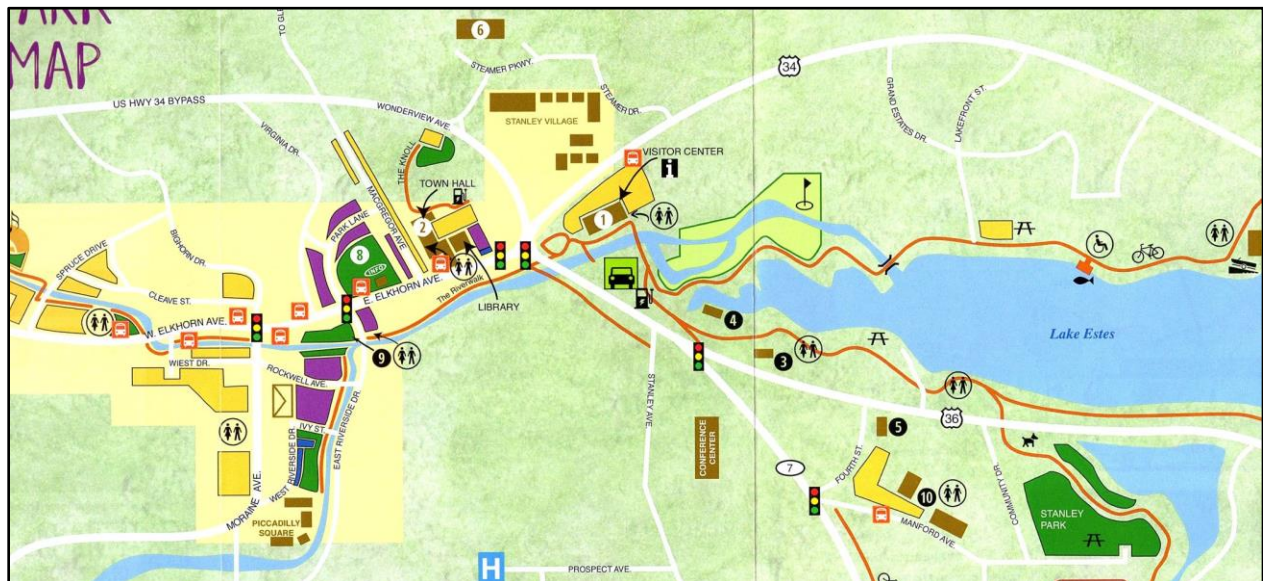
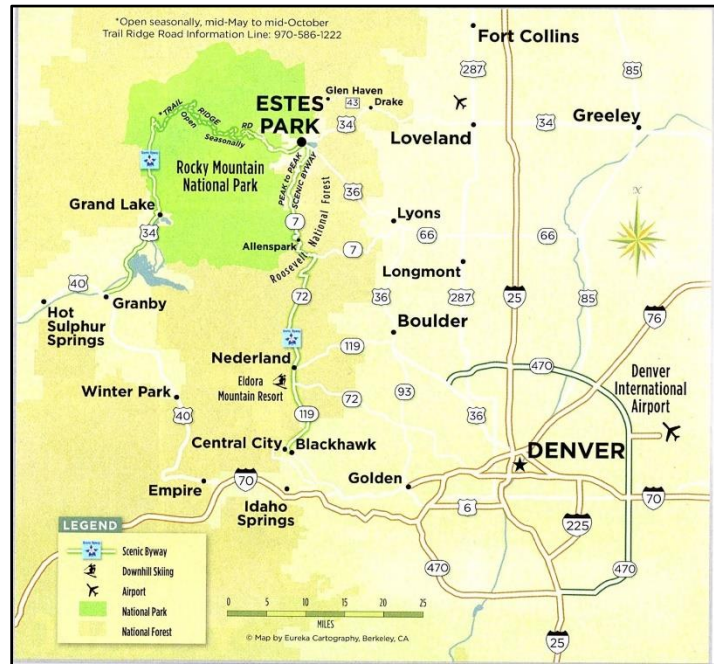


ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

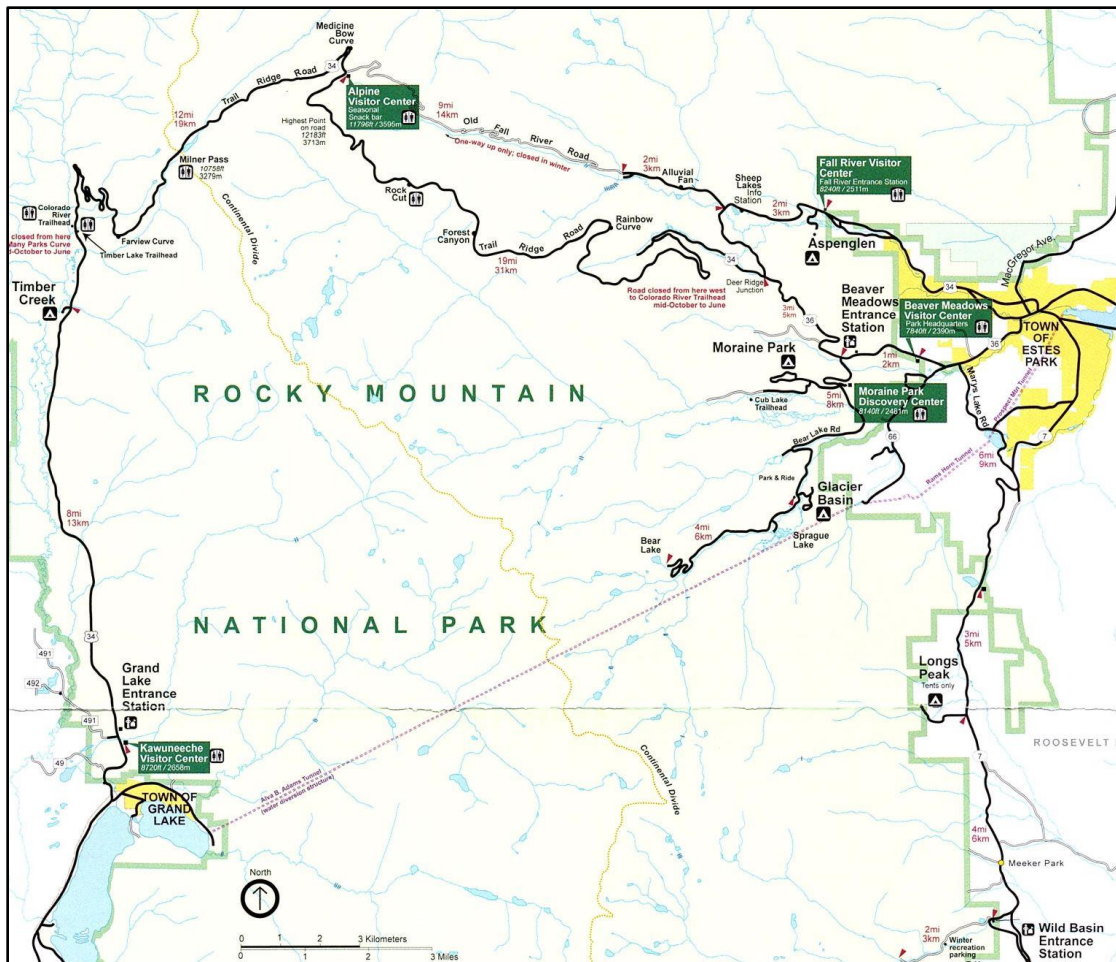
By Ken McNaughton

When I heard that the 2019 annual general meeting (AGM) of the Clan Macnachtan Association Worldwide was to be held in Estes Park, Colorado, I decided to add some hiking in the adjacent Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP). The Rocky Mountains stretch almost unbroken from Alaska to below the USA's southern border. In 1915, Congress dedicated Rocky Mountain National Park, which now covers 400 square miles (103,600 ha). Estes Park is the gateway town.



OLD FALL RIVER ROAD

The AGM was to be held in Stanley Park, south of Lake Estes, so I reserved a week at a bed-and-breakfast north of the lake and planned to visit different areas of the RMNP. The first road built into the RMNP west from Estes Park is called the Old Fall River Road and may have followed a Native American trail. More than 10,000 years ago, Paleo-Indians seasonally hunted and possibly traded here. Later, Ute, Cheyenne and Arapaho bands came to these mountains.



Estes Park is at an elevation of 7522 ft (2293m). The Old Fall River Road bears WNW and rises to a height of 11796 ft (3595m) at the Alpine Visitor Center. In doing so it passes through three ecosystems. The montane, below 9000 ft, favors ponderosa pines on warm south-facing



slopes, Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine on cooler north-facing slopes, open forest of trees up to 150 ft, bushes and streams. In the fall, elk gather to rut. The road is a one-way dirt road with a 15-mph speed limit. With stops for photographs it took more than an hour to traverse the nine miles.

The second ecosystem, subalpine, between 9000 and 11400 ft., has thirty inches of precipitation annually, with Engelmann spruce and flat-needed fir trees to 100 ft.



Above 11400 ft we come to the alpine ecosystem, with extremely thin soil, ultraviolet light, drying winds and bitter cold of the tundra (Russian for “treeless mountain tract.”) Plants hug the ground in dense mats.



young German man. A short walk away I came across a yellow-bellied marmot sunning itself.



The climb on the narrow road is nerve racking, but the views of distant crags are inspiring; numerous switchbacks are necessary to gain height.



The Alpine Visitor Center sits atop the ridge in the center of the photo, the only place in the park to purchase food and beverages. I had a Caesar salad and a cup of tea and chatted with a



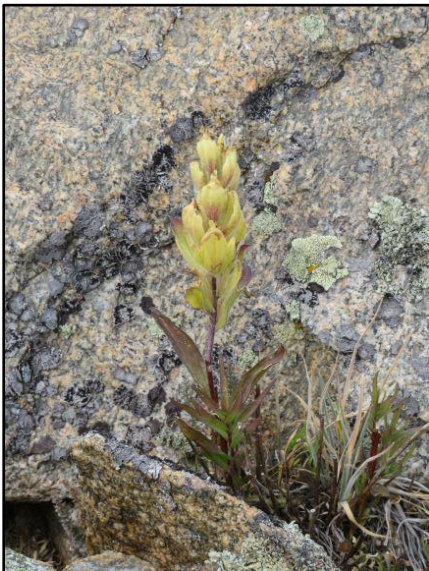
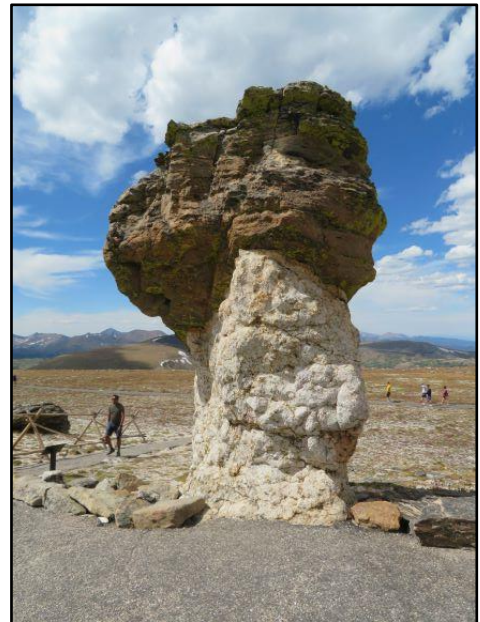


At this altitude it is easy to feel “on top of the world.” Nearby, snow was melting into a green pool.



Then it was time to turn around and start the journey home, on the more recently constructed Trail Ridge Road, which also supposedly follows a Native American trail.

A trail called “Tundra Communities” rises uphill past numerous interpretive signs, but unfortunately with roughly 35% less oxygen than at sea level. I learned a lot about the small flowers that hug the ground and the lichens, and was fascinated by a line of “mushroom rocks.” The dark colored schist was originally sand, silt and clay at the bottom of a long-departed sea. Molten magma from deep in the earth invaded the schist and gradually cooled into the lighter granite. Mushroom shapes were formed when the granite stems eroded faster than the schist caps.





I was lucky to capture a photo of an adult Clark's Nutcracker, which looks similar to the Gray Jay, but has a longer beak. Earlier in the year I had my near-sighted, astigmatic and cloudy lenses replaced with artificial ones. I can now see better at a distance and noticed the bird land in a tree. I aimed the Canon point-and-shoot in its direction, but could not see clearly in the view-finder with my new lenses. But this one shot did the trick. During summer and fall these birds store thousands of pine cone seeds, which they eat during the winter and feed to their offspring.

BEAR LAKE

Nest day I drove west on Trail Ridge Road, checked in at the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center, entered RMNP and turned south on Bear Lake Road. The parking lot at Bear Lake fills up early in the morning, so I joined a shuttle at the park-and-ride and walked the half-mile loop around the lake.



(Along Trail Ridge Road I noticed these elk seemed very content in the long grass, perhaps because "the boss" was away).



I love the subtle differences between the greens of the trees and their reflections in the water.



The lush grass at the edge of Bear Lake is yet another green.

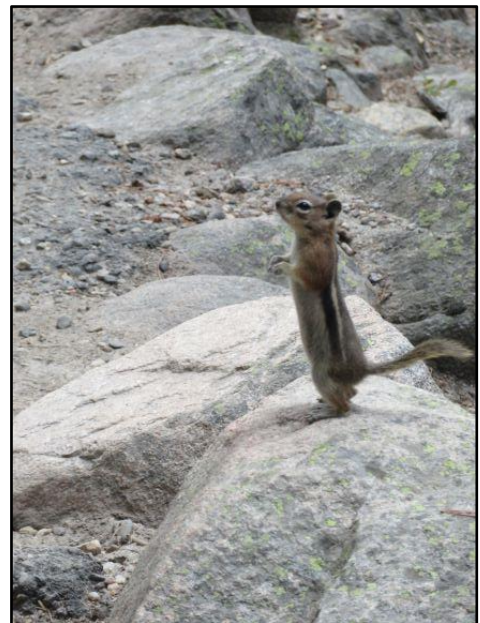


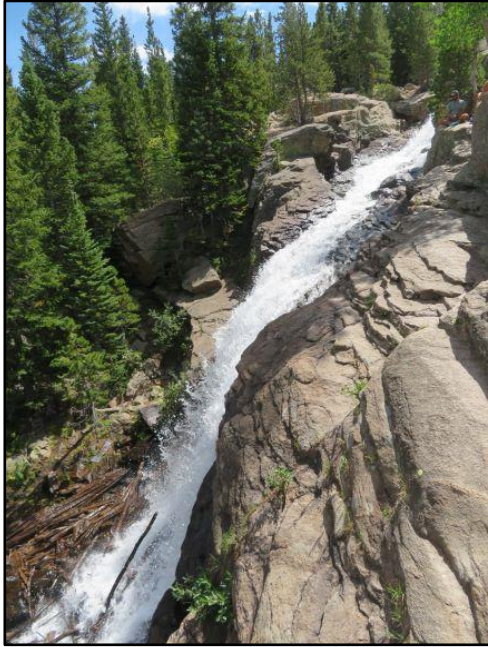
A couple enjoy the view of the lily pads.

The chipmunks live up to their reputation for playfulness; one sniffed my shoe.



Chipmunks have stripes, whereas this looks like a western gray squirrel. When you are small it sometimes helps to stand on your hind legs. I hiked one mile there-and-back to Nymph Lake and another mile to Alberta Falls.





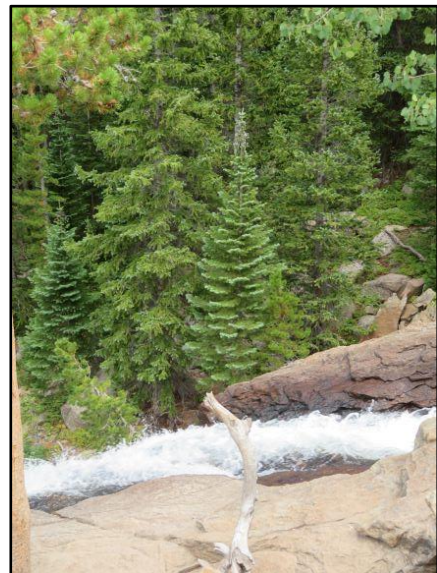
Along the way I met Eileen, who was born in Texas, graduated in environmental science, went to London to do a master's degree in hydrology, met an Englishman and decided to stay in England, where she thought she could learn more about protecting the environment than she would in the USA.

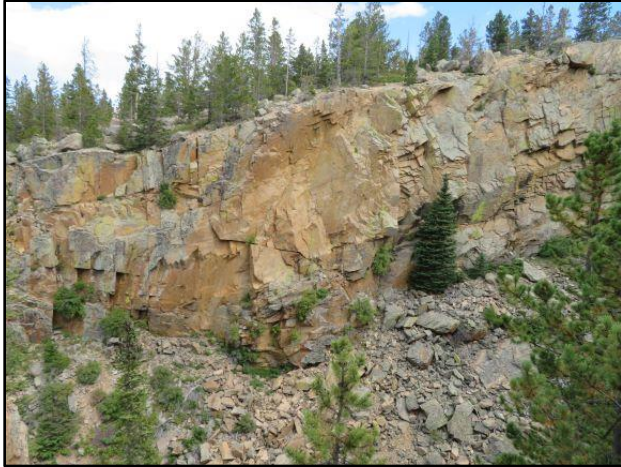
She had torn a muscle in her foot and elected to do this less strenuous hike alone, while her partner attempted the Flattop Mountain hike (12324 ft).



We bonded because I did a master's degree in fluid flow in Australia and went to London to attempt a PhD in biochemical engineering.

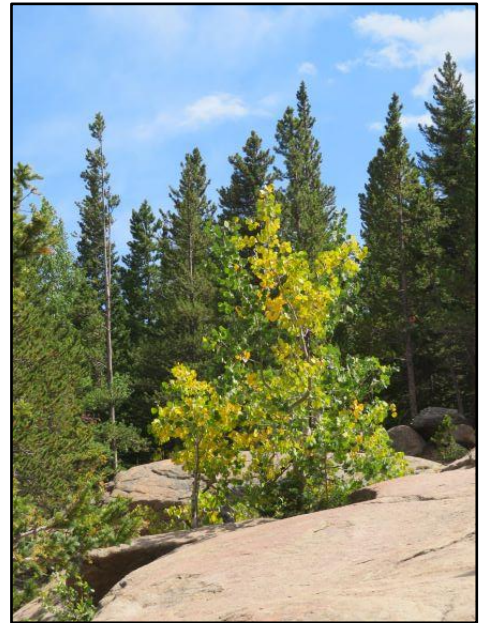
Eileen and I took photos of one another and I settled down to eat a packed lunch by the falls. This little fir stood very straight across the water.





The rockface over the way told a rugged story, for those who can read the signs.

One small tree was starting to show the signs of early autumn.



LONGS PEAK



On Friday I drove south from Estes Park on Route 7, along the eastern edge of the RMNP to the Longs Peak region. At Lily Lake, a ranger sat on a bench ready to answer questions. The peak by the lake is only 9500 ft, but is popular with climbers, and is called “Jurassic Park.”



Wild flowers grew all around the lake in a profusion of colors and styles.

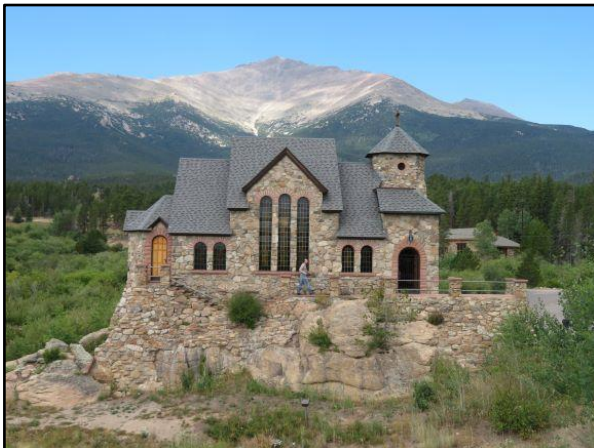


The walk around the lake is just under a mile and there are benches on which to rest and meditate.



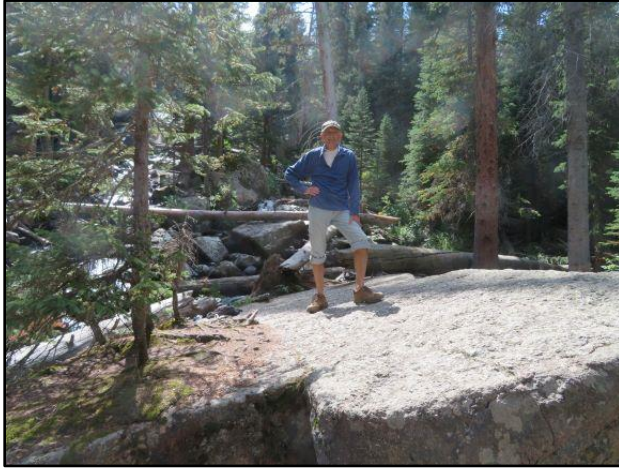
I passed the turnoff for Longs Peak, the highest mountain in the RMNP at 14259 ft. Hikers leave around 2 am to catch a parking spot, avoid the heat of the day and complete the round trip. The rest of us can admire the peak, and others of similar elevation, from a distance.

Further south on Route 7, at Allenspark, land was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Oscar Malo for a church, known as The Chapel on the Rock. Denver architect Jacques Benedict designed the Catholic chapel, which was completed in 1936. Pope John Paul II prayed here during his visit to Denver for World Youth Day in 1993; he later hiked in the surrounding woods and spent some time at the adjoining Saint Malo Retreat Center.



I set my sights on the nearby Wild Basin Trailhead, which I reached along a narrow, winding two-mile gravel road. After I parked, a ranger radioed the park entrance that there were only two spaces left.

It was only a third of a mile to Copeland Falls, where I met Jared, who lives in Nebraska and serves in the US Air force, and his girlfriend Grace, who lives in Ohio and serves in the National Guard; trips like this are a way to get together.



It was another 1.3 miles to Calypso Cascades, where I sat by the falls and enjoyed my packed lunch. Hiking up these steep mountains where the air is thin can be tiring. Around midday I rolled up my jeans and removed my socks. That made a big difference in the heat and my Vasque hikers were very comfortable.

My photo was taken by Jesse David Flood, lead pastor of the Brightpoint Church in Markleville, Indiana, who was visiting with his wife Laura. Jesse carries his camera-phone in a gimbal stabilizer, which steadies the picture while he records a video sermon.



ESTES PARK



Estes Park, population 5,858, is nestled in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. In this region, “park” is sometimes used to mean a relatively flat area.

The Fall River flows from north of west into town (seen at right in the photo), and joins up with the Big Thompson, which flows from south of west. The emerging Big Thompson River was dammed to form Lake Estes, as part of a hydroelectric scheme. The Colorado-Big Thompson Project collects melting snow in the upper Colorado River basin west of the Continental Divide and transports the water to the East Slope via a 13-mile tunnel beneath Rocky Mountain National Park. Water flows to more than 640,000 acres of irrigated farm and ranch land and 960,000 people in portions of eight counties. The project consists of 12 reservoirs, 35 miles of tunnels, 95 miles of canals, six hydroelectric power plants and 700 miles of transmission lines



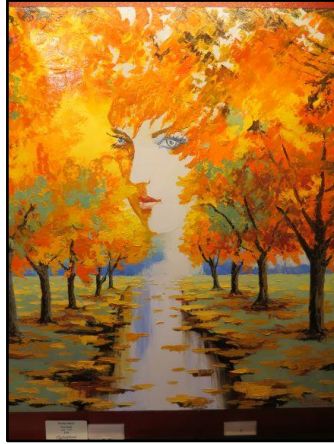
There is a wonderful Riverside Park by the junction, and here I sat on a brass saddle on a rock. A six-year-old girl called Ellie came by, singing “Baa baa black sheep.”

She stumbled with the words, so I sang along to help out, then asked if she knew

any other nursery rhymes. She immediately started “Twinkle twinkle,” which we finished together. I asked if I could take her photo, and she asked if she could take mine. After I chatted with her mother, Jaime, Ellie took me to a bronze sculpture of a black panther, and wanted me to take a photo of her sitting on its head.



Ron Wilcocks has a degree in computer science and owns Earthbound Collections, an art gallery on Elkhorn Avenue. He invited me to a reception on Friday evening, with food and wine and two musicians playing, Max Wagner on sax and Stu MacAskie on keyboards.



I particularly liked the work of Stanislav Sidorov, who captured the black-and-white bark and small round shimmering leaves of aspens in “Rustic Autumn,” a mysterious female figure in “Autumn Goddess,” and a musical street scene in “Autumn Nocturne”.

I ate dinners twice at Wild Rose and Ed’s Cantina, and once each at Nepal’s, Pho Thai and Bird and Jim (see photo). The latter was named for two intrepid pioneers in the area. Isabella Bird was a Scottish traveler who stayed with a local family in 1873, helped herd cattle on horseback, and summited Long’s Peak with the aid of Mountain Jim. He lived alone in a cabin, trapping and hunting, and lost an eye in a battle with a bear in 1868.



Twins Francis Stanley and Freelan Stanley were the co-inventors of the Stanley Steamer steam-driven automobile. Freelan built the Stanley Hotel in Estes Park, which opened in 1909, a 142-room Colonial Revival retreat for upper class easterners, who would be picked up in Denver by a Stanley Steamer. Stephen King was inspired by the hotel to write “The Shining,” which Stanley Kubrick made into his 1980 movie starring Jack Nicholson.

The Park Theatre was built in 1913 and is the oldest operating cinema in the western US. When I arrived in Estes Park, it was showing David Lean's 1962 "Lawrence of Arabia" one of my favorite movies of all time. An 80-foot neon-outlined tower was added in 1922.



Next day he was at the bottom of our garden, trying to rub the fur off his large antlers. This must have been the boss of the elk herd I saw as I first entered Estes Park. It was a record hot day for that time of year, and the elk were standing quietly in the shallow water of Lake Estes.



One morning I saw a large bull elk feeding at the resort next to my bed-and-breakfast.



One night at the bed-and-breakfast I heard the piano being played in the gathering room. I sat down and listened as one of the other guests, Leshko, from Poland, improvised for twenty minutes, and then launched into the Great American Songbook. Later, his wife, Cecilia, from El Salvador joined us.

SCOTFEST

The tents for the Longs Peak Scottish-Irish Highland Festival could be seen across Lake Estes from my bed-and-breakfast. Every hour on the hour, four cannons were fired in rapid succession to herald the festival, and smoke hung in the air.



From the bed-and-breakfast, I circled to the east, parked at lakeside, and walked into Stanley Park.



Welcome Ceremony with the Macnachtan Clan in presence of the Northern Caledonian Pipe Band; attending the AGM of the CMAW and proposing we explore the possibility of allowing daughters of the Chief to inherit the title; attending a jousting competition with Peter and his family; attending (with Erin Grantham, a new recruit from Denver) a trick-riding demonstration by four young women currently traveling with an Italian circus; twice joining the mosh pit for a performance by the charismatic Scottish Celtic rock band Albanach; and dancing an entire set up front at a performance by the Celtic rock band Tempest, from San Francisco.



On Saturday morning, clans paraded downtown, which created some excitement.



Peter McNaughton, chairman of the Clan Macnachtan Association Worldwide (CMAW) convened the tent with the help of Paula Renshaw, secretary, and her husband Jim, and Peter's daughter Laura, with her husband Matt and son Coulton. For me, the highlights of the two-day festival were parading into the

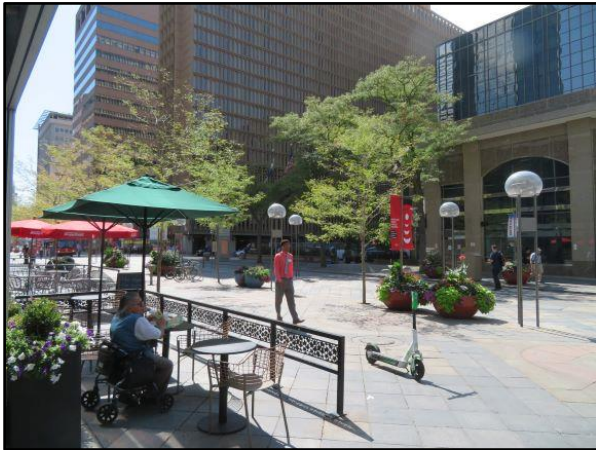
DENVER

I had pleasant memories of Denver's 16th Street Mall from a business trip many years ago and I was curious to see it again.



I remembered it as traffic free, but there are many ways of getting around apart from walking.

There is a bus, a tram, even a lonely scooter, waiting on the sidewalk for a passenger.



Plenty of tables and chairs, for singles, couples, even a dog.

A brightly colored cow seemed to have its sights on a pedestrian.



No one was playing the piano; it was probably out of tune anyway.



This tough young lady was hiding in an alley.



The headquarters building of *The Denver Post* is at the top of the Mall, close to the state Capitol. The surrounding parks hosted a lot of people looking like permanent fixtures. At a food stall, the proprietor was cutting a man's hair, and a sign said "Free haircuts for homeless only."

The 3-1/2-hour flight from Denver back to Baltimore passed quickly. I sat with Jeff and Nancy Switkes. Jeff practices finger-style guitar and, as a role model, immediately mentioned the Australian master, Tommy Emmanuel, who I saw perform live for the first time at Maryland Hall in Annapolis on July 24th. Nancy is managing director of the Georgetown Quintet and plays two of my favorite instruments, the bassoon and baritone sax.

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