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8 Tips for Conquering a Fourteener

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Jul 1, 2011 Misty Faucheux Comments



Colorado is most famous for its mountain peaks, especially its fourteeners. Adrenaline junkies love tackling these super-high peaks, but that doesn't mean that we regular folks can't try our hand. You do, however, need to take certain precautions before you even drive to the trailhead.

Mental/Physical Preparation

Climbing a fourteener is generally a grueling experience, unless you do the lazy man's fourteener – Mountain Evans. On this hike, you drive all the way to the top, and then just hike the last 500 feet. Most people, however, want a more challenging mountain. So, if you want to attempt all-day or multi-day fourteener hikes, get your body and mind ready.

Preparing for the Elevation

Altitude sickness can come on fast, and you can get extremely sick, extremely fast. The best way to deal with altitude sickness is to climb 1,000 feet at a time. If you've never gone above 5,000 feet, try going up to 6,000 feet one day, 7,000 feet the next, etc. If you start getting sick, stop, and head down the mountain. Try it again at a later date.

Stay Hydrated and Eat Before

Momma always said to drink plenty of water and eat your breakfast. This is triply true when hiking a fourteener. Eat complex carbohydrates, which give you plenty of energy, and eat throughout the hike. Do not let yourself get dehydrated, which can bring on altitude sickness.



Bring on the Sunscreen

While the day may look cloudy, you are more likely to get sunburned at higher elevations since you are closer to the sun and the atmosphere is thinner. Use 35 plus protection sunscreen, and lather it on every 2 hours.

Give Yourself Time

Start hiking as early in the day as possible. Do not start your hike around 10:00 a.m. and think that you're going to make it up the mountain by noon. You won't. Worse, you'll be hiking to the summit during the heat of the day, increasing the chances of dehydration or heat stroke.

Go Slowly

Look at the length of the hike and overestimate how long you think it will take to go round trip. Then, take your time. Rushing up or down a mountain increases the chances of falling, twisting an ankle or slipping on wet rocks. Walk slowly. If necessary, bring an overnight pack, and stay the night on the mountain.

Always follow your instincts. If you are nervous about heading out on a particular terrain, don't go that way. Your body knows what's good for it.

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Dress Appropriately

It's always better to be overdressed than underdressed on a fourteener. Weather changes rapidly on mountain tops. While it may be wonderfully sunny and warm at the base, you could walk into a snowstorm at the summit. Wear several layers of comfortable clothes, and be prepared to add and remove layers throughout the hike.

Enjoy the View and Take Plenty of Pictures

Once you have conquered the mountain, stop and take in the roses – or in this case the amazing scenery. You'll get unobstructed views

of the entire area, including the surrounding mountains and valleys. Always bring plenty of memory cards for your camera. You'll definitely want to capture the moment when you made it to the summit of a 14,000 plus mountain.

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