

The New York Times

I've seen Rocky Mountain National Park with my own eyes

By Wade Dar. Ebby
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Here I am, climbing Mt. Ida Trail in RMNP.

You will never understand the true beauty of nature until you have seen it with your own eyes. Why do I make such a bold statement? It is because of the shimmering light which cascades on the brilliant white snow of the peaks of Rocky Mountain National Park. It is because of the mesmerizing rush of the Cache La Poudre river, spilling over the ancient rock. It is because of the divine air which flows through my body, cleansing my soul and ridding my mind of the polluted mess which we all suffer in. When I am in Rocky Mountain National Park, or any of America's National Parks for that matter, I am free. I am enjoying the earth in its raw state, unaltered by

civilization. And I am also free of the stresses which dilute my conscience.

My venture in Rocky Mountain National Park began on July 7th, 2018. It was a gorgeous summer morning as my friend Pat and I drove along I-70. The mountains grew, hugging the road with steep, rocky inclines. We arrived at the base of the park at 5am. Wisps of fog drifted in front of our headlights as we pulled into a parking spot. Pat retrieved a flashlight from his backpack and illuminated a path through the dirt parking lot. We crunched through the dirt until we came to the entrance of the park. The sun had just reached an angle such that the clouds above billowed with pink and purple. In front of us stood the gate to the park. Made of beautiful silver stone, it arched above us 30 feet. At the very top of the arch, carefully crafted in wooden lettering, it read "Howdy Folks!" Pat and I stood gazing at the gate in awe before approaching the information placard on the right leg of the arch. We studied the information and warnings about the treacherous trek ahead of us, but were reaffirmed of our motivations from the last sentence on the placard:

"Beyond this gate is an expanse of wilderness that only the most willing, fearless, and adventurous people will ever see with their own eyes."

We then walked under the arch, exiting reality and entering the wilderness of the Rocky Mountains.

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For the next 15 days, we followed the worn paths of the adventurers who came before us. We set up camp when the sun set and woke up when the sun rose. Along our journey, we found our own food, killing rabbits when we needed to. I only had two batteries for my camera, so I only turned it on to take the most profound pictures. I will entertain you with another gorgeous shot I took, seen to the right.

By the end of our trip, we had seen some of the most magnificent scenery on planet earth. I may have pictures to prove that I was indeed in the park, but I have something that 99.89% Americans do not have and will most likely never have: the experience of being there myself. My feet touched the soil; I drank the cold run-off water; I traversed the steep mountains; I slept beneath the pines; I lived off of the land.

After doing some research from the National Park Service, I have concluded that Pat and I are two of only 20,000 people who ventured into the park this year. That number has of course increased over the

past 100 years since the public opening of the park, but I am still surprised that more people do not enjoy the park. When the Organic Act of 1916 was passed, creating the National Park Service, Teddy Roosevelt's legacy had insured one thing: national parks would never be industrialized for tourism. As is widely known, paved roads cannot be found in any of America's national parks, thus excluding the majority of Americans from ever seeing the parks. For many years, I struggled to understand why the government decided not to use modern means of transportation to allow more people to experience the parks. But, after mustering up the courage, stamina, and strength to spend those 15 days in the park, I realize why.

The park cannot be enjoyed behind the window of a car. It cannot be enjoyed with the noise pollution of traffic. It cannot be enjoyed unless you step back to a time when humans did not control every aspect of the nature around them. In the park, I felt closer to the earth than I had ever before.

The raw landscape and I developed a relationship that can only be formed when you are faced with the realities of the wilderness.

Since Pat and I's trek through Rocky Mountain National Park, I have reminisced for many hours about my emotional connection to the land. I find myself longing to see more of America's exotic landscapes with my own eyes. The time and energy needed to do this is well worth the experiences which ensue. I challenge you, no matter how scary or impossible it seems, to be willing, be fearless, and be adventurous... see America's National Parks with your own eyes.



No words could describe this, so here it is.



This photograph, while beautiful, does not do RMNP justice. To truly experience the park, you must go.

“I’ve seen Rocky Mountain National Park with my own eyes”

By Joey Lovato

For my *It Might Have Been* project, I have written an article by a fictional writer of the New York Times in 2018 named Wade Dar. Ebby. His article accounts his experience in Rocky Mountain National Park and his thoughts about why seeing it with your own eyes is life changing. In his world, the National Park Service never allowed roads to be built in any of America’s National Parks. Thus, witnessing the natural beauties of the parks is only possible upon trekking through the wilderness on foot, horse, bike, etc. In his article, he mentions that only 20,000 people had been in the park in 2018. In reality, over four million people have been in the park this year, which is an astounding number to hear. I wrote this piece to illustrate the unfortunate effects of allowing the American public to visit National Parks with such convenience. Without that convience, seeing the National Parks in person would be a much different and rarer experience. I would like to thank Edward Abbey for the inspiration to write this article. Below is an excerpt from his book, *Dessert Solitaire*, which was a large influence for my article:

“Howdy Folks. Welcome. This is your National Park, established for the pleasure of you and all people everywhere. Park your car, jeep, truck, tank, motorbike, motorboat, jetboat, airboat, submarine, airplane, jetplane, helicopter, hovercraft, winged motorcycle, snowmobile, rocketship, or any other conceivable type of motorized vehicle in the world’s biggest parking lot behind the comfort station immediately to your rear. Get out of your motorized vehicle, get on your horse, mule, bicycle or feet, and come on in. Enjoy yourselves. This here park is for *people*.”