

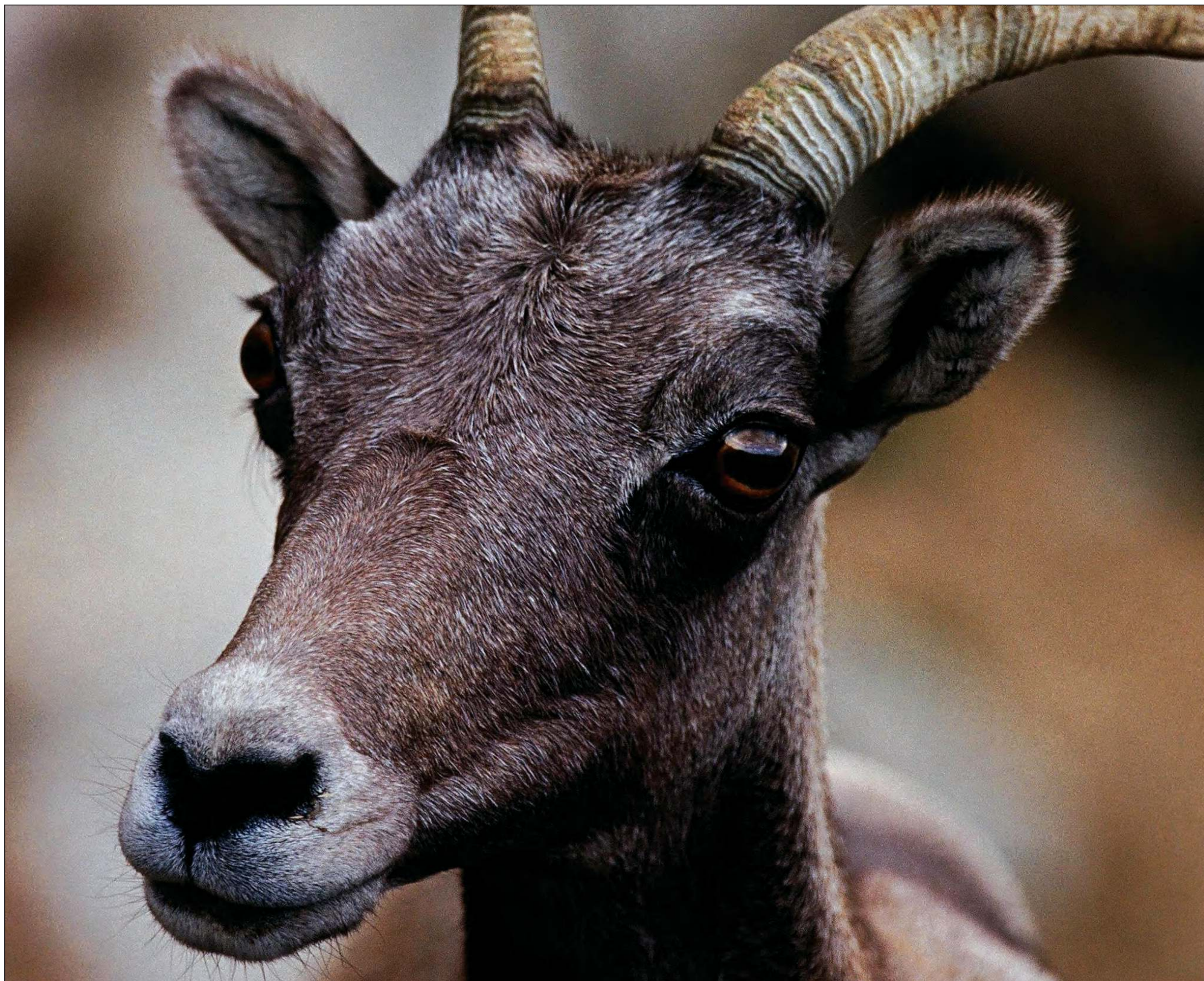
# Weekly Register-Call

COLORADO'S OLDEST NEWSPAPER

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NEWSPAPER OF RECORD FOR GILPIN COUNTY, BLACK HAWK, AND CENTRAL CITY • THURSDAY, JULY 1, 2010 • 75 CENTS

- Mine reclamation hauling to be done on back roads. [GOVERNMENT p2, 15](#)
- Madama Butterfly Opera opens to good reviews. [ENTERTAINMENT p3](#)
- High Peaks Art Festival in Nederland displays creative talents. [ARTS p13](#)
- Volunteers clean up Red Men Cemetery and four others. [HISTORICAL p14](#)
- Nederland band student chosen to march in Greeley Stampede. [MUSICAL p17](#)



DAVE GIBSON

**Wild thing!** As with the greeting by this bighorn sheep on Mount Evans, wildlife encounters don't get any better than in Colorado! **p12**

# Walkin' on the wild side of Mount Evans

## Spending a day on a famous "fourteener"

By Dave Gibson

Originally called Mt. Rosa, Mt. Evans was renamed so in 1895 in honor of Colorado's second Governor of Colorado Territory,

John Evans. In 1917 Denver's Mayor Robert Speer, with the Pike's Peak road attracting tourists from his town, secured the funding for a new road to the summit of Mt. Evans. Only able to be worked during the summertime, it took ten years to complete and opened on October 4th 1927. Paved three years later, it remains the highest

paved road in the world.

Taking Colorado Scenic Byway Hwy.103 south out of Idaho Springs, one rises 7,000 ft. to the terminus of Hwy. 5 (Mount Evans Scenic Byway), just below the summit of Mt. Evans. Daytime highs at the top only reach sixty degrees - if you are lucky - so it is advisable to bring extra clothing. Snow is a possibility on any day of the year. Mt. Evans Research Station's caretaker Ralph Reiner has recorded wind-chill temperatures at 198 degrees below zero and wind-speeds of 224 mph. Up to 500 inches of snow fall there every winter. Despite the harsh conditions, a few creatures find the alpine tundra environment to be an ideal habitat.

Mt. Evans has always been one of my favorite and most productive locations to view wildlife. I saw my first mountain goat at Mt. Evans. Introduced in 1947, they may be displacing native bighorn sheep who also reside in the area. As I wind up the road past the Nature Center, the ancient bristlecone pine trees start to thin. Some of them have been around for over 2,000 years! On my right is a hillside where I have fond memories of an hour I spent with two white-tailed ptarmigans several years ago. It is also where I observed a long-tailed weasel checking each rock crevice for a potential meal. Unfortunately, I don't see any ptarmigan or weasels today and I

keep motoring. Along the way daredevil yellow-bellied marmots sun themselves at the edge, and sometimes even in the road. Potholes are the entrances to their dens which can reach 23 ft. in depth. A marmot barks its shrill alarm call a few times and ducks into its hole. Loosely translated it means: "Car tire! Car tire!" At a bend with a breathtaking view of an emerald-colored lake, bighorn sheep approach visitors for hand-outs (which are strictly prohibited to protect the sheep). One year I informed a woman that she was not supposed to feed them, but when my head was turned she slipped the bighorn a couple of Cheetos and drove off. Even with their adorable big brown eyes, today the habituated sheep get only salt from the sweaty hands of enchanted tourists and the roadway.

Ten miles up the Mt. Evans road approaching Summit Lake, the permafrost has buckled the pavement. Beyond, I notice a small furry creature scurrying on a talus slope. Similar in size to a golden-mantled ground squirrel, it is a pika or "whistling hare." Often seen before heard, this one is busily gathering plant matter and setting it out to dry in the sun. After it has cured, he will stash the bounty in his burrow. The summer season is short and only the most industrious will survive.

The endless vista of Denver and

the Great Plains is fronted in shades of blue from nearby mountain ridges. It is said that you can see for 100 miles from the top. Working my way in that direction, the treeless terrain becomes other-worldly. Mooncape rocks jut toward the azure sky. Several of the stones resemble marmots as I do double-takes in search of photography subjects. I spot a herd of seven mountain goats in the distance. Making a slow serpentine approach, I sit down in fairly close proximity to them. Unperturbed by my presence they go about their business of grazing and tending their young. The nannies eat while two kids bound about in play. Two sub-adults and a billy, whose strands of woolly white fur gently drift in the breeze, round out the group. They slide closer as they feed, at one point coming within six feet of me!

At road's end lie the stone ruins of the Crest House, which burned down because of a propane explosion in 1979. It used to house a gift shop/snack bar, but now is a rustic windbreak from which to view the surrounding peaks. For those wanting to bag a "fourteener" (one of Colorado's 54 peaks over 14,000 ft.), the summit of 14,264 ft. Mount Evans is only a short trail and 116 ft. of elevation away. I elect to head down as I don't want to climb another fifty three.



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