

A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains

by Isabella Bird (1873)

She was on her way back to England from Hawaii & wrote her sister letters of her adventure. She heard Colorado was beautiful, especially Estes Park. So, she took the train from San Francisco to Truckee, CA on Sep 2 and rented a horse to see Lake Tahoe. She heard a different story on the Donner party than what is told in history books. Then she rode the train again the Cheyenne, WY & a stage to Ft. Collins.

She rented a horse & headed to Estes Park. There were few lodges then & travelers would stop at any house along the road & would be fed & allowed to sleep the night for a fee. Some were quite the character. One man tried to show her the way, but only got them lost. She met Jim Nugent [or Mtn Jim] who had a bad reputation as a desperado. He took to her & escorted her to see different sites in the mtns.

She spent a month with the Evans in Estes Park [7500'] & then wanted to see more of CO. She bought an Indian pony, who could smell rotten wood of an old bridge & know not to cross on it. She wanted to ascend Long's Peak [American Matterhorn], but was turned back by a storm. The financial panic hit & she couldn't get any money from the banks so she sat it out at the Evans. She worked on the ranch to earn her keep.

Some days it would be hot & other days freezing. One day she rode up to a house so frozen she needed help off her horse. She became legendary herself. Once it was so cold the wind made her eyes water, then froze them shut. One time her horse needed a nail to keep the shoe on, but it took days to find one. Greeley prohibited liquor & was without crime, some were the opposite.

She saw firsthand the destruction of mining. She would have to keep her ink near the stove to keep it from freezing. They would heat a rock & take it to bed to keep warm. Mtn men would drink hot water with a pinch of cayenne pepper to cure a cold.

The silver spruce is the most attractive tree. The timberline is at 11,000' there. Some cabins were not "chinked" [joints between logs filled to keep out weather]. Sometimes snow would blow inside the cabin. The Indians were furious at the white man for killing all their buffalo for the hides & letting the meat rot. She saw cattle drives from TX & wagon trains off the main trail heading into the plains. Sick people would go to Denver to try to improve their health.

Before her trip she visited places like Prince Edward's Island, Canada. During this adventure she traveled 800 miles on horse between Loveland & Co Springs & the Rockies between. After her trip she founded hospitals in India, China & Korea.

Notes: other beautiful sites were: Pleasant Park & M'Ginn's Gulch.