

Halie H.

1-28-10

Mountain Climbing

When most people think of mountain climbing, they immediately think of Mt. Everest, Mt. St. Helens or Mt. McKinley. These mountains are basically impossible for any average human being to climb. Although, Mt. Everest is a far off dream of mine since few have climbed it. My dad and I have started climbing 14,000 foot peaks in Colorado, especially in Hinsdale County. We plan ahead to decide which peak we will climb, what equipment we need ,and what there is to learn about the trail from the people in town. The main parts of climbing that people ask are why we do it, how we scale them and why we select which mountains.

One of my incentives to climbing mountains is looking at the beautiful view from above. My favorite part is the snow capped peaks, looking half frosted. Gazing west at the distant mountain ranges in Utah, the massive rocks look majestic. They slowly fade from dark blue to gray blending into the sky into miraculous stages. It is usually calm on the tops of the mountains. The people I have met while on top have the same avid mindset about mountains as I do. In the summer of 2008, hiking up Red Cloud Peak, we met a pair of climbers. One was a blonde haired lady with calves the size of small timbers and climbed like a mountain goat. But her partner, an amputee, was even a bigger surprise. He started at four in the morning and was still climbing after we passed him on the way down. Most people I talk to about climbing mountains ask how we can do it, and it's actually quite easy for people who are fit.

Probably my least favorite thing to do is the most important if it's in the middle of the summer. Waking up at four or five in the morning to get a start on the two to six hour climb, depending on the length of the trail, is the worst. It's most challenging in the dark climbing

through the wooded areas. Above the tree line it gets easier to see and climb until the climbers reach the switchbacks. It helps the climbers to study maps before they climb the summits. We usually stop for a break half way through for a snack and another look at the map. Water and energy bars work really well because they are fast to eat and light- weight. The last half of the climb is either hand and foot or crawling up gravel slopes. We climbed Uncompahgre Peak in Hinsdale County, nine miles from Lake City, Colorado, which sits in its own National Forest. The word Uncompahgre means "hot spring," and it is also my favorite peak. We climbed this mountain because it is the area's pride. This is only one approach that people use to pick a summit to climb.

Climbers pick mountains for different reasons. In Colorado the fourteen thousand foot peaks and higher are considered a feat. Then comes the season climbers hike it in and choosing different mountain ranges. Colorado has a handful of ranges including the San Juan, Sangre De Cristo, Sawatch, Elk, Tenmile, Front, and the Mosquito. My favorite mountain range is the San Juan, located on the western slope. The trail type is also a consideration as some are gravel, others dirt, and still others merely washed-out cow paths. They are also ranked in easy, moderate and difficult. Surprisingly, the easier trails take longer to hike than the moderately difficult trails, while moderate hikes are a decent climb and in a relatively quick time. We usually pick easy to moderate hikes. The difficult trails are usually filled with switchbacks and hand and foot climbing. These trails take some time to hike and are the most dangerous. The time of the year is also an important subject to base a climb on. We climb in the summer because of vacations we take to Colorado. Fall is the only other time that is possible to climb these mountains. Snow packed back roads and melting snow usually shut down the climbers in the winter and spring.

Although the difficulty of the climb, convenience, and the time of the year are our primary reasons to pick mountains, they aren't the only things. Climbers also consider their level of training, their mental toughness and if they think they need a tour guide. These all go along with selecting equipment, buying maps and talking to the locals about the trails. Mountain climbing is probably one of my favorite out-of-school hobbies. If I could, I would skip school in the fall and climb Uncompahgre.