

The Most Beautiful Place in Colorado?

by Marilyn Reeves

No matter how frequently I have driven 285 between Denver and my home town of Salida, each time I crest Kenosha Pass and see the panorama of South Park spread out before me, I am awe-struck by its enormous expanse.

Then, driving out of the hills at the west end of the Park and catching my first glimpse of the Collegiate Peaks, I am thrilled by their spectacular beauty, as though seeing them for the first time all over again.

As much as I enjoy revisiting the beautiful sights of my childhood, there is another place in Colorado that, for me, trumps them all. And that is the little town of Ouray.

It has been so many years since I have been there, and my memory of all things past has become so unreliable, that I beg your indulgence if my recollections do not square with your own knowledge of the place. I can only give you my time-worn impressions after forty years or more.

First, we drove through the San Juan Mountains, which I believe to be the tallest, most rugged and breath-takingly beautiful in the entire state. Unless your mind (or your spirit) is asleep you can't help but 'ooh and aah' at the sight of them!

Then, as we approached the town of Ouray, we were stunned by the sight of a tall, slender waterfall plunging hundreds of feet down a mountainside – an enchanting preview of coming attractions.

Having spent the night at a charming inn, we got up early the next morning and walked through town admiring the old Victorian houses all dressed up in contrasting shades of pastel colors. Big urns filled with flowers and overhanging flower baskets, along with filigreed wrought-iron park benches and old-time street lamps, gave the over-all impression of an enchanted Swiss hamlet set down in 20th Century America.

After breakfast we visited a dark cavern – was there an iron walkway? were there hand rails? – and witnessed an enormous fall of water thundering into the cave, casting plumes of fine spray over the spectators and filling the place with such overwhelming energy that it left me quaking in its power.

But the thing I remember best was walking through a neighborhood in the center of town and coming to a hillside that virtually abutted the back yards of some of the residents, where still another waterfall greeted us. It skipped and sang as it cascaded its merry way over a scattering of rocks and boulders into a natural grotto surrounded by slender green trees. Grass and wild flowers grew helter-skelter amongst the rocks and rivulets.

I sat and studied this lovely little bit of heaven and tried to imprint it all into my imperfect memory, so that the pictures in my mind would last a lifetime. It is, without a doubt, one of the loveliest places on earth.