

Mountain Hike

Last Saturday 25 of us drove into the Colorado foothills and climbed Chief Mountain. Most are students at Colorado School of Mines. There were five vehicles with American drivers. Seven were Chinese. Four from India. Others were from Pakistan, Egypt, Brazil, and America. The vertical climb was about 300 meters over a distance of about 4 kilometers.



At Golden we had thick fog but soon climbed out of that on the highway. Skies were clear above as we started. At lunch time after we came down Chief Mountain for a picnic the skies were getting cloudy with a threat of showers rapidly developing. Temperatures were comfortable for the hike, about 10 degrees C at that elevation.

At the summit there were some golden mantle squirrels who were eager for peanuts, sometimes taking them out of our fingers.



The summit itself had no trees, as is obvious from the photo. Near the summit some of the trees were permanently distorted by the prevailing winds during the growing season. They are called “flag trees”. The photo shows a dead tree with most of its branches on one side. In the mid-1960s I used such trees to map the complex air flow patterns around Whiteface Mountain in northeastern New York State and published my report.

Also near the summit were bristle-cone pine trees. They like to grow in the harsh environment. In California some such trees are thousands of years old, and they can be old in Colorado also.



This view is of Mount Evans, one of the highest in Colorado. There is a paved road to its summit, where I took two Chinese visitors last year, and an astronomy observatory up there. The “tree line” is obvious, where the dark green becomes brown. Above the tree line the climate is too cold and the growing season too short for tree survival.





This is the hiking pathway as we descended into the thicker forest. An occasional view to the north showed lightly colored scars on the hillsides, from waste rock of the gold mines.



We had a picnic lunch about a kilometer away. It was still sunny then. Some Gray Jays kept watch of our tables, ready to clean up crumbs.



Ed Holroyd,
11 September 2014

