

# The Long Way Home: An Unexpected Moose Encounter

October 2024

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Photographing majestic elk during the rutting season in Estes Park, Colorado, and Rocky Mountain National Park was an unforgettable experience. The rut is the mating season for elk, during which males compete for females by bugling, fighting, and displaying their size. The eerie sound of their bugling, coupled with the crisp air, stunning landscapes, and the gentle rustle of leaves, made for a photographer's dream weekend. Little did I know that my trip home would offer an unexpected wildlife encounter.

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On Sunday morning, I received a text alert informing me that Trail Ridge Road was closed due to an early fall snowstorm. Trail Ridge Road is the highest continuous paved road in the United States, cutting through Rocky Mountain National Park. It connects Estes Park on the east side to Grand Lake on the west side of the Continental Divide. The road offers magnificent views in every direction and allows visitors to experience life high in the mountains at an elevation of 12,183 feet above sea level. While Trail Ridge Road is immensely beautiful, it is also our main route home to the far northwest corner of Colorado. My heart sank at the thought of taking the long detour around the national park, which would add two hours to our already five-hour drive. But as fate would have it, the universe had a special photography moment in store for me.



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Driving at 60 mph, I shifted my focus from the closed road to the excitement of the beautiful snowy Colorado landscape. Suddenly, everyone in the car shouted, "Moose!" It was a genuine moment of thrill. Quickly checking my mirrors, I pulled over to the side of the road, adrenaline pumping, hoping the moose would not run off into the forest. I made a U-turn and raced back, equipped with my camera and feeling slightly panicked. Upon arrival, I was greeted by a breathtaking sight: a bull moose, a cow moose, and a young calf



were peacefully grazing by the side of the road. My heart raced with excitement as I reached for my camera, knowing how rare it is to capture a bull, cow, and calf moose together in the wild. However, as I snapped my first shot, a wave of frustration washed over me. All my camera settings were

still adjusted for the snowy mountain scenery I had been photographing earlier. The exposure was off, my shutter speed was too slow, and my white balance was set for a bright, snowy landscape. In frustration, I muttered, "Oh please don't run into the forest." Once I adjusted my settings, I captured the moose in various poses: the bull moose with its antlers silhouetted against a backdrop of golden aspen trees, and the cow moose gently guarding her calf.

What initially felt like an annoying detour transformed into an unforgettable photography opportunity. As I later reviewed my shots, I couldn't help but feel grateful for the unexpected adventure.



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This moose encounter reinforced the importance of being prepared, adaptable, and ready to seize the moment. Nature photography is full of surprises, and you never know what you



might find just around the corner— sometimes, it's even better than what you originally planned.

Happy shooting, and remember to always keep your camera ready for the next adventure!

Steve Cochrane Photography

