

General Hiking Guidelines

Assessment of Ability

A fair assessment of your hiking ability and that of the weakest member of your group will help you to maximize your hiking enjoyment. You should consider whether any disabilities or medical conditions might prevent a person from performing ordinary tasks at high elevations. You should assess the experience of your group in hiking at high altitude.

Dehydration, Drinking Water and Giardia

Colorado's low humidity and dry atmosphere can lead to dehydration, especially when hiking in hot weather. You need to make sure that everyone in your group has enough drinking water for the hike you have chosen to take. DO NOT DRINK untreated water from lakes or streams in Rocky Mountain National Park because of the microscopic organism Giardia Lamblia. This microorganism can cause serious illness in humans.

Altitude Sickness

At high elevations there is less oxygen in the air. Reduced oxygen intake can cause an illness commonly known as altitude sickness. The best way to avoid altitude sickness is to become acclimated to the higher altitude slowly over several days through shorter hikes that stay in lower altitudes. The symptoms of altitude sickness are shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness, weakness and loss of appetite. The only cure for altitude sickness is to descend to a lower altitude with more oxygen.

Hypothermia

The lowering of the body's core temperature to dangerous levels is called hypothermia. Exposure to wind, rain, sleet or snow and cold temperatures at higher altitudes and contribute to this condition. You can prevent hypothermia by staying warm and dry. When hiking you should always carry raingear and extra layers of clothing, including a hat and gloves to stay warm and dry.

High Altitude Sun Exposure

Ultraviolet rays are stronger at higher elevations. You should wear a hat, sunglasses and have plenty of sunscreen to cover exposed skin and ears.

Summer Weather

Although characterized by clear sunny mornings, stormy afternoons and cool nights, the weather in Rocky Mountain National Park is unpredictable. You should observe the weather conditions prior to taking your hike. I recommend starting your hikes by 8:00am to take advantage of the better weather in the morning and avoid the usual afternoon thunderstorms produced by the heating of the day. I also recommend taking chocolate bars,

such as Hersey bars, for quick energy on the hike uphill. I usually freeze the chocolate bars, so they stay hard longer in my backpack and don't get soft and mushy.

Lightning

Lightning is a real threat in Rocky Mountain National Park, especially above tree line. Lightning kills more people each year in the United States than any other weather-related hazard. Lightning typically strikes the highest object in an area. Therefore, don't be the highest object around and don't stand next to the highest object for protection. I was nearly killed by lightning on a hike to Mount Ida. We were above tree line on a ridge with lightning bolts landing 5 to 15 feet from us. Just before the lightning bolt would strike our hair would stand up from the static electricity and we would dive to the ground, so we were not the highest object around. I don't ever want to experience that again and you should not want to either. During the lightning storm, we were also being pummeled by wind, rain and sleet with temperatures in the 30's. Having the proper layers of clothing and rain gear kept us from getting hypothermia.

Wildlife

The animals in Rocky Mountain National Park are wild and free to roam. Larger animals, such as, deer, elk, moose, bear, bighorn sheep and mountain lions can pose a serious threat to visitors, especially if you get to close to their space. **DO NOT APPROACH OR TRY TO FEED WILDLIFE.** Respect the animal's territory and take care not to disturb its movements. With proper camera equipment, pictures can be taken from a safe distance from the animal.

Insects

Mosquitoes, flies and ticks are all found in Rocky Mountain National Park. Ticks are more prevalent in the spring and early summer. You can deter these pests with insect repellent containing DEET.

What to Take on Your Hike

A good pair of hiking boots with high ankle support is recommended for hiking in Rocky Mountain National Park.

The following is a list of items that you should take on your hike:

- *Water
- *Extra layers of clothing
- *Sunscreen and lip balm
- *Sunglasses
- *Rain gear & hat
- *Food
- *Map and Compass
- *Flashlight with extra batteries
- *First Aid Kit
- *Pocket Knife
- *Waterproof Matches or Lighter
- *Hip Pack or Backpack

Please adhere to the "Leave No Trace" outdoor ethics by packing all your trash out of the National Park.

The hikes recommended on this website are the ones that I found most enjoyable and useful for acclimation to higher altitudes. I have personally hiked to all of the destinations listed in this website. Obviously, there are many other hikes that you can take in Rocky Mountain National Park. I would buy a good hiking guide book, such as, "The complete hiking guide by Lisa Foster", to find descriptions and trail heads for other hikes that I have not listed on the website.