

Glad to Know You, Colorado

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We know you by your colors, Colorado. Even your name is Spanish for “Colored Red,” describing the river your explorers found cascading from the top of the continental divide, tinted with reds pulled from the sandstones it traversed. We know you by the purples of your mountains, the greens of your forests, the blues of your skies, the oranges of your sunsets, the yellows of your autumns, and the ambers of your grain.

We know you by the silver, gold and minerals you have yielded us. If we have not been good stewards, exploiting, then abandoning mines to fill with toxic waste and spoil your precious streams, those are our failures, not yours.

We know you by your vistas. Pikes Peak emerged slowly, beckoning to migrants traversing westward. Soon the panorama of your entire front range opened before them, stretching three hundred miles wide. We know you by mountain ranges like the Sangre de Christos, the Sawatch, the San Juans, Collegiate Peaks, Ramparts, Never Summer Range and many more. We know you by the alpine Trail Ridge Road in Rocky Mountain National Park, and by white-knuckle Independence Pass, both closed by deep snow to drivers in the winter.

We know you by Mesa Verde, the city of cliff dwellings that once bustled with ancestral Puebloans who wove baskets and tilled the soil for corn. We know you by the vast anthropologic evidence of the lives peoples made for themselves in what is now the Canyon of the Ancients National Monument.

We know you from your important rivers, the Arkansas, the Rio Grande, the two Platte Rivers, and especially the Colorado River that sustains seven states and some twelve million people. We know you by the lesser rivers that feed them, like the Gunnison with its deep, black canyon, the Animas, the Canadian, Cherry Creek, Clear Creek, the Frying Pan and Parachute Creek.

We know you by your wide valleys, including the San Luis, the Roaring Fork, Grand Valley, the Wet Valley, and North, Middle and South Parks. We know you by the Uncompahgre Valley and the Paradox Valley, named because its Dolores River, it is said, has a tendency “to perform strange and unexpected things in the area.”

We know you by your farms, from the peach orchards of Palisade and the melon growers at Rocky Ford, the potato patches at Center, the truck farms of Brighton, the wheat fields of Akron and the sugar beets of Holly.

We know you by your cities, radiating like points on a compass from Grand Junction to Denver, Fort Collins to Pueblo, and Durango to Greeley. We know you by places like Rangeley, Julesburg, Cortez, and Springfield in your corners, and hundreds more, each a story of its own, serving the farms and ranches of your plains, along the rivers, and in the mountains.

You met many of us at birth, Colorado and welcomed others with signs at your borders. We may be old friends now, but we still have wonders to discover. Glad to know you, Colorado.