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VACATION ISSUE

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JULY/AUG. '74

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# Message from the Editors

A recent issue of *Backpacker*, a magazine devoted to camping and the outdoors, reports that more than a hundred US colleges and universities now offer courses in the outdoor experience — everything from freshman backpacking and basic mountaineering to advanced alpine survival and ski touring.

One professor was able to convince his superiors to let him give a course in — of all things — walking. He had stumbled upon the idea when his wife drove him to work one morning. As she dropped him off, there was a brief argument over what time she'd pick him up. "Forget it," he said, "I'll walk home."

And walk the professor did — on leather soles over a hot highway he had driven many times before. But he contends he saw more in that walk than in all of his previous trips by car — "saw more, thought more, realized more." He couldn't help wondering what it would do for a college class.

"My students learn a lot," he says, "about themselves as students, as men and women, as Americans. And about America, too, as they walk."

More and more Americans are beginning to discover the heightened sense of life, the involvement with terra firma, that comes from using one's own two feet as means of locomotion. People are coming to find that walking is one of the cheapest, healthiest and pleasantest recreational activities that anyone of any age can engage in. According to one recent estimate, there are about 20,000,000 recreational walkers and hikers in the country today: people who simply walk for pleasure.

When done on properly designed trails and paths, walking is less harmful to the environment than just about any other outdoor sport. But such trails and paths are in short supply. More are badly needed.

Now there will be a Colorado Trail — an imaginative and far-sighted plan to develop a 350-mile mountain route across the state for people who want to walk for the fun of it — be they casual Sunday strollers or serious backpackers.

On page 24 of this issue, Conservation Editor David Sumner gives us a rundown on where this project is now, where it's going, and why it deserves support. Walking, as Sumner observes, can renew one's acquaintance with nature, can reaffirm and strengthen family ties, can educate, and can be very enjoyable.

Ten years ago, President Lyndon Johnson declared that "The forgotten outdoorsmen of today are those who like to walk . . ." That's not true any longer. The walkers are on their feet, and ready to be counted.

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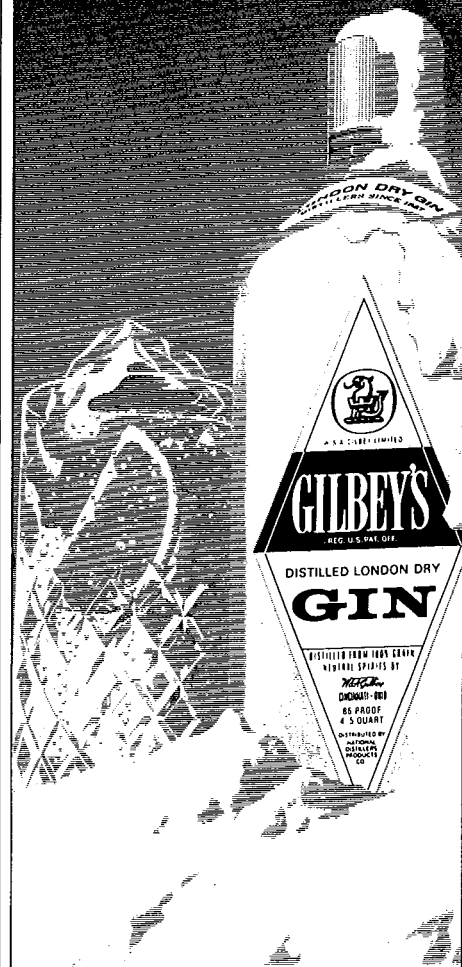
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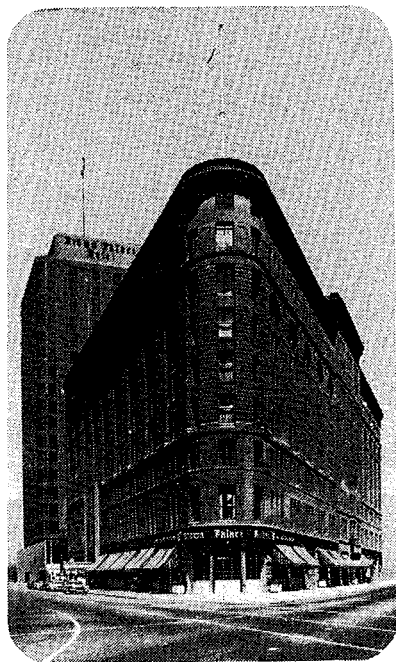


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Story and Photos by David Sumner

# The Colorado Trail Takes Shape

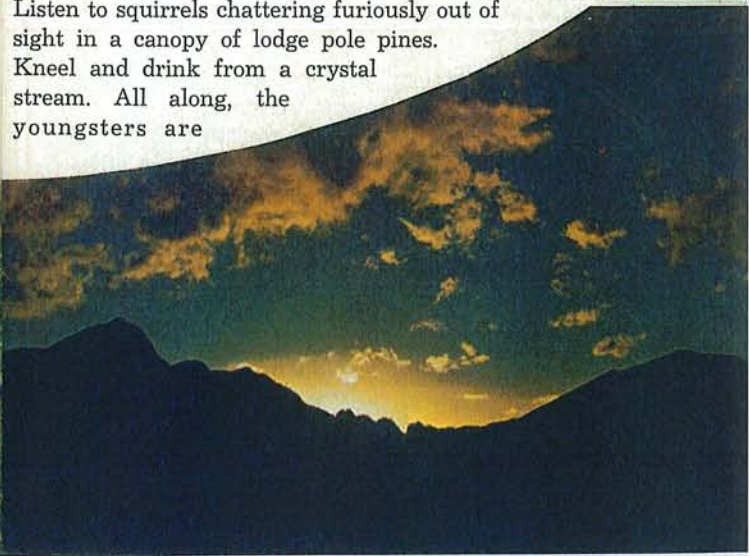
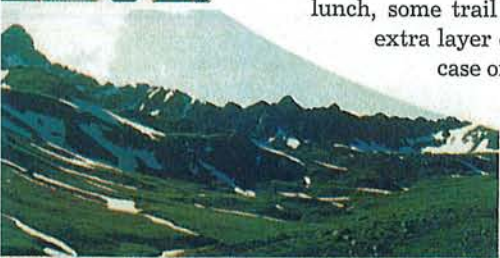
**From Denver to Durango, this 1,100-mile Trail System Will be the Best in the U.S.**

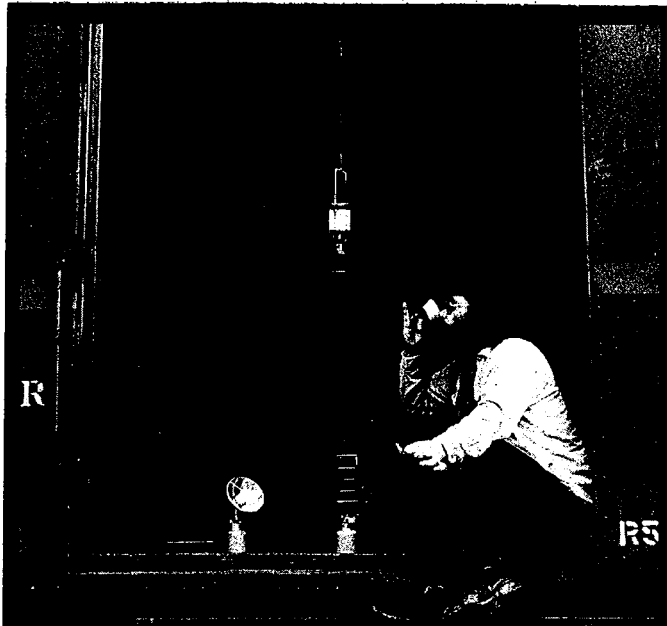
**S**UMMERTIME in the Colorado Rockies. It's barely seven in the morning, but already the sun is high enough to banish the last of the night's chill. The sky is a bright, brittle blue. No clouds in sight. Only a light breeze, and somewhere in the distance the watery rush of a high-country stream. Couldn't be a better day for hiking the trail, and your family agrees; the kids have been chomping at the bit ever since sunrise.

You distribute the new lightweight knapsacks, checking their contents (all anyone will need is lunch, some trail snacks, a drinking cup, an extra layer of clothing, plus a poncho in case of rain). Then the whole crew starts out — the children scampering ahead

along the well-marked path, the adults taking it easy in the rear. The route is gentle, the woods lush, the quiet just delightful. It hardly seems like you're working at all.

The day lolls on. You stop to rest as you need it, sit on a log just to breathe in the air, and poke around according to your whims. Investigate the weathered ruins of an old miner's cabin. Check out a strange wildflower and identify it in the trail guide. Watch two mule deer — a doe and her fawn — feed across a forest opening. Listen to squirrels chattering furiously out of sight in a canopy of lodge pole pines. Kneel and drink from a crystal stream. All along, the youngsters are





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just as fascinated with the trail as you are.

Lunch in an aspen grove comes and goes lazily, and before you know it, the afternoon shadows begin to lengthen. You've walked five, maybe six miles, feel a little tired, but by no means exhausted; the kids have slowed to a modest trot, though their energy still exceeds yours and their flood of questions is unchecked. Why this? What's that? Always their spontaneous curiosity, and out here in the unspoiled mountains you find yourself recapturing that same lively spirit — slipping happily back into the best of your own childhood enthusiasms.

So the day ends. It's been something you've always wanted to do. But before this, you've never known quite where — or how.

Now you do, on the new Colorado Trail.

IMAGINE A HIKING trail that will trace a 350-mile route through some of the most interesting and varied mountain country in Colorado. Make it a gentle trail, not a back-breaker, so that anyone in modest physical condition can enjoy it. Plan the route in segments so it can be walked a little at a time (or more if one wishes). Be sure there are lots of easy access or "feeder" trails. Trace it for all-season use; give the ski tourers their chance, too. And above all, make the whole route interesting — even educational. Let it take hikers through a maximum variety of ecosystems, over all kinds of terrain, past historical sites from the by-gone mining and pioneer days. Let them discover firsthand all the richness the Colorado mountains have to offer. Don't miss a thing.

And finally, give this route a name. Keep it simple and direct. What could be better than the Colorado Trail.

When first announced only a year ago, the Colorado Trail was but the beginning of a dream — a concept to fill a growing recreational need, aggravated by 30 years of neglect of foot-trail construction. The plan is for a 350-mile intermediate hiking path angling across the state. The starting point will be in the foothills of the Rockies just south of Denver; the finish (or beginning, if you wish) will be the colorful old railroad and freight center of Durango in the southwestern corner of the state. Most of the route will track through seven of Colorado's vast National Forests, and there'll also be trail tie-ins with a number of the state's major resorts: Keystone, Breckenridge, Copper Mountain, Vail, Crested Butte, Purgatory. The entire system will have 1,100 miles of foot and horse

trails—and no vehicles of any kind will be allowed anywhere on them.

On paper 12 months ago, it looked like an “everything trail” — in all likelihood a practical impossibility despite the vision and good sense that generated the original concept.

But today the basic idea appears more sound than ever. On-the-ground work done last summer and winter amply testifies to this. In every case, field crews found that their blueprints more than proved out along the proposed route. Especially heartening is the fact that some 70 percent of the trail may already exist. Numerous old hiking paths, logging trails, mining roads, railroad grades and stock driveways already weave and meander through the forests and just need to be tied together with comparatively short, connecting links. Only a minimum of trail development will be necessary to make this grand network a reality.

For the beginnings of the Colorado Trail, one must flip the calendar back several years and zero in on the US Forest Service’s Rocky Mountain Regional Office in Denver where the staff is facing a broad array of recreational-use pressures:

- Between 1967 and 1973, an annual 20 percent increase in hikers is heading off into the woods over the trails of Colorado’s 11 National Forests. Prospects of a continued rise in the years to come — up 600 percent more within the next 25 years.

- Mounting criticism of the agency’s failure to limit and control the recreational use of Wilderness Areas. What might be called “over-camp” was badly degrading these special preserves. Observers noted campsites denuded of all vegetation; a proliferation of fire rings; horse hitching areas where soil and small trees had been equally torn up; widespread refuse; rutting of meadows. The wilderness was literally being “loved” to death.

- Roadside campgrounds filling to excess, forcing many vacationers to turn away and spend the night — who knows where? Denver radio stations actually took to broadcasting “campground conditions” along with the regular Friday afternoon traffic reports.

- Winter ski touring growing at a faster rate than either hiking or roadside camping. Increased pressure to perform search and rescue work, and to control avalanches.

- Growing concern that the Forest Service is not meeting the recreational needs of the

## Relocating to Denver?

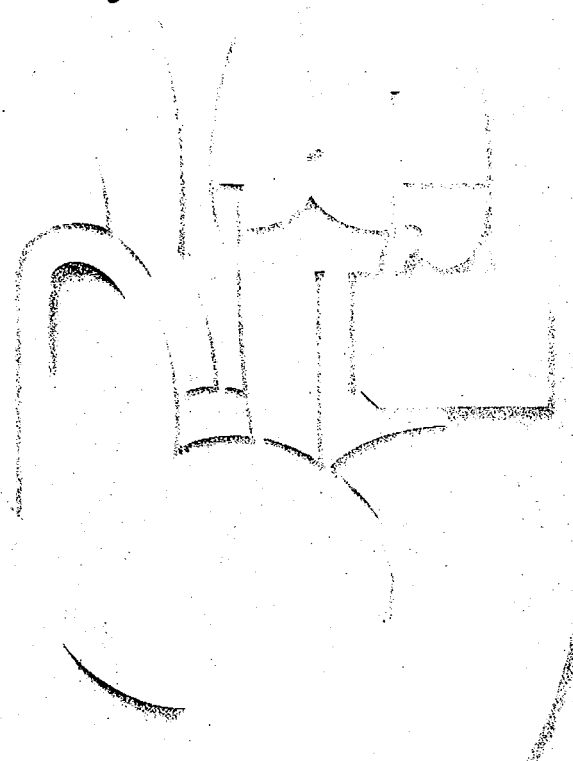
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average family, the people who want to get out of their cars and hike moderate distances without laboring under a 35-pound pack. The Forest Service, so this line of criticism went, was concentrating all its efforts at the extremes — rugged wilderness maintenance on one end of the spectrum; motorized campground development on the other. What about the families who would like to take just a Sunday walk in the woods?

- An awareness that recreational activities in the Forests were at best controlled in a haphazard manner. While some areas were virtually overrun, others (many of them readily accessible) were all but untouched.

With the budget of the Forest Service largely allocated to “higher priority” concerns (mainly logging), and recreation well down the list, dealing with this battery of concerns and complaints was no easy chore. And in truth, they’re going to require continuous imag-

inative and innovative steps from now as far as one can see into the 21st century; otherwise recreational abuse of the Forests can only grow worse.

The Colorado Trail is one such step, a first and hopefully a giant one as well. It will not be a cure-all, but if all goes well, it could help alleviate many of the problems the recreational explosion in the Rockies has thrust into the Forest Service’s lap. More significantly, and positively, this 350-mile hiking and ski touring corridor could provide a significant, new and unique outdoor opportunity for all kinds of people interested in getting “back to the earth for a while” — not just the seasoned backpacker.

As it now stands, the basic ingredients of the Colorado Trail look like this:

It will be a major intermediate trail, more challenging than the easy walking trails of Denver’s Mountain Parks, but not nearly as rough as a route along the Conti-

mental Divide or into a remote wilderness. Much of the path will be designed for the less experienced outdoorsman — the person who, like millions of Americans, yearns to get into the mountains, but doesn’t quite know where or how.

Numerous access paths and connecting loops will make it possible for families to hike the Colorado Trail in segments — as little or as much as one desires. The entire 350 miles in a couple of months, or just a few of them on a lazy afternoon.

All-season use is an integral part of the working concept. As various alternatives are studied, careful attention will be paid to the differing needs of backpackers and cross-country skiers. This may well mean different routes for different times of the year; a mountainside path could be highly scenic in the summer, but out of the question in the winter because of avalanche danger.

Unlike most of the old routes

## FOLLOW THE COLORADO TRAIL

*Though the final route of the Colorado Trail has not been exactly fixed, there’s a good chance that those who hike this 350-mile, Denver-to-Durango route will discover much of the following:*

- *Why Harry Orchard wanted to roll kegs of dynamite down the slopes of Greenback Mountain onto the unsuspecting townfolk of Telluride.*

- *The relationship between porcupines and ponderosa pines.*

- *Why Indian paintbrush blossoms in three different colors.*

- *Where petrified wood can be found in Colorado and why it is petrified.*

- *How early day miners constructed a quarter-mile tunnel through Treasure Mountain (and found little treasure).*

- *The location and size of the world’s largest Colorado blue spruce.*

- *What a tassel-eared squirrel looks like,*

*and the sounds it makes as a warning.*

- *Why there are two lonely, ten-ton blocks of marble lying abandoned on a mountainside not far from Crested Butte.*

- *What a stock driveway is.*

- *How the ghost town of Vicksburg got its name and its history.*

- *What a fire really does to a forest.*

- *Why pikas don’t hibernate, and how they make it through the mountain winters.*

- *Why both bear and elk are sometimes hard on aspen trees.*

- *How small, delicate plants with bright, colorful blooms survive on the harsh alpine tundra above 11,500 feet.*

- *How the Ute Indians used yucca.*

- *Why no one should eat wand lillies.*

- *How to spot a coyote crossing, or a rabbit scrape, and a deer path.*

*All this, and much more, you’ll discover on the Colorado Trail.*



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in the Colorado mountains (which began as game trails and were successively enlarged by fur trappers, miners, loggers and sheepherders) this one will not simply follow the easiest path between two points. Instead, the trail will wander, meander and digress in the most interesting manner possible. This means it will take in a broad diversity of landscape (everything from high alpine tundra to comparatively lowland sage plateaus), veer off to historic ghost towns, edge along interesting and unique geologic formations, reach up to scenic overlooks, and do anything else necessary to make traveling the route an adventure in discovery. In this sense the Colorado Trail will be a genuine rarity — a true recreational route, rather than only a revamped early day trail which was built for practical reasons of just getting there and back the fastest way possible. A true discovery trail. At carefully selected locations along the route, current plans envision the construction of rustic overnight mountain huts like those of the Appalachian Mountain Club in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, or the considerably more varied huts common throughout the European Alps. Basic features would include a large sleeping dormitory plus several smaller bunkrooms; a kitchen serving modest, nourishing meals; a dining and common room; maybe even a drying and warming room. Extensive surveys and study will precede any hut building, and that is just now getting under way. Inevitably, these shelters will be year-round facilities — serving both hikers who wish to spend a summer's night in the mountains and cross-country skiers uninterested in bivouacking in the snow.

At this date, the route remains only approximate. The Colorado Trail itself does not yet exist; only the broad corridor in which it will fall has definitely been identified; this winds west from

Denver to Kenosha Pass (Route 285) over the Continental Divide toward Vail Pass, and then south through the Gunnison area to Ouray and Telluride, and finally to Durango. Selection of that final route now depends on the results of intensive exploration within the corridor (in some places it's up to 60 miles wide); an astounding number of alternatives are being checked out, investigated and evaluated before the final line is drawn on the maps.

---

### HELP WITH THE TRAIL

You can help with the Colorado Trail by sending your ideas and suggestions to the Editors — or by volunteering your time out in the field. Copies of all correspondence will be forwarded to the office of the new Colorado Mountain Trails Foundation. Write to:

*Help With the Trail*  
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In short, that is the present direction of the Colorado Trail. In addition to being a fresh, intelligent door to the Colorado mountains, proponents also see it as a significant "act of conservation."

"Yes, I believe there are many people who would like to get outdoors, but who need a trail to lead them out there," explains Rocky Mountain Regional Forester, Bill Lucas. "But I also have other concerns as well. Both the trail and the huts will, by their very existence, do what we call 'concentrate use.' A footpath does less damage to the backcountry than any other facility for outdoor recreation; if we do this right, I believe the Colorado Trail will attract many people who would otherwise be scattered all over the Forests in a haphazard, unplanned fashion. We know they're coming — look at the past growth, the future projections. Our concern is to do them the best justice we can, while also preserving the integrity of the land."

"What is now being done to limit or regulate camping, campfires and grazing of recreation livestock in areas of heavy use?" Congressman Donald G. Brotzman recently asked Lucas.

The Colorado Trail may be one answer, and so are the proposed mountain huts, for the latter also serve to "concentrate use" in addition to being warm, friendly places where a hiker or tour skier can hang his hat for the night, get a couple of good meals (plus a sack lunch for the next day's walk), and avoid the rigors of carrying food and shelter on his back. To get the best possible advice, the Forest Service has retained Dr. William Reifsnyder, a professor of Forest Meteorology at Yale University and author of the fascinating Sierra Club Totebook, *Hut Hopping in the Austrian Alps*. Reifsnyder's job title will be "outdoor recreation planner," but his real task will be to explore and locate possible hut sites along the Colorado Trail. Having hiked the Rockies, the Sierras, the Adirondacks, the White Mountains of New Hampshire and the Austrian and Swiss Alps, he knows the problems of intensive recreational use firsthand. His remarks on the huts of the Austrian Alps point directly to their positive conservation purpose.

"Even though (Austrian) alpine trails receive very heavy use," he writes, "the impact of the hiker is minimal. He does not pitch a tent, build a fireplace, gather wood, trample the earth around his campsite, leave his debris. He merely passes by and the only sign of his passage is his spoor. The impact is concentrated at the huts where it can be dealt with adequately.

"As a result," Reifsnyder continues, "although many parts of the Alps are more heavily used than sections of the Sierra (or the Rockies), the visible impact of man's recreational use is less."

None of this means that either the Colorado Trail or its huts will be foolproof, but there's no ques-

tion that both represent a fresh direction for recreational planning in the Rockies.

Signs that this interlocking, master concept makes good sense began to emerge last summer when the first group of volunteers — all high school and college students — headed west into the Pike National Forest from the red sandstone monoliths of Roxborough Park south of Denver.

Their job was to reconnoiter the Colorado Trail corridor all the way up to the Continental Divide, and by mid-August they'd accomplished their task. Wandering along existing trails, following abandoned railroad grades and old logging roads, and occasionally going through trackless woods, the volunteers came up with a blueprint for an effective, workable path. En route, they made careful note of all major natural, geologic and historic features. They studied the background of the old Denver, South Park and Pacific Railroad Company; noted numerous springs and creeks where good drinking water was available; located an early day homestead and an area often used by bighorn sheep (which they carefully skirted); catalogued several unique geologic formations and a historic railroad bridge. And surveyed and recorded much more.

Much of their concern was directed toward plotting a sensible route through the forest. Slopes that were too steep for a modest hike they avoided; in checking out one canyon, they found obvious signs of winter avalanches and for that reason took their explorations elsewhere; a detour was found around an area of fragile alpine tundra that too many hiking feet might degrade. Access routes to various towns and road heads were carefully noted.

In no case was the basic concept of the Colorado Trail questioned. All hands pitched in, their imaginations captivated by what they were starting. If there were any reservations, they were contained

only in the parting words of the student team leaders.

"The scope of this project is phenomenal," they wrote in their report. "We hope our efforts have initiated this worthwhile endeavor. Good luck!"

A second stage of reconnoitering took place last winter down on the Gunnison National Forest in the central part of the state. This time most of the workers came from the student ranks of Western State College in Gunnison; their on-the-ground study was tied into regular course work in winter ecology and they came away with six hours' academic credit, plus plenty of good experience in the field. Local guides and outfitters, sport shop and resort operators, cross-country skiers and other interested citizens were also involved in one phase or another — bringing the total number of winter participants close to 100. Their ages ranged from 12 to over 60; some had never completed high school while others held PhDs; some were rank beginners on touring skis while their companions had years of winter mountaineering experience in Canada, Alaska and the Alps.

When their winter's work was complete, this all-volunteer crew had inventoried and graded 35 ski touring routes traversing well over 200 miles of mountain terrain. No final decisions on Colorado Trail loops were made, but all possibilities were checked out; some of these unquestionably will be plugged into the system.

Still a third project was initiated last year in the San Isabel National Forest, also in the central part of the state. Here the Main Range Trail — an old, 1930s vintage, CCC-built hiking route which travels almost 80 miles on the flank of the great Sawatch Range (site of Mt. Elbert, the highest peak in Colorado) — is a likely candidate for redesignation as part of the Colorado Trail.

Among the primary attractions along this long, winding path are the old, little known, well-pre-

served ghost towns of Vicksburg and Winfield; these are two of five gold camps that sprung up in the Clear Creek Valley back in 1880 and 1881. Today most of the old, log miners' shacks have long since been converted to summer cabins, but the various owners have banded together as the Clear Creek Historical Society, and are now laying plans for a substantial restoration of the two historic towns. The schoolhouse in Winfield and the old Levin cabin (he was an early day sourdough miner) will be open to visitors, and the exteriors of all the other buildings will be made to look as much as possible like they did back in the '80s.

Could these landmarks be features of the Colorado Trail? Yes, and there's every good chance they will.

So much for the beginning. The next major step came at the initiative of the Forest Service; though the germ of the Colorado Trail developed within the agency, personnel there wanted from the start to make this a true people's project and not one more inconclusive, overly tangled bureaucratic invention. So last fall, Regional Forester Lucas began to send out feelers to anyone who might be interested. The result was a large, enthusiastic gathering in November, 1973, of one of the most thoroughly mixed groups ever to get together under one roof in Colorado: attorneys, college students, Sierra Club members, newspaper editors, bankers, mountaineering shop operators, hotel managers, wilderness guides and outfitters, and many more.

From this assembly, and from subsequent meetings of smaller representative groups, the Colorado Mountain Trails Foundation has been born — a privately incorporated, non-profit citizens' group which will shortly take over all planning, development and management of the Colorado Trail.

When that happens, the Forest Service's lead role will diminish;

however, the agency will continue to offer assistance in areas requiring its special expertise and administrative guidance. The entire arrangement and operation will be similar to that of the venerable Appalachian Mountain Club in the East: a people's project on Federal land, but supported and run by the citizens who care about it.

As for this summer, work on the Colorado Trail is already under way. In the early spring, Forest Service rangers, covering all the territory included in the trail corridor, compiled an exhaustive list of work that must be done. The miles of country that must be explored and inventoried are vast; this comprises the bulk of the project list: go out, see what's there, determine the best route, note anything and everything of interest, check old trails and see if they fill the bill. This will mean a lot of walking, looking and thinking. In addition, there will be light maintenance on some established trails, a much smaller amount of actual trail development, and research to be done on historic sites.

Who will do this work? Not Forest Service employees, but rather volunteer, grass roots citizens.

Recruited largely by the Colorado Springs-based National Hiking and Ski Touring Association (NAHSTA) and also from those who responded to this magazine's 1973 article introducing the Colorado Trail, the earliest of these volunteers began work in late June. As the summer progresses, more will arrive and be dispatched to take part in various work projects in the National Forests

throughout the state. A late June training session has already broken in a cadre of citizen crew leaders who will direct the activities out in the field.

In addition, another group of students from Western State College will be using the birth of the Colorado Trail to develop their skills in environmental analysis. Also, an older hiking group from Durango (mostly teachers and many of them in their 50s) will be working to establish the kind

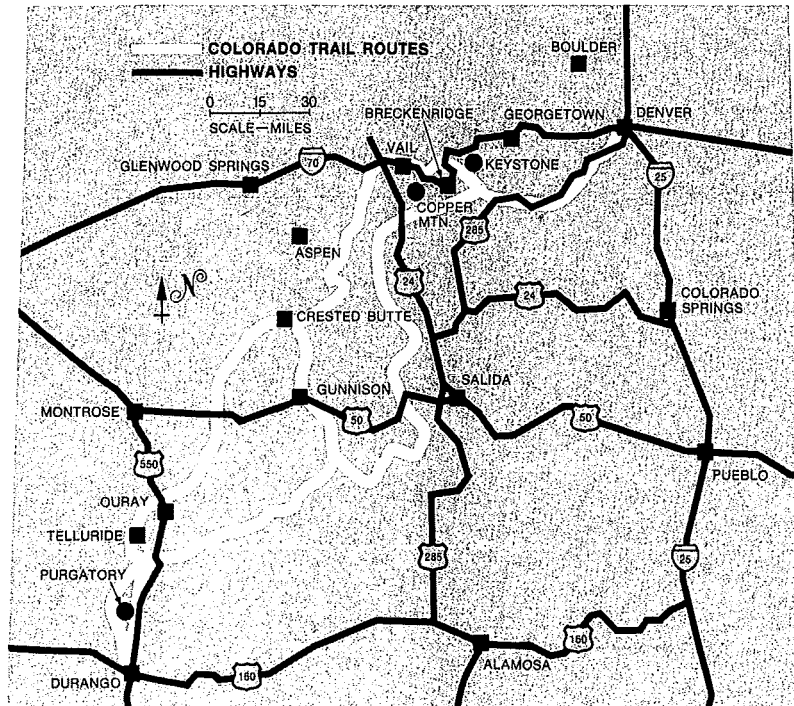
cares can help meet the goal.

"Trails are part of the American way of life," Regional Forester Lucas notes. "Look at the great trails that helped win the West—the Oregon, the Santa Fe, the Lewis and Clark, the Overland and the Mormon Trail. They opened new horizons; they gave people hope and promise, and they also provided an unlimited opportunity for adventure. If we can recapture even a few remnants of that great national experience for 20th century Americans with the Colorado Trail, then I think we'll have done one heck of a job."

As this nation nears its Bicentennial, its historic trails—once the lifelines of a civilization—have largely fallen into disuse. The few that remain are crisscrossed by pavement, barbed wire, power lines, pipelines and other barriers; in many places they are obliterated by cities and towns. And in place of these great old trails we now have Interstate

Highways, whisking people from one nearly identical community to the next—insulating them at 60 mph from the land which is their birthright.

If the Colorado Trail works out as planned (and all signs look most favorable), it could well mark a healthy reversal of this trend. An early American trail with no stoplights, no trailer trucks, no dotted yellow lines and no aluminum guard rails. A trail that offers only the mountains and all they have to give. A trail that offers the feeling of satisfaction that comes from just meandering through the beautiful, remote forests on one's own two feet. □



*"A trail that offers the satisfaction of just meandering through the forests on one's own two feet"*

of walking trail suitable for people of their age.

But the amount of work still to be done is vast, and many decisions are yet to be made. The new Foundation will not only have to continue recruiting, training and organizing volunteers; it will also have to raise funds to keep this extensive project rolling. Links in the Trail will have to be developed. Maintenance will be an ongoing activity. Interpretative signs will have to be conceived and posted at points of interest along the route. Someone should come up with a unique *Guide to the Colorado Trail*. It all falls in the realm of challenge; anyone who