

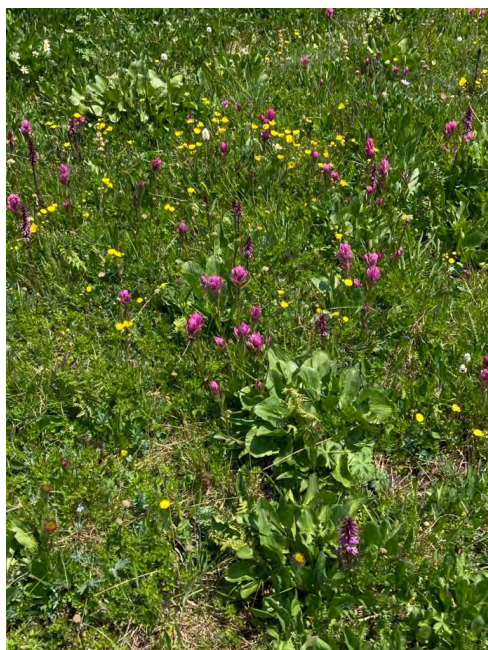
When a Three-Mile Hike Turns into Five

Maryann Gaug ©2024

I fell asleep excited about the next day's hike up Mayflower Gulch in the shadow of the craggy peaks of the Tenmile Range. I hadn't journeyed up there in years. Judging from the wildflowers on the other side of the ridge where I had hiked a week earlier, the fields of color near the Boston Mine cabins up Mayflower promised to be spectacular. I would hike three miles round trip, giving me plenty of time for flower photos.

Imagine my disappointment when I awoke on July 23 to wildfire smoke haze of the thick kind. I groaned, not sure if I should subject my huffing and puffing lungs to the pollution. The trail would start at 11,000 feet and steadily ascend 600 feet in 1.5 miles to the remains of the old town.

My desire to hike amidst gorgeous wildflowers overcame my concern about my lungs, and off I drove to the trailhead. I found a spot in the parking lot among other hikers' metal steeds. I wandered over to the bulletin board to check the map and information, plus to decide what clothes to wear. It was chilly when I arrived, but I knew the sun would warm me up along the trail. Suddenly I heard, "I know you." I turned and said, "I know you, too!" I hadn't seen Audeen since before Covid. She and her husband Ken were leading a group of 20 hikers from the Denver area up the trail to the cabins and beyond. I had realized the night before that the trail climbed much higher, another 500 feet in 1 mile.



The hike along the dirt road where wagons once rumbled led me through spruce-fir forest. Even though a lot of people passed me, I enjoyed stretches of road by myself. Not many flowers bloomed along the way. I reached the sunny open upper meadows where the old cabins and some mining remains reminded me of times gone by. This area had bustled with mining activity after 1900.

Audeen was eating a sandwich when I arrived at the cabins. She had waited for me, and we walked together for a while, attempting to identify flowers and a white-crowned sparrow. Amazes me that the bird nests, lays eggs, and rears young at that elevation.

A passing woman said, "Maryann!" Maxine is a friend of my friend, Jacque. I had just visited her in assisted living the day before. I hadn't seen Maxine in a number of years. After a short conversation, including an update on Jacque's health,

we parted ways. What a coincidence!

By that time I had decided that I would hike 1 mile farther up the road to the old mining buildings. The wildflowers did not disappoint along the way. They filled the open meadows with various shapes and colors. I kept a steady pace, figuring I'd eat lunch up high then take flower photos on the way down. Near the old mine buildings I met Ken and his friends. Nice to chat with them for a little while. I headed off to inspect the tram building.

Following a little trail through the meadow and some moist areas, the flowers outdid themselves. Pinkish purple elephant heads, magenta paintbrush (my favorite), yellow sunflowers, and daisies surrounded me. I walked carefully to be sure I didn't crush any, especially when sitting to take photos.

Arriving at the old buildings, I found a big rock for my lunch perch next to a dilapidated cabin. The tramhouse, at 12,100 feet, still had cable running up to the Boston Mine higher on the mountainside. Tram cars had carried the ore from the mine down to the tramhouse on the cables. From there it was loaded onto wagons to be taken to a smelter. Amazing that the perhaps 40-foot multi-storied building still stands today, its mechanisms in ruin. Such a beautiful day! Except for the haze. The craggy peaks provided a stark contrast to the lush green meadows and the mining history I sat immersed in. A little chipmunk ran through the plants and into a bush. Sitting there was my idea of heaven!



I slowly headed back down on a different trail to meet the main dirt road. I crossed a sparkling little creek lined with bright white four-petaled bittercress, yellow cinquefoil, and pearly rose crown. I found miniscule pink pygmy bitterroot, no larger than my thumb nail, hiding under other plants. Blue harebells and purple daisies added to the palette of the natural painting. White bistort and creamy marsh marigolds basked in the sun. I passed a Summit County Open Space sign. In 2009 the county had purchased the mining claims in the area to protect them from future mining and to preserve their history.



As I hiked down toward the cabins, yellow paintbrush replaced the magenta variety. Sunflowers, native white thistles, white chickweed, alpine sagewort, purple daisies, and sunflowers entertained my eyes. The throngs of hikers

from the morning had thinned, leaving me more time to explore the old town and peek through a few remaining windows. Some cabins were only an outline of logs revealing where dreams and hopes of striking it rich once thrived. I can't even imagine what everyday life must have been like in the harsh winter environment.

Wandering around the cabins, a voice called out, "Maryann!" I had just been thinking of Rosanne and her husband a couple of weeks earlier. And there she was in front of me! After retiring, she had moved from Summit County to California. What fun catching up with her!

Because I decided to walk the extra mile to the tramhouse, I enjoyed the marvelous display of high alpine flowers and grasses. Who could have anticipated meeting four friends from the past, whom I hadn't seen in several years, in the high alpine environment of Mayflower Gulch?

Hiking to the tramhouse enriched my day so much. Meeting old friends was a bonus. I returned to the trailhead high on the day's events. I'm thankful that my 3-mile hike turned into that 5-mile hike!



The tramhouse and craggy peaks