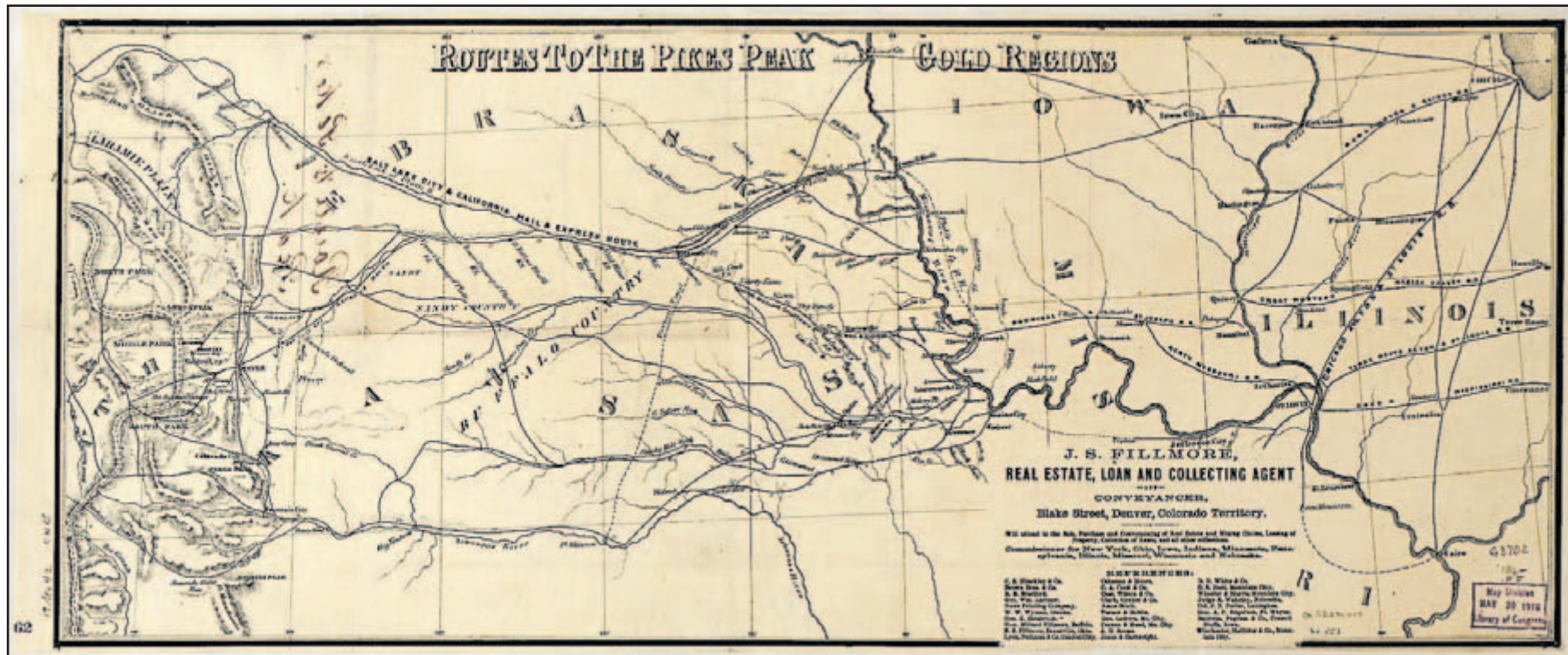


FIRST DRAFT

MOUNTAINS MAJESTY



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

This map, believed to have been printed in the early 1860s, makes it clear that the mineral area along Colorado's Front Range was still known as the "Pike's Peak Gold Regions."

Pikes Peak has long been a visible sentinel to Colorado travelers

In August of 1860, the Chicago Tribune reported that many fortune hunters who had headed to the Rocky Mountain gold fields had "a hang-dog look" about them as they returned to the East.

"It's amusing to see the signs painted on some of the wagons," the paper said. "One has on the wagon cover 'Pike's Peak or bust,'" and the same, on returning, adds, 'Busted, by G—d.'"

Most Coloradans know that Pikes Peak — called America's Mountain by many sources — was named after Zebulon Pike, the military explorer who viewed it in 1806.

However, when gold was discovered in 1858 in what's now Colorado, it was on Cherry Creek near Denver, 70-plus miles from Pike's Peak. So why did gold-seekers use the motto "Pike's Peak or Bust"?

And why was it referred to as the Pike's Peak Gold Region? "Pikes Peak's proximity to the edge of the Great Plains, as well as its height, made it the first (mountain) sight of westward bound wagon trains," says a website for the Broadmoor Manitou & Pikes Peak Cog Railway.

Colorado's Front Range was then part of Kansas Territory, but most folks knew little about the region except the name of its most famous landmark: Pike's Peak.

Spanish explorers who visited in the 1700s referred to the peak as "Los Ojos Ciegos" (The Blind Eyes) or Sierra del Almagre (Red Ocher Mountain). To the Utes, who lived in the region long before the arrival of white men, it was "Tavá Kaa-vi, the Sun Mountain."

Zebulon Pike didn't apply his own name to the 14,115-foot-high mountain. He called it "the Great Peak" or "the blue mountain" in official reports of his expedition to the Southwest.

The big peak caught his attention as he and as his small party marched up the Arkansas River in the autumn of 1806. On Nov. 15, Pike recorded in his journal: "At two o'clock in the afternoon I thought I could distinguish a mountain to our right, which

appeared like a small blue cloud."

He thought the group would reach its base the next day, but it wasn't until Nov. 26, that Pike, Dr. John Hamilton Robinson and Privates Miller and Brown began the climb, after leaving their blankets and food behind.

"We commenced ascending, found it 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," he wrote.

They set out again the next morning, and reached the summit of what's believed to be 11,500-foot Mount Rosa, southwest of Colorado Springs.

The temperature was four below zero, Pike wrote. But even more disheartening, "The summit of the Great Peak ... now appeared at the distance of 15 or 16 miles from us. It was as high again as what we had ascended, and it would have taken a whole day's march to arrive at its base."

Because Pike's party wasn't clad for extreme weather, had no food, and there was

little prospect of successful hunting at that altitude, he decided to abandon the climb. "I believe no human being could have ascended to its pinical (pinnacle)," he wrote.

He was proved wrong on July 14, 1820, when botanist Edwin James and two other members of Major Stephen Long's expedition to the Rocky Mountains completed the first documented ascent of the mountain. Native people had no doubt reached the summit well before James.

Today a different mountain, James Peak, in the Arapaho National Forest, honors Edwin James. It lies within the James Peak Wilderness Area west of Boulder.

However, if you were a traveler or were geographically informed during the early decades of the 19th century, you might have referred to Pike's Peak as James Peak, the name given to it by Major Long to honor the botanist on his 1820 expedition.

In 1831, you could read in the Philadelphia Inquirer that Pike had placed the mountain "James's Peak" at a latitude too far north in his official report, even though he didn't give it that name. In 1842, the Baltimore Sun informed readers that "James Peak has been estimated to be eight thousand five hundred feet above the common level of the plain."

A newspaper in Buffalo, New York, carried an article in 1843 about a book by explorer Thomas Farnham, whose Oregon-bound party had traveled up the Arkansas River in 1839 "till they came in sight of James Peak, the source of the Arkansas."

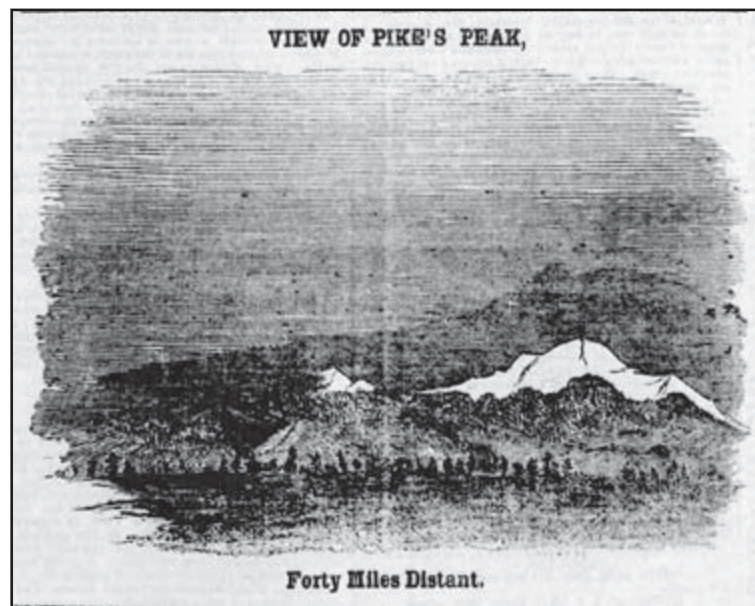
Not everyone accepted that name, however. Well before James made his climb, Pike was killed during the Battle of York in the War of 1812. Military men such as Col. Stephen Kearney and Major John Fremont referred to the mountain as Pike's Peak to honor their fallen comrade.

When members of Col. Henry Dodge's 1835 expedition to the Rockies wrote an account of their trip for Eastern newspapers, they made clear their naming preference. They camped "near the great snow-capped mountain ... Pike's Peak, which name we hope it will always bear, as it affords a lasting memento of a dangerous, successful and remarkable expedition."

By 1849, the name was synonymous with enormous things. Thus, an Illinois newspaper said a local butcher had "lard enough to fry a heap of doughnuts of the size of Pike's Peak."

A decade later, after gold had been discovered in Cherry Creek, Pike's Peak was the name assigned to the gold field.

And despite some failed Pikes Peak gold seekers, the rush to what became Colorado wasn't a bust. Problem was, the gold wasn't in easily accessible placer finds in streams, the Chicago Tribune noted, but in buried lodes that require more work to mine.



WWW.NEWSPAPERS.COM

This drawing of Pikes Peak appeared in the New York Herald in October 1845. It was one of the first images of the mountain that residents of the eastern United States would have seen.

Even so, the newspaper said, "The resources of the Pike's Peak country are such, that its destiny is already sealed for a great and populous State in a very short time."

That proved an accurate prediction, although initially most of the mining activity in the state was near Denver, or Leadville or west of the Continental Divide. It wasn't until 1890 that gold was discovered in Cripple Creek, at the base of Pikes Peak.

Three years later, Katharine Lee Bates helped to make the mountain more famous when she penned the opening lines of the song, "America the Beautiful" while visiting the summit of the mountain.

Construction of a road and a cog railroad to take visitors near the summit of Pikes Peak ensured it is one of the most visited mountain peaks in North America. The Pikes Peak International Hill Climb auto race, which began in 1916, continues to make the

mountain newsworthy. What's more, according to a survey released just last month by the life insurance company, Choice Mutual, Pike's Peak has another claim: It is the top choice for Coloradans as a location to spread the ashes of loved ones.

Sources: "The Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike," by Zebulon Pike, Volume 2; "The Naming of Pikes Peak," by Raymond Calhoun, Colorado Magazine, April 1954; "Among the Eternal Snows: Naturalist Edwin James and His 1820s Ascent of Pikes Peak," by Phil Carson, www.historycolorado.org; "Pikes Peak - The Broadmoor Manitou and Pikes Peak Cog Railway," www.cograilway.com; Historic newspapers at www.newspapers.com; www.choicemutual.com/blog/where-americans-would-choose-to-have-their-ashes-spread/.

Bob Silbernagel's email is bobsilbernagel@gmail.com.



BOB SILBERNAGEL



NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY THROUGH WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

Tourists regularly visited Pikes Peak from the time Colorado became a territory. This photo, titled "At Timberline on the Pikes Peak Trail," was taken in 1929.



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE THROUGH WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Portrait of explorer and soldier Zebulon Pike, painted by Charles Wilson Peale in 1808, shortly after Pike's return from the West.