

THE COLORADO TRAIL

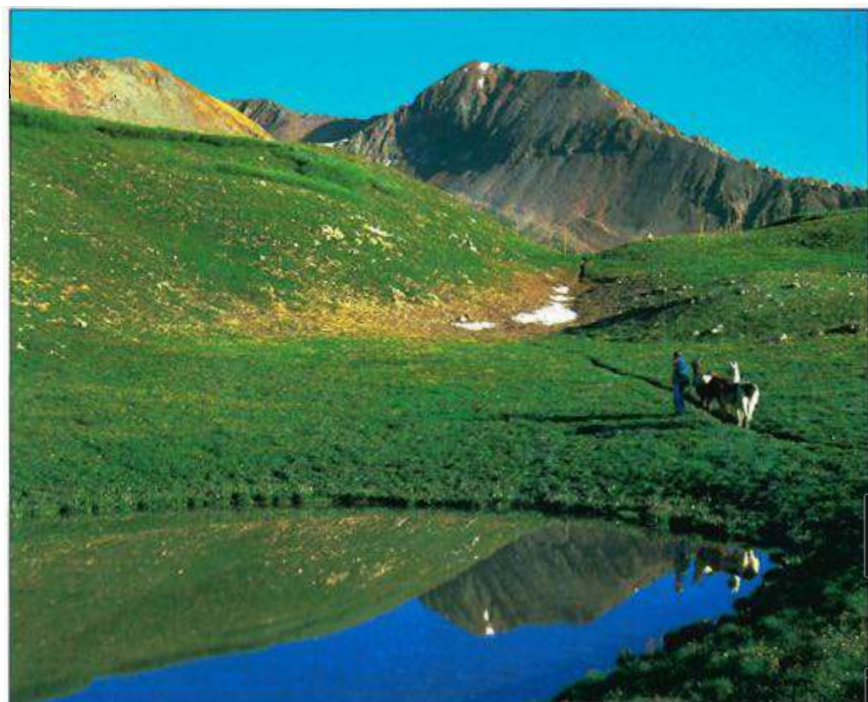
 *The Official
Guidebook*

"Including the
29 Official
Colorado Trail
Topographic
Maps"

*By Randy Jacobs
Photography by John Fielder
2nd Edition*

THE COLORADO TRAIL

The Official Guidebook



On the way to Rolling Mountain (13,693'), San Juan National Forest

Text by Randy Jacobs
Photography by John Fielder



A portion of the proceeds from the sale
of this book benefits the Colorado Trail Foundation.

2nd Edition



functions, and accredited educational courses, and you will be invited to participate in fully supported treks and special occasion hikes on the trail.

In addition to making a charitable donation and becoming a Friend of the Colorado Trail, you can further help by volunteering to serve on a trail crew or you can even "adopt" a section of the trail to maintain as your own.

HISTORY OF THE COLORADO TRAIL

The concept of a Colorado Trail was fresh and exciting back in 1973. There was talk of creating a recreational corridor across the state by linking existing trails, and in the July issue of *Colorado Magazine*, editor Merrill Hastings proposed a trail between Denver and Durango. But if anyone is to be given credit for the idea of today's Colorado Trail, it would have to be Bill Lucas.

As head of the U.S. Forest Service's Rocky Mountain region, Lucas was aware of the growing demands that recreation put on national forests. The increase in visitation was alarming, and he hoped to reduce the pressure on existing trails. He organized a public meeting of interested groups to discuss the possibility of a recreational corridor complete with side trails, access points, and eventually even a hut system. Additional considerations were the reality of shrinking budgets.

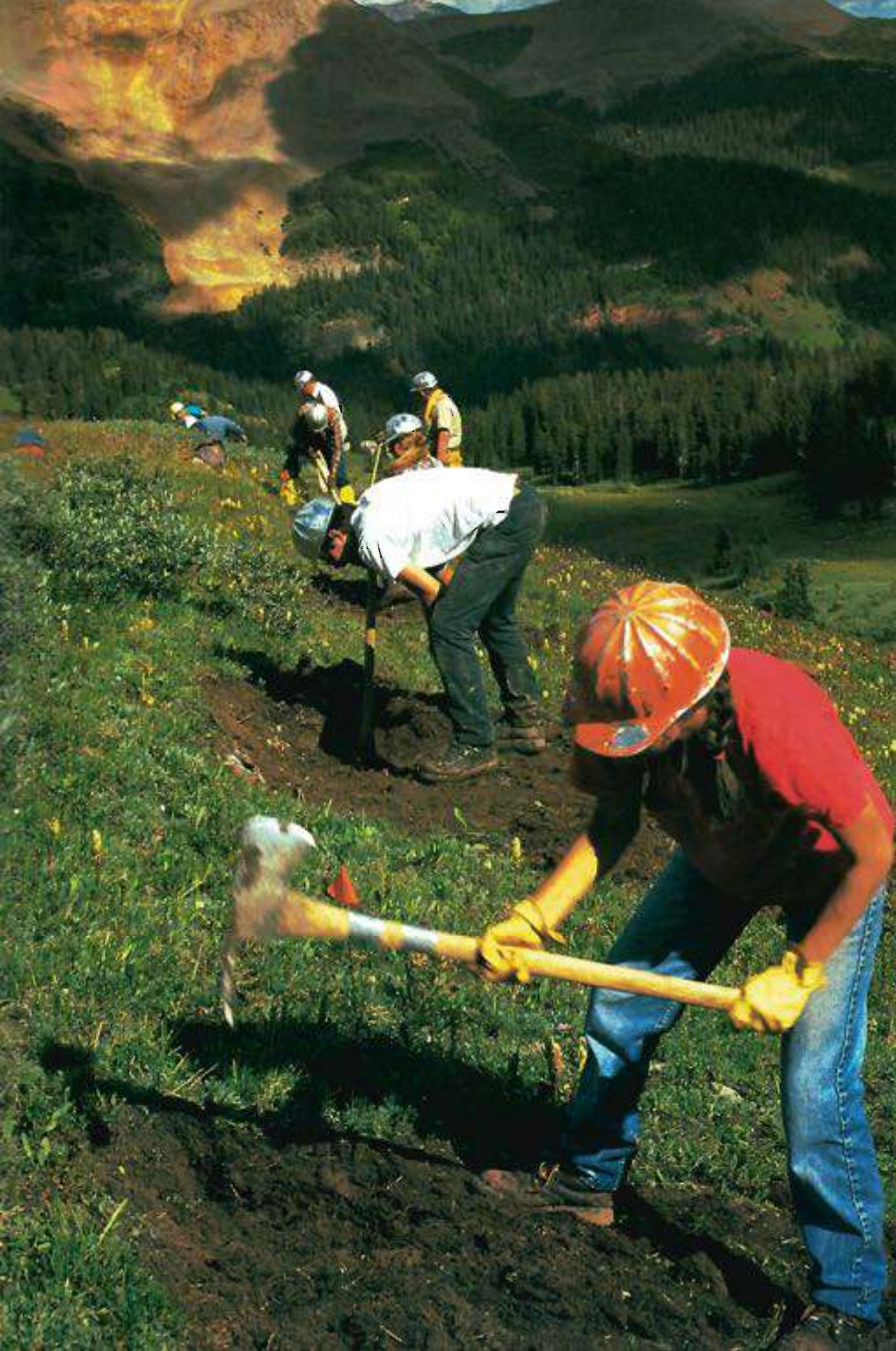
The November 1973 meeting raised more questions than it answered, but it did result in the establishment of the Colorado Mountain Trails Foundation (CMTF), a nonprofit organization created to work with the Forest Service to make the Colorado Trail a reality by using primarily volunteer labor. Initially funded with a \$100,000 grant from the Gates Foundation, as well as numerous smaller grants, the CMTF planned to make the trail a Colorado Centennial-United States Bicentennial project. Gates promised additional funding, assuming progress on the trail continued, and completion was tentatively set for 1978.

In its first years, the CMTF worked with the Forest Service in organizing volunteers to inventory existing trails to be considered for the main route as well as for the side trail system. Dr. Hugo Ferchau, a biology professor at Western State College in Gunnison, spent his summers leading groups of students from Lake Pass to Molas Pass to document existing trails. In the meantime, Gudy Gaskill had been named executive trail director by the CMTF to recruit volunteers for inventories elsewhere on the proposed route and to begin trail construction.

When an environmental assessment was undertaken by the Forest Service, it was estimated that three-quarters of the route followed existing trails. Based on this report, an official decision was made on the route of the Colorado Trail, with various alternate routes proposed.

At the same time, questions were being raised about the ability of the CMTF to continue coordinating the trail effort. The organization had exhausted nearly all of its original seed money on overhead costs and, although not officially disbanded, had become polarized and seemed to be unable to establish a unified course of action for the project.

Here the story of the Colorado Trail might have come to an end were it not for Gudy Gaskill. Gaskill had been recruiting volunteers for the CMTF from its infancy and also chaired the Colorado Mountain Club's (CMC) Trail and Hut Committee, which was established to organize volunteer crews to preserve the



state's network of hiking trails. When the CMTF foundered, Gaskill continued to organize volunteers through the CMC. Slowly, year by year, mile by mile, headway continued on the Colorado Trail.

The first section of the trail to be completed by Gaskill and her volunteers was in the South Platte district, the section closest to Denver. Next the crews moved to the Leadville and Salida districts, where, in 1984, they were visited by journalist Ed Quillen. The resulting "Trail to Nowhere" cover story in the *Denver Empire* (December 9, 1984) was decidedly pessimistic in describing the jubilant beginnings and unfortunate downfall of the CMTF, and it raised serious doubts about whether the trail would ever be finished. The article did, however, attract the attention of one influential Coloradan — Governor Richard Lamm.

With the support of the governor's office behind the project, an ambitious schedule was devised for finishing the original links and thus finally joining Denver to Durango via a hiking trail. The resulting two-year plan, which was coordinated by the Forest Service, called for completing nearly 60 miles of trails through six forest districts during the 1986 and 1987 seasons, using primarily volunteer labor. Almost half of the total mileage would be constructed in the Animas District of the San Juan National Forest, where the Hermosa Highline detour would reroute trekkers around the originally proposed route, thus avoiding a heavily used trail along Vallecito Creek in the Weminuche Wilderness. Other areas needing attention were a 20-mile stretch between Copper Mountain and Tennessee Pass and neglected sections around Twin Lakes Reservoir and Mount Princeton.

Concurrent with this renewed focus on the Colorado Trail, a new Colorado Trail Foundation (CTF) was formed to organize volunteers, provide leaders, supply trail crew base camps, and coordinate trail construction with the Forest Service. The new board of directors consisted of individuals determined to complete the Colorado Trail and was headed by the energetic Gaskill.

The effort put forth during those years by the volunteers was unprecedented. In 1986, some 400 volunteers labored in 20 trail crews building new tread. The following year, nearly a thousand volunteers happily took up their tools in 46 trail crews. The complicated logistics taxed the CTF's volunteer organizers, many of whom used their own vehicles to help the Forest Service supply and relocate base camps. Also challenged were the dedicated Forest Service liaisons who worked tirelessly alongside the volunteers.

The volunteers and Forest Service personnel enjoyed a tremendous feeling of accomplishment when, on September 4, 1987, "golden spike" ceremonies were held simultaneously at Molas Pass, Camp Hale, and Mount Princeton to commemorate the linking of the Colorado Trail from Denver to Durango. The ceremony, however, did not mark the completion of work on the trail; since then, CTF volunteers and the Forest Service have been busy each summer maintaining the existing trail and building new tread to improve substandard sections. In addition, work has progressed on connector and loop trails extending from the main corridor. Eventually, shelters along the trail may eliminate the need for long-distance trekkers to shoulder the extra weight of tents.

Please join us for a walk on a unique hiking trail built by the people and for the people. We encourage you also to explore the many side, loop, and connector trails. And, as you travel the Colorado Trail, you will be a part of the continuing effort to preserve a unique aspect of Colorado's colorful heritage.