Our Colorado Trail Journey
By the Van Zweden boys (Eli, Miles, Jonas)
Summer of 2011
April 30
Today we have started the long march towards the end of the Colorado Trail at the Indian Creek Trailhead near Denver. The hike was a day trip and was supposed to be 16 miles but the mileage on the map was wrong, so it was only about 13 miles. During the hike we saw Denver through a gap in the foothills. We also listened to Bible verses set to music and books on tape on our MP3 players. Towards the end of the hike, we saw a tree that had been hit by lightning – there was a crack down the middle and the bark had all exploded off of one side of the tree. Then we peered down off of a rocky outcrop and we could see the parking lot which inflated our urges to get down and go home to a tasty refreshing dinner and work our muscles again before a very, very good nights sleep.
The stupendous Colorado Trail is just so cool. Today we hike most of the 11.5 miles through a burn area, so there were no trees to obstruct our view. We looked at a quartz mine and disapproved of the wreckage of old cars that people decided to dump there along with other junk. It probably would have been a lot prettier if it weren’t for these things. We followed an old road along a ridge that we thought was more scenic than the trail running about 100 yards below the ridge and paralleling the road. We had our first casualty on the street outside our home last night: Aaron broke his ankle and won’t be joining us for a while.
May 14
Today we hiked segment 3 with some friends, which went pretty well except that they were going a bit slower than we intended. Eli and Miles had an appointment in Denver at 4pm, so we went ahead of our friends and zoomed along getting tired, but excited as to the fun we would have that evening. We stopped where a stream went through a huge metal culvert – Miles took Dad’s trekking pole and went through it, emerging safely on the other side. After that escapade, things went smoothly. We found the Tahoe at the end of the segment where dad had left it that morning (and then biked back to the beginning of the segment).
May 20-21.
Segment 4 is about 17 miles and dad was worried that us kids couldn’t walk that far in one day – so he gave us a choice of doing it in two days with full backpacks. We thought that would be a better deal than walking all 17 miles in one day so we started on a Friday afternoon. We had trouble finding a good campsite near a water source. Thankfully, dad got a gallon of water from a small stream and we hiked a mile or two trying to find a flat place to camp. As it was growing dark, we finally found a flat, dry spot among some snowbanks and soon had a crackling fire to warm us. The next day passed uneventful besides looking at about 30 beaver dams and finding elk antlers. We finished the segment on Saturday and were pretty exhausted!
May 28
Segment 5 is about 14.5 miles long and we decided to do them all in one day (without wearing those heavy backpacks). Eli was just getting a cold and so it was pretty grueling for him. Nevertheless, we pressed on. Near the middle of the day, we stopped for lunch and Jonas leaned against a small aspen tree. A second later, we heard a crack, and Jonas was sitting on the ground with the tree laying under him. We all had a good laugh. Near the end we came across some forts and had a lot of fun playing in those. We also passed a recent burn area where everything was red – we figured it was the red coloring from the slurry bombers that hadn’t washed off of the trees yet! We ended the trip at Kenosha pass in high spirits because this was the last day hike and we were done for the month. We plan to wait until July 4 to allow the snow time to melt and when Dad gets 7 weeks off of work to hike straight through from Kenosha Pass to Durango.
July 4
Today we start through-hiking to Durango from Kenosha Pass – about 400 miles left to go! Jonas keeps calling it “Kenoshatopa Pass” because he confuses it with “Cochetopa hills”. Segment 6 is the longest segment on the whole Colorado Trail – it is 32 miles long. “Whew! That is going to be hard”, was Eli’s first thought, but by the second day of hiking it seemed like a no-brainer.

The day was rather eventful – we invited our friends to picnic at the trailhead and to hike the first six miles with us without backpacks. At the six mile point, we crossed a road and grabbed our backpacks from the car and bid our friends goodbye. We spied a mother grouse with several young chicks barely a few days old. The baby was so cute that Eli almost wanted to pick it up. After saying goodbye to our friends, we hiked another two miles. We had lots of trouble finding a place to camp with water, but we finally came to a spot with a handy snow bank we could use for water. Dad cooked dinner, and then attempted to melt snow for breakfast and for water the next day. He managed to spill the melted water pot THREE TIMES when dumping more snow in. Each time, he just got more snow and started over again – it was pretty dark by the time we got to bed.
July 5
This was day 2 of our through-hiking. Only about 35 more days to go. Jonas is already expressing his disapproval of Muesli for breakfast. This day passed uneventfully. We hiked up over Georgia pass which was supposed to be pretty difficult because of the snowpack – but we got through without a problem (but there were lots of snow drifts). The ranger we talked to yesterday said he saw people routinely turned back because of the snow and warned us of much difficulty ahead – but we didn’t have any issues. We are now at camp near the confluence of two streams and trying to make a fire. Can’t wait for tomorrow’s hike. Jonas really enjoyed being above treeline today – he likes the views. Dad teases him about how much fun he’s having.
July 6
We are developing a groove now. Waking up in the morning, eating breakfast, taking
down the tent, packing everything up, stretching our muscles, and starting the days hike
is starting to get routine. Dad makes us stretch every morning and evening because he
thinks we are as old and creaky as he is.
Eating lunch on the trail is not something we’ve mastered yet. This morning, partway
down the trail, we heard howling and yipping very close by. Assuming it was coyotes,
we crept closer and closer until we were very close… we looked around a tree and saw a
bunch of sled dogs in kennels. Plain, harmless sled dogs. We then saw lots of mountain
bikers and found lots of biking equipment on the trail (pumps, broken parts, etc). We
viewed a valley that had been ruined by old dredging/mining operations in the Swan
River area. Upon reaching camp, Jonas made his first campfire all by himself. Miles
poked his foot with a stick 10 days ago and it is infected again. Dad is a bit nervous
about this and treated it before we all went to sleep.
July 7
Jonas decided to get an extra power boost this morning for breakfast by drinking olive oil straight from the bottle. He reported that it was disgusting. We saw some deer dashing away from the trail as we got started this morning.

Eli is so excited since we only have six miles today and then Mom and Aaron meet us and we get to goof off the rest of the day. As we got closer to the end of the segment, we could hear the highway. Upon reaching it, we crossed over and made camp a quarter mile beyond on a bluff overlooking the area. We then walked to the nearest bus stop and waited there for an hour for the bus while we wrote our journals. We finally got on the bus and made our way toward lunch, Mom, and Aaron. We then rented some canoes and paddled to some islands on Lake Dillon and had fun playing and exploring them. Mom and Aaron (on crutches) then hiked to our tent in a rainstorm and we all went to bed. We waited in the car for an hour until we thought the lightning had subsided and then made a “run” for the quarter mile to camp!
July 8
Today we hike without backpacks for all of Segment 7 which is 12.8 miles. There is a lot of moisture in the air and lots of clouds obscuring the Ten Mile range that we intend to cross. We wake up at 6am and start climbing the 3600 feet to the top of the ten mile range. We encounter heavy runoff and walk on snow for over a mile. Finally, at 11am we reach the crest of the ten mile range at 12,500 feet and hopefully look over the other side to see…. A wall of water coming towards us on strong winds! We could barely see Vail Pass and Copper Mountain ski area. We quickly put on our fleece and rain jackets and braced for the full fury of the storm. From here we had another couple miles above treeline and Dad was concerned about lightning. So he directed us off the trail and straight down the tundra… we ended up in the right side of the “K” couloir (of SKY couloir skiing fame) and took that straight down until we crossed the trail right before the end of the segment where Mom and Aaron were waiting to take us back to Denver.
July 11
Off we go again as Mom drives us to the trailhead for Segment 8 starting at Copper Mountain. There is still a monsoonal flow over the area. If we keep hiking like this, Eli says he will probably lose his mind. As we hiked through the ski resort, we observed ski lifts and studied how they worked. Along the way, we met another through-hiker named Zac who had been a helicopter pilot for the 10th Mountain Division in Iraq. We are planning to spend the night at a hut that is part of a hut system named for this Army division that trained in this area in preparation for WWII. As we made our way up Guller Creek, we saw lots of beaver dams. We found Janet’s Cabin at mid-afternoon. We got into the hut using the combination and since it is raining hard, we are happy to be there. There is some construction work going on at the hut. We are careful not to take, move, or damage anything so the workmen won’t be impacted by our visit when they return. The area is beautiful with wildflowers and rushing streams and lots of snow still on Searle Pass.
**July 12**

Clonk! Clonk! Clonk! – Down the cabin stairs we went as we started our day at 7:10am, warm and dry. Everything outside was sopping wet. Within an hour we were on top of Searle Pass, and another hour later we were on Kokomo Pass where we enjoyed taking pictures of marmots. The views above tree line are spectacular. Jonas always gets excited when we are above tree line. We can see the mine on Fremont pass and tailings piles and lot’s of rugged mountains all around. Then we dropped down into Camp Hale, which is an abandoned Army camp for the 10th Mountain Division in WWII. Dad managed to lose his MP3 player helping Jonas cross a stream – right in the middle of listening to Shackleton’s journals of his voyage to Antarctica! After exploring some munitions bunkers and running into Zac again, we moved on to our campsite. Dad and Miles saw a tiny fawn run off into the forest near camp. Eli and Miles set up the tent by themselves – Dad is thinking this is one more chore he doesn’t need to do now. Then Dad took us down to the stream where we all washed socks and hung them on our packs to dry.
July 13
We started the day as usual. We kids have this silly game where we “claim” waterfalls and stretches of streams and other mountain features. Going down the trail it sounds like, “I claim that waterfall”, “I claim that natural bridge”, “No, I saw it first” – Dad says it is no wonder we don’t see any game. We hoard as many claims as we can and assign dollar values to our properties and exchange them among each other. We came across an old mine with a house and an old truck, winch, and outhouse and had fun exploring the ruins. Miles found an old puffball and it squirted brown stuff all over his face. We also crossed Tennessee Pass where there were old charcoal ovens and viewed the 10th Mountain Division Memorial to all the men who died in the Italian Alps from that division in WWII. We passed our first “trail magic” box, with all sorts of goodies for through hikers. Dad had to remind us to leave something for other hikers! Now we are sitting on a rock in one of the finest campsites we’ve had all trip: Porcupine Lakes. We are resting after catching leaches and attempting to catch salamanders. We are very relaxed indeed!
July 14
We got up and did the usual packing after Miles did dishes (his prize for being the last done with breakfast). Then, putting on our backpacks again, we trudged down the trail. Not much interesting today – just that we are very tired and Dad wants to fall asleep every half hour. We kept hiking on, stopping at a nice vertical stream for lunch. We found another stream to camp at and set up camp. Eli and Jonas roasted graham crackers over the campfire and were much impressed with their ingenuity. Jonas’ boot leather is starting to disintegrate, with large holes forming around the ball of his foot on both sides. Dad doesn’t want to introduce new boots at this time because of the risk of blisters, so is scheming ways to nurse this pair along for another 300 miles!
July 15
As always, we started the day with the usual routine. Miles puked in the middle of the night last night and Dad wasn’t feeling well yesterday – but today both are much better. Dad let Eli take down the tent by himself, or…well…he instructed Eli and then Eli did most of it. We met a group of boy scouts on the trail and observed how tired they looked. There are a lot of old mines on the trail today – we visited another one of them and found huge chunks of mica, but it wasn’t quite as interesting as other mines we’ve visited. But we enjoyed the hike today, all the same – we reached camp at 1pm and we had lunch and Eli and Miles set up the tent again. We then played a game of Pictionary and played for the rest of the day. We saw a pine marten across the river from the tent. We end the week tomorrow and get picked up by Mom – can’t wait to get home for the weekend.
July 16
We wake up early and start hiking along with a gazillion weekend warriors all dressed in spandex trying to climb Colorado’s highest summit: Mount Elbert. After the first mile or so, we leave the dog-walking, pink clad, pseudo-mountaineers behind (they turned off to go up the peak) and enjoy a walk through beautiful aspen stands with views of nearby 14er summits. Near the end of the morning, we veer off of the Colorado Trail onto a route Dad thinks will be much more scenic and exciting and drop into the village of Twin Lakes. We find some cool forts along the way. Dad thinks the next 80 miles of Colorado Trail will be boring as it skirts the east side of the Sawatch range… He thinks that going straight through the middle of the Sawatch and then pick up the CT on the southern end of the range at Marshall Pass will be a much better route. We’ll see about that. We get to Twin Lakes, where we have to figure out how to cross the raging Lake Creek as it pounds down the valley from Independence Pass. We stop at the Twin Lakes visitor center where the man tells us of a gauging station bridge in the gorge that allows access to the public (the regular bridge being washed out). As Mom is delayed, we start walking up the highway an additional two miles to the bridge where Mom and Aaron pick us up.
July 18
We were dropped off by Mom near Twin Lakes on the road heading over Independence Pass. We trudged down the trail on our third week. We tried to find the trail over Hope Pass but mistakenly thought we were on the wrong trail and turned back trying to find the right one. Finally, we figured out we were on the right trail all along and began climbing toward Hope Pass. When we reached the pass, we started a long tradition of raising “Ebenezer” stone cairns on passes (“stone of help” in Hebrew) and giving God thanks for His continued help and strength in getting this far. Then dropping off the pass, we made our way down, pushed over a few dead trees just to enjoy the crash (Eli is a closet redneck), and eventually made our way down to the valley floor in sporadic rain where Mom was waiting to give us our backpacks. Then we waded across Clear Creek and hiked on to camp at Clouses Lake and the rain started again.
July 19
Big 17 mile day today, and the vegetation is all sopping wet from the rain last night. It’s not even worth talking about the beginning of the day, except that while we were hiking up to the pass above Pear Lake, we got soaking wet and freezing cold and our boots were going “squish” with every step. We were miserable going through willows and streams and then it got worse. Dad’s map shows a trail going down the gulch from Pear Lake, but when we got there…no trail. Cool route, Dad. After several hours of pushing through 8 foot willows and scrabbling over rock glaciers, and getting cliffed out and having to retrace our steps several times to find a non-vertical route, we finally found the Texas creek trail at the bottom of the gulch. But our troubles were far from over – we still had to climb up another 2,000 ft up to Cottonwood pass and the clouds were lowering and starting to make noise. We figured we could at least climb up to treeline and make a decision then about whether it was safe to continue above treeline. The rain never really let loose all afternoon and we made it to the top of Cottonwood pass amid sporadic rumbles from above. From Cottonwood pass, we bushwacked several miles down to the Ptarmigan Lake trailhead and now we are safe, warm, and dry in our tent.
July 20
This morning, we started the climb up to Ptarmigan Lake and the pass above. We were hoping Aaron’s medical troubles would allow him and Mom to meet us in St. Elmo in the afternoon so we could enjoy some time at Mount Princton Hot Springs resort. We kept trying to get cell reception and finally at 11am were able to confirm that Mom and Aaron would be able to meet us. After crossing the pass, we had to walk down a 4WD road for a couple miles to find the Poplar gulch trailhead. From there we climbed another 2,000 ft pass and dropped back down to the ghost town of St Elmo where we waited a few minutes for the welcome sight of the white Tahoe with Mom and Aaron. We hopped into the car and drove to the hotel at the hot springs resort. We checked in and played in the best pool and waterslide Eli had ever experienced before.
**July 21**
We got up and went to the pool with the waterslide at 9am, but found it closed. We spent the next hour in the riverside hot springs which are naturally warmed pools of water. Then we did a few slides on the waterslide and reluctant to leave, we were dropped off in St. Elmo again to start our hike up to Chalk Creek Pass at 11am. For once this is a one-pass day after several days of multiple passes. We saw lots of tailings piles and broken down mining structures along the way. Once over the pass, we did some shoe skiing on a snowfield and then hiked down a beautiful valley to Lost Wonder Hut where we had dinner. We moved on to Boss Lake after dinner which we thought was too trashy and rednecky (there is a 4WD road to the lake) to camp at, so we went a mile further to Hunt Lake and set up camp in a pretty spot just as it was getting dark.
**July 22**

Waking up, we took our breakfast down to the lake and enjoyed the view. After breakfast, we packed up and started climbing up to the ridge of the Continental Divide (over 12,000 feet). We will be hiking on the Continental Divide for the next 100 miles or so. We reached Monarch Ski resort and worked hard to find a camp site with water. Dad found some cell service and asked Mom to pack some caulk to patch Jonas’ shoes and for some other supplies when she meets us at our next resupply point. After climbing off of the divide, we camped on an old road bed that used to carry traffic over the pass before US 50 was built. It was flat, unused, and had a stream flowing nearby. Dad took a nap while us boys explored a small canyon, built a dam 3 feet wide and 2 feet high to practice our engineering skills. We breached it and watched the wall of water travel down the stream. This, we voted as our best campsite yet. Dad isn’t too happy with us altering the environment with our dam, but let it slide this time because we were close to a road and there were plenty of other human impacts around.
July 23
We woke up to find ourselves very cold. We soon finished breakfast and moved off toward Monarch Pass. We hiked along the Continental Divide again, but since today was a Saturday, we were being swarmed by bikers. This makes the hiking less pleasant because we need to step off the trail every minute or so to let them pass, but the scenery is outstanding, the trail is flat, and we can understand why they come here. We re-joined the Colorado Trail as it came up from Fooses Creek this morning and joins the Continental Divide Trail. We reached Marshall pass at about noon, but were shocked to find that Mom and Aaron were not there! Instead, a family friend had been recruited to resupply us since Aaron’s medical problems had spun out of control and they couldn’t leave home. We enjoyed the rest of the day at the hotel, thankful that someone was able to resupply us, even though it wasn’t Mom and Aaron. Dad did laundry and caulked Jonas’ boots and did other resupply procedures.
July 24
Getting out of bed was especially hard for Eli this morning, but he finally forced himself out of bed to a good breakfast of muffins and grapes and soda. Then we attended church in Salida. Eli’s impressions on the whole service would take up too much space, but in a nutshell, he thought the music was much too lively for his liking (and the drummer was much too enthusiastic), but he liked the sermon with the exception that the pastor told too many stories. We were dropped off at Marshall Pass later that afternoon to find a campsite. As we were exchanging goodbyes, we wondered if we would make it through the upcoming 90 mile week on the trail. We made camp easily enough and hung the bear bag and Jonas decided to make a fire that got a little too high because of the branches with dry needles he was throwing on (OK, it was 10ft high when Dad figured out some parental supervision was required). Jonas is amazed at the beauty of the mountains as we watched a rainbow form in the evening rain.
July 25
This morning was especially warm and for once we were able to eat breakfast without freezing hands. As we moved off, Eli was very worried because we were going to attempt to hike 18.5 miles to the next water source, Baldy Lake. After not seeing much except for a deer, we reached camp at the lake with great relief and met one of our trail friends named “Vince” who seemed to be very experienced, except that he drank water straight from the lakes and streams without filtering. He is convinced that there is no Giardia in cold water, but we are not that confident – especially since the water in the next two days will be well contaminated by cattle. We have a relaxing 14 mile day tomorrow. Jonas’ caulked boots are holding together nicely.
July 26
Another warm morning, and very pretty too. Unfortunately, it was cloudy and we knew it was going to rain on us before we got to camp. By the time we met “Doc” (a new trail friend going north on the Continental Divide Trail), it had not rained yet. Doc was a nice man who gave us candy and helped us learn where we might find water tomorrow where we had a 20 mile stretch without reliable water. Then we met a guy named “Mouse” who carried a seven pound pack for his 1,000 mile hike he was doing. He gave us cookies he just got from Apple, the much-anticipated “trail angel” camped out a few miles ahead. Apple is a retired IBM engineer who spends his time along the trail giving aid and encouragement to weary hikers. We soon reached Apple, and he gave us more cookies and soda, and chips. Then, satisfied, we pressed on again, and three miles later we found some more “trail magic” in a cooler that someone else provides for weary hikers. We had another soda and then a mile later we reached camp high on Pine Creek and ate dinner in the rain. Then we migrated to the tent for relaxation. Given our upcoming 20 mile day tomorrow, Eli is not too eager for the next day to arrive, but Jonas says he can’t wait.
July 27
Miles and Jonas are excited for the challenge of a 20 mile day. The morning was easy, and warm too, but very cloudy. Like yesterday, we expected it to rain, but it didn’t until we reached camp at 6pm. The time in-between, however, was exhausting and fun. We had a shortage of water and reached a spring at 5pm just in time. We also caused a stampede of cattle and then a cacophony of noise. Then leaving the ruckus of angry cows behind us, we climbed and descended the last remaining hill and camped at Cochetopa Creek at 6pm after the record-breaking 20 mile day. Dad took a celebratory bath in the creek before retiring. We all have sore feet!
July 28
We woke up to a cold morning but then the sun came out and things got very hot. Rocks for bathroom duty were scarce at the campsite, but there were an abundance of gopher holes. We perfected our technique of finding a deep vertical gopher hole and positioning ourselves just right to get a direct hit. We complete the bathroom break by filling in the hole with surrounding dirt – an activity we call “flushing the toilet”. While the gophers must find this extremely rude, we figure they like to dig holes and will be happy to make an alternative home.

Hiking in hot weather is not very pleasant, but we made it 14 miles alright with the help of ZipFizz energy drink mix and some water bottles someone gave us near Eddiesville trailhead. Dad was tempted to ask them if they had any beer, but thought better of it at the last minute. We found wild strawberries which got us through the last mile to a beautiful campsite below San Luis Peak where we plan to enjoy the rest of the day.
July 29
Another warm morning. We then went up to a 12,600 foot pass below San Luis Peak (a remote 14er). Then, leaving our packs near a post and quickly climbed San Luis Peak with Dad in tow. Some other climbers gave us candy at the top for our effort. After descending and retrieving our packs, we went a couple more miles and looked back at the awesome, impressive peak towering above all the others. We met some people on San Luis pass who were tourists from Iowa who had pity on us after hearing we had come 300 miles from Denver – they gave us some plums. After climbing the fourth and fifth ridge (above 13,000 feet) that day we found a spring which we drank directly from without filtering. That was fun and refreshing. We then climbed our sixth ridge and dropped into middle mineral creek to camp near an old abandoned beaver dam. Jonas enjoyed the beautiful cliffs rising across the valley from our campsite. Later talked to a hiker one day behind us who reported seeing a bear in our camp of the night before when she came through hours after us!
**July 30**
Dad opened the tent at 6am to see a cow and calf moose walking by the tent in the meadow nearby. He quickly woke the rest of us and we all got pretty excited! We then hiked over several more passes and ridges where we saw a large herd of elk nearby. We also saw areas with volcanic duff shaped in weird forms. Finally we descended onto Snow Mesa for several more exposed miles before dropping onto Spring Creek Pass to be met by Mom and Aaron. Along the way we met a 3400 sheep with a shepherd we enjoyed talking to. He couldn’t believe that we had walked 350 miles to get to that point. After meeting Mom and Aaron, we went down to Lake City and booked a cabin for a couple nights.
August 1
We woke up in the small cramped cabin that was part of a group of cabins in Lake City where we had stayed the last two nights. We drove back up to Spring Creek Pass and started back on the trail again for a short 9 mile day. The clouds were very dark and there was no sunshine. We enjoyed walking in the cool weather. We met some people coming the other direction who said they stayed the previous night in the Colorado Trail Friends Yurt and said the hutmaster was OK with CT hikers staying there. Although it was only four more miles to the yurt, we went those four miles with glee in our hearts. Then we saw the yurt and scrambled up to it, expecting the best…and the best is what we got: a stove, a sink (without running water), two tables, some chairs, a woodstove, and we even got to sleep in army-issue beds at night. We are now very relaxed and have all afternoon to ourselves. We are hoping to fix up some mushrooms for dinner that Eli found this morning. Later that evening, another through-hiker camped nearby came up to the hut for a long visit. She hadn’t met us yet, but already knew our names from others on the trail. Eli is excited that we are “trail celebrities”.

![Hut and landscape](image-url)
August 2
We awoke in the warm yurt and moved out at 7am (a record start for us). We hiked up the marshy trail getting our feet slightly wet in the process, hardly aware that we would be very wet by this afternoon. We passed over the highest point on the entire Colorado Trail (13,300 feet) and saw over 100 elk. We ate lunch at an old mine trying not to listen to the obnoxious buzz of tourists on ATVs that had arrived at Carson Saddle from near Lake City. We then continued toward the one pass we had to climb over that day. We worriedly watched the clouds build and then we saw two bull moose in the willows below the trail. Then we saw a weasel and a beaver at the same time. Alas, we tarried too long enjoying the wildlife – the rain started to fall so we hustled along towards the pass. It wasn’t a hard rain, but it didn’t stop either. We were soaked to the bone in an hour. This was the worst day of the entire trail for Jonas. We got over the pass feeling very cold and then we thankfully reached camp at a lake an hour later. There was a brief break in the rain which allowed us to set up camp and cook dinner before it started raining again. We found freshwater shrimp in the lake next to our camp and enjoyed watching them swim around. We puzzled over why the water in the lake was warmer than other lakes. We hope tomorrow won’t be so rainy.
August 3
We woke up in a very wet tent, then ate breakfast and began hiking. We saw no game today although we went over several passes and ridges and passed a lot of people. We also came across a place full of rocks with crystals on them and collected some. Dad isn’t too pleased about all the extra weight from the rocks we are carrying around. We then hiked over a pass and stopped in wonder at the sight which greeted our eyes. One of the most beautiful valleys we have ever seen – but we also saw clouds building so we hurried on and we reached camp at a desolate mine with rails leading out of a hole in the rock and a very broken down cabin near Stony Pass. We shoe-skied all afternoon and tried to dam another stream – only to have it breach and we were not able to fix it. Now it is raining again and we are probably going to spend the rest of the day in the tent. The sheep dogs and shepherd we met earlier are likely getting wet too.
August 4
One of the coldest mornings yet. We washed dishes with freezing hands and prepared ourselves for the most spectacular part of the trail (according to the guidebook), and spectacular it was. There were miniature canyons in the first part, and then we lost the trail on the tundra several miles later – Dad took about 15 minutes trying to reconcile the map with the guidebook with the signs on the trail. Finally, we bushwacked across the tundra to where we thought the trail should go, and picked it up again. We took another detour to view another spectacular valley, finding very cool crystals and meeting our friend Jenny from the yurt. We ate lunch at a mining shack and explored an old mine and got hailed on and found more wild strawberries. Passing below treeline for the first time in about 40 miles, we then viewed huge towering waterfalls and finally camped among a large pile of rocks left behind by an ancient glacier. We spent the afternoon and evening looking among these rocks and found them festooned with crystals and more cool stuff. We observed that part of the stream flowing by camp promptly disappears in a hole in the ground. We hung a bear bag with our food in it and jumped into the tent hoping for a good night of sleep and plenty of goodies tomorrow.
August 5
Only 10 miles to Molas Pass and getting picked up by Mom and Aaron. We saw more spectacular scenery down Elk Creek – passing by Arrow and Vestal peaks and crossing the Animas river and the Silverton and Durango narrow guage railroad before climbing up 40 switchbacks up to Molas Pass. We found lots more strawberries, and then car camped at little Molas lake – the most beautiful car campground we’ve ever seen (and free too!).
August 8

After a couple days off and camping and staying at a motel in Silverton, we are ready to depart on the 6th and final week of the Colorado Trail (“the final mission” in Eli’s words). On Saturday, we climbed Handies Peak (a 14er near Silverton) and toured a ghost town as well as toured a huge gold mill. We also saw a couple bears while driving on a road outside of Silverton.

We are jubilant and triumphant that we have come this far! Early on, we saw some strange things on the mountainside about 500 feet above us. Eli and Miles decided to hike up there to see what it was – it turned out to be a climate research project being conducted by staff at a nearby college.

We got thoroughly excited when we hiked by large and small holes in the ground that we could hear water running through. Soon we came to the stream passing into a large hole that we could walk into for 20 or 30 feet before the cave ended! Then we “ate up the trail” (in Eli’s words) all the way to camp where we played in waterfall and set up the tent and ate dinner with more relish than usual and went to bed.
August 9
We actually woke up in a dry tent for once (it seems like)! Not a cloud in the sky! We ate breakfast, washed dishes, and started off very gladdened that already one of the days of our final week was over and we were getting closer to the destination we have so longed for. We gazed for the last time at our raging waterfall on Cascade Creek where we camped and started hiking. Dad found a huge puffball near the trail and threw it against a rock so we could watch it explode (Dad denies being a redneck). The trail took us along the top of a 500 foot cliff and this trend continued for the rest of the week (i.e., long dropoffs near the trail). The morning was beautiful and the sun burst over the horizon, shooting out its golden rays every which way and touching the tops of the mountains so they seemed to glow of their own accord – but all this was lost on us as we were intent on not falling off the cliff! Several times that day we looked out and marveled about God’s creation and many times we longed to be home. Reaching camp is always a relief and we were happy to settle down to eat dinner, watch the alpenglow, marvel about God’s creation again and go to bed hoping to be well rested by tomorrow.
August 10
We had no early sun this morning and as usual, Jonas did dishes because he was the last one done eating breakfast (he hates the raisins in the Muesli). Eli realizes that he usually escapes doing dishes some way or another, a fact that he congratulates himself on. Unfortunately, we were not better rested today and as a consequence we suffered a bit on the trail. It is wonderful to realize that God has strengthened us this far. Now we are almost done. The enormity of this is hard to take in! We got tired many times today during an 18 mile hike and we saw no wildlife except a bird that had the notion to run slap into Eli’s face and he would have had he not redirected his course. We enjoyed picking rotten giant Boletes and watching them fragment as we threw them against a tree and saw a short tailed weasel (also called an ermine, or stoat) at lunch time. We feasted on wild strawberries and found it difficult to walk past some patches because of our gluttonous natures. We had no idea where our campsite would be, but we would soon find out. Ere long, we reached a spot where we could cut off the trail for our camp site. We bushwacked, descending the incline with less alacrity than usual, owing to our tiredness. But we made it down the hill and found a campsite easily enough and thankfully set up the tent and washed our feet in the creek nearby. The we migrated to the tent. We close our entry for the day, and look forward to writing more tomorrow.
August 11
Our dad made a good decision in letting us sleep in this morning. Upon waking up we found ourselves very rested despite our hard day yesterday. We stopped for a break and observed a Golden eagle soaring majestically upward from the valley below into the bright blue sky above. We met a man who was going slower than us so we passed him and were able to reach one of the few camps in that stretch and find a site big enough for our tent. Besides the stench of horse poop, it was a good campsite. We bathed our feet in the creek nearby and then made fire to roast marshmallows and make s’mores. Can’t wait for tomorrow – the last day!
August 12
We awoke with much excitement over the prospect that we end the trail today – the long, long awaited day. We started across the bridge and Eli carefully kept track of all the landmarks in the guidebook so he knew how many miles were left to go. We accidentally scared up five grouse that we enjoyed watching. Because we were close to Durango, we saw a lot of bikers and hikers and as we drew near the finish line we picked up our pace and catching sight of it, we rushed forward. Jonas was overjoyed and declared the whole trip a great experience! Miles thought the whole thing was “easy”. Eli was overwhelmed by mixed feelings and thoughts and emotions as he crossed that line, that final line. The line he never thought he would never cross WAS crossed at that final moment and some trail friends were there to greet us. Jenny had apparently gotten sick and had to delay her final day to be the same as our final day! We bummed a ride to our hotel and ordered a pizza which we ate with much relish and relaxed to wait until Mom and Aaron could arrive from Denver.