

MOUNTAIN TRAILS HIKING CLUB

2016 CLUB NEWSLETTER

Welcome Message

Welcome Hikers! We are off to a great start, thanks to your support in spreading the word. We currently have over 50 members! Not too bad for getting off the ground less than 3 months ago. We have four hikes under our belts, and many more in the months ahead. Before I go any further, let me take a moment and tell you a bit about myself and the vision for this club.

I am originally from West Virginia and grew up exploring mountains and forests. As many of you know, I retired from active duty Air Force 2 years ago and spent much of my career organizing similar groups to get together and enjoy the outdoors. I founded the Southern New Mexico Hiking Club (which grew to over 100 members in the late 90s), and also led three large-scale hikes in the Swiss Alps to raise money for the Fisher House Foundation. I have the experience and drive to organize and lead this club, which I hope you'll support and enjoy. The best news is, unlike my previous efforts, I am no longer subject to periodic reassignment, so I am in this for the long-term. My motives are simple: I enjoy hiking and sharing this pastime with others. This club allows me to meet people through a healthy activity and see more of our beautiful surroundings.

You can expect this club to continue to grow through various outreach campaigns and especially through your efforts to spread the word. While we initially started as a Missile Defense Agency (MDA) club, we quickly added members who have no connection to Schriever AFB. Therefore, we are an open-membership club of the greater Colorado Springs region and welcome all to join. Over the next year or so, I plan to focus my recruiting efforts on the military bases in the community. Many families come here for only 3 or 4 years, wanting to hike and meet people, but unsure how to begin. This will be the ideal way to connect these transient families and show them the best of what Colorado Springs has to offer.

You will find many helpful articles in this newsletter, so I encourage you to read it completely. I will be offering similar newsletters about every 3 months or so. Future issues will include additional content from members like you, so consider offering your own contribution (story, drawing, poem, helpful tips, etc.) Once again, welcome to our hiking club, and I'll see you on the trail!

Rob Jackson
Club Organizer



Our Hiking Club is off to a GREAT START!
(Castlewood Canyon State Park - April 2016)

What's in a Name?

It's official! We are now named the Mountain Trails Hiking Club. The original name "TRAC" was an acronym for Treeline Recreational Activities Club. That's quite a mouthful! Although it was satisfactory to get the initial messages out, I was not happy with this name and sought a replacement. I briefly considered "Happy Trails Hiking Club", but decided not to run the risk of a copyright suit from the legal owners of Roy Roger's famous song (not to mention the term has a slang meaning which I will not elaborate on here.) Simply put, from this point forward, you now belong to the Mountain Trails Hiking Club, or MTHC.



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Rain and overcast skies was no match for this dedicated group!

(Walk to the Shrine 5K - May 2016)

~ Hike Ratings ~ How Are They Determined?

Several of you have asked about the mystery surrounding my hike rating system. As you know, every hike is rated 1-10 based on overall difficulty. But what goes into this number? Well, it's a combination of several factors. The most prominent factors are overall hike length and amount of climbing involved. However, there are other factors as well, such as altitude and terrain difficulty. For example, in June we have two hikes which are both rated a "7". The Mount Rosa climb is rated 7 because of the length of the hike (7+ miles) and high altitude (over 11,000 feet). The Eagle Peak climb is also rated a 7, but it is shorter (4 miles) and takes place at lower elevation (7,000-9,000 feet). However, the climb is much steeper and more difficult. Both hikes balance out to an overall "7".

As you come out on hikes, you should get to know which ratings you can accomplish and set your schedule and goals appropriately. If you have issues with specific types of terrain (i.e. bad knees for going downhill), I encourage you to read the hike description in addition to the rating. Hike ratings are not set in stone, so let me know if you feel a hike has been underrated or overrated for difficulty.

Forms/Waivers

I will soon be sending out a short form with waiver for each of our members. I need to gather some basic information as well as have you read/sign an understanding of risk and responsibility. This is routine for any outdoor club and benefits both you and I as we move forward. The information I am collecting is simply names, addresses, email addresses, and contact numbers. The only information that will be shared with anyone is your name, as I may identify you in photos or advertise attendees from some of our hikes. The remaining information is solely for me to communicate club business with you.

The waiver portion of this form is for you to acknowledge that hiking, as with any outdoor activity, contains some element of risk and that you accept responsibility for incidents arising from participating in these activities. Hiking is low-risk compared to many other outdoor activities, but important that you understand your role. I will only lead you on hikes in which I have already completed and know the route. I have first aid training and a healthy respect for foul weather and other dangers, so you are in good hands. Still, no one knows your limitations and physical condition better than you, so it is vital that you never undertake a hike that you are not fully prepared to accomplish. I will be distributing these forms within the next month. When you receive this form, I encourage you contact me if you have any questions or concerns.



The first club hike

(Black Forest Section 16 - March 2016)



Basic Rules of Hiking

While hiking itself is little more than walking in nature, participating in an organized group involves a few considerations. Please note the hiking rules below and do your part whenever you participate with the club:

- Do not leave anything on the trail...if you bring it with you, take it out again. This includes food waste. Also, do not remove anything natural you find on the trail. If you find a rock or leaf fascinating, leave it alone so that others may enjoy it as well. Want to do something extra? Picking up trash you do come across would be going the extra mile to improve the trail for others.
- Keep at least one other hiker within sight at all times. This will avoid halting the entire group while we locate a lost hiker.
- Be courteous to other hikers, especially those in our group. Not everyone enjoys hiking the same way; some want to socialize while others may prefer the peace and quiet of the forest. Partner with like-minded members so that everyone can enjoy the hike. Also, try not to tailgate...spread out and share the trail with others. This is not a race, so enjoy the pace!
- Don't take unnecessary risks. Watch your step and stay away from ledges and overhangs. Injuries are possible, but you can minimize the risks by being smart.
- Be responsible with your dog. Most of our hikes are dog-friendly, but remember that some club members may be allergic or otherwise not fond of barking dogs. When bringing a dog, keep them on a leash and give ample space between you and others in our group.
- Come prepared with comfortable clothes and appropriate supplies. Healthy snacks are encouraged for most hikes, but may not be necessary for shorter outings. However, you should always have water or similar beverage as dehydration occurs quickly on the trail.
- Do not attempt any hike for which you are not prepared to do. While it can be fun test your limits, if you cannot complete a hike, you risk cancelling the trip for others (we do not allow hikers to return alone). Start with easier hikes and gradually work your way up.
- Leave wildlife alone. We will frequently see deer, rabbits, squirrels, and birds. Take photos, but please give them space, we are in their home. Encounters with more dangerous wildlife (snakes, mountain lions, black bears) are rare, but if it happens, do not panic, but rather understand how to handle such encounters.
- Be on time. Whether you meet at the designated carpool location or drive straight to the hike site, please be considerate, plan ahead and be on time for hike starts.



Fresh Air and New Friends
(Spruce Mountain - May 2016)

Weather Conditions

Hikes are scheduled weeks in advance, so there is no way to predict what the weather will be like when that day comes around. We live in a location which enjoys year-round sunshine, so you can expect Mother Nature to be cooperative most of the time. However, there will be occasions where the weather will affect our club activities. It's important you understand our policies regarding weather.

All of our hikes begin fairly early in the morning, which not only beats the crowds, but also beats the heat and/or afternoon thunderstorms. My goal is that (for most hikes), we are done before noon. There will be some hikes which are longer and may push into afternoon, but most hikes will be done by midday. For those rare days which have rain in the morning, we will generally still hike. You can make a personal choice if you want to stay home because of rain or snow. There are times (such as the recent Mount Rosa climb) where I will postpone if we are planning a high-elevation hike which receives unexpected snow. I will be scheduling hikes for all seasons, but our winter hikes will be at lower elevations and will be more susceptible to schedule changes. If there is enough interest, we may even plan an occasional snowshoe outing.

Make no mistake...where I do not mess around is thunder and lightning. Overcast and rain is one thing, but once we have thunder and lightning, I will cancel the hike (if it has not yet started) or return to the vehicles by the most direct route (for hikes in progress). This could mean we do not reach the summit of some of our summer climbs. Set aside your pride, the mountain will still be there for next time. I need you to know and accept that I will never compromise the safety of anyone on our hikes, and I expect club members to fully cooperate should the occasion arise in which I cancel or terminate a hike due to potentially dangerous weather.



Pikes Peak Challenge

On September 10th, we'll be doing our big hike up Pikes Peak. This is a serious and difficult hike; in fact, it's the only hike we have which is rated a "10" on the difficulty scale. In my experience, whenever we have a very tough hike, it's common to have members who overestimate their ability or simply want to give it a try without knowing if they are prepared. This hike is 13+ miles long and climbs over 7,000 feet to the summit of 14,114 feet. As you know, the oxygen is very thin above the tree line. I expect we'll only have a limited number of participants from our club. To be frank, I cannot serve as the hike police to say who can do this or not, nor will I be able to walk back down with those who are in over their head.

Therefore, we're going to participate in this hike through the annual Pikes Peak Challenge. This is a premier event to raise funds for the Brain Injury Alliance of Colorado. There are several hikes to choose from, including hiking just to the Barr Camp and back, so anyone can participate based on their ability. However, this event is limited to just 450 people, and all registrants must raise a minimum of \$200 before the day of the event. The organizers of this event are serious about safety, so anyone who attempts the Summit Climb and does not reach Barr Camp by a designated time (10:00 a.m.) will be turned back. In short, they are providing a safety filter which I cannot do on my own. This is the primary reason we are climbing Pikes Peak through this event.

You can read all about this event at their website, and I will be providing more information soon so members can sign up before the registration fills up.

<https://www.pikespeakchallenge.com/>



Volunteer Opportunity

Northrop Grumman sponsors a trail section that is part of the Pikes Peak Greenway trail. The NG section is on the northern part of the trail, but just south of Woodmen. It's called the Northridge reach. You can get to the section by parking in the Costco parking lot, and walking west down to the trail that's along Fountain creek. Our NG sign is along the trail. Volunteers will be spending 1-2 hours cleaning up trash along the trail and the waterway, and the city will provide the bags. We will place the filled garbage bags somewhere that the city can easily get to, and they get picked up by the trail coordinator. The time window is initially set for 8-11 a.m., but that may shorten depending on how many will be volunteering.

If you are interested in helping, please contact the POC listed below:

Bonnie Hall

719-721-9565

Bonnie.hall.ctr@mda.mil





Future Plans for Mountain Trails Hiking Club

You may be wondering what the vision is for the future of this club. Here's a peek at where we are going. Today, we are little more than an organized email group, and that is fine for now. We'll operate that way for the rest of the year. However, this newsletter represents a step in a more formal direction. I also plan to launch a club website by the end of June, and will send emails from this site's .com address, moving away from using my .mil account for club business. This website will also include a basic app that you can load onto your phone or tablet. This will be a great way to keep up with the latest without filling your email inbox. The website will provide basic info for now, but will be more advanced by the end of the year, allowing members to log in and sign up for hikes, view hike history, and even set member preferences.

Also, I'll be designing and ordering club T-Shirts and Hats before the summer is out. Members will be able to vote on design and colors. As we wind down the autumn season, we will have a club dinner for all the members and their families.

Looking further down the road (2017), I intend to partner with the local military bases' Outdoor Recreation programs. I will volunteer to lead hikes for them; in return, they will encourage potential members to join our club. Inevitably, we'll grow to the point where we have to put a limit on the number of hikers for each outing. No one wants to share the trail with a 50-person group! Do not worry, though, as there will be more hikes and even some Saturday/Sunday repeats to accommodate everyone.

Needless to say, once we reach this size, I will not be able to personally lead every hike. My plan is to introduce a Hiker Helper / Hiker Leader program sometime in 2017. Hiker Helpers volunteer to assist with large groups, take attendance, and ensure everyone is accounted for. If you joined us for Castlewood Canyon, my wife Sondra served as a Hiker Helper. This will be a volunteer program and will have some perks for those who help on a regular basis. The Hiker Leader program is for advanced members who are ready and willing to lead their own outings.

We are on to something good here and the sky is the limit to where it can go. Regardless of how large we grow, you can count on the experience to remain the same...a fun, friendly atmosphere where people can enjoy the outdoors and meet new friends.



UPCOMING SCHEDULE



Cheyenne Mountain State Park

June 11 - Ratings 2 & 5 (choose from 2 hikes)

Meet at 8:00 a.m. @ Target
Cheyenne Mountain Shopping Center
1630 E Cheyenne Mountain Blvd



Beautiful Cheyenne Mountain State Park awaits hikers of all levels! There will be two hikes to choose from; a beginner-friendly loop (great for the kids!) and a more strenuous trip up to the Talon loops. Wildlife sighting are very common in this park, and the views are great!

Mount Rosa Climb

June 18 - Rating 7

Meet at 7:00 a.m. @ Target
Cheyenne Mountain Shopping Center
1630 E Cheyenne Mountain Blvd



Are you ready for a big hike? Our club will be hiking to the summit of Mount Rosa (11,500'). This is not technical (no gear/experience required), but you must be in good shape as this one is a 7.2 mile round trip that climbs nearly 2,000 feet. The view of Pikes Peak and Cheyenne Mountain are well worth it! Come join us if you're ready!!

Eagle Peak Climb

June 26 (Sunday) - Rating 7

Meet at 7:00 a.m. @ Super Target
9670 Prominent Point
Colorado Springs



Ascend the rocky peak overlooking the Air Force Academy and enjoy a fantastic view. This is a tough hike and climbs relentlessly nearly 2,000 feet to the summit. However, hikers are treated to beautiful streams and aspen groves.

2016 SCHEDULE

March 12: Black Forest

April 9: Castlewood Canyon State Park

May 14: Walk to the Shrine 5K

May 21: Spruce Mountain

June 11: Cheyenne Mountain State Park

June 18: Mount Rosa Climb

June 26: Eagle Peak Climb

July 9: Horse Thief Falls/Pancake Rocks

July 17: Fox Run Regional Park

July 23: INCLINE!

August 6:

August 14:

September 10:

September 17:

October 9:

October 15:

October 22:

November 5:

December 3:

Palmer Trail Loop / Section 16

Seven Bridges

Pikes Peak Challenge

Paint Mines Interpretive Park

Emerald Valley

Mueller State Park

East Spanish Peak Climb

Stanley Canyon

Bear Creek Nature Center