

## On the Colorado Trail with Zane Grey and *The Mysterious Rider*

by Kevin Blake, PhD

*The Mysterious Rider* was published in 1921, but the origin of the story came four years earlier during Zane Grey's 1917 trip to Colorado. Some of Grey's most memorable writing about the joys of fishing, hunting, and travel amidst spectacular scenery came from this adventure. The "Colorado Trails" chapter of *Tales of Lonely Trails* (1922) is about this trip, and it is one of the favorite passages of Terry Bolinger, longtime president of Zane Grey's West Society. Terry once remarked that those descriptions of Colorado, and Trappers Lake in particular, fueled his initial interest in Grey and caused him to attend his first Society convention.

*The Mysterious Rider* was released in the middle of Grey's incomparable streak on the top ten *Publishers Weekly* bestseller list: eight different books for eight consecutive years (1917–1924), a feat never equaled by his contemporary writers. The story of Hell-Bent Wade saving the romance between Columbine Bellounds and Wilson Moore became the number three bestseller of 1921 (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1:

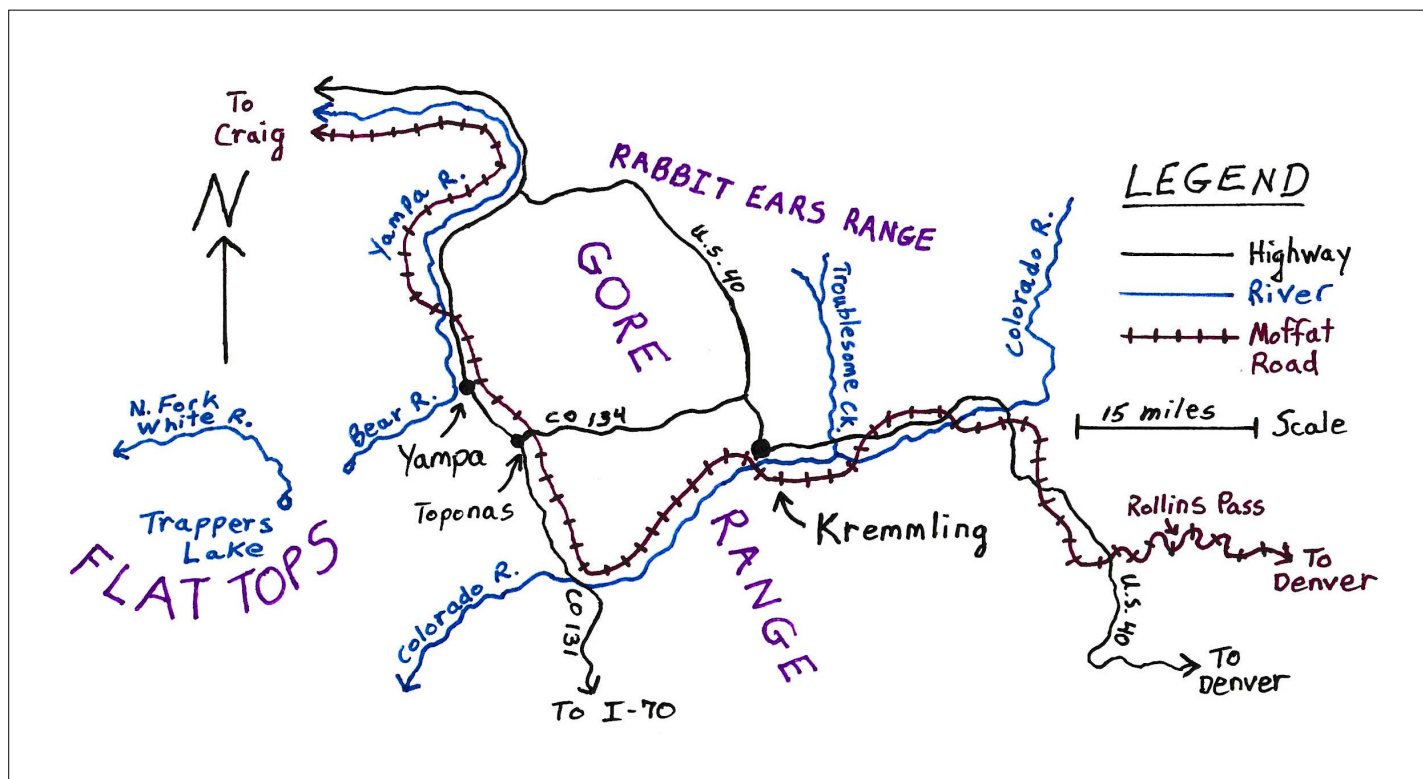
Harper and Brothers first edition of *The Mysterious Rider* with a wrap-around dustjacket illustration by Frank Tenney Johnson.

The American Library Association reported in 1921 that the book was the favorite of the American doughboys stationed on the Rhine. Half a century later, Joe Wheeler found that this book ranked third among Grey's Westerns in the 1974 survey of library readership that he conducted as part of his doctoral dissertation research.

Even before the Colorado trip, 1917 was a momentous year for Zane Grey and central to his literary success. In June, he finished the manuscript of *The Man of the Forest*, the number one bestselling book of 1920. In July, he took a train trip to the Pacific Northwest and gathered material for *The Desert of Wheat*, the number three bestselling book of 1919. In August, he fulfilled one of his angling dreams by landing his first broadbill swordfish off Catalina Island. An account of that feat became a centerpiece in *Tales of Fishes* (1919).

This article recounts the 1917 Colorado outing and explains how the geography of *The Mysterious Rider* arose from Grey's trip. Much of the book's geography parallels Grey's "Colorado Trails" adventures in *Tales of Lonely Trails*. The first step in any geography study of Zane Grey is to read what Chuck Pfeiffer wrote about his fieldwork in 1985 on *The Mysterious Rider*. Pfeiffer's 1988 article, "Zane Grey in Colorado," is comprehensive and accurate. Here I build upon Pfeiffer's work by describing my fieldwork in July 2021 with Terry Bolinger and Todd Newport, past president of Zane Grey's West Society, and our efforts to walk in the footsteps of Zane Grey's 1917 trip.

After fishing at Catalina, Grey traveled by train from California to Denver, Colorado, where he met up with a group of family and friends. The travel party included his brother R. C. and his wife Reba, Dorothy Ackerman, Claire Wilhelm, and Mildred Ferguson (Pauly, 2005).



Map 1: Setting of The Mysterious Rider in central Colorado.  
All map drawings courtesy of Kevin Blake.

On August 22, they took a train west-northwest from Denver to Yampa, Colorado, on the Denver and Salt Lake Railroad (Map 1). This rail line was better known as the “Moffat Road,” named for the Denver businessman who first financed the route. Ski tourists today can still take the Moffat Road from Denver to Winter Park through the Moffat Tunnel, but the tunnel was not completed until 1928. In 1917, the train took an arduous route over Rollins Pass (elevation 11,676 feet), slowing to a crawl as the engine ascended the “Giant’s Ladder,” a set of sweeping switchbacks with a 4% grade (Fig. 2).

After arriving in Yampa, Grey spent one night at a hotel. Grey did not record the hotel name in *Tales of Lonely Trails*, but a Yampa historian, Paul Bonnifield, informed me that he learned from Johnny Bird, one of the packers who rode with the Grey outfit, that the Grey outfit stayed at the Royal Hotel on Moffat Avenue (Fig. 3). Grey spent much of the day after his arrival sitting on the boardwalk, charmed by the “deserted” aspect of the wide street. Unfortunately, the Royal Hotel burned in 2015 (Herold, 2020).

Scott Teague of Yampa, an experienced bear hunter, guided the Grey party for their entire five-week outing. On August 23, the Grey outfit took wagons southwest from Yampa, traveling next to a rushing stream into the foothills of the Flat Top Mountains (today called the Flat Tops). Grey wrote in *Tales of Lonely Trails* that he was told the creek was named Stillwater, which puzzled him given its turbulent character.

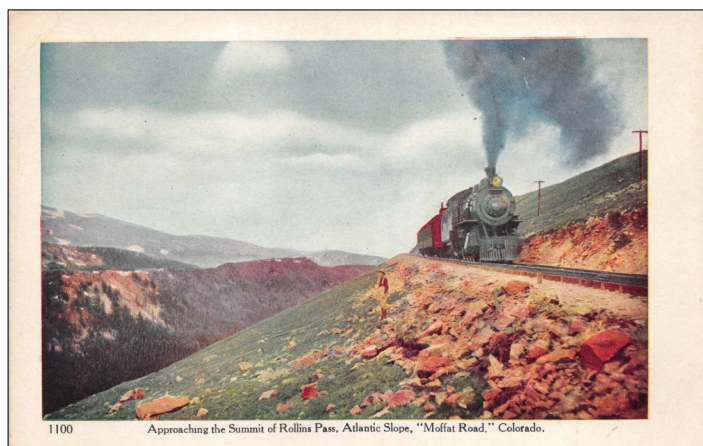


Fig. 2: Postcard view, circa 1910, of Rollins Pass on the Moffat Road. Publisher unknown.





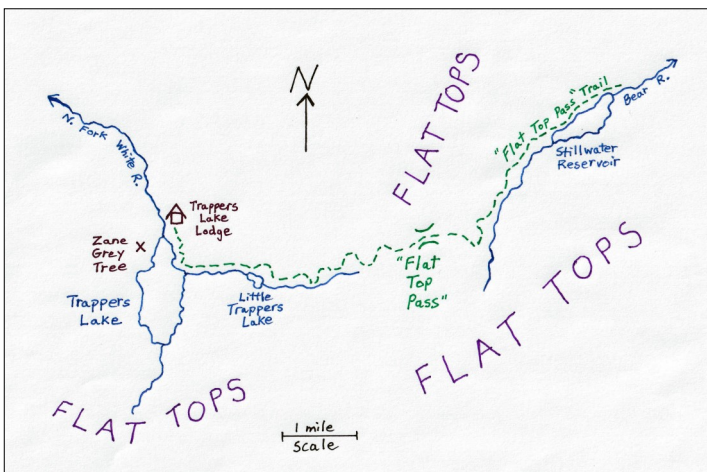
Fig. 3: Royal Hotel on Moffat Avenue in Yampa. October 2012 photo courtesy of Terry Bolinger.

This narrow mountain stream is a tributary of the Yampa River; today it is called Bear River. Stillwater is the name of the farthest reservoir upstream on Bear River, constructed in 1940. At the dam there is a hiking trailhead which may be near the location where the Grey outfit transferred from wagons to horseback for the climb over the Flat Tops (Fig. 4). Their destination was Trappers Lake, across the watershed divide that separates the Yampa River from the White River. The divide or pass has no official name, but Grey called it “Flat Top Pass.”



Fig. 4: Derby Peak (elevation 12,186 ft.) towers above Stillwater Reservoir. The trail toward Flat Top Pass leads toward the linear snowfields in the center right horizon, just below the low point in the ridgeline.

In July 2021, Terry Bolinger and I hiked from Stillwater Dam to Trappers Lake, following the route Zane Grey took in 1917. The trail was 8.6 miles one way, starting at 10,280 feet, crossing the pass at 11,412 feet, and ending at Trappers Lake at 9,627 feet (Map 2). Just as Grey wrote in *Tales of Lonely Trails*, when we reached a series of benches high in the spruce forest we had “splendid” views (Fig. 5).



Map 2: Flat Tops Wilderness Area.

The Flat Tops are an unusual mountain range in two ways. First, though many summits reach over 12,000 feet, most are not visible from a paved highway. Colorado Highway 131 through Yampa only provides a distant glimpse of the greatness of the range. The Flat Tops Scenic Byway, with gravel and paved sections connecting Yampa with Meeker, comes much closer to the range, but only offers brief views of a few major peaks. Second, the Flat Tops form an irregular sprawling shape on the map, and even though the Flat Tops were glaciated, this is not a linear, long range with serrated peaks, like many other famous Colorado ranges. Those ranges were formed mostly by faulting, but the origin of the Flat Tops is volcanic, with erosion-resistant basalt rock giving the mountains their namesake level tops.





*Fig. 5: This southeastward view includes (from left to right), Flat Top Mountain (elev. 12,354 ft., the highest point of the range), Derby Peak, and Sheep Mountain (elev. 12,241 ft.).*

Reaching treeline, the upper limit of mature trees, we approached the pass by hiking past the snowfields that made a strong impression on Zane Grey (Fig. 6). These linear snow patches persist throughout the summer on the east-facing slope of a high bench just below the pass. This was the “point of no return” on our hike, as our cabin reservations at Trappers Lake were across the divide ahead of us, and our car was at the trailhead behind us.

The plan was for Todd Newport to meet us at Trappers Lake and give us a ride from Trappers Lake back to Terry’s car at the Stillwater Dam Trailhead after we enjoyed the lake for a couple of days. But trouble awaited Terry and me at the pass: a thunderstorm had developed on the west side of the divide, yet we could not see its severity and size until we topped out at Flat Top Pass. We really had no debate on the issue of proceeding or turning back, though; we were motivated to complete the hike so

that we could see the entirety of what Grey experienced on this trail. Lightning flashed nearby several times, and I hoped that the giant trail marker in the shape of a cross was not an omen about our impending fate (Fig. 7).

Yet it was not all that surprising to experience stormy weather on top of the pass. One time when Grey was on the pass, he met the surreal sight of hail “falling thick and white . . . like a streaked curtain as it fell into the abyss.” For about three-quarters of a mile, Terry and I were the tallest features on top of the pass. We were relieved to finally reach a tree taller than us, and to see the heavy rain and lightning pass us by with just a few sprinkles. For me, however, this moment was the highlight of the trip. Exhilarating! There is nothing that makes a person feel so alive as to be in the rarefied, cool air of high elevation, with nearby storm clouds adding mystery to the surrounding summits.



*Fig. 6:  
Terry Bolinger hikes uphill toward the snowfields that lie just below the pass, to the east.*

*Fig. 7: Trail signs at Flat Top Pass. Trappers Peak (elev. 12,002 ft.) is on the horizon just to the left of the cross-shaped marker.*







*Fig. 8: Terry Bolinger in the burn area of the Big Fish Fire (2002). Little Trappers Lake and Trappers Lake lie below to the west.*

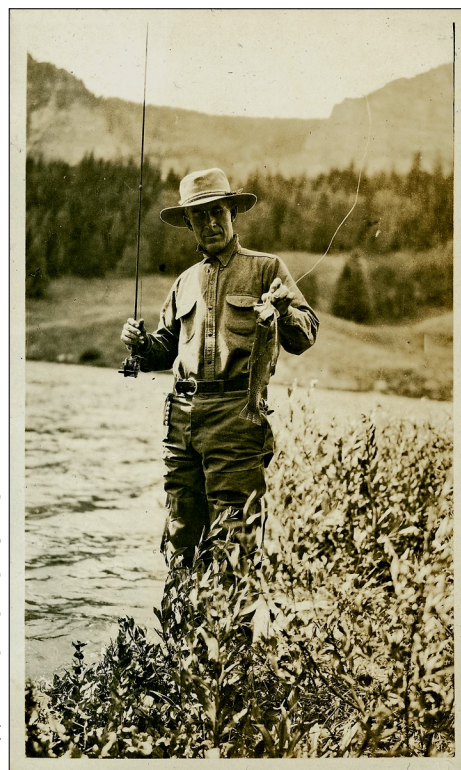
On the west side of the divide, we entered a vast burned-over terrain where the “Big Fish Fire” in 2002 consumed about 10% of the forest in the Flat Tops Wilderness Area as well as the original Trappers Lake Lodge (Fig. 8). The trail then descended a tiresome series of steep switchbacks with rocky footing to go around the southern end of the Chinese Wall, a vertical escarpment that extends about six miles. The hike began to feel long, but we were anxious to see Little Trappers Lake, a “small clear green sheet of water,” according to Grey. Soon, to our surprise, we saw Todd Newport! He had hiked up the trail to meet us, wondering what kind of condition we would be in given the storm.



*Fig. 9: This is the classic view of Trappers Lake, looking south from the north end of the lake.*

*Fig. 10:  
Zane Grey  
fishing at  
Trappers Lake.*

*Courtesy of  
L. Tom Perry  
Special  
Collections,  
Brigham Young  
University.*



As tired as we were, seeing his smiling visage was one of the best sights of the day. Todd was astounded that Terry and I had

dodged the worst of the storm given the deluge at the Trappers Lake cabins. As we reached Trappers Lake, Zane Grey’s description seemed apt: “it was big, irregular, and bordered by spruce forests, and shadowed by the lofty gray peaks” (Fig. 9).

Teague led the Grey party to a camp on the west side of the lake, where they could see how the lake was enclosed “on three sides by amphitheatric mountains.” They spent eleven nights at the Trappers Lake camp. On most days, Trappers Lake “glistened green in the sunlight and it lay like a gem at the foot of the magnificent black slopes.” Each day they fished or hunted (Fig. 10). The wildflowers impressed Grey; here he saw his first columbine, but his favorites were what he called “purple asters” (today they are called “fleabane”). We, too, found these in abundance (Fig. 11).



*Fig. 11:*

*Fleabane flowers on the west side of Trappers Lake. These “purple asters” were Grey’s favorite flowers at the lake.*





*Fig. 12: Sunset lends a glow to the fireweed and Himes Peak (elev. 11,201 ft.) in this view northwest from near the outlet of Trappers Lake.*

The most vivid blooms in July 2021, though, were the fireweed, thanks to the open meadows created by the Big Fish Fire (Fig. 12).

After a night at Trappers Lake, Todd, Terry, and I set out to see if we could find the Grey campsite. Years ago, Terry met a man who took him to the “Zane Grey tree” because it supposedly marked the campsite. Eventually, we found the same spot on the northwest shore of the lake. The tree still stands as a giant burned snag on a slope well above the lake (Fig. 13). The square nails in the tree, perhaps once



*Fig. 13: Terry Bolinger at the base of the “Zane Grey Tree,” a giant burned snag. Local lore suggests this was the campsite of the Zane Grey outfit in 1917.*

used to hold up a tent fly, are purported evidence that this was a campsite a century ago since square nails were common then.

We also attempted to find the locations of some of the photos that Zane Grey took in 1917. That photo album is currently held at Brigham Young University. We succeeded in repeating several images, the most interesting of which is at the outlet of the lake (Figs. 14a, 14b).



*Fig. 14a: Some of the Zane Grey party crossing the outlet of Trappers Lake. Courtesy of Brigham Young University.*

*Fig. 14b: Repeat photograph of the Zane Grey party crossing the outlet of Trappers Lake. The conifers on the opposite shore in the 1917 photo were burned in 2002, whereas the willows on the near shore are now much taller than in 1917.*





Fig. 15: Trappers Lake from the Cradle of Wilderness Overlook, view southeast.

Our ability today to experience an untrammelled Trappers Lake is due to preservation efforts that began only two years after Grey's visit. In 1919 the National Forest Service sent one of their surveyors, Arthur Carhart, to Trappers Lake to plat where summer cabins could be developed along the lakeshore.

Struck by the beauty and solitude of the place, Carhart went back to his supervisors with a new idea: the lakeshore, he argued, should remain pristine and undeveloped. Over the following decades Carhart continued advocating for the absence of mechanized equipment in certain landscapes, and this eventually became known as the wilderness idea (Fig. 15). Thus, Trappers Lake is called the "cradle of wilderness," with the entire lake within the Flat Tops Wilderness. That means there is no road to the lakeshore and no boat ramp (the cabins and re-built lodge are a couple hundred yards below the lake outlet). The lake is perpetually quiet, with the surrounding terrain the domain of the angler, hiker, horse rider, or wildlife. Illustrating the wilderness quality was our view of a bald eagle soaring over the lake and several beavers swimming in the lake.

After leaving Trappers Lake, Scott Teague led the Grey outfit to a new camp in the Flat Tops. *Tales of Lonely Trails* offers few clues to its location, other than it was near to Dome Peak (elev. 12,172 ft.) on the eastern edge of the range and at a lower elevation, which Grey wrote was appreciated by all (Fig. 16).



Fig. 16: Dome Peak (far left) and Flat Top Mountain (far right) seen from Yamcolo Reservoir, view south. The second camp of the Zane Grey outfit in the Flat Tops was near Dome Peak.



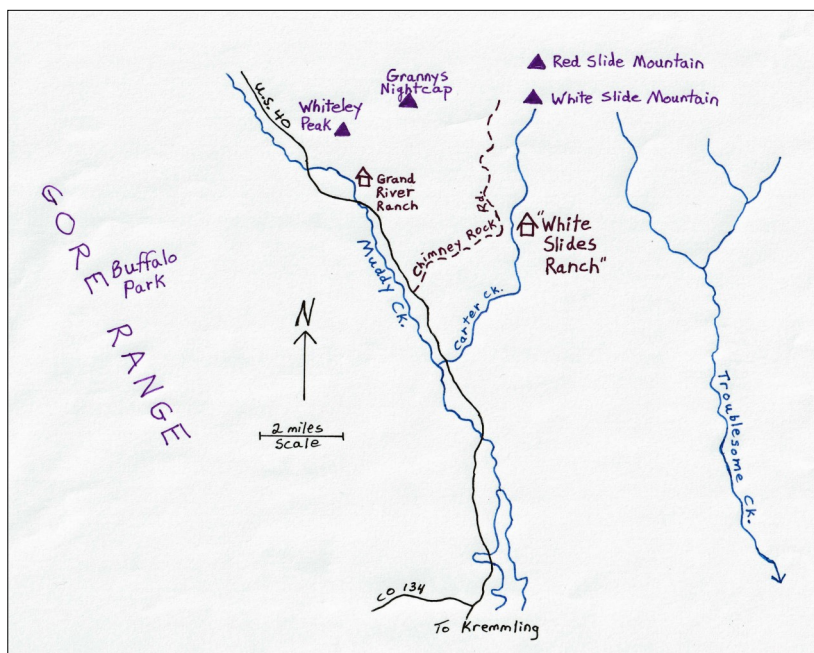


Fig. 17: The Zane Grey outfit taking a break on the trail in 1917, somewhere in central Colorado. Courtesy of L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University.

They hunted for four days and then moved on again, this time to an entirely different mountain landscape, the Rabbit Ears Range. It took four days of hard travel by horseback, fifty miles in a north-eastern direction (Fig. 17). They crossed the Gore Range and passed through Buffalo Park to reach what Grey called the "Troublesome Country." Named by army soldiers in 1865 who found it difficult to cross, Troublesome Creek drains a large section of the southern slopes of the Rabbit Ears Range. According to *Tales of Lonely Trails*, Grey and Teague disagreed more than once about the best place to camp on the trek over the Gore Range. Why did they go to so much trouble to relocate? Grey wrote in the 1918 "Colorado Trails" serialization in *Outdoor Life* that the purpose of visiting the Troublesome Country was to shoot grizzly bear specimens for the Denver Museum of Natural History.

After two nights at Trappers Lake, Todd drove Terry and I back to Stillwater Dam to get Terry's car. While Todd headed back to Arizona, Terry and I continued following Grey's 1917 route. We drove northeast across the Gore Range on Colo-

rado Highway 134 from the tiny settlement of Toponas to the intersection with U.S. Highway 40, just a few miles north of Kremmling. To reach the area of Grey's camp in the Rabbit Ears Range, we went north on U.S. 40 from the intersection with Colorado Highway 134 for about eleven miles to where sharp-peaked Whiteley Peak (elev. 10,115 feet), an outlier of the Rabbit Ears Range, towers over the highway (Map 3).



Map 3: White Slides Ranch Area.





Fig. 18:  
Whiteley Peak (left),  
Granny's Nightcap  
(right), and the  
Grand River Ranch  
of the Haworth family  
on Muddy Creek.

The Grand River Ranch of the Haworth family is located there, about sixteen miles north of Kremmling. The ranch is located along Muddy Creek, which is a tributary of the Colorado River, which was called the Grand River until 1921. In 1985, one of the Haworths told Chuck Pfeiffer that the Grey campsite was near Granny's Nightcap (elev. 9,612 feet), which is about two miles northeast of Whiteley Peak (Fig. 18). For nearly three weeks the Grey outfit hunted for bear around Whiteley Peak, yet they never got a grizzly. But Zane Grey came away from the Troublesome Country with something far more valuable – the story and setting of *The Mysterious Rider*.

This book is set near White Slide Mountain (elev. 10,850 feet), a high summit in the Rabbit Ears Range about four miles east of Whiteley Peak (Fig. 19). Grey called it White Slides rather than White Slide. Like the Flat Tops, the Rabbit Ears Range is volcanic, but is composed of less resistant rock that has significantly eroded. The range is named for Rabbit Ears Peak, the decaying remnant that reminded government surveyors in the 1870s of a pair of rabbit ears.

This range is unusual in that it runs for thirty miles in an east-west direction and the Continental Divide follows the crest of the range; most ranges trend north-south. The namesake white slide is high on the southeastern slope of White Slide Mountain. Grey wrote in Chapter 1 that it was an avalanche scar, but it is probably volcanic tuff. Tuff is compressed layers of volcanic ash, and on steep slopes the tuff erodes through freezing and thawing, as well as snowmelt and rain, into deep fissures and strange shapes.



Fig. 19: The southern slopes of White Slide Mountain in the Rabbit Ears Range.



Grey placed White Slides Ranch, the fictional ranch of Bill Belllounds, below (south of) White Slide Mountain. Grey wrote that the ranch was on Troublesome Creek. Technically, though, the south slope of White Slide Mountain is in the Carter Creek watershed, a tributary of Muddy Creek. The Troublesome Creek watershed is just over a mile to the east; it is easy to see how Grey either did not notice this subtle distinction, or perhaps he could not resist using the more colorful place name for a story about the troubles of Columbine Belllounds. She is named for the state flower and is the adopted daughter of Bill Belllounds. Columbine promises to marry Bill's hard-drinking and wayward son, Jack, to settle him down and to keep the ranch from having to be divided among Bill's heirs. Columbine, however, has strong feelings for a cowboy at the ranch named Wilson (Wils) Moore.

Since Grey used real place names throughout *The Mysterious Rider*, its geography is one of the more straightforward among his books. The greatest geographic mystery of this book is, where is White Slides Ranch? Grey writes in Chapter 1 that the general setting of the book is near Middle Park and Kremmling, but Chapter 2 states the ranch is about twenty miles from Middle Park. Colorado has four

large "parks" or upland valleys near the headwaters of major rivers: North Park (North Platte River), Middle Park (Colorado River), South Park (Arkansas River and South Platte River), and the San Luis Valley (Rio Grande). Middle Park is the smallest of these (Fig. 20). Muddy Creek and Troublesome Creek are the two most significant tributaries of the Colorado in Middle Park. The parks generally include grassy meadows and sage slopes, but not the higher forested mountains. The Gore Range bounds Middle Park on the west and southwest, the Rabbit Ears Range on the north, the Front Range on the east, and the lower Williams Fork Mountains and Vasquez Mountains on the south. Kremmling, located in the southwestern part of Middle Park, has always been a ranching town.

After introducing the setting of White Slides Ranch, Grey reveals the book's protagonist, Bent Wade – the mysterious rider. Hired by Bill Belllounds to rid the ranchlands of predators, Wade is Columbine's birth father, though they have been separated for over eighteen years, ever since Wade wrongly accused Columbine's mother of being unfaithful. He is called Hell-Bent Wade because even though he has a heart of gold, trouble follows his every step (Friesen, 2019).



Fig. 20:  
Middle Park  
postcard  
illustrated by  
Charles H.  
Harmon.  
Published by  
Williamson  
Haffner Co.,  
circa 1910.





Fig. 21: White Slide Mountain and the Rabbit Ears Range. Carter Mountain Ranch, the probable inspiration for White Slides Ranch, is located to the right of the aspen tree in the center of this image.

With Wade's backstory, the temporal setting of the book comes into focus. The book is set from September to May. Wade previously worked in the gold mines at Cripple Creek, Colorado (Chapter 4), and with the heyday of Cripple Creek mining in 1891-1895, that would suggest a temporal setting of the late 1890s. Wade also was in Dodge (Dodge City, Kansas) during its prime; that was when he lost Columbine and her mother (Chapter 18). Dodge City was the primary terminus for the great cattle drives from Texas in the early 1880s, and eighteen years elapsed since then, which also suggests a temporal setting of the late 1890s.

Wade travels to White Slides Ranch from Meeker, located west of the Flat Tops, and this journey in *The Mysterious Rider* dovetails with Grey's 1917 trip. Wade camps at Trappers Lake and his observations in Chapter 4 of *The Mysterious Rider* echo Grey's writing in *Tales of Lonely Trails*: Trappers Lake is a "beautiful sheet of water, mirroring the black slopes and the fringed spruces and flat peaks." From Trappers Lake, Wade travels over Flat Top Pass, crossing from the White River into the Yampa River watershed, then Wade rides down the Bear River, a "bright, winding stream." Wade then travels through "Elgeria" (Yampa was named Egeria until 1906, and the extra "l" is either a misspelling by the manuscript typist or Grey mis-remembered the name). Wade then crosses the Gore Range. From its

eastern side he looks down into Middle Park and proceeds directly to White Slides Ranch.

Though White Slide Mountain is easily visible northeast of U. S. 40 while driving north from Kremmling, the best viewpoints are along a good gravel road that leads northeast off U. S. 40 about twelve miles north of Kremmling. That road is labeled Chimney Rock Road, or Grand County 27. After driving up the steep road for about three miles, Terry and I stopped to walk over to a ranch gate. We noticed that the Carter Mountain Ranch (established in 1899) closely matched Grey's description in Chapter 5: "White Slides Ranch was hidden from sight, as it lay in the bottomland . . . the gray old peak (White Slide Mountain) towered proud and aloof . . . the eastern slope of the valley was a vast sweep of sage and hill and grassy bench and aspen bench. . . . A long lane led from the pasture-land, following the brook that ran through the corrals and by the back door of the rambling, comfortable-looking cabin" (Fig. 21).

I checked Chuck Pfeiffer's article while at this viewpoint to re-read what he wrote about the likely model for White Slides Ranch. I was struck to see that Chuck had stopped at this exact same place, over thirty years earlier, and he reached the same conclusion that this ranch was the probable inspiration for White Slides Ranch. It was a fine moment in our fieldwork to realize we were at or near the same spot where Zane Grey and Chuck Pfeiffer once were.



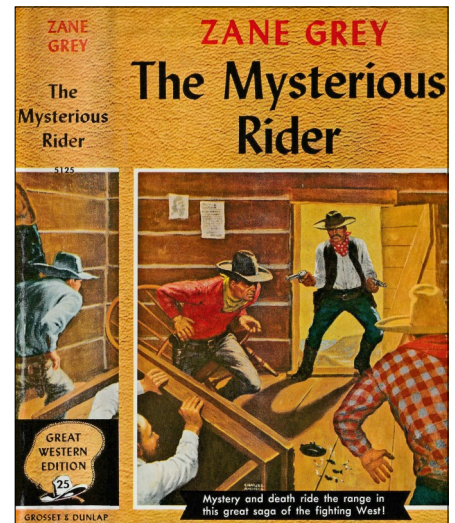
After about six miles total distance from U. S. 40 the gravel road enters Arapaho National Forest and becomes Forest Road 103. A short distance farther up the road we found an aspen grove that reminded me of the scene in Chapter 14 where Wilson Moore and Columbine Belllounds secretly meet and profess their mutual love in a grove about halfway between Moore's cabin and White Slides Ranch. It is "an open, pretty spot, with grass and wildflowers, and old, bleached logs, half sunny and half shady under the new-born, fluttering aspen leaves" (Fig. 22). Admittedly, this aspen grove may not be the same one described by Grey, but there is no doubt that Grey rode through this terrain during his bear hunts. Moore's cabin location is mentioned in Chapter 6 as "under old White Slides . . . under the red bluff." Perhaps the red bluff refers to Red Slide Mountain, located just a half mile north of White Slide Mountain, or it could mean a reddish outcropping of volcanic rock, several of which are in the area.



Fig. 22: This aspen grove is reminiscent of where Wilson Moore and Columbine Belllounds secretly declared their love.

Buffalo Park is another place from the 1917 trip that is mentioned in both *Tales of Lonely Trails* and *The Mysterious Rider*. It is located on the east edge of the Gore Range, about five miles southwest of Whiteley Peak, which places it about ten miles straight west of White Slides Ranch. Jack Belllounds turns out to be a bad apple in more than one way, and he has become involved in a gang of cattle rus-

Fig. 23: Grosset & Dunlap Great Western Edition dustjacket illustrated by Charles Andres. Hell-Bent Wade is depicted with his guns drawn in the shootout with cattle rustlers at a cabin in Buffalo Park.



tlers, stealing from his father's ranch. In his research, Pfeiffer was told that the rustling plot was based on actual history in the Troublesome Country. Hell-Bent Wade tracks the rustlers to a cabin in Buffalo Park and confronts them with guns drawn (Fig. 23). During an epic gunfight, Wade kills all the rustlers except Jack, who he spares when Jack agrees to give up Columbine as his betrothed.

Ultimately, though, Jack goes back on his word, and Wade sacrifices himself in a shootout with Jack in which both men die. The place names of Troublesome Creek and White Slide Mountain can thus be viewed as metaphors for the declining affairs at the ranch and Wade's sacrifice that enables Wilson and Columbine to marry and live at the ranch with the blessing of Bill Belllounds. Wade is buried in the same aspen grove where Wilson and Columbine had their fateful meeting.



Fig. 24: The Hotel Eastin in Kremmling on Park Avenue promotes room 120 as a Zane Grey Room to commemorate where he stayed in 1917.





Fig. 25: The purple arrow has been added to this postcard to indicate the rock shadow of "the mysterious rider."

Photo by Jean Landess, published by the Kremmling Area Chamber of Commerce.

At the end of their hunting trip in the Rabbit Ears Range, on or about September 28, 1917, the Grey outfit probably went to Kremmling and stayed in the Schuler House Hotel before boarding the train. The now re-named Hotel Eastin offers a chance to stay in the same room where Grey may have stayed in 1917 (Fig. 24). The hotel proprietor, Thomas Shepherd, says that Grey stayed in room 120, which is now themed as the Zane Grey Room.

Though Grey probably derived the plot for *The Mysterious Rider* from stories told by local ranchers, the title for the book may have been inspired during his short stay in Kremmling. There is a rock formation in the cliffs on the north side of Kremmling that in the early evening light forms a shadow that resembles a rider on horseback (Fig. 25). Although there is a dearth of printed references to this shadowy rock formation, I think the locals call it "the mysterious rider." Unfortunately, I have not been able to pin down the timeframe when the rock formation acquired its name. Thus, it is not clear to me if Grey decided on the title for his book when (or if) he heard that name and saw the shadow while in Kremmling. Or, conversely, perhaps the formation was named for Grey's book, given how the local setting of this popular book is a source of pride.

*The Mysterious Rider* is Grey's only book set entirely within Colorado. Three other Westerns feature

Colorado settings: *Arizona Ames* is, in part, set in the same Troublesome Country; *Raiders of Spanish Peaks* is mostly set in and around La Veta, though it begins in Garden City, Kansas; *Twin Sombreros* is set mostly in Las Animas, but it concludes in Texas. Given how inspiring the Flat Tops and the Troublesome Country were to Grey, I have wondered why Grey never went back to Trappers Lake or the high mountains of central Colorado. Perhaps the fishing was not good enough? Certainly, Colorado was not easy to reach from either Pennsylvania or California. Furthermore, he was uncomfortable with the high elevation.

Or perhaps he did not go back to central Colorado because a new destination captured his imagination in 1918: the Tonto Basin of central Arizona. The Tonto Basin was much more accessible from southern California, whether by train or automobile, and it offered great bear hunting in a setting with a milder climate and lower elevation than the Flat Tops. Grey also had his favorite guides in Arizona (the Doyles and the Haughts), and he became obsessed with getting the story of the Pleasant Valley War, taking trips to the Tonto Basin three straight years to gain the trust of his local informants. That story, *To the Last Man*, was number nine on the bestseller list and will celebrate its centennial in 2022.



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