

VAIL AREA

MOUNTAIN RANGES AND STREAMS

## VAIL AREA MOUNTAINS AND MOUNTAIN RANGES

The Vail Valley refers generally to Vail, Avon, Beaver Creek, and environs. Historically and geographically, Vail is located in the Gore Creek Valley and Avon in the Eagle River Valley. The mountains surrounding these valleys are some of the most beautiful in Colorado. Although the Gore Range, running northeastward from Vail, is clearly the most prominent, there are others associated with the valley that deserve attention - the Tenmile Range to the east, the Mosquito to the south, the Sawatch Range to the southwest, and the Flattops to the northwest. Portions of these ranges can be seen from either Vail Mountain or Beaver Creek Baldy, or both.

### THE GORE RANGE

Rising east of Vail, the Gore Range runs some 70 miles to the northwest, covering portions of Eagle, Summit, Routt, and Grand Counties. It was named for Sir St. George Gore, an Irish baronet whose lavish hunting expedition in 1854 crossed the range at Gore Pass, 40 miles north of Vail. Lord Gore did not visit the area today called the Vail Valley.

John Wesley Powell, famous for his exploration of the Grand Canyon, climbed the highest peak in the Gore Range on September 26, 1868; later, a correspondent with the climbing party named the 13,580-foot mountain for him. The second ascent was made by a party with Dr. Frederick V. Hayden's survey of 1873, immediately after their first ascent of the Mount of the Holy Cross.

Although there are no 14,000-foot peaks in the Gore Range, it is an extremely rugged mountain area. Few trails penetrated there in the days of western expansion; there was little mining or trapping activity and few of the summits were named. When the Colorado Mountain Club began climbing in the range during the 1930s they used an alphabetical system to identify the peaks. Some of these are still in use today.

A few of the more prominent landmarks as seen from Vail and Beaver Creek's mountains are:

- Bald Mountain 12,136'
- Red-Bufferalo Pass (note hyphen) 11,500'+
- Grand Traverse 13,083'
- Spider 12,656'
- Peak C 13,121'
- Mount Powell 13,580'
- Eagle's Nest Peak 13,420'

## THE TENMILE RANGE

One of the scenic highlights of a trip eastward out of the Vail Valley is to top Vail Pass, and, descending, view the awesome mountain barrier ahead. This is the Tenmile Range, squeezed at an angle between the Gore Range on the north, and the Mosquito Range on the south. Its single fourteener, Quandary Peak (14,265') is the 14th highest in the state, and was named for rock that miners found on its slopes and were unable to identify. They were in a quandary, and named both the mountain and a mining town for their dilemma.

The most notorious peak in the range is Bartlett Mountain, whose summit no longer exists. Huge deposits of molybdenum, a metal-strengthening alloy, were mined by the "glory hole" method, which collapsed the mountain in on itself. Molybdenum booms during the World Wars, and again in the 1960s, were followed by depressions; today, only a few miners work there.

The Tenmile Range (actually closer to 12 miles long) has a line of mountains named simply Peak One on up to Peak Ten (and note the "alphabeticals" in the Gore Range). Although seemingly sheer from the Vail Pass side, they ease off gently to the east, and the lower slopes of Peak Eight, Nine, and Ten form the Breckenridge Ski Area.

Pacific Peak, 13,950', is the striking pyramid seen from Vail Pass and the ridge of Vail Mountain.

## THE MOSQUITO RANGE

The Mosquito Range can be seen to the south from several points along the ridge of Vail Mountain. The range begins where the Continental Divide, running east-west at this point, marks the southern end of the Tenmile Range (which is on the Western Slope) and the beginning of the Mosquitos (which are on the Eastern). According to Rev. John Dyer, who carried mail over the range on skis back in the 1860s and for whom one of the peaks is named, local men disagreed over a name for their mining district, so left a place in their record book blank. Resuming the meeting later, they opened the book and found a mosquito smashed on the blank line. Thus the name of district and range.

Four of Colorado's "fourteeners" lie in the range: Mount Sherman (14,036'), Mount Democrat (14,148'), Mount Bross (14,172'), and Mount Lincoln (14,286'), the eighth highest in the state.

The crest of the Mosquitos runs for miles above timberline,



its raw and barren slopes a challenge for the thousands of prospectors who mined the area in the 1800s, many of whom made the awesome winter trek to Leadville over 13,182-foot Mosquito Pass, the highest pass in the state. They were patriotic as well as hardy. When men at the Mosquito Mining Company named Mount Lincoln, they sent the president a bar of gold worth \$800 mined from the mountain. It is said that one of Lincoln's last official acts before his assassination was to send a message of thanks to the miners in the Mosquito Range.

Peaks seen from the ridge of Vail Mountain include:

Mosquito Peak 13,781'

Dyer Mountain 13,855'

Mount Sherman 14,036'

### THE SAWATCH RANGE

The Eagle River marks the eastern and northern boundary at the northern end of the Sawatch, a range which runs one hundred miles to the south and contains fifteen peaks over fourteen thousand feet high, including Mount Elbert, at 14,433' the highest in Colorado.

While Elbert is the highest, the Mount of the Holy Cross (14,005') is far more famous, earning national acclaim back in the 1870s with the photographs of William Henry Jackson and the paintings of Thomas Moran. Annual pilgrimages up nearby Notch Mountain to view the cross of snow, begun in the 1930s and resumed in 1976, brought further recognition. Both Notch Mountain and the Mount of the Holy Cross stand out on the southwest horizon from many points on Vail Mountain.

The New York Range, the northernmost mountains of the Sawatch, rises to the south along Lake Creek and Beaver Creek, with Mount Jackson (named for William Henry Jackson, famous western photographer), Gold Dust Peak, and New York Mountain all well-known to Eagle County hikers.

Sawatch was originally spelled like the town of Saguache, which has its word-origin in a Ute word loosely translated as "a spring in the blue earth." Both words are pronounced like the anglicized version.

The following peaks are most prominent from Vail Mountains's ridge (only Mount Jackson, Beaver Creek Baldy, McCoy and Gold Dust Peaks can be seen from any of Beaver Creek's ski terrain):

Beaver Creek Baldy 12,161'

McCoy Peak 11,380'

Grouse Mountain 12,799'

Gold Dust Peak 13,380'

Mount Jackson 13,670'  
 Mount of the Holy Cross 14,005'  
 Notch Mountain 13,237'  
 Whitney Peak 13,271'  
 Mount Massive 14,421'  
 Mount Elbert 14,433'  
 Mount Columbia 14,073'

### THE FLATTOPS

The Flattops form the horizon northwest of the Vail Valley and can be seen from both Vail and Beaver Creek Mountains. Circular rather than linear in area, the Flattops are part of the White River Plateau which represents a transition from the fractured folds of the Rocky Mountain core to the mesas and plateaus in the western part of the state. Both the White and Yampa Rivers have their headwaters there.

Formed from ancient lava flows, the Flattops are aptly named for their general contours and are beautifully filled by stands of fir and spruce, once totally killed by a beetle infestation, and with many streams and lakes long celebrated by trout fishermen. When Congress created the National Wilderness Preservation System in 1964, the Flattops Wilderness Area was one of the first to be set aside.

Prominent landmarks in the direction of the Flattops include:  
 Red and White Mountain 11,192'  
 Castle Peak 11,275'

### WATERCOURSES IN THE VAIL VALLEY

Vail Valley's main watercourses, Gore Creek and the Eagle River, are fed generously by many tributaries. Main Gore and Black Gore Creeks join at the base of Vail Pass and flow downvalley approximately 10 miles before emptying into the Eagle River. The Eagle's headwaters begin up on the Continental Divide near Fremont and Tennessee Passes, flow through Red Cliff and Minturn, pick up the waters of the Gore at Dowd Junction (I-70 and U.S. 24) and swing west to meet the Colorado River just west of Dotsero. The Eagle, approximately 50 miles long, begins and ends within the boundaries of Eagle County.

Draining into Gore Creek ...

#### From the north

\*Deluge Creek  
 \*Bighorn Creek



- \*Pitkin Creek -- for Gov. Frederick Pitkin
- \*Booth Creek -- name origin unknown; some say an early hunter
- \*Spraddle Creek
- \*Middle Creek
- \*Red Sandstone Creek
- \*Buffehr Creek -- named for the family who ranched at its mouth.

#### From the south

- \*Black Gore Creek
- \*Mill Creek

Draining into the Eagle River ( Red Cliff to Edwards) ...

#### From east and north

- \*Turkey Creek -- interesting: no turkeys around here today.
- \*Rock Creek
- \*Two Elk Creek
- \*Game Creek
- \*Gore Creek -- Piney Creek in 1873, renamed by an unknown person, obviously for "Lord" Gore, who never saw it.
- \*Traer Creek -- named for an early settler.
- \*Buck Creek
- \*Metcalf Creek -- one of the earliest settlers in the Avon area.
- \*June Creek -- it normally dries up during the month of June.
- \*Berry Creek -- for Harrison Berry, pioneer settler of Edwards area.

#### From west and south

- \*Peterson Creek
- \*Fall Creek
- \*Cross Creek -- named by the Hayden Survey in 1873 as Roches Moutonees -- "sheep rocks" -- Creek, changed briefly to Mountain Creek, and then assuming present name from the Cross of Snow which drains into it.
- \*Martin Creek
- \*Grouse Creek
- \*Whiskey Creek -- probably relating to moonshining, a common local activity during Prohibition.
- \*Stone Creek -- for homesteader Charles B. Stone, who later became Denver's chief of police.
- \*Beaver Creek
- \*McCoy Creek -- for John F. McCoy, son of the Colorado River McCoys, who came into this country before 1900, bought up the Terrell Ranch to add to his own homestead, and went on to become a leader in both Eagle and Garfield Counties.

\*Lake Creek -- presumably for the many timberline lakes that line the upstream canyon walls.