenridge. It is one of the most popular fourteeners due to its easy-to-follow route and easy access from Denver. Also there are no 4 wheel drive vehicle requirements to get to the trailhead. The route is rocky underfoot most of the way up past the tree line, but portions have been improved by the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative in the early 2000's. While this mountain is not difficult, it's still a fourteener with 3500' of elevation gain and is susceptible to rapidly changing weather conditions and occasional tricky footing, so the trail still packs a punch. Much of the climbing occurs in two relatively short sections. One climbs 1300 feet over a 0.9-mile section, roughly midway through the hike. The other climbs 1100 feet during the final 0.8-mile push to the top. It's an OK first mountain for someone wanting to try a fourteener, although Mt. Elbert or Mt. Democrat are easier.



The peak's name comes from a group of miners who were unable to identify a mineral specimen found on its slopes in the 1860s. The group was in a quandary over the exact nature of the mineral, and so dubbed the mountain "Quandary Peak!" We do know that some silver-bearing Galena has been found and mined at the Monte Cristo Mine on this mountain – maybe that was the unknown mineral?





We overnighted in Breckenridge and started early to get to trailhead by 5:30 am. Even though the summer monsoon weather pattern hasn't started up yet, this June, 2013 has been unusually hot which can produce electrical storms in the mountains.

Shan and Rocky on the trail at 5:30 am.



We hiked for over an hour up to tree line at about 11,800' and that's where the rocks started, the trees shrunk and then disappeared.

Rick pointing to the last tree.

Just above tree line we had a fun surprise. Some of the whiter rocks started moving – and we realized we were seeing mountain goats above us.



We continued uphill and to our delight more goats appeared and they didn't spook much. Clearly they felt they were the owners of the mountain. This appeared to be two families – two big Dads and two Moms each with a baby goat in tow.





Oh yeah – there's
some good
jumpers.



We left the goats to their wanderings and headed uphill through the rocks. Rocky, our four year old Australian Terrier, was showing his strength and agility by hopping and jumping rocks his size almost all the way up – for over 3 miles and 3000' of elevation gain, until we later got near the summit which was still under snow cover.



*Shan and Rocky at about
12,800' headed up; the summit
is not yet in sight.*



About 800' from the summit we transitioned from rocks to snow.. The snow conditions were perfect – at that altitude the snow was firm enough to prevent post-holing and yet soft enough to get purchase with our boots.

Of course Rocky had no trouble with his built-in crampons.



Shan and Rocky nearing the summit.



And then we were at the summit – **Quandary Peak, elevation 14,265’ at 9:40am**, not exactly a record time up (3500’ in 4 hours and 10 minutes) but we did spend some time with the goats and it was my first of the summer and Rocky’s first ever. Rocky is now an official fourteenner dog!



From the summit you can see four other nearby fourteeners (one of which is Mt. Democrat) that were summited all in one day by Emme surely the champion fourteener climber of all Australian Terriers (having checked off 17 in her climbing career). Emme is Rocky's grandmother!

On that day in August, 2008 her summiting exploits raised \$16,000 in pledges for the Aspen Animal Shelter & the Canine Health Foundation (see <http://rickcrandall.net/wp/four-fourteeners-in-one-day/>)

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Small dog meets four tall peaks

Editor's note: On Saturday, Aug. 30, we mad took us to the trailhead at Kite Lake.



At that time in 2008 Obama's prospects were on the rise and we thought summiting Mt. Democrat was pretty cool. Now, 5 years later ... not so much.



At 10:10 am headed back down.

Rocky was back into bouldering – but also on a keen lookout for Marmots and Pikas.



This shot was just before an amazing stunt I wish I'd had the reflexes to capture. Rocky spotted a Pika and with several of us as witnesses, he leapt into the air down-mountain, catching 4 or 5' of air as the mountain under him fell away, and amazingly, landed front feet on a boulder, pivoted and scrambled across more rock just missing the clever Pika who ducked into a crevice just in time!



"Pikas are native to cold climates; most species live on rocky mountain sides where there are numerous crevices to shelter in. They are small mammals, about 6 -8" long. They feed on plant matter and lichens found among the rocks."



As we got back to tree line, I turned around to take one last look at Quandary Peak – and guess what? There were the storm clouds gathering right at the peak – we were glad we'd started early!



Back at trailhead at 12:50, feelin' good. We were 2 ½ hours coming down for a total of a 6 ½ hour leisurely day and a great start to the summer season.