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*Our Purpose:* To Establish federal designation of the Pike National Historic Trail.

## Which Mountain Did Pike Climb?

By John Patrick Michael Murphy

*continued from the Jan. 2009 issue*

### The Historians

In 1820, the Long Expedition entered El Paso County from the north, leaving the waters of the Missouri (South Platte River) and entering into the Arkansas River drainage at the Palmer Divide above today's Monument, Colorado. Edwin James convinced Long to allow him and 2 companions to attempt to climb what became known as Pikes Peak. All three made the summit and James recorded the country below him on a fine July day. He wrote, "*On the south the mountain is continued, having another summit (probably that ascended by Captain Pike,) at the distance of eight or ten miles. This, however, falls much below the High Peak in point of elevation, being wooded quite to its top. Between the two lies a small lake, about a mile long, and half a mile wide, discharging eastward into Boiling-spring creek.*"<sup>[iv]</sup>

It is clear that he was looking at Mount Almagre (12,367') and the lake between him and the mountain that was "wooded quite to its top" was Lake Moraine draining into Ruxton Creek, an affluent of Fountain Creek. Thus Edwin James started the controversy as to which mountain Captain Pike and his men climbed.

The next reference after James' is historian and former secretary of the Colorado Territorial Legislature, Frank Hall. He moved Pike from Almagre and placed him on Cheyenne Mountain in his four volume work, *The History of Colorado* (1889).

Elliot Coues (pronounced Cows) followed the track of Lewis and Clark (1893) and Zebulon Pike (1895) and agreed with Frank Hall, asserting that Pike climbed Cheyenne Mountain.<sup>[v]</sup> Many notable historians, including Irving Howbert (1914)<sup>[vi]</sup>, Milo Quaipe (1925)<sup>[vii]</sup>, Manley Ormes<sup>[viii]</sup>, (1933), and Eugene Hollon (1949)<sup>[ix]</sup>, agreed and pronounced Cheyenne Mountain as the one Pike climbed. They would be joined by Spencer Penrose, always a consummate promoter, who erected a sign at his beautiful Cheyenne Mountain Lodge, on top of the north summit, which proclaimed Pike stood right there (with a great view of Pikes Peak).<sup>[x]</sup> Now the historic structure is just a concrete foundation with the rubble of his dream crassly scattered and shoved down the east side of Cheyenne Mountain above Fishers Canyon.



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However, Colorado College professor, Donald DeWitt<sup>[xi]</sup> studied the matter a hundred years ago and rejected Cheyenne Mountain because it was so far to the east of the line from Pueblo to Pikes Peak, that it made no sense. It had to be a mountain other than Cheyenne. He noted that Pike wrote that he was at the "summit of this chain", and knew that Mount Almagre, from the summit of Mt. Rosa, looks as if it is just a high point on southeast ridge of Pikes Peak, and not a separate mountain, which left only Mt. Rosa as the "summit of this chain." He proclaimed that they climbed Mount Rosa. Unfortunately, he went on and opined that his ascent route to Rosa took him over Black Mountain. Had he just stated that Pike climbed Rosa, and not added that his route took him over Black Mountain, the mystery probably would have been solved years ago. DeWitt had the proper summit but the wrong route. As a result, the proper summit was discarded because it was connected to the wrong route. I believe his theory was discounted by one of his students.

Lloyd Shaw (Colorado College 1908) was interested in all matters pertaining to the West, and tramped the local mountains on solitary walkabouts— sometimes for weeks on end. He realized that Professor DeWitt was right— Cheyenne Mountain made no sense, but neither did Mt. Rosa via Black Mountain.<sup>[xii]</sup> In the first half to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century probably no one knew the mountains to the southeast of Pikes Peak better than Lloyd Shaw.

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**HELP! The Pike computer** - The Pike computer, on which the the membership records were kept for the Pike Association, was destroyed on Feb. 6. Many member's names were recovered because many had email addresses, but some did not. We need your help in recovering members who did not have email. **Please let us know the names and addresses of those folks at [harv.pike@gmail.com](mailto:harv.pike@gmail.com)**

**PIKE'S SOUTHWESTERN EXPEDITION: OUTFITTED OR ILLFATED** By Don Headlee Part 4 of 4

Perhaps the most noted use of the guns was when Pike had his men to conceal his writings in the barrels of their weapons. He writes on May 1, 1806, *"In the night I arose and after making my men charge all their pieces well, I took small books and rolled them in small rolls, and tore a fine shirt to pieces, and wrapt it round the paper and put them down the barrel of the guns, until we just had rooms for the tompons, which were then carefully put in."*

Pike mentions his pistols several times in his journal. On November 22, 1806 when they encountered the war party of Grand Pawnee who was returning from an unsuccessful search for Comanche, he found himself surrounded by Pawnee endeavoring to steal his pistols. By December 14<sup>th</sup> in an inventory of their weapons given by Pike he states, *"Bursted one of our rifles, which was a great loss, as it made three guns which had bursted, and the five which had been broken on the march, one of my men was now armed with my sword and pistols."* Among the items listed in Lieutenant Melgares inventory of arms, equipment and other things remaining in the barracks and belonging to the Americans were: two broken carbines, several muskets (four of the muskets with bayonets), one musket with two barrels and an assortment of accouterments used with firearms.

The last group of items to be discussed and found mentioned in the journal and letters will include trade goods, an assortment of tools and other items needed for survival. Like the expedition of Lewis and Clark before them, they left with a supply of trade goods to be used as gifts for the Indians they would meet on the journey. In his report to his father dated April 6, 1807 Lieutenant James Wilkinson mentions an intermediate sized medal given to the Pawnee chief, Iskatoppe. The "peace medal" was a common gift to be given to the chiefs and the custom was to continue for many years to come. Another practice that was common for expeditions at this time was the presentation of an American flag to the Indians. Pike mentions a flag given on August 30<sup>th</sup> to the chief of the Little Village of the Osage along with other donations. On September 29<sup>th</sup> at the council with the Pawnees, Pike found a Spanish flag unfurled at the chief's door. He charged them with the removal of the flag and gave them a flag of the United States to be hoisted in its place. He admonished them for flying the Spanish flag and it was replaced with the American flag. After perceiving the sorrowful countenance of the Pawnee, Pike returned the Spanish flag with the injunction that it was not to be hoisted during their stay. This was received with a shout of applause by the Pawnee.

Another interesting item given as gifts to the chiefs was the gorget. This item was a carry over of an antiquated piece of military equipment originally used to protect the throat. Pike presented gifts at the meeting with four principal chiefs of the Osage. He mentions giving *"a doubled barrel'd gun, gorget and other articles (this man wore the grand Spanish medal) and the second the small medal you furnished me, with other articles; and each of the other a gorget in their turn."*

All expeditions of this period took a supply of whiskey with them. It was the military custom of the time to ration a gill of whiskey to the men each evening. However, it was also a practice to give whiskey to the Indians as a part of gift giving. On July 29<sup>th</sup> Pike mentions that one or two gills of whiskey were given to three young Osage, which intoxicated them all. Other standard goods given as gifts were: carrots of tobacco, knives, fire steels and flints. All these items are mention in the November 22<sup>nd</sup> entry relating to the meeting with the returning war party of Grand Pawnee. The demand for ammunition, corn, blankets and kettles by the Pawnee was refused. After showing contempt for the gifts given them and being thrown away by some, Pike and his men began loading their horses. The Pawnee began taking items from the soldiers and Pike ordered his men to take their arms and separate themselves from the "savages" and he declared to them he would kill the first person who touched the baggage. They found that the Pawnee had managed to steal one sword, a tomahawk, a broad axe, five canteens and sundry other small articles.

In his additional instructions to Pike dated July 12, 1806, General Wilkinson states, *"Dr. Robinson will accompany you as a volunteer. He will be furnished with medicines, and for the accommodations which you give him, he is bound to attend your sick."* However, in Pike's journal we find no evidence of Dr. Robinson performing any medical attention to Pike's men. All references to Robinson by Pike mostly relate to him as a constant companion, whether hunting or exploring. To the contrast, in the Lewis and Clark journals many references are made to the medical attention practiced by both. We have an inventory of the medical supplies taken by Lewis and Clark, but only the vague mention of supplies for the Pike expedition. We can only assume that Dr. Robinson attended the medical needs of Pike's men.

In closing, the statement made by Pike in his letter to General Wilkinson on October 2, 1806 should give us an insight into the many reasons for this expedition. Pike writes, *"Any number of men (who may reasonably be calculated on) would find no difficulty in marching the route we came with baggage wagons, field artillery and all the usual appendages of a small army; and if all the route to Santa Fe should be of the same description in case of war, I would pledge my life (and what is infinitely dearer, my honor) for a successful march of a reasonable body of troops, into the province of New Mexico"*. Forty years later this exact action took place as Colonel James Watts Kearney and the Army of the West crossed the plains of Kansas and Colorado and entered into New Mexico for a bloodless conquest. They certainly were better equipped than their predecessors who went before them.

Resources for this article:

The Journals of Zebulon Montgomery Pike, Vols. 1 & 2, with Letters and Related Documents. Edited and Annotated by Donald Jackson, University of Oklahoma Press: Norman

[The Southwestern Journals of Zebulon Pike 1806-1807](#). Edited by Stephen Harding Hart and Archer Butler Hulbert, University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque



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Shaw rejected Mt. Rosa because he knew it would take much longer than 10 hours to climb Black Mountain, lose considerable elevation to the Duffields Meadows and then negotiate the Green Mountain and Knights Peak terrain, before Pike could even start up Rosa. It would take far too long to match Pike's climbing time from a base camp below Black Mountain on Turkey Creek. Pike historian, James McChristal did field work years ago and came to the same conclusion as Shaw. Mt. Rosa would be forgotten for 70 years. It was just too far and too high and it would take too long to climb Rosa via Black Mountain, and still match Pike's journal entries as to the time it took to make the climb.

I first met this delightful man when I was a pupil at the Cheyenne Mountain kindergarten in 1950. I was also his paperboy a few years later. He had Pike plays and reenactments as a matter of course at Cheyenne Mountain School where he served as superintendent of District 12. Shaw proclaimed that it was on the northwest ridge of Blue Mountain that Pike gave up his attempt. He built a cairn on the 9,982' summit (Shaw recorded the elevation as 9,970') and named it Mt. Miller after Pike's climbing partner Theodore Miller. He actually thought Pike spoke to him on this mountain top and informed him that this was where the historic climb occurred. [xiii] Shaw convinced such eminent historians as Le Roy Hafen [xiv], Steven Harding Hart (1933) [xv], Professors Robert Ormes (1952) [xvi] and Harvey Carter (1956) [xvii] of The Colorado College, who agreed that it seemed the most eligible peak.

The greatest of the Pike historians, Donald Jackson [xviii], who someday may be found to have erred in his historical writing, but so far I don't think it has happened, would not give his opinion other than stating that it could not be Blue Mountain because he confirmed personally that the summit of Pikes Peak could not be seen from the summit of Blue.

Here the matter stood for a decade until 1975 when Glenn R. Scott, of the USGS produced his "Historic Trails of the Pueblo Quadrangle" maps which placed Pike on Mt. Rosa via Gray Back Peak. Scott moved Pike's base camp two mountains north, having him climb Gray Back Peak on his way to climb Rosa. Scott made the discovery serendipitously. In addition to being a master cartographer interested in Pike's route for his historic trails map, he was a rock hound who climbed St. Peters Dome ridge looking for precious gems, while not investigating Pike. He looked to the southeast and saw that Pike could have climbed Gray Back Peak from Deadman Canyon, circled Sugarloaf, and ascended to the ridge where he stood. This ridge intersected the south ridge of Mt. Rosa at about 10,000'. A climb of another 1,500' would get them to the summit of the "highest of this chain." He placed 2 question marks on his Historic Trails map showing that the route was probable, although still conjectural. After my investigation was well on, I called him in Denver to say there was no longer a need for the question marks as the matter was now, not only probable, but confirmed by research. His map had Pike on the wrong approach march, as he thought Pike ascended Turkey Creek, and it placed the cave (mentioned by Pike) far too low, but it set forth the route from Deadman Canyon correctly. He was the very first to publish the right mountain and the right route from base camp to the summit.

### The Victim's Statement

**Monday, November 24, 1806:** *"The climbing party left 12 men behind them at the breastwork in Pueblo they erected that morning, and left at 1 PM "With an idea of arriving at the foot of the mountain, but obliged ourselves to take up our lodging this night under a single cedar..." "Distance advanced, twelve miles."*

**Tuesday, November 25, 1806:** *"Marched early, with the expectation of ascending the mountain, but was only able to encamp at its base, after passing over many small hills..." "Our encampment was on a creek; we found no water for several miles from the mountain, but near its base found springs sufficient. Took a meridial observation of the mountain, and the altitude of the mountain." "Distance advanced, twenty-two miles."*

**Wednesday, November 26, 1806:** *"Expecting to return to our camp that evening, we left all our blankets and provision at the foot of the mountain. Killed a deer and hung his skin on a tree with some meat. We commenced ascending; found the way very difficult, being obliged to climb up rocks sometimes almost perpendicular; and after marching all day we encamped in a cave without blankets, victuals, or water. We had a fine clear sky, whilst it was snowing at the bottom...some distance up we saw buffalo."*

**Thursday, November 27, 1806:** *"Arose hungry, thirsty, and extremely sore, from the unevenness of the rocks on which we had lain all night; but were amply compensated for our toil by the sublimity of the prospects below. The unbounded prairie was overhung with clouds, which appeared like the ocean in a storm, wave piled on wave, and foaming, whilst the sky over our heads was perfectly clear. Commenced our march up the mountain, and in about one hour arrived at the summit of this chain; here we found the snow middle deep, and discovered no sign of beast or bird in habiting this region. The thermometer which stood at 9 degrees above 0 at the foot of the mountain, here fell to four below 0. The summit of the Grand Peak, which was entirely bare of vegetation, and covered with snow now appeared at the distance of fifteen or sixteen miles from us and as high again as that we had ascended; it would have taken a whole day's march to arrive at its base, while I believe no human being could have ascended to its summit. This with the condition of my soldiers, who had only light overalls on, and no stockings...determined us to return." "We descended by a long deep ravine with much less difficulty than we had contemplated." Found all are baggage safe, but the provisions all destroyed. It began to snow, and we found shelter under the side of a projecting rock."*

**Friday, November 28, 1806:** *"Marched at nine o'clock. Kept straight down the creek to avoid the hills. At half past one o'clock shot two buffaloes, when we made the first full meal we had eaten for three days. Encamped in a valley under a shelving rock. The land here was very rich, and covered with old letan [Comanche] camps."*

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Saturday, November 29, 1806: "Marched after a short repast, and arrived at our camp before night. Found all well." [xix]

Footnotes

[iv] James, Edwin, *Account of an Expedition from Pittsburg to the Rocky Mountains*, Ed. Maxine Benson, p. 224.  
 [v] Coues,  
 [vi] Howbert, Irving,  
 [vii] Quaufe, Milo, Ed., *The Southwestern Expedition of Zebulon Pike*, The Lakeside Press, p.78.  
 [viii] Ormes, Manley,  
 [ix] Hollon, Eugene,  
 [x] Personal memory of author.  
 [xi] DeWitt, Donald,  
 [xii] Shaw, Lloyd,  
 [xiii] Sprague, Marshall, *The Great Gates*,  
 [xiv] Hafen, LeRoy, *Western America*, Second Edition, p. 185.  
 [xv] Hart, Steven Harding, *The Southwestern Journals of Zebulon Pike 1806-1807*, University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque  
 [xvi] Ormes, Robert,  
 [xvii] Carter, Harvey,  
 [xviii] Jackson, Donald,  
 [xix] Pike, Zebulon Montgomery,

*Continued Next Month*

*Top 10 Things One does not say to Pike After he returned from the 1806-7 Expedition-*

10. How many shoes did you use?
9. Why didn't you get back for Thanksgiving? I had dinner prepared for you.
8. Who planned your trip?
7. Why did they complain?
6. When do you want to go again?
5. Easy trip, hey?
4. We're serving unsalted buffalo today.
3. So where is Robinson.
2. Did Lt. Facundo Melgares let you in on everything?
1. Should have brought more warm clothing.

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