

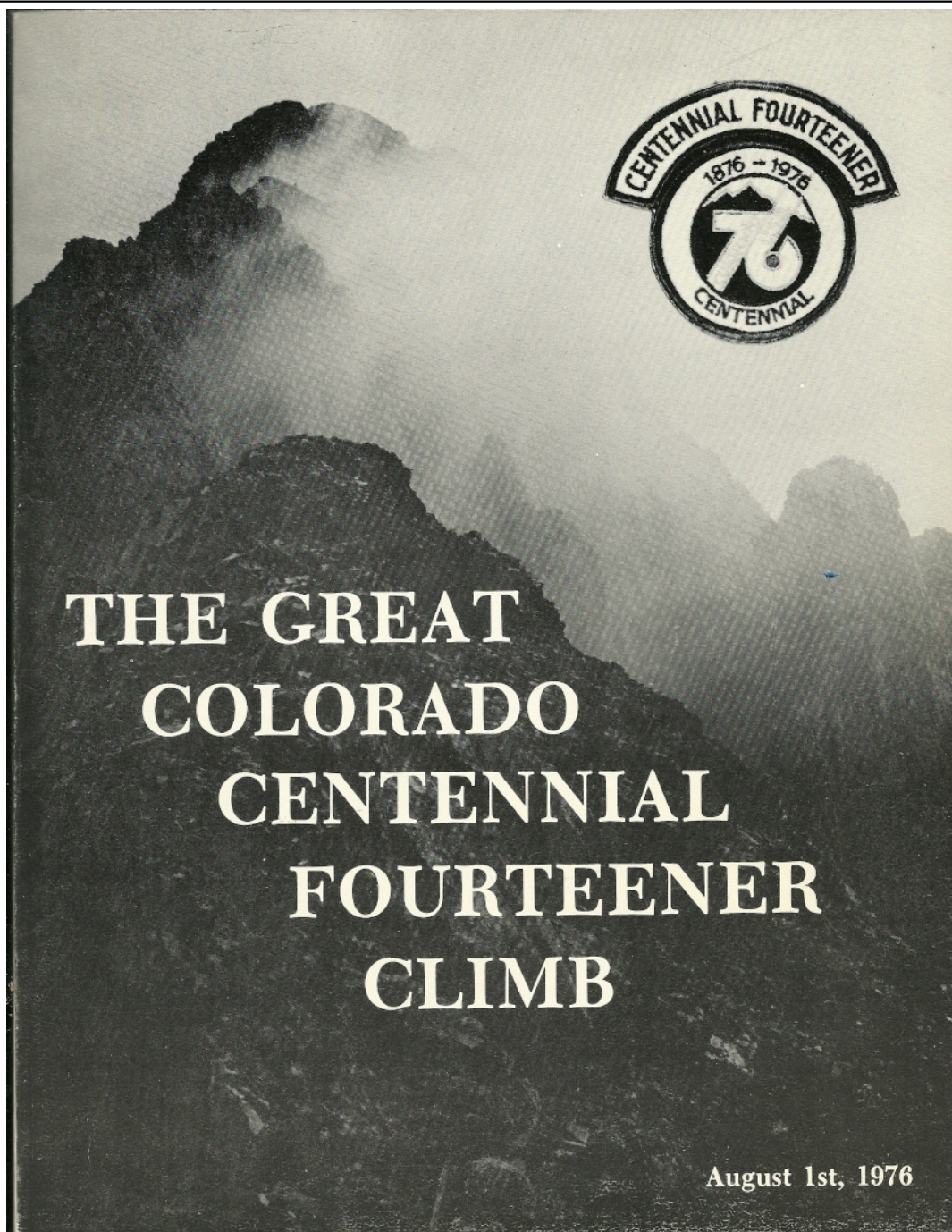
The Bicentennial (6) The Great Centennial 14er Climb

Category: Centennial- Bicentennial (1975-1976)

Published: Tuesday, 25 October 2011 12:21

Written by dave

Hits: 5542



The Obvious Celebration for Colorado's 100th Birthday

Our Pikes Peak or Bust Committee happily continued to

sponsor, create, or support a wide variety of Bicentennial and Centennial events - such as organizing a fund raising 'Settlers Ball' in the old 1909 County Courthouse that was being turned over to the City by the County to permit the Pioneer's Museum to move from its small quarters, and fund the refurbishment. I pushed it with publicity, and it was a grand success.

It was the summertime by this time, when Coloradoans climb the mountains they love. That was in full swing when I got a call from George Barranté - the executive director of the State Centennial Commission. He said that the idea of the Commission backing a Centennial climb of Colorado's 14,000 Foot Mountains was not getting the support they thought they would from Colorado's 'Climbing Community.' They may have to cancel it. They asked the world class Colorado Mountain Club from Boulder to support, even organize, it. They refused, citing the danger unless only accomplished climbers were permitted to join the effort. And the bad publicity, and maybe law suits that would come if anyone got injured or killed would not be worth it. They said they didn't think they could recruit enough climbers to climb all 54 peaks on one day.

I laughed. Once again I had more faith in Colorado's ordinary people - not 'experts' that the elites, especially from Boulder, did. I knew tens of thousands Coloradoans and visitors climbed Colorado's mountains every year,

and the number of reported deaths or serious injuries was very, very small.

Once again time was short. August 1st, 1976 - Colorado's 100th Birthday was only 5 weeks away. But I saw that date was also a Sunday, which meant many working stiffs who wanted to climb would be able to so over that weekend. The pool would be bigger.

I thought fast while on the phone and discussed how it could be organized - by once again, appealing to the Colorado masses, and not try to recruit climbers one of a time.

I said that if the Commission got all the media in Colorado - especially the Sunday issues of the Denver Post - which is read all over the State - to know about it, and invite everyone to join, I was sure we could recruit at LEAST one two-person climbing party for every one of the fifty four 14,000 feet or higher peaks in Colorado. 108 climbers. If the Commission did that publicity our Pikes Peak or Bust by '76 Committee would organize and sponsor it.

It was a deal. (George Barrante, as a Lt Colonel, had worked under me at Fort Carson, Colorado back in the early 70's before we retired. I trusted him to be able to convince the other Colorado Centennial Commisioners to go along. He did.)

I followed up with The Plan. By this time in the Centennial year I had wrangled from a Denver developer named Anshutz, who was buying an empty store space in downtown Colorado Springs to let us use that easily accessible room for the Committee's office, sales counter, display windows, and small meeting space. For at least the summer months. He agreed. We installed four telephones inside.

The newspaper publicity would invite anyone across Colorado to join the Great Colorado Centennial Fourteener Climb for August 1st, 1976. Each climbing party had to have at least two climbers, could nominate which Colorado 14er Peak they wanted to climb, and give our Committee evidence that they had the technical ability or experience to climb the peak they wanted. We would then either approve or not their climbing team's request for specific peaks. If approved they would be recognized as one of the official Centennial 14er Climbing parties.

There would be a kick-off at the Governor's Mansion in Denver on Sunday, July 23d, when each Climbing Party would be recognized and given a packet. (The packet would have a simple sheet of instructions, A small Colorado state flag to wave on top, one shoulder patch (Centennial Fourteener over the Colorado Centennial logo) for each member of the party. A requirement that they take a photo on top, write a simple story of their

party and the climb, and to bring down a small stone from the top) And turn those things in so we could publish a book about it.

They had to contact us by mail or by visiting our Colorado Springs Centennial office, or by telephone call.

The Mountain Climb Gold Rush

I woke up on Sunday the second weekend in July, and glanced through the Denver Post, where the public announcement, and our Committee's address and telephone number were printed. It occurred to me, many might first want to call, so I drove downtown since our hard working volunteer staff had that Sunday off. Before I even took out my key to open the front door of the office at 9AM I could see through the glass that ALL four lines on our roll-over numbered telephones were lit up!

I went in, and did not get out of that office until after 7 that night! EVERYBODY wanted to make that Centennial Climb! True Coloradoans. And those who did not get through on the telephone by afternoon drove all the way down from Denver and beyond to get their bid in for a Mountain! By the end of that one day every one of the 54 peaks had been asked for! Many popular peaks were asked for twice or three times! By the end of the day over 70 groups had called in or came in. Within a week 300 groups representing 2,000 climbers applied!

So I made another decision. And that was where my Enjoy Colorado files (which had comprehensive information of ALL Colorado, and my understanding of Coloradoans paid off. For while I have climbed in the Colorado mountains all my life, I was not an expert climber. But I knew that at least 10 Colorado 14,000 foot peaks were very difficult - and potentially dangerous to climb. So many people wanted to climb that I ruled that I would approve only ONE technically qualified climbing party on the 10 most difficult peaks, but TWO parties for the other 44 easier and less dangerous peaks. I didn't want two parties technically climbing the tough ones at the same time, endangering each other by falling rocks or route disputes.

So we had 100 recognized climbing parties. Even then we ran out of peaks for just two small parties each, so many of them combined into one larger group climbing at the same time. By the time the August 1st date came, we had over 645 'recognized' climbers in 55 rather than 54 groups. The '55th' Peak was added and recognized by a Dr Cougar with his family after he, failing to get one of the original peaks, telephoned me long distance from Europe that his family had researched the fact that in Grizzly Peak HAD BEEN recognized in 1876 at over 14,000 feet high but it had been downgraded by the Geological Service as being only 13,988 feet high. He argued that for a CENTENNIAL climb shouldn't that be recognized? I

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laughed and said yes - so that made Grizzly the 55th Peak climb we recognized.

And here generally are where those 54 14ers are in Colorado.

After studying the map of 14'ers, select "Next" to go onto some stories about that Climb and my family's Experience on Mount Sherman.

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