

Published August 21, 2023. Editor's Headline: "Hiking for the Birds."

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Last week I participated in a hike in the Snowies organized by the Cheyenne Audubon Society, a group I occasionally joined when I lived nearby. I relocated to Saratoga last year but thus far have ventured only on a couple of modest mountain walks. So, when the email arrived announcing the bird walk at an elevation of "over 10,000 feet," I was ready to go. I spread the word among the gardeners of the town's community garden where I am active, and three more people signed up, a couple who volunteered to drive everyone, and a participant from France recently relocated to Saratoga with husband and child, who was grateful for her first outing into the vastness of the Snowy Range.

The hike's destination was Miner's Cabin on Tipple Trail, which began near Lake Marie (elevation 10,500) and covered about two and a half miles to a parking lot near the former cabin and its adjacent mine, where a hundred years ago miners brought forth gold, silver, and copper. Two Audubon members volunteered to drive shuttle for drivers, so we wouldn't have to hike back to our cars, which would have been too strenuous for folks like me.

It was a gorgeous day, wind still and sunny, somewhat cool with blue skies. A cloudburst during the night had left droplets glittering on the forest-floor plants. The air was slightly damp which, at altitude, is more comfortable than bone-dry weather. The birds seemed to enjoy it, too, for they were out in force, foraging and surveying their surroundings. The experts among us spotted and identified many a specimen, some of which stayed put long enough for me to get my binoculars focused.

One in our group is an expert on mushrooms, which we learned to examine as we walked. Another member, a geologist, pointed out the aggregates of coarse rocks and sharp-edged boulders and, whenever we came upon a sizable rock jutting from the earth, explained its striations.

The walk had its challenges. Exposed tree roots made you stumble if you didn't watch out, and some creek crossings consisted of boulders with uneven surfaces. I was glad for my walking stick, and so was the French woman to whom I lent one of mine.

I had recently experienced an "I could have died" moment and was anxious to reestablish my grip on reality, since the incident was in some ways my own fault: I overheated and fainted in the so-called Hobo Pool, which is the local mineral-springs hot pool. Luckily, an off-duty emergency responder and his wife saw what was happening, jumped in, and pulled me out. Afterward I only remembered trying to get to my water bottle at far the side of the pool and finding the water suddenly seemed too heavy to move through. Then it was "lights out" until I awoke stretched out on the concrete walkway that circles the pool.

The couple who saved me are local residents who maintain a small business here. A few days after the rescue I visited the young woman and invited them to attend a music evening of mine in a couple of weeks, organized by Friends of the Library, at which I would mention their efforts and ask them to tell our audience a little about their business. She said she'd be able to do so but her husband would be on duty.

Since then I have heard of other visitors to the pool who passed out and had to be pulled to safety. I also heard of someone who died in the hot waters. The pool is open 24/7 and free of charge, so no lifeguard is on duty. People who frequent it have learned to pace themselves. I know now to be mindful of my blood pressure, which is on the low side. It seems, the heat serves to lower anyone's blood pressure, which can quickly reach a danger point for me.

For the remainder of the summer, I'm swimming laps in the adjoining swimming pool which, in Saratoga, is free for people over 65. I'll venture into the Hobo Pool again when it gets cold, and I'll limit myself to brief periods of immersion.

As for the hike in the mountains, it got me reacquainted with some of the walkers from Cheyenne; plus, it forced me to focus on the Snowy Range's spectacular beauty, its birds, and the wildlife we encountered along the way. Shortly before we arrived at our meeting point in the morning, a moose crossed the road directly in front of us, ambling along at a leisurely pace. Our driver was quick on the controls and slowed down while Angélique shrieked with delight, "A moose! A moose!" The sighting was the high of the day for my French friend, who'd been eager to spot one of these creatures. I myself was just glad to live another day and experience its joys and challenges.