

## Fascinating Colorado Facts

*By Dennis Payton Knight*

I have called Colorado home since about 1970 when F.W. Woolworth brought me from Montana to continue my management training at their large Cinderella City store in Englewood. I was fascinated on arriving to learn that Cinderella City then claimed to be the world's largest shopping mall, a massive structure with several hundred stores. Ours was the second largest Woolworth's in Colorado, but it was dwarfed by the world's largest Woolworth store in downtown Denver.

Over the years I've continued to be fascinated by Colorado facts. For instance, this is the only state that is entirely over a thousand meters above sea level. For us un-metric morons, that translates to 3,280 feet. Colorado's lowest point is on the Arikaree River where it flows at 3,315 in elevation into Kansas.

Another fascinating fact about Colorado lies at timberline, the other end of the spectrum. Our tree line ranges from 10,500 feet in the north to 12,000 feet in the south; either is higher than other ranges in our hemisphere, like the Alps, because our latitude is further to the south.

The highest paved road in North America ends at the top of Mount Evans at 14,271 feet. And when you get there, hold on to your hat. In the afternoon of July 28, 2012, a tornado, weak and short-lived that it was, struck downhill at 11,900 feet. It was the second-highest altitude tornado ever recorded in the United States, but above timberline, so there was no damage. A few hats came down in Denver, however.

Seventy-five percent of all land above 10,000 feet in the United States lies in Colorado. We have 53 peaks over 14,000 feet and 637 over 13,000 feet. A giant among them, if not quite so high, at 11,332 feet, is Grand Mesa. At 500 square miles, it is the largest mesa, or flat top mountain, in the world, rising spectacularly in 6,000-foot cliffs above Grand Junction.

Speaking of the Grands, not many of us front-rangers know that Grand Junction is named from the river that runs through it. The mighty Grand River lent its name to Grand Mesa as well, to Grand Valley, even to the Grand Canyon far downstream. In 1921, it was renamed the Colorado River because Colorado Congressman Edward Taylor from Glenwood Springs got a resolution passed in Congress to do so.

Ostensibly the name was changed from Grand River to distinguish it from the Rio Grande also flowing from Colorado but to the Gulf of Mexico. By Taylor's logic, however, the Grand probably should have become the Wyoming, following traditional river-naming protocol, because the chief tributary is the Green River originating in Wyoming, farther away from the confluence with the now-called Colorado River, emanating from its headwaters near Grand Lake.

And Colorado didn't even get its name, which means 'colored red' in Spanish, from a river. It's not certain, but likely it came from those pretty red rocks around Pike's Peak. Are you fascinated yet?