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*Out-of-Door Playgrounds of the
San Isabel National Forest*

The scene on the cover is a reproduction
from a photograph of Rito Alto Lake
on the San Isabel National Forest.

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Out-of-Door Playgrounds of the San Isabel National Forest

BEYOND the rolling country lying to the west of Trinidad, Walsenburg, and Pueblo, and east of the broad reaches of the great San Luis Valley of southern Colorado, in the San Isabel National Forest, there rises abruptly a high, sharp line of mountains, dark with forests along their base and white along their summits with everlasting snow. By day they gleam in dazzling white; by night they seem but the ghosts of mountains; and in the evening, when the light on the high peaks turns to rose and violet before it dies, they are beautiful beyond description. So thought, at least, the old Spanish friars, who reverently named them Sangre de Cristo Mountains. To the east of this range lies the lovely Wet Mountain Valley, and bordering that, the rolling hills of the Wet Mountains. Southward from both of these the Las Animas division of the Forest occupies the high country between the Culebra Range and the Spanish Peaks, landmarks for the returning westerner.

The Sangre de Cristo is a sharp, saw-tooth range, containing numerous peaks above 14,000 feet. Sierra Blanca (14,390 feet) is the third highest peak in the State. The Las Animas division is similarly high and rugged, but the Wet Mountain division is much lower and more gentle in topography.

In these mountain regions there is much to entice the dweller in the hot lowland cities. Numerous clear, cold streams that have their rise high up amid the peaks and canyons and lovely mountain lakes, mirroring the passing clouds and the forests on their shores,

tempt the traveler to tarry a while and rest. In this country of bright, clear days and crisp, cool nights one can rest indeed. Under such conditions camping becomes well-nigh the ideal existence. Should one care for a longer and more sustained stay or to return year after year, what could be more alluring than a cabin or summer cottage set in an aspen-bordered grassy park or on the shore of a sparkling lake?

There are rainbow trout and the gamey eastern brook trout to be had for the taking. Black-tail or mule deer may be found, and grouse are fairly abundant throughout the heavy timber. About the Spanish Peaks are some of the few remaining flocks of wild turkey in the State. One may come upon elk in the Wet Mountain division, or catch sight of the wary mountain sheep upon the higher ranges, or find the track of a bear, or hearken, at night, to the scream of a mountain lion.

Where is all this? A thousand miles from nowhere? Not at all. The Forest is easily accessible from near-by railroad points and is penetrated by hundreds of visitors every year. Many good roads and trails, built and maintained by the Forest Service, lead into all parts of the mountains, and all lines of travel are well marked with signs.

Camping Grounds.

The visitor will have no difficulty in finding a picturesque spot in which to pitch his tent. From Westcliffe, in the Wet Mountain Valley, many attractive camping grounds in the Sangre de Cristo Range may be reached by a wagon or pack trip of from 6 to 20 miles. The most popular localities are in the vicinity of Hermit Lake, Lakes of the Clouds, Brush Creek Lakes, Venable Lakes, and Sand Creek Lakes, and on Colony, Grape, Spring, Brush, and Taylor Creeks. Beautiful camp sites are also to be found on the west side of the range on North

A CAMP ON THE HARDCRABBLE ROAD.

The Wet Mountain division of the San Isabel National Forest is a popular camping ground. There are many excellent tent sites along streams well stocked with fish.

and South Crestone Creeks and in Willow Park near Crestone. The headwaters of the Huerfano River near the south end of the Sangre de Cristo Range, reached from Gardner and Walsenburg, are visited by larger numbers of campers each summer.

The Wet Mountain division is very popular with campers, and affords excellent tent sites along North and South Hardscrabble, Squirrel, Greenhorn, and Middle Creeks, and the St. Charles River. Southwest of Beulah a public municipal camp ground of 110 acres has been set aside for the use of residents of the city of Pueblo, and farther to the north, on South Hardscrabble Creek, another community camp site has been created for the town of Florence. The mountains of this division are readily accessible by good automobile roads from Pueblo, Canon City, Florence, and Walsenburg.

THE SPANISH PEAKS.
Excellent hunting, fishing, and camping grounds.

The Spanish Peaks and Culebra Range are also visited by large numbers of campers, as this region is a favorite recreation center for the people of Trinidad, La Veta, and other towns.

Fishing

The fishing in the streams and lakes of the San Isabel is among the best to be found in the eastern Rocky Mountains. The principal species caught are native, eastern brook, and rainbow trout. Annual "plants" of fry by the Forest Service in cooperation with the State and private individuals keep even the most frequented waters well stocked.

Brush Creek Lake, 19 miles from Westcliffe by trail, is heavily stocked with eastern brook trout. It is situated just below timber line and surrounded by evergreen forests and towering cliffs.

The Lakes of the Clouds, three in number, nestle among the crags at the source of Swift Creek. These are the most popular fishing waters of the region, and rainbow trout weighing 7 pounds have been taken from them. Below the lakes, Swift Creek with its many beaver dams is also plentifully supplied with trout. The lakes may be reached from Westcliffe, via "The Pines," on horseback, distance 15 miles.

Middle Taylor Creek and Hermit Lake, 12 miles from Westcliffe, may be reached by wagon. These waters, on account of their accessibility, are visited by large numbers of fishermen each year. At Hermit Lake private cabins may be rented by campers.

Macey Creek and the Macey Lakes at its source are well stocked with native trout. The trip is made from Westcliffe by wagon or automobile to the Petty ranch, 9 miles, thence by trail 2 miles to the creek and 5 miles to the lake. Bear and Venable Lakes, 9 miles by automobile and then 5 miles by trail from Westcliffe, also afford fine native trout fishing.

GREENHORN MOUNTAIN.

The Wet Mountains are comparatively gentle in outline.

Medano Creek and Lily Lake at the headwaters of the Huerfano River, distance 20 and 25 miles, respectively, from Gardner, are noted fishing waters.

On the San Luis Valley side of the Sangre de Cristo, Sand Creek and the lakes of the same name afford a combination of magnificent scenery and good fishing unequalled on the Forest. These waters may be reached by trail from Crestone or from the Wet Mountain Valley via Music Pass.

North and South Crestone Creeks and the Crestone Lakes, all within 10 miles by trail of the town of Crestone, are exceptionally fine trout waters.

In the Wet Mountain division there are a number of good fishing streams readily accessible from Pueblo, Canon City, Florence, Beulah, and Rye. Among the most important of these may be mentioned the St. Charles River and Middle, South Hardscrabble, and Greenhorn Creeks, in all of which good catches are almost certain.

In the Spanish Peaks and Culebra country excellent sport is to be had in Cucharas, Indian, North, and Wahoatoya Creeks and their tributaries.

TWIN SISTERS PEAKS.

Typical of the rugged beauty of the Sangre de Cristo Range.

Game Animals and Birds

There are large numbers of black-tail or mule deer in all parts of the San Isabel Forest, and they are slowly increasing under the protection afforded by the State game laws. Mountain sheep are found in the high, rocky timber-line country of the Sangre de Cristo and Culebra ranges. Their most frequented haunts are near the headwaters of Brush, Colony, Sand, Crestone, and Venable Creeks, where they may occasionally be observed in the summer time. There are a few bear and mountain lions in the wilder and less-frequented parts of the Forest.

Elk, king of the antlered wild game which some decades ago roamed these ranges of the Rocky Mountains, have been practically extinct for the past 35 years. In 1916, however, the Forest Service, in cooperation with the Biological Survey and citizens and clubs of Pueblo, imported 24 head of elk from the Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming and released them in the vicinity of Buelah and Rye in the Wet Mountains. The increase of this band, counted by Forest

officers at the end of the first year, was five calves, and the animals showed every sign of thriving in their new mountain home.

Grouse are fairly abundant in all heavily timbered portions of the Forest, and in the Spanish Peaks region there is a flock of wild turkeys—the last within the State of this wonderful species which in the early days was one of the greatest game birds of the continent.

Mountain Climbing

No place in the west offers better facilities for mountain climbing than the rugged ranges of the San Isabel. The Sangre de Cristo Range presents a stretch of sky-piercing crags and mountain peaks unrivaled in Colorado. Among the most noted peaks which attract climbers are Old Baldy, 14,176 feet; Kit Carson, 14,100 feet; Humboldt, 14,041 feet; Gibson, 13,729 feet; Horn, 13,447 feet; Rito Alto, 12,989 feet; Hunt, 12,446 feet; and Nipple, Twin Sisters, and Methodist Mountains, ranging from 11,000 to 12,500 feet in elevation.

Sierra Blanca, 14,390 feet, at the southern end of the Sangre de Cristo Range, may be readily ascended by a good trail from Gardner in the Huerfano Valley or Blanco in the San Luis Valley, the round trip requiring three days. The Crestone Needles, 14,233 feet, reached from the town of Crestone on the west side of the range, or from Westcliffe in the Wet Mountain Valley, are said never to have been scaled by mountain climbers.

In the Las Animas division, the peaks of note are Culebra, 14,069; Trinchera, 13,546 feet; and the East and West Spanish Peaks, 12,708 and 13,626 feet, respectively. The first named peak is accessible from San Acacio on the Rio Grande Railroad, and the others from La Veta. In the Wet Mountain division, Greenhorn Peak, 12,530 feet, is easily reached by a good trail from the town of Rye.

The many peaks mentioned afford wonderful views of the mountains and plains of Colorado. From the Sangre de Cristo Range

SIERRA BLANCA.

The mountain climber will find a perpetual challenge in the rugged, saw-tooth range of the Sangre de Cristo with its numerous peaks over 14,000 feet in elevation.

appears to the west and south the vista of the wide-spreading San Luis Valley, which in summer is a checkerboard of color, showing the blue-green of alfalfa, the yellow of grain stubble, the dark green of the pines, and the silvery gray of the sagebrush, with snow-capped peaks in the far distance. To the east and northeast is the Wet Mountain Valley, the rolling Wet Mountains, the Arkansas Hills, and the massive uplift of Pikes Peak. From the summit of Greenhorn Mountain and the Spanish Peaks the eastern view is one of low rolling hills, checkered with farm lands, and of the Great Plains stretching to the far horizon.

Natural Curiosities

The Spanish Peaks, called Wahoatoya by the Indians and Los Dos Hermanos by the Spanish, consist of huge masses of hard volcanic rock which were thrust up through the softer sandstones and shales at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. A large number of narrow dikes branch out from the large masses like spokes of a wheel and extend in all directions for many miles from the foot of the peaks. In many places these dikes, owing to their hardness and freedom from disintegration, stand above the ground surface as narrow walls from 50 to 150 feet in height.

The shifting sand hills near Liberty, at the southwest end of the Sangre de Cristo Range, are said to be the largest traveling inland sand dunes in the world. Many of the dunes are between 500 and 1,000 feet in height. The whole area of the sand hills, which is absolutely devoid of vegetation, covers a tract 6 by 8 miles in extent. Flanked by valley lands on the west and timbered mountain slopes on the east, it furnishes a unique and interesting sight. These dunes may be reached by wagon from Crestone, 15 miles, or Alamosa, 30 miles away.

A picturesque example of the action of wind and weather on sandstone, which has worn the rocks into grotesque and fantastic shapes, is to be seen along the Huerfano River, 8 miles from Gardner.

The Caves of the Winds, a system of giant crevices in a mountain of solid white marble, is one of the principal natural wonders of the Forest. These caves have been penetrated to a depth of over 1,200 feet, without the end being reached. They may be reached by wagon road from Westcliffe, distance 15 miles.

A few miles west of Canon City and just north of the San Isabel Forest boundry, lies the celebrated Royal Gorge. This far-famed defile is the rift through which the Arkansas bursts from the mountains to freedom and the plains below. The canyon walls of ruddy granite and gneiss rise from 1,000 to nearly 3,000 feet above the mad, boiling waters of the river. Through this giant crevasse the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad winds its way, hugging close to the wall, until at the narrowest point of the gorge, where the towering cliffs are but 10 yards apart, the celebrated Hanging Bridge carries the train safely over the rushing stream. From Canon City a scenic trip of much interest may be made over the Sky-Line Drive to the top of the Royal Gorge.

Summer Homes in the Mountains

Those who wish something more permanent than a tent or temporary camp can build on land leased from the Forest Service a permanent camp, cabin, or summer cottage, to which they can return year after year. An act of Congress passed March 4, 1915, authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to issue long-term permits for summer-home sites for a period of not more than 30 years and for areas of not over 5 acres. For ordinary summer-home use, sites are usually limited to areas of an acre or less, for which a small yearly rental is charged.

AN OPEN-AIR AMUSEMENT.

In the National Forests is the last frontier where it is a man's pride to know how to ride and to handle a gun or a rope, to be familiar with the wild life of the forests and plains, and to be able to take care of himself in the woods.

The San Isabel, on account of its proximity to many large towns and cities, offers an ideal location for a summer home, and the popularity of the Forest in this respect is rapidly increasing. Many beautiful sites are located near Beulah and Rye in the Wet Mountain division, some of which have already been applied for. Unexcelled opportunities for summer-home building are also to be found on Middle Taylor Creek near Hermit Lake, on the Huerfano River in the Sangre de Cristo Range, and near Walsenburg and La Veta in the Spanish Peaks country.

Application for term permits for summer homes should be made to the Supervisor of the Forest at Westcliffe, or to the District Forester at Denver.

Outfitting Points

Westcliffe, at which the headquarters of the Forest Supervisor is located, is a thriving town of 300 people at the terminus of a branch of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad running from Texas Creek on the main line, distance 25 miles. Here may be found three hotels, two garages, a livery barn, and numerous stores from which outfits for a trip into the mountains may be purchased. Gardner, on the Huerfano River, with two stores, two hotels, and a garage, is a central outfitting point for trips to Sierra Blanca Peak and the upper Huerfano. On the San Luis Valley side of the Sangre de Cristo, Villa Grove and Crestone are small towns with limited tourist facilities, from which numerous interesting trips may be made into near-by mountains.

In the vicinity of the Spanish Peaks, La Veta, Walsenburg, and Trinidad are all splendid towns with every facility for equipping

Breaking camp after a night's rest.

travelers. The celebrated coal camps of the region may also be visited from these points.

Many parties outfit at Salida, Canon City, and Florence—important cities on the Denver & Rio Grande—for a vacation outing in the northern part of the Sangre de Cristo and Wet Mountains. The eastern slopes of the Wet Mountains are readily accessible from Pueblo, the second largest city in the State. Beulah and Rye, two noted summer resorts in the Wet Mountains, are 28 and 35 miles, respectively, from Pueblo by an excellent automobile highway.

Lines of Travel

The various divisions of the San Isabel are easily reached by both railroad and automobile. The main line of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad from Pueblo to Salida skirts the northern boundary of the Forest; the Salida-Alamosa narrow-gauge division in the San Luis Valley parallels the Sangre de Cristo for its entire length, and the Walsenburg-Alamosa division, which crosses La Veta Pass, traverses the Huerfano country. The Colorado & Southern and Denver & Rio Grande Railroads from Pueblo to Walsenburg and Trinidad run a short distance to the east of the Wet Mountains and Spanish Peaks.

There are many fine motor roads in the valleys surrounding the Forest, but automobiles can not penetrate for any great distance into the rugged mountainous country of the Sangre de Cristo and Las Animas divisions. On the north of the Forest is the celebrated "Rainbow Route" running from Pueblo to Salida via Florence, Canon City, and the Royal Gorge. From Canon City and Cotopaxi, on the main highway, good branch roads run to Westcliffe and continue southward through the Wet Mountain Valley to Gardner and Walsenburg.

From Salida one may go south by the "Gunbarrel Route" to Alamosa, where a junction is made with the "Spanish Trail" running

MAP OF THE SAN ISABEL NATIONAL FOREST.

Solid black lines represent Forest boundaries. Distances between solid light lines (township boundaries) represent 6 miles.

west from Walsenburg via La Veta Pass. On the eastern side of the Forest, the "Colorado-Gulf Highway" to the Gulf of Mexico runs parallel to the Wet Mountains from Pueblo to Walsenburg. From Pueblo, Walsenburg, Salida, and Alamosa connections may be made with automobile highways running north, south, east, and west to all parts of the country.

A Word of Caution

Although the Forest divisions are comparatively narrow and located at high altitudes, there are few tracts of equal extent in the State upon which so many people and such large investments are so dependent. This region is the oldest settled part of Colorado, people having come into this country in 1854. To-day approximately 100,000 residents of cities, towns, and homesteads are more or less dependent on the Forest, principally for domestic and irrigation water, and for timber and summer range for live stock. The towns of Trinidad and Florence have cooperative agreements with the Secretary of Agriculture for the protection from fire of watersheds from which they draw their water supplies and for the regulation of the use of the land for forest purposes.

To preserve the beauty of the mountains, as well as to make them of benefit to mankind, it is very necessary to exercise every precaution to prevent forest fires, which destroy the green trees, dry up the streams, drive away the game, and turn the beauty spots of nature into desolate wastes. A large percentage of the forest fires which occur each year are due to human agencies, and are, therefore, preventable. By putting out your camp fires, using care with lighted matches and cigarette and cigar butts, and cleaning up your camp and picnic grounds before leaving them, you can do much toward safeguarding the National Forests from the scourge of fire and making them a pleasant vacation land for those seeking rest and enjoyment.