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# 10 reasons to be thankful for Colorado outdoors, according to top athletes and advocates

By Seth Boster [seth.boster@gazette.com](mailto:seth.boster@gazette.com) Nov 25, 2019 Updated 5 hrs ago

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Dan Pittz and son Tiernan Pittz, right, hike the trail above the Royal Gorge past a beautiful view of the Arkansas River last month.

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In this season of giving, we're continuing a tradition of asking adventurous Coloradans to give thanks to the great outdoors.

Here's what they had to say:

## **Alison Dunlap, Colorado Springs**

### **Two-time mountain bike Olympian**

I am thankful for Palmer Park. It is a treasure and a gem hidden inside the concrete jungle of our city. I have spent the past 33 years wandering its trails, riding the techy ledges, watching the sunsets, leading (mountain bike) clinics, discovering our geologic past, and best of all teaching my son how to ride a mountain bike on its trails.



Two-time Olympian and world champion cyclist Alison Dunlap speaks during a news conference on Jan. 25, 2017, at USA Cycling announcing the inaugural Colorado Classic cycling race. Dunlap says she's thankful for Palmer Park, touting it as "a treasure and a gem hidden inside the concrete jungle of our city."

CHRISTIAN MURDOCK, THE GAZETTE

## **Jesse Jakomait, Colorado Springs**

### **Record-setting cyclist**

There are so many amazing trails to be thankful (for) but if I must pick one, it would be Agate Creek off of the Monarch Crest Trail. Its rough and raw surface combined with a healthy dose of gravity in a remote setting make it my favorite trail I've ever had the pleasure of riding.

Hundreds of riders pedal right by the entrance each weekend while riding the famous Crest trail, but for those curious souls that detour off the main line, they are treated to magnificent dirt and the perfect mix of rocks and root to use everything a mountain bike is capable of.

## **Ilana Jesse, Colorado Springs**

### **Alpinist**

The 14,000-foot peaks of the Sawatch (range) provided an opportunity to confront my demons, born from the aftermath of a near fatal accident in May 2018. I was thankful to spend every free moment this summer scouting the Colorado cult classic line, Nolan's 14, linking up 14 of these peaks in succession.

Throughout all of the talus, backcountry navigation and heinous bushwhacking, I achieved what I sought to find: a renewed trust in my self-sufficiency in the mountains as well as a love for their relentless beauty.

## **Donnelle Johnson, Franktown**

### **Co-founder of Hunting Divas, HuntData, pro staffer for Cabela's, Bass Pro Shops**

I am thankful for the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to hunt Shiras Moose in Colorado ... I applied for 21 years before successfully drawing my tag, and when the time came, my friends and family surrounded me on this 21-day adventure to harvest a moose in the Walden area. ... I'm so thankful to be able to feed my family and friends with this great organic meat from my 2019 hunts.

### **Eric Larsen, Crested Butte**

#### **Renowned polar explorer**

There isn't a day that goes by that I'm not thankful for Crested Butte ... Nearly every day in the summer, I ride my mountain bike on hundreds of miles of incredible trials with equally incredible scenery. In winter it's really cold, which, not surprisingly, I love as well. When it snows 10 or 12 inches, it takes me seven minutes versus my normal five to get to the ski hill.



Donnelle Johnson poses with a set of antlers and her favorite bow. The Frantown-based woman is an accomplished hunter who recently took her first moose.

Photo courtesy of Donnelle Johnson



Jesse Jakomait, known for his accomplishments on a bike, has taken recent months to explore untrammeled wilds in the San Juan Mountains.

Photo courtesy of Jesse Jakomait

### **Ted Mahon, Aspen**

#### **Mountain guide and ski instructor**

I am continually grateful for Ashcroft and the Castle Creek Valley just outside of Aspen. In winter it's a go-to for backcountry skiing, access to the Braun Huts, nordic trails up at Ashcroft, or ski mountaineering missions on summits of all heights and difficulty.

When the snow melts we change gears and hit the trails and peaks on foot or bike. The more time I spend up there the more special I find it to be.



Ling Li treks up Barr Trail the day after the bomb cyclone hit the Pikes Peak region on March 14. No matter the weather, Li summits Pikes Peak at least once a month as part of her training. "It's easy to take for granted what's in our backyard," she notes.

the gazette



Ted Mahon stops to take pictures of fellow skiers in the area he loves near his home in Aspen: Ashcroft and the Castle Creek Valley. Photo courtesy Ted Mahon

## **Ashlee Sack, Cañon City**

### **Trails advocate**

I am thankful for the Royal Gorge Park ... In recent years, trail construction has allowed public access to some of the most inspiring and humbling views in southern Colorado.

I challenge anyone to stand on the rim of the Royal Gorge, watch an inversion make its way through the 1,000-foot, granite-walled canyon, gaze at the majestic Sangre de Cristo mountains in the distance and not feel complete awe.

## **Erik Weihenmayer, Golden**

### **First blind person to summit Mount Everest**

As a blind person, I don't drive. ... And other motorists are thankful! But jokes aside, it is important to me to have places to access that I can get to train outdoors without getting a ride or having a partner.

I live right at the base of North Table Mountain and over the years have explored all over the mesa. ... North Table is a place where I can get out independently and explore.

## **Robert Younghanz, Colorado Springs**

### **Fishing guide and "Bug Guy"**

Both iconic and prolific, the diminutive mayfly, *Tricorythodes explicates*, commonly known as the Trico, provides trout with an abundant food source, and anglers with countless hours of time spent on our hallowed rivers in Colorado.

After emerging, they hover over the river in breathtaking clouds during their nuptial flight. ... This hatch is greatly anticipated and no doubt beloved by both the fly fisher and trout alike.

**Ling Li, Colorado Springs**

**Mountaineer**

Every time I venture into the outdoors and climb locally or internationally, I appreciate every experience. But none of this would be possible without Pikes Peak, my training peak. ... It's easy to take for granted what's in our backyard, but I'm so thankful that this peak is so accessible with so many fun routes to the summit.



Fishing guide and "Bug Guy" Robert Younghanz is thankful for the diminutive mayfly, *Tricorythodes explicates*, commonly known as the Trico.

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Seth Boster

Seth is a features writer at The Gazette, covering the outdoors and the people and places that make Colorado colorful.

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