COLORADO FOURTEENERS AND THE NATURE OF PLACE IDENTITY*

KEVIN S. BLAKE

ABSTRACT. The fifty-four Colorado Fourteeners—mountains more than 14,000 feet in elevation—were early symbols of westward expansion, mineral wealth, and wondrous scenery, and they are increasingly popular as environmental icons in place attachment at national, regional, state, and local scales. The symbolism of this contrived yet iconic collection of peaks is examined through the evolution of the Fourteener concept, the popularity of peakbagging, and the role of the Sawatch Range Fourteeners in creating a larger community identity. Elevation is the gatekeeper into the Fourteener club, in which a distinctive landscape iconography of shape, accessibility, and aesthetics reflects the role of idealized nature and mountains in place identity. *Keywords:* Colorado, cultural geography, landscape, mountain geography, place identity, Rocky Mountains.

The grandest mountains and mountain scenery are found in Colorado. The highest peaks rise, snow-clad, proudly and defiantly in the clear blue sky; their gray sides and white crests being visible in this clear atmosphere for many, many miles away.

—George A. Crofutt, 1881

From mountain gloom to montane glory the world's highest peaks have long commanded center stage in the symbolism of natural landscapes. Language and culture mold the circumstances by which mountains have been judged, and these verdicts are recast to fit the fleeting ideals of different times (Nicolson 1997). Romanticism and geomorphic knowledge prompted a shift from an almost Biblical fear of the mountain fastness toward more favorable attitudes about mountains in Europe during the nineteenth century. At the heart of the taste for mountain scenery was familiarity through personal experience and an appreciation for grand size (Rees 1975). These led to the development of an American mountain aesthetic in the mid-1800s, with the Transcendentalist ideals of Emer-

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✦ DR. BLAKE is an associate professor of geography at Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas 66506-2904.

son and Thoreau molded at first hand in the raw-hewn terrain of the Appalachian Mountains.

For many New Englanders the position of humanity in the cosmos is defined by a roll call of celebrated summits: Katahdin, Greylock, Chocorua, Wachusett, and Grand Monadnock (Rydant and Bayr 1992). In addition to a mountain's height and shape, direct experience through alpine hiking contributes to the character of a mountain (Stier and McAdow 1995). Throughout the eastern United States various clubs promote hiking a collection of high peaks, including the Adirondack Forty-Sixers, White Mountain 4,000-Footers, New England 4,000-Footers, New England 100 Highest, Northeast 11ers, Catskill 3500s, and South Beyond 6000s (Heinrichs 1997). Although the mountains in these collections have attained great fame, equaled by peaks in the Sierra Nevada and Cascade Range, America's fascination with mountains as ideal nature reached its pinnacle in the Colorado Rockies.

Colorado's fifty-four Fourteeners—mountains with a summit elevation more than 14,000 feet above sea level—affirm the state's long-heralded status as the rooftop of a continent (Figure 1).¹ Including such famed summits as Pikes Peak, Longs Peak, Mount of the Holy Cross, the Maroon Bells, and Uncompahgre Peak, the Fourteeners influence how Americans identify with nature. As a barrier to easy movement and communication, a zone of concentrated timber and mineral resources, islands of moisture, areas of government control, and restorative sanctuaries, the Fourteeners well illustrate these five historic themes of the Mountainous West (Wyckoff and Dilsaver 1995) (Figure 2).

Since the mid-1980s, however, these summits have experienced an unprecedented wave of hiking popularity, which has led to severe environmental threats. The headlines fairly shout, "Peaks in Peril" and "Fourteeners under Siege," as the wilderness character of the mountains is loved to death (Kelly 1994). The Fourteener phenomenon is played out on the national stage as coverage of the climbing allure and environmental perils reaches widely read publications such as the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, the *Washington Post*, and *Time* magazine (Benner 1992; Kenworthy 1998, 2001; Woodbury 1999). The imprint of Colorado's Rocky Mountains on place identity is also illustrated through architectural design with the soaring, white, translucent roof of Denver International Airport, which is an oft-derided attempt to evoke the snow-capped Fourteeners to the west (Sommers 2000).

Given the tendency of mountain studies to emphasize physical, ecological, or natural hazard topics, cultural geography is a research direction that is essential if a complete mountain geography literature is to be created (Price 1981; Smethurst 2000). A cultural geographical perspective on the evolution of the Fourteeners is presented here as a contrived yet iconic construct, for mountains sustain a symbolic role in place identity, whether at the national, regional, state, or local scale. The present-day symbolism of these peaks and the etymology of the term "Fourteener" have been largely ignored in the literature on peaks, which focuses largely on the details of description, exploration, mountaineering, or place-names (Ormes 1951; Rennicke

FIG. 1—The fifty-four Colorado Fourteeners.

FIG. 2—Uncompahgre Peak illustrates the five historic themes of the Mountainous West. Uncompahgre is the highest point in the San Juan Mountains and was once thought to be the highest in the Rocky Mountains. (Photograph by the author, September 1995)

1986; Noel, Mahoney, and Stevens 1994; Jacobs and Ormes 2000). Even the most comprehensive treatments of the Fourteeners are nearly silent on the summits as icons of place identity (Borneman and Lampert 1998). The human geography literature on Colorado's Fourteeners is even more spartan, offering at best a peripheral treatment of the Fourteeners as a collective entity (Brown 1929; Blake 1999; Morin 1999; Wilson 1999; Wyckoff 1999).

My data-collection methods for this study included long and less-than-linear conversations with mountaineers, public land managers, and employees of mountain-related organizations in their offices and in the field, participant observation distilled from dozens of hikes on and conversations about the Fourteeners since 1966, analysis of archival materials, and visual interpretation of landscapes in a case study of the incorporated towns near the Fourteeners of the Sawatch Range, Colorado's highest uplift. And I can confess a personal involvement, thanks to a lifelong attachment to hiking on the Colorado Fourteeners, though never as an actual resident of Colorado.

Other elevation-based Colorado mountain groups, primarily the Thirteeners (the peaks higher than 13,000 feet) and the Centennial Peaks (the top one hundred in the state), have gained recognition (Roach and Roach 2001). The Fourteeners, however, are what set Colorado apart symbolically and physically (Figure 3). With fifty-four of these towering giants, Colorado has more Fourteeners than the rest of

FIG. 3—Famed for its size and multiple summits reaching more than 14,000 feet, Mount Massive is Colorado's second-highest Fourteener. Many of the Fourteeners—and other distinctive peaks of lower elevation—that are visible from the state's designated scenic byways are noted with this type of sign. (Photograph by the author, August 2001)

North America combined.² Washington has one, and the approximate numbers elsewhere in North America are California with fifteen, Mexico with seven, and Alaska and Canada combined with twenty-eight (Porcella and Burns 1995; America's Roof 2002). The Fourteener count is approximate, even in Colorado, thanks to a sometimes acrimonious but always enlivening debate over what constitutes a separate mountain (Graves 1968; Hill 1968; Carpenter 1971).³

I explore the character of the Colorado Fourteeners through three themes that capture how the Fourteeners as a group, rather than as individual peaks, contribute to place attachment. In the first section I address the evolving conceptualization of these peaks as a cohesive group and the relatively recent origin of the term "Fourteener"; both processes have given synergy to the fifty-four peaks as a force in constructing place identity. The focus of the second theme is the cherished desire of many hikers to climb every mountain. The negative environmental consequences that abound from recreational overuse attract additional attention to the Fourteeners as icons of ideal nature, bonding people with the Fourteener sense of place. In the third section I examine the role of the Fourteeners in the place identity of local communities; specifically, why townspeople identify with certain mountains and how this place attachment achieves iconic expression.

FIG. 4—A scenic view of Mount of the Holy Cross, based on William Henry Jackson's 1873 photograph. The snowfield to the right of the cross has been likened to a kneeling angel with outstretched arms. The photograph was published in about 1915 by the Van Noy Interstate Company in a Denver & Rio Grande Railroad promotional brochure, "In the Clouds." (Reproduced from the collection of the author)

EVOLUTION OF THE FOURTEENER CONCEPT

As the traditional homeland for Utes and a vision-quest destination for several Plains Indian nations, Colorado's mountains have been significant to American Indians for centuries (Trimble 1993). Pikes Peak was a symbolic boundary landmark for Black Elk, the Lakota medicine man, and Blanca Peak is widely regarded as the Navajo sacred mountain of the east (Bernbaum 1990; Blake 2001). A few Fourteeners attained worldwide fame in the process of attracting early explorers, trappers, miners, tourists, scientists, and alpinists. The literature and maps produced by the expeditions of Zebulon Pike, Stephen Long, and John C. Frémont, among others, were influential early accounts of some peaks later recognized as Fourteeners, yet the Fourteeners were not conceptualized as a distinct group until after the George M. Wheeler and Ferdinand V. Hayden surveys of the mid-1870s (Bueler 2000). Those surveys provided many of the names, illustrations, ascents, and measurements that were necessary to popularize the Fourteeners (Farquhar 1961; Hart 1977). Only after systematic measurement of many ranges did 14,000 feet emerge as a convenient round number with which to distinguish the highest peaks. Three of the most famous mountains of this era—Pikes Peak, Longs Peak, and Mount of the Holy Cross—were identified as topping 14,000 feet, yet no Colorado mountain exceeded 14,500 feet (Figure 4). Thereafter, "the imaginary line in the sky at 14,000 feet separated the chosen few from the rank and file" (Roach 1999, 278).

In the late 1800s the 14,000-foot peaks, though not yet known by the name “Fourteeners,” were frequently touted as a group representing wondrous scenery—the best in America. First published in 1881, *Croft’s Grip-Sack Guide of Colorado* extols the glorious beauty visible from Grays Peak and states that Blanca Peak, at 14,464 feet, is believed to be the highest of the forty-one peaks more than 14,000 feet (Croft 1881). The guide also claims that Colorado’s mountains outshine those of Europe: “The Alps—storied monuments of poetical legendary fame—cannot compare with these mountains in scenes of sublime beauty and awful grandeur. . . . Nowhere in the Old World do we ascend so high, from no point is the view so wide and so expansive” (p. 25). Boasting of Colorado’s highest mountains became part of the pantheon of American idealized images as “pride thus paved the way for a cult of bigness” (Lowenthal 1968, 65).

Lists of Colorado’s highest peaks soon appeared in popular literature. Though not restricted to elevations of more than 14,000 feet, the 1904 *Nell’s Map of Colorado* lists the highest mountains of Colorado, as does *Among the Rockies*, a 1907 railway photographic extravaganza that touts beautiful views of the Front and Sawatch Ranges (Nell 1904; Tammen Curio Co. 1907). The Colorado Mountain Club legitimized and institutionalized the concept of 14,000-foot mountains as a distinct group with a 1914 leaflet listing these peaks and with the 1925 publication of *Fourteen Thousand Feet: A History of the Naming and Early Ascents of the High Colorado Peaks*, the first book devoted solely to Colorado’s crown jewels (Hart 1977). Later descriptions and promotions of Colorado scenery often gained an extra cachet by noting mountain elevations in excess of 14,000 feet (Union Pacific System 1930; Writers’ Program . . . 1941).

By the 1970s Colorado’s 14,000-foot mountains were nearly at their centennial of being celebrated as ideal landmarks in the American national identity. Yet their iconic potential had not yet reached its zenith, in part because of a certain awkwardness and inconsistent labeling. The term “Fourteener” has gained widespread currency only since 1978; previously these mountains were variously known as “14,000s,” “14,000-foot peaks,” or “fourteens” (Means 1931; Melzer 1939; Graves 1968). The first mention in print of the word “Fourteener” was in 1967, in an article in *Summit* on the location of the world’s 14,000-foot peaks: “The Cult of the Fourteener reaches its apex in Colorado, where fifty-three altars await the worshipper” (Powell 1967, 18). But even with such hyperbole the word “Fourteener” had to reach a mainstream audience before it was widely adopted.

The first significant popularization of the word “Fourteener” occurred in 1970, when *The Fourteeners: Colorado’s Great Mountains* appeared. With the goal to “bring you in closer communion with Colorado’s mountain miracles through a better understanding and deeper appreciation of them” (Eberhart and Schmuck 1970, 1), the authors set the standard for much of the subsequent popular literature on Colorado’s Fourteeners: artistic photographs of each peak accompanied by glowing descriptive prose. This book is a clear contribution to forging a Fourteener identity: No peak above the golden elevation is left out, and none below is included, no matter the character of the individual summit. Albeit in black and white, this was

the first coffee-table book to promote the Fourteeners. The potential power of this format to influence public ideals had already been aptly demonstrated by the Sierra Club in the Grand Canyon dam controversy (Fradkin 1981).

Much of the 1970s literature about the 14,000-foot mountains contains intermingled usage of the terms "fourteens" and "Fourteeners." The second significant popularization of the Fourteener label came with the 1977 publication of the first large-format Fourteener book in color: *The Majestic Fourteeners*. The role of the Fourteeners in the state's identity is captured in the book's foreword: "Mighty mountains are what we Coloradans find most inspiring about our state . . . and, it is comforting to know that these mountains belong to you and me" (Crouter 1977, 5). The decisive force that institutionalized the Fourteener label occurred in 1978, with the publication of the first edition of Walter Borneman and Lyndon Lampert's classic, *A Climbing Guide to Colorado's Fourteeners*; the same year saw the last usage of the term "fourteens" by the Colorado Mountain Club, in its *Trail & Timberline* journal and climbing guide (Richards 1978). Colorado thus had spawned "Fourteener" as a new word; California and other places adopted it later. In little more than a decade the term "Fourteener" had become ubiquitous, and the towering peaks were poised to play an even stronger role in place identity through an exceptional boom in the popularity of hiking.

CLIMB EVERY MOUNTAIN

The allure of mountaineering has long enhanced awareness and appreciation of mountains, even in the face of inevitable fatalities. Both the Matterhorn and Mount Everest, for example, achieved infamy and greater popularity after legendary climbing disasters in 1865 and 1996 (Shipton 1966; Breashears 1997). The Colorado Fourteeners, though less treacherous than many peaks, still pose great risks and offer more than a chance taste of mountaineering thrill and intrigue. Fourteen thousand feet, arbitrary as that elevation may be, in part gains a distinct sense of place because of physical extremes and challenges, including thin air, rockfalls, avalanches, volatile weather, lightning, rugged terrain, and verticality (Nesbit 1953; Wright 1966; Trimble 1970; Barry 1992; Dawson 1994). Despite improved climbing gear and hiker awareness, hardly a year passes without a fatality on the Fourteeners (Blevins 1999; Gutierrez 2000). Fourteener popularity continues to soar, however, pushing hikers of all levels of experience into the danger zone.

Many Fourteeners were probably first climbed by American Indians and miners. The Wheeler and Hayden survey climbs of Blanca Peak reported a walled, circular depression on the summit that might have been excavated by American Indians (Bueler 2000). The first recorded ascent of a Fourteener was that of Pikes Peak in 1820 by three members of the Long expedition. Many recreational climbs of the best-known peaks were made in the last half of the nineteenth century, including the first scaling of a Fourteener by a woman, in 1858 (Mazel 1991). The popularization of Fourteener mountaineering and the contribution of this activity to the

FIG. 5—Hikers contemplate a route on the eastern ridge of Quandary Peak. Given the challenges of elevation, terrain, and weather, none of the Colorado Fourteeners is necessarily an easy hike, but in good weather some are less difficult to ascend than others. Large groups and greater numbers of hikers are increasingly common on Quandary and the other “walk-up” Fourteeners. (Photograph by the author, July 1997)

Fourteeners as icons of ideal nature began in the late nineteenth century with such notable recreational climbers as Frederick Chapin (1995).

Early in the twentieth century, mountaineers began focusing on the Fourteeners as a group to be climbed in its entirety. In 1923 Carl Blaurock and William Ervin became the first climbers known to have ascended the forty-six then-recognized 14,000-foot peaks in Colorado, followed soon by Albert Ellingwood (Bueler 2000). The drive to climb every mountain received a key boost with the publication of the 1931 edition of *Fourteen Thousand Feet* that included “A Climber’s Guide to the High Colorado Peaks,” by Elinor Eppich Kingery—the first climbing guide to the Fourteeners (Hart 1977). By September 1934 the first woman, Mary Cronin, had climbed what were then recognized as fifty-one 14,000-foot peaks, and in 1937 the quest for speed records began when Carl and Bob Melzer climbed all of the Fourteeners in a single season (Bueler 2000).

Of all the Fourteener literature, climbing guidebooks have played the mightiest role in enhancing the Fourteeners as symbols of great mountains. First written by Robert M. Ormes in 1952, *Guide to the Colorado Mountains* is a classic tome of mountain recreation; in 2000 it reached its tenth edition (Jacobs and Ormes 2000). The Borneman and Lampert book, however, has become the classic Fourteener guide,

spawning two revised editions and a glut of competitors (1998). In addition to focusing exclusively on the Fourteeners and integrating much of the earlier research on the histories of the peaks, the authors lifted from the baize of the bridge table the popular term "Grand Slam" to describe climbing every mountain. By referring to the profound influence of the mountains on the peoples of the surrounding regions and labeling mountain wilderness as one of the state's most precious resources, this book alludes to the importance of the Fourteeners in national and state identity. The Fourteener phenomenon has continued unabated for a quarter-century: "In a state where outdoor recreation is close to the official religion, hiking Colorado's 54 mountains that top 14,000 feet is a leading denomination" (Kenworthy 2001).

The experience of climbing a Fourteener has changed greatly since the mid-1980s, however, as amenity migrants are increasingly drawn to booming Front Range cities and mountain towns. When I scrambled up my first Fourteener in 1966, sighting another hiker or finding an established trail was a rare event. Into the 1980s the situation remained much the same, but the enduring popularity of the Borneman and Lampert guide proved seminal in urging many climbers to ascend every mountain. From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s the number of hikers on the Fourteeners roughly doubled, to an average of approximately 1,200 persons summiting each peak each year (Kelly 1994). Now hikers by the thousands flock to the Fourteeners on summer weekends (Figure 5). Grand Slam records are set every year: Hikers as young as age seven have climbed them all, the speed record is now less than eleven days, and one person has completed twelve Grand Slams (Bueler 2000; Meyers 2000; Kenworthy 2001). Today the Fourteeners receive more than 200,000 visits annually, but these numbers are only approximations of actual use. The summit registers are unreliable—they are often stolen, overwhelmed by sheer numbers, stuffed with extraneous business cards and trash, or spurned by climbers—so an anecdotal quality pervades the statistics. Still, firsthand observations by U.S. Forest Service personnel indicate more than 20,000 visitors annually at Grays Peak and Torreys Peak, two of the most-climbed peaks because of their relative ease and their proximity to Denver. On the busiest day in 1999, 605 hikers were tallied on the Grays Peak trail (Morrow 2001).

Summitting Fourteeners is not just a Coloradan phenomenon: Hikers of many racial and ethnic backgrounds come from all over the continent and world (Kelly 1994). I have met hikers on Fourteeners from such surprising places as Wales and Slovakia. A plethora of guidebooks, calendars, photographic essays, postcards, CD-ROMs with interactive topographic maps, T-shirts, replicas of survey benchmarks, and cloisonné pins illustrate the appeal of the Fourteeners well beyond Colorado. For thousands of hikers today, simply being on or within view of a Fourteener, rather than reaching its summit, is pleasure enough.

The desire of so many to reach out and touch a Fourteener transformed what had been primarily the domain of the mountaineer looking for a technical climbing challenge, or the denizen of a mountain mystic seeking spiritual renewal, to the playground of the "peakbagger." Peakbagging implies that the mountains are col-

lectibles and that the hikers are dedicated to completing all of the climbs in a particular collection. But a peakbagger's cause may pass from dedication to addiction, when the goal of reaching a summit becomes so dominant that it places his or her life in danger in this beautiful but hazardous environment. Moreover, environmental concerns about recreational overuse cause some mountaineer purists to look askance at peakbagging, as though the quest were little more than a notch on a belt (Heinrichs 1997; Shelton 1998).

Most peakbaggers are avid about reaching summits and can recite their successful ascents, yet they respect the mountains even during their wilderness experience (Heinrichs 1997; Emmons 2001; Sheets 2002). Even with the peakbagging craze, fewer people have climbed all of the Fourteeners (1,037) than Mount Everest (1,196) (AdventureStats.com 2002; Crockett 2003). Solitude is still possible at certain times on the Fourteeners. Peakbaggers are also some of the strongest advocates of protecting the Fourteeners, and their desire to climb every mountain does not mean that they ignore spiritual renewal. As an example, consider my field notes from a hike to the summit of Mount of the Holy Cross in 1998:

Nothing prepared me while I walked in the gloomy shadows of Halfmoon Pass for the surreal quality of the rugged peak flaming pink-red with dawn's first light. A sight so beautiful: the peak symbolic of deep faith, alpine wilderness splendor, famous photographs and paintings. It was well within my reach but still ethereal, towering, and challenging. And then, just a few steps further on the trail, the perfect panorama was completed with the sight and sound of a rushing, high, majestic waterfall that takes the snowmelt from the Cross Couloir, through the Bowl of Tears, and on down East Cross Creek. After that moment, no matter what happened next, I knew the day and the hike would be perfect.

Hordes of hikers cause ecological degradation, however. The Fourteeners' capacity threshold has become a top issue in assessments of Colorado's mountains, especially in relation to wildlife and alpine vegetation (McNicoll and others 1999). The noise, water pollution, trail erosion, soil compaction, vegetation trampling, and wildlife harassment that occur during recreational overuse probably alter the environment in some places far more than mining, ranching, or logging ever did (Finley 1995). Winter now provides less of a respite for the Fourteeners than it did in the past, for off-season ascents have become increasingly common (Asphaug 1998). On the Fourteeners within designated wilderness areas, nonconforming uses—such as people hitting golf balls from Mount Massive's summit—are acute (Rowan 2001).

In reaction to the highly visible and rapid degradation of many Fourteener trailside environments, the Colorado Fourteeners Initiative (CFI) was formed in 1994 “to protect and preserve the natural integrity of Colorado's Fourteeners and the quality of the recreational opportunities they provide” (CFI 2002). The primary response to negative environmental impacts has been improvement of trails (Moller 1995). The CFI started by documenting trail conditions, with the goal of establishing standard routes to stop the creation of “social trails,” the multiple paths winding all

over the face of a mountain. Ironically, peakbagging makes the work of the CFI easier, in that the environmental impacts are concentrated and can be ameliorated with the construction of sustainable trails (Cox 1999). The CFI's actions have not gone unopposed, however: Some hikers argue that the best way to protect the mountains is to leave them alone, because new trails will only bring more hikers (Woodbury 1999; Cox 2001).

Other potential solutions to overuse of the Fourteeners include promoting other hiking opportunities, regulating recreation, and improving education. By 1984, tramping of the Fourteeners had prompted publication of two books advocating hikes on lower-elevation mountains (Borneman 1984; Garratt and Martin 1984). The trend to climb Thirteeners rather than Fourteeners has also been encouraged by assertions that the lower mountains actually offer more adventure and less hassle (Cox 1998; Shelton 1998; Roach and Roach 2001). Although restricting use of the Fourteeners in wilderness areas is a future possibility, limiting access to nature is generally an unpopular stance; thus the CFI partners with the Leave No Trace organization to promote minimal environmental impacts (McNicol and others 1999). Peak stewards, volunteers who are sponsored by the Forest Service and the CFI, have also been placed at some trailheads to educate hikers about Leave No Trace and Fourteener ethics (Cox 2000).⁴

By the late 1900s high mountains and Colorado's identity were even more inseparable than they had been in the 1800s. Although complex and challenging, environmental issues have contributed to the perception of the Fourteeners as collective icons of ideal nature that are worth protecting. The intense reclamation efforts to save the Fourteeners forge a stronger attachment between local residents actively engaged in reclamation and the highest mountains. The more the Fourteeners are threatened, the more popular they become (Purdy 2002). With the rise in recreational mountaineering, the Fourteeners have become a prize that represents the ultimate climbing experience, yet this also causes the type of environmental degradation that clouds their image as centerpieces of protected, wild nature (Vale and Vale 1989). Today the Fourteeners spawn ideals of both wilderness defense and preservation funds; the conundrum is that access is needed to ensure that the public values the peaks, yet the impact of such use demands strict preservation measures (Kelly 1994).

FOURTEENER ICONOGRAPHY

The Fourteeners have become towering and tangible "peaks of identity," engendering a collective sense of attachment between communities and their surrounding idealized landscape (Blake 1999). To grasp the process by which identity is developed between the Fourteeners and nearby towns, I used as a case study the Sawatch Range in central Colorado, where I have climbed every Fourteener. Key to my interpretation of place identity is the Fourteener iconography evident in such landscape features as welcome signs and the logos of businesses, chambers of commerce, and government offices. I also tested the attitudes of local residents toward the Four-

teeners through conversations, newspaper mastheads, business names, postcards, actions toward land preservation, and tourist brochures.⁵ Elsewhere in Colorado the mountains below 14,000 feet may also be peaks of identity,⁶ but the Sawatch Fourteeners dominate the iconography of nearby towns even when other peaks are closer.

Crowning the Continental Divide, the Sawatch Range is appropriate as a case study, for it contains a barricade of fifteen Fourteeners, more than any other range in Colorado, and includes four of the five highest peaks in the state. The mountain splendor and elevation of the range result in nicknames such as “Colorado’s Roof-top,” “Backbone of the Continent,” and “Heart of the Rockies.” The range takes its name from a phonetic spelling of *saguache*, a Ute word meaning “water of the blue earth,” which was given to hot springs near Mount Princeton and to a former lake in the San Luis Valley, and it has been said that the only way to pronounce “Sawatch” is to sneeze it (Rennicke 1986). Spanning two national forests, four wilderness areas, and parts of five counties, the Sawatch Range extends nearly 100 miles in a north-west–southeast direction from the Eagle River to the town of Saguache, averaging 20 miles across but widening to 40 miles in places. The Sawatch includes one of the most famous Fourteeners, Mount of the Holy Cross, the long-popular Collegiate Peaks group of five Fourteeners in the heart of the range,⁷ and several peaks that have become infamous for their degree of ecological degradation.⁸

The Colorado mineral belt cuts directly through the heart of the Sawatch,⁹ so mining was the primary economic activity from the 1700s until about 1910. Both hardrock and placer activities contributed to significant environmental impacts because they resulted in heaps of waste rock from mines and smelters and in clear-cuts of timber for fuel, building materials, mine timbers, and railroad ties. In the twentieth century ranching and outdoor recreation–based tourism have each, in turn, bolstered the economic base of the Sawatch. Even though a strong belief in mining and associated industries pervades the local communities, the Fourteeners and associated tourism have largely supplanted mining as the dominant icons of community identity (McNicol and others 1999).

Minturn, a small but growing amenity town (population 1,068; elevation 7,817 feet) on the cusp of the Greater Vail area in the northern Sawatch, is the closest incorporated town to Mount of the Holy Cross. Probably because of its small size and narrow valley site, Minturn’s businesses feature few icons of mountains—only two representations of Battle Mountain, the closest distinctive summit visible from town. The “Top of the Rockies” scenic-byway brochure notes that Minturn is the gateway to the Holy Cross Wilderness Area, but as a consequence of the mountain’s limited visibility and accessibility, Holy Cross icons in the landscape are few.¹⁰ Though rarely viewed, the distinctive character of Mount of the Holy Cross provides a cachet that many higher and more visible Sawatch Fourteeners lack.

Rumors of a giant cross hiding deep in the northern Sawatch were finally proved true in 1873 with William Henry Jackson’s photograph (Figure 4) and Thomas Moran’s painting of Mount of the Holy Cross. Soon thereafter, Henry Wadsworth

Longfellow's poetry further established the peak as a symbol of Christianity and the legitimate conquest of the West (Kinsey 1992). Because the mountain contained one of the most recognizable icons in the world, a national monument was formed around it in 1929. By 1950, however, the monument had been abolished, a victim of

low visitation, poor access to views of the cross in the rugged terrain, and a perception of the cross that was less distinct than the one in Jackson's photograph (Brown 1968). Even though Mount of the Holy Cross has since been designated a wilderness area and its fame lingers regionally and locally, today comparatively few people outside Colorado are aware of its history, significance, and location.

The contribution of Holy Cross to local place identity is manifest in postcards, in the name of the local Holy Cross Ranger District, and, most significantly, as the peak showcased on Minturn's logo (Figure 6). The logo is prominently displayed throughout the newly constructed Town Hall and is featured on new welcome signs at both ends of town. Historical symbolism and elevation are key to the role of Mount of the Holy Cross in the iconography of Minturn.

Without its legendary cross and Fourteener status, the mountain would go unheralded.

The relationship of the Fourteeners to place identity is more deeply ingrained and complex in Leadville (population 4,763; elevation 10,152 feet) than in Minturn. In the local iconography, the Fourteeners symbolically compete with the heritage of mining-born-and-bred Leadville (Wyckoff 1999). Leadville is positioned on the western slopes of the Mosquito Range, but its defining views are of two distant yet towering Sawatch Fourteeners, Mount Massive and Mount Elbert, Colorado's two highest peaks (Figures 3 and 7). Though more central to the town's mining past and closer to town, the Mosquito Fourteeners and several lower Sawatch peaks lack the height and aesthetic prospect of Massive and Elbert, so they are the only peaks of identity for Leadville.

Except for its high, broad shoulders, Mount Elbert hardly merits a second glance, yet it has been recognized for its primate elevation among the Rockies since the 1920s (Toll 1923). Elbert is the icon of the Leadville Ranger District, a choice justified in part by the interest of hikers in bagging the state highpoint via a hike that, by Fourteener standards, is long but relatively moderate. Forest Service Ranger District logos are high powered in the development of place identity, given their widespread visibility on forest literature, signs, and equipment and given the symbolic importance of how the public land-management agency represents its lands. Perhaps just as important to the choice of Elbert over Massive for the logo is Elbert's

FIG. 6—Mount of the Holy Cross on the logo of Minturn, Colorado. (Photograph by the author, July 2001)

FIG. 7—Mount Elbert, high point of Colorado, and a mine headframe. (Photograph by the author, August 2001)

FIG. 8—Mount Massive and relics of the power-drill competition held during the Leadville Boom Days celebrations in 1999 and 2000. (Photograph by the author, August 2001)

pointed summit as viewed from Leadville, a form that makes it easier to reproduce as a simplified icon (Rowan 2001). Elbert is also featured on four current postcards, a total equal to or greater than any other Sawatch Fourteener except Mount Princeton.¹¹ Ironically, on one postcard the rather undistinguished shape of the Elbert massif led to misidentification of two nearby Thirteeners as the state's highest peak. Instead of diminishing the importance of Elbert, however, this misidentification may indicate the power of primacy in place attachment. Being number one means that Elbert symbolically lays claim to far more terrain than do most mountains, even serving as a peak of identity in Leadville, where it appears in several business names and icons.

The aptly named Mount Massive is impossible to ignore as the probable leader of Leadville's two peaks of identity (Figure 8). Massive is much closer to town and is the centerpiece of the Mount Massive Wilderness Area, whereas Elbert lacks such a designation. Three current postcards feature Massive's rugged multiple summits and eastern slopes, which are covered by snow more frequently than are Elbert's open ridges. In an important bonding of Leadville and Massive, the three postcards portray the townscape in the foreground. Massive also dominates the mountain iconography of local businesses and artwork and is featured on the masthead of the local newspaper. The effort to preserve the open view of Massive from across the Hayden Meadows near Leadville is yet another indication of the peak's significance in local place attachment (Morrow 2001). Mining is clearly central to Leadville's character, but Massive and Elbert are each also community icons of pride, supplanting the Mosquito Fourteeners in a celebration of beauty, wilderness quality, and elevation.

Like Leadville, Buena Vista (population 2,195; elevation 7,954 feet) is close to several Fourteeners; but, unlike Leadville, no ambiguity exists as to the local peak of identity. Mount Princeton dominates the town's iconography through business names and signs, the Chamber of Commerce logo and promotional brochures, the official town logo and signs (Figure 9), the masthead of the local newspaper, and five current postcards, including one that misidentifies it as Mount Antero, the next Fourteener to the south. Nine local business or organization signs feature a faithful representation of a nearby mountain; in every instance it is Princeton. One of the well-known Collegiate Peaks, Princeton is neither the highest of the group nor the closest to town, yet it is the only mountain that prompts local residents to say, "It's what we look at each morning to remind us why we live here," and "It's who we are, the icon of Buena Vista" (Figure 10). The accessibility of the peak is important to the role of Princeton in local place identity, but even more significant are its visibility, shape, color, and qualification as a Fourteener.

Mount Princeton is the gateway peak in views from the highways leading into Buena Vista, especially coming west over Trout Creek Pass on U.S. Route 24. The massif's distinctive trio of pointed summits, as viewed from the east, sets Princeton apart from the other Collegiate Peaks in local iconography. When the *Chaffee County Times* changed its masthead in 1995 to show a detailed representation of Mount Princeton, the announcement describing the change touted the "timeless majesty of

the Mount Princeton trio of peaks" (Chaffee County Times 1995). The Chalk Cliffs on Princeton's southeastern flank also add to its character on postcards.¹² Furthermore, the entire massif of Princeton is easily visible from town, with no intervening foothills. The other Collegiate Peaks, with equally distinctive but less visible shapes and elevations, are set farther into the range.

As case studies, Salida (population 5,504; elevation 7,036 feet) and Poncha Springs (population 466; elevation 7,469 feet), the southernmost incorporated communities along the high eastern front of the Sawatch, differ from Minturn, Leadville, and Buena Vista. The local mining heritage is inescapable—the smokestack of a former smelter towers over Salida—yet mining as an icon is far less obvious today than is the unambiguous peak of identity, Mount Shavano (Figure 11). Like Princeton, Shavano is a gateway mountain, dominating the approach to Salida–Poncha Springs from the east and also prominent in approaches from other directions. At the southern end of the Upper Arkansas River Valley, Shavano is at a geographical fulcrum, a crossroads of highways and landforms, with the Sawatch to the north and the Sangre de Cristo Range to the southeast and with passes leading south into the San Luis Valley and west over the Continental Divide.

Easily outdistancing all cultural features and other mountains, the iconography of Shavano is rivaled only by that of the Arkansas River, one of the premier whitewater recreation rivers in the nation. Signs, logos, postcards, and local residents all proclaim the significance of Shavano in the local place identity. One resident dismisses Tenderfoot Hill, the small, steep rise on the edge of Salida that sports a hillside letter, as "nothing but novelty." Another resident says of potential city icons, "Mountains and rivers are the only things that last."

Important to Shavano's identity is the uninterrupted, full view of the massif; views of the peak are framed by the northwest–southeast orientation of Salida's street grid, which parallels the former railroad right-of-way. Even more distinctive is a snow formation that appears on Shavano's east side for a few weeks each spring. As the snow melts from the summit and ridges, a lingering snow-filled crevice resembles an angel with uplifted arms. The legend of the Angel of Shavano, whose melting snow sustains life in the valley below, is an indispensable part of Shavano's iconography (Everett and Hutchinson 1963). Shavano's angel legend and visibility combine with its Fourteener status to assure that it remains more central in local place identity than do other nearby distinctive peaks, such as Mount Ouray, a high Thirteener in the southern Sawatch, and pointy Methodist Mountain, at the northern end of the Sangre de Cristo.

FIG. 9—Mount Princeton on the logo of Buena Vista, Colorado. (Photograph by the author, August 2001)

FIG. 10—Mount Princeton and Buena Vista, Colorado. The former Chaffee County Courthouse, now occupied by the Buena Vista Heritage Museum, is visible at the right edge of the photograph. (Photograph by the author, August 2001)

FIG. 11—Diana Blake views Mount Shavano (left) and Tabeguache Mountain (center) from the southern slope of Mount Antero. In the 1870s Antero was a Uintah Ute chief, and Shavano was a Tabeguache Ute chief. (Photograph by the author, August 1990)

FIG. 12—A model-railroad diorama in the Buena Vista Heritage Museum depicts Mount Shavano as the peak of identity for Salida. The painting includes the Angel of Shavano snow formation and Salida's preserved smelter smokestack. (Photograph by the author, August 2001)

A diorama of railroads in the Upper Arkansas River Valley displayed in the Buena Vista Heritage Museum succinctly portrays the local peaks of identity. On the backdrop are painted many mountains, but there is room for only one or two peaks behind each town. Although the mountains in any direction from town could have been portrayed in the diorama, faithful representations of Massive and Elbert appear behind Leadville; of Princeton, behind Buena Vista; and of Shavano, behind Salida (Figure 12). The primary factors in creating Sawatch peaks of identity include Fourteener status, massif visibility, shape, snow cover, and legendary history. But in the identity of each Sawatch town, Shavano, Elbert, Massive, and Holy Cross likely play lesser roles than Princeton does in the character of Buena Vista. Not only is Princeton within the memorably nicknamed Collegiate Peaks, it has the distinctive trio of summits, the Chalk Cliffs, a stand-alone quality, easy accessibility by road, and a lack of iconographic competition from mining or from the Arkansas River.

PEAKS OF IDENTITY

Other strong examples of the Fourteeners as peaks of identity exist outside the Sawatch. The one with the strongest ethnic tie is Culebra Peak, otherwise known as La Sierra, the southernmost Colorado Fourteener in the Sangre de Cristo Range.

With a tradition of communal land use by Spanish Americans that dates back to the 1850s, private ownership of the mountain since 1960 has brought strife to the local sense of place (Weinberg 1997; Wilson 1999). Climbers who are attempting to summit every Colorado Fourteener have also experienced angst because of the restrictions placed on access to Culebra (Meyers 2001).

A Fourteener may be a peak of identity both for a local community and for a larger region. Mount Evans is a peak of identity for Denver, but so is Longs Peak, more distant yet higher and more rugged. As the centerpiece of Rocky Mountain National Park, Longs is also arguably a peak of identity for the whole Rocky Mountain region. Appearing in countless print advertisements, television commercials, calendars, and magazine cover images, Mount Sneffels and the Maroon Bells are additional examples of Fourteeners that represent all western mountains as ideal nature in regional place identity.

This overlap of spatial resolutions for peaks of identity is illustrated best by commodified and contested Pikes Peak, "the mountain that defines the Colorado Springs region, Colorado, and even America" (Colorado Springs 2001). Considered by many to be the most spectacular Fourteener, because of its tremendous 8,000-foot rise from the plains (Writers' Program . . . 1941, 4), Pikes Peak is also a symbolic landmark of the entire West. The mountain was popularized by Zebulon Pike's first summit attempt, the "Pikes Peak or Bust" gold rush, and the foot trail, roadway, and cog railway that have each, in turn, led to a summit ultimately riddled with development and memorials. The rich symbolism of Pikes Peak and the summit view that inspired the lyrics to "America the Beautiful" combine to result in its promotion as "America's Mountain" (McChrystal 1999). Even amid such favorable hyperbole, the idealized nature of the Fourteeners has led to controversy over the environmental damage caused by the Pikes Peak Highway (Rutledge 1999).

The link among nature, place identity, and the Fourteeners depends on their conceptualization as a distinct group. Without this assemblage, a few peaks of more than 14,000 feet would have a strong image, but others would be essentially ignored. Elevation is a critical, but not the only, factor in Fourteener symbolism. Mountains barely above that elevation are heralded as peaks of identity for local communities, the state, the region, and the nation, yet peaks just below that elevation are often hardly known. But elevation is merely the gatekeeper into the Fourteener club: Once in this elite group of mountains, other traits, including shape, accessibility, and the aesthetics of visibility, are as important as elevation in determining the nature of place identity.

The increasing emphasis on climbing other Colorado mountains, such as the Thirteeners, the Centennial Peaks, or county high points, is not likely to cause a significant lessening of Fourteener use, nor will less promotion of the Fourteeners by the public land agencies.¹³ The Fourteeners are already overburdened with attention; their well-established image and marketing allure are more likely to trickle down to other mountains than to diminish. The accelerating commodification of the Fourteeners in material goods has a silver lining, however, because many prod-

ucts promote environmental awareness and celebrate a love of and pride in the mountains as peaks of identity.

The symbolism of Colorado's Fourteeners has served as a dynamic and potent force for a century and a half. The future will probably bring change to their place identity. What we see as overuse today may be seen as acceptable use in the future. As their popularity continues to spread beyond Coloradans, mountaineers, and peakbaggers, the Fourteeners will increasingly be viewed as symbols of higher ideals regarding nature and the management of mountain land use. Though not yet a household name outside the state and the region, the fifty-four Fourteeners will become increasingly central in place identity, as symbols not only of wondrous scenery but also of how mountains should appear in the idealized natural world.

NOTES

1. Fourteen thousand feet equals 4,267 meters, but the metric system fails to generate enthusiasm when it comes to the height of mountains in the United States (Roach 1999). The closest round metric figure, 4,000 meters, includes well over 600 peaks (Winner and Winner 1977), far too many to achieve a strong identity. Furthermore, every climbing club in the United States bases its criteria on feet, so I use that measurement system throughout this article.

2. Colorado also has the highest mean elevation, approximately 6,800 feet, of any state in the nation (Writers' Program . . . 1941).

3. In this article I adopt the traditional count of fifty-four Fourteeners (Borneman and Lampert 1998). The consensus for determining a separate mountain relies on a 300-foot drop to the saddle that connects two higher elevations. An illustration of the arbitrary nature of this consensus is the fact that both North Maroon Peak and El Diente Peak fail the standard yet are accepted as Fourteeners. A distance of 0.25–0.50 mile between summits is sometimes used as a standard for defining separate mountains. Some mountaineers use a list of fifty-five Colorado Fourteeners, which includes Challengenger Point, approximately 0.20 mile distant from and 300 feet lower than Kit Carson Peak (Roach 1999). Some massifs have multiple summits that exceed 14,000 feet, as do the five summits of Mount Massive, but they count as only one Fourteener with the application of these standards.

4. Ironically, in 2001 the stewards were moved from busier mountains to La Plata Peak, in response to four fatalities in the preceding three years on that Fourteener. The stewards' emphasis on education correspondingly shifted from "Leave No Trace" to hiker preparedness (Rowan 2001).

5. Although postcards and scenic brochures are intended primarily for consumption by tourists, local residents typically select their content.

6. Some examples of mountains below 14,000 feet that are peaks of identity in Colorado are Horsetooth Mountain (Fort Collins), Fisher Peak (Trinidad), Grand Mesa (Grand Junction), Sleeping Ute Mountain (Cortez), the La Plata Range (Durango), Mount Kendall (Silverton), Mount Abrams (Ouray), and Mount Sopris (Carbondale).

7. Harvard, Columbia, Oxford, Yale, and Princeton constitute the Collegiate Peaks, a group that first gained an identity in 1869 (Borneman and Lampert 1998). The expansive Collegiate Peaks Wilderness Area, designated in 1980, contains eight Fourteeners, but not Princeton.

8. Mount Elbert, Mount Harvard, and Mount Belford in the Sawatch were among the first peaks to receive attention from the CFI. Although these Fourteeners feature great heights, their relatively moderate steepness attracts many beginning peakbaggers.

9. The Sawatch Anticline formed approximately 70 million years ago, during the Laramide Orogeny, with the Sawatch Range on its western flank and the Mosquito Range on its eastern flank. Oligocene batholiths later added to the mountain-building sequence of the central and southern Sawatch. As the mountains rose, mineral-rich solutions seeped upward through fissures and crystallized to produce Colorado's mineral belt, a 50-mile-wide mineralized zone extending from near Boulder to

near Durango. Subsequently, crustal extensions produced the Rio Grande Rift that splits the Sawatch Anticline. Thousands of feet of overlying rocks were eroded to expose granite, schist, and gneiss; Pleistocene glaciation scoured the Sawatch; and the Upper Arkansas River eventually occupied the rift (Chronic 1980; Karnuta 1995). Mount Antero, in the Sawatch, features the highest mineral locality in North America (Borneman and Lampert 1998).

10. Mount of the Holy Cross is visible from only one road in the state: an unpaved route over Shrine Pass. The mountain rises on the southwestern horizon, nearly 20 miles from a rustic Forest Service viewpoint along the road. The mountain can also be seen from the top of a Vail ski lift. Viewing any aspect of the mountain from a closer proximity requires a moderate hike after a long drive on the rough Tigiwon Road; the best vista of the cross on the eastern face requires a strenuous climb of Notch Mountain.

11. In 2001 I collected every postcard featuring a Fourteener that was for sale in the local communities. Of the fifteen Sawatch Fourteeners, only the five I examined in this study appear on the postcards.

12. Containing no chalk, the Chalk Cliffs are named for a white, chalky appearance caused by the hydrothermal alteration of Mount Princeton's quartz monzonite (Karnuta 1995). The Chalk Cliffs are featured on three current postcards of Mount Princeton, including one on which it is misidentified as Mount Antero.

13. An example of depublishing the Fourteeners occurred in the summer of 2001, when the Leadville Ranger District and CFI agreed to stop distributing hikers' cards on which were printed the Leave No Trace ethics and a checklist of the Fourteeners. Their concern was that the checklist could be promoting use of the Fourteeners to an extent that the Leave No Trace ethics would be impossible to uphold (Rowan 2001).

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