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December 11, 2020

WRIT 2701: Green Rhetoric

### Escape to the Flatirons

My friends had all moved back to Denver after an extended Quarantine. We had created a master list of places around Denver we wanted to explore. We went to the Paint Mines, St. Mary's Glacier, the Sand Dunes and did our first fourteener together. We had a few more places to check off this list before the summer ended and the fall quarter started. One of our final destinations was the Flatirons in Boulder. This was one of the places I chose to add to the list.

The Flatirons are on 45,000 acres of land protected by wildlife services. This massive amount of land provided the perfect escape from our apartments. After being stuck inside for months on end, everyone was excited to get outside and away from Tiger King, TikTok, and Trump.

The mountain towers over the city of Boulder in a jagged pattern. The peaks are giant red stones that look like they are growing towards the sky as you drive closer to them. The Flatiron seems to be entirely removed from the city and seems like they are on a completely different planet than the city. Because of this, I was dying to stand on one of those peaks and to feel like I



was anywhere but on earth. The Flatirons were the perfect escape.

I picked my group up at nine on the dot and jumped onto I-25. I sped towards Boulder while my friend pulled up the map of the trail we were planning on taking. He went through the trailheads we were going to take turns at, but I

was too busy dreaming about the top of the peaks to listen. I wasn't too worried because



Colorado trails are easy to read. Our typical hikes usually followed some semblance of a straight line, or the trailheads had extra information on them to direct hikers to the top. Plus, someone in the group always brought a speaker, so even when someone fell behind, they could hear the music playing and follow it.

We finally pulled into the parking lot, and everyone finished their coffee and double-checked their bags for the necessities: water, chapstick, toilet paper, bandaids, and a small trash bag.

Once everyone was all geared up and ready to go, we set out to find the first trailhead. A couple of groups were walking near us, a couple with a brown dog and matching outfits and another group of 6 college-aged people.

Boulders and trees surrounded the first trailhead. The path was a light red, orange color. I started kicking some of the smaller rocks on the trail as we approached the sign. I had to stop when I heard “what the hell just hit my foot” from one of my friends trying to walk in front of me. I started to examine the trail we walked on and realized how often it had been used. The trail was worn down by hikers, runners, and bikers. The path seemed to be very popular and frequently used. This was surprising. I came up to get away from people and everything going on, but the path seemed to be just as connected to Boulder as CU Boulder is.

We made it to the first trailhead in about five minutes and started to play music. We waited a while for my friend to queue his “perfect hiking mix” and let the two groups pass us. I decided to take a seat on a nearby rock and wait for him to finish while admiring the large trees

around me. There was a mix of Aspen and Pine, the two typical trees seen on Colorado hikes. The Aspen trees were blowing in the wind, making them shimmer in the sunlight. It looked like glitter above me. The pines stood still and almost looked like fake Christmas trees in a window display. While I was busy spacing out, my friend had gone over the Trailheads again, and the queue had been completed. I came back to reality just in time because my friends had all started walking. I jogged to catch up and started walking next to the speaker.



We continued down our trail singing along to songs, chatting about our upcoming classes, and planning our next adventure. We stopped for our first break near a metal, green power, or water tank. It was covered in graffiti and seemed entirely out of place, sitting in the middle of a forest.

After drinking some water, we marched forward down the trail. We walked down the side of a steep hill onto a dirt path. It had been completely cleared of trees and looked like a road. Power lines were running down the side of it, and construction workers fixing them. We followed this road for two miles before we came across our next trailhead that led us back into the forest. The walk became more green and full. The trees were tightly packed together, and tall grass was growing on all sides of us. It slowly blew in the breeze as we walked by.

At this point, the group had become quieter, and we were just listening to the music playing. Everyone was beginning to get tired and hungry about halfway through this trail. We decided to stop and take a snack and water break. We found a nice spot and planned to stay for about an hour to enjoy the forest scenery and catch our breath. I found a perfect grassy spot away

from the rest of the group to lay down and stare at the passing clouds and treetops. In the corner of my eye, I could see the smoke plumes from the forest fires raging just north of us. I knew the forests were on fire, but it was still shocking to see the main plume. I had watched the ash fall like snowflakes on my patio just a few days earlier.



I drifted deep into thought about why Colorado was on fire and why it had to be this year out of all years for this to happen. Before I knew it, an hour had passed, and I heard my friend calling my name again. I wasn't quite ready to leave my thoughts, and the spot I was sitting was too perfect not to stay for a little longer. I shouted back that I would catch up to them later or meet them at the peak if I couldn't find them. We weren't too far from the major climb up, so I wasn't worried about it. They headed out, and I waited till I couldn't hear the music to start walking in their direction.



I got up, packed my backpack, and headed in the direction they had left in. I walked along, admiring the forest and its bright green and brown hues. The sun was in a perfect spot,



and the smoke cloud was no longer in my line of sight. I had a chance to pretend the bad parts of 2020 had never happened and that I was on the path I had planned for myself a year ago. The smoke still weighed heavy, and my thoughts drifted back to everything that had happened this year. It was beginning to seem that I couldn't escape the anxiety and fear that came with 2020. I kept walking and admiring the fallen logs on the side of the path when I saw a tiny chipmunk pop out of a hole in the log. It wagged its tail and distracted me from completely spiraling in my own head.

I saw a trailhead in the distance and jogged over to see which direction I would be headed next on my solo walk. As I approached, I started to notice that all the markings were missing from the post. I looked all over it and found nothing. I began to panic. I was too busy being excited or staring at trees to pay any attention to the directions I needed so badly at this moment.

After a very long five minutes had passed, I calmed down and tried to pull myself together. On one side of the trail, there was a straight path that looked like it was headed downhill, and the other side led to the base of the mountain. I chose to go towards the mountain because my friends were waiting for me at the peak, which was the closest peak.

I started my ascension towards the peak, and my excitement about this hike came back to me. I was about to be on the top of a mountain away from everything else happening around me. I climbed further and further up with this thought in my mind to keep me from being completely terrified.

Finally, I had made it past the treeline, and there was only a little more to go. I kept pace and didn't stop till I reached the peak. I was completely winded by the time I got to the top, but that didn't stop me from taking in the view. I



had finally done it. I had the feeling of complete freedom. It didn't bother me that I was alone. I didn't need my friends to enjoy the view.

While taking in the landscape below, I started to notice how the mountains I once thought were on another planet were connected to Boulder. There were houses on the different bases of peaks and roads cutting through them. They didn't seem as distant and removed as I had pretended they were.

The Flatirons were just as affected from this year as I had been. The smoke cloud was billowing in the sky, powerlines, water tanks, and houses littered the base. The dream of escaping seemed more unrealistic than ever. I could see people driving down the highway and people walking down the streets. Even though they all looked like ants, I realized I couldn't escape the year, and climbing the mountain proved it with all the human marks. If a mountain can't escape 2020, a human definitely can't.