Golden Rocks: The geology and mining history of Golden, Colorado

Saturday May 16, 2020, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Limit 20: $40 member/$50 non-member

Trip Leader: Donna Anderson, Ph.D., who has been working on a book with the same title for the last 1.5 years.

Golden lies in a confined valley between mountainous geologic features that mark the transition from the Great Plains to the Rocky Mountains. No other setting is like it along the Front Range of northeastern Colorado.

Iconic North and South Table Mountains first meet the eye in Golden’s unique landscape. Rising 600 feet above the Golden Valley, they form the sentinels that separate Golden from the metropolitan area to the east. Castle Rock, the prominent peak on South Table Mountain that forms part of Golden’s city logo, rises steeply up 650 feet above the Golden Valley floor, commanding city views. The dramatic 1500-ft rise of the Rocky Mountain Front Range dominates the west side of Golden.

Apart from the dramatic landscape, what’s so special about Golden’s geology? Hidden in its rocks, Golden has one of the best-preserved stories of how the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains evolved over the last 300+ million years. The rocks in Golden tell the story of two mountain-building episodes; two mass extinctions of life on Earth; dinosaurs and woolly mammoths walking across the land at different times; lava flows running along the land surface; long periods of being under oceans; tropical to subtropical climates; and massive erosion and glacial flooding. Not only that, 19th century settlers exploited Golden’s rocks to start industries, some of which have fallen away, whereas others flourish today. To a geologist, then, this is why Golden rocks.

The Trip will begin and end in Golden with the option of after-trip refreshment at the Golden City Brewery, a geologist-owned and run brewpub. Two hiking stops will cover approximately 2 and 1 miles, respectively, with a lunch and overview stop in-between. Hiking will be on dirt and paved trails: the afternoon hike is very steep but short. In case of bad weather, the trip will be run a week later, on Saturday May 23.