

14 Tips for 14er Fun

BY CHAFFEE COUNTY SEARCH AND RESCUE



1. CHOOSE Your 14er: Assess YOUR ability before selecting which 14er to hike. Only Class 1 hikes have trail all the way to the summit. Mt. Belford-NW Ridge route, Huron Peak-NW Slopes route and Mt. Elbert East Ridge route are Class 1. The other 14ers in the Sawatch are all Class 2 near the summits.

2. Do your RESEARCH: Know exactly where the trailhead is and whether your vehicle can get there. Read about the route, including mileage, elevation gain and notable landmarks.

3. Assess your ABILITY: Take into account your experience with altitude; 1 mile that gains 1,000' of elevation gain takes much longer to hike than 1 flat mile at sea level.

4. Start EARLY: In the summer, regular mountain thunderstorms create significant risk of being struck by lightning. Plan to summit and be back to treeline by noon!

5. Plan a TURNAROUND time: Before starting your hike, decide on a time to turn around and head back, even if you don't summit. This helps avoid being caught by lightning and/or dark.

6. Your CELLPHONE is not reliable: Cell reception in Chaffee County's backcountry is sparse. Have a plan for communication that does not rely on your phone.

7. Hike with a trustworthy FRIEND: It is best to hike with a group... but only if you stick together! Do not split up your group, even if it means that no one summits.

8. Be PREPARED to spend the night: When things go wrong, it can take many hours for Search & Rescue to reach you. Having a means for fire and shelter, as well as a headlamp sure makes the wait more tolerable.

9. HYDRATE and FUEL often: The dry, high elevation air requires drinking more water and keeping your body fed is vital to get you happily through many hours of hiking.

10. Know how to NAVIGATE: Carry a map and compass, even if you also use a GPS. More importantly... know how to use these tools.

11. Use SUN protection: Solar power is intense at high elevation. Be sure to use sunscreen. Sunglasses and a brimmed hat can make the hike much more comfortable.



Approaching the summit of Mount Yale. Photo: Scott Anderson

12. Pack extra LAYERS: The weather at 14,000' is often radically different than at the trailhead. It can be sunny and 80 degrees in the valley while hailing, windy and 35 degrees on the summit.

13. Hike SLOWLY: Most 14er routes start around 10,000', leaving you short of breath from the get-go. The higher you go, the less oxygen in each breath. Slowing down helps your lungs, heart and body adjust.

14. ENJOY your hike: Avoid getting overcome by "Summit Fever", a malady that leads to poor decision-making. Remember that the mountain will still be there... that summiting is optional, returning safely & happily to the trailhead is mandatory! Every moment spent in Buena Vista's big, beautiful backyard is amazing; take time to fully enjoy your time here.

SUPPORT SEARCH AND RESCUE

Our organization is 100% volunteer! Members donate their fuel and vehicle costs as well as personal backcountry gear and hours and hours and hours of time each year. We run roughly 60 missions a year covering 1,015 sq miles and we can't do it without your help!

Donate online at: chaffeecountysarnorth.org

Contribute to the state-wide search and rescue fund by purchasing your CORSAR card before you travel into the back country. Search: CORSAR card on-line for more details.