

A R O U N D

BOULDER

Our Mountain Parks

**ARE WE LOVING
THEM TO DEATH?**

SPOTLIGHT ON RECREATION

*Also Featuring Boulder's Best
Activities, Entertainment,
Dining, Shopping, Events,
Mountain Escapes, and More...*



PUBLISHER'S WELCOME

Welcome to North America's Best



ON THE COVER: Boulder's Mountain Park System is a haven for rock climbers, as well as many other avid recreationists, creating intense pressure and new policies for multiple use. See cover story on page AB6. (Cover photo by TR Youngstrom/Outside Images.)

WELCOME TO *AROUND BOULDER*, a special supplement to *FLATIRONS—The Boulder Magazine*, recipient of the 1994 Gold Ozzie Award for Best Overall Magazine Design in North America. We are extremely proud of this coveted honor, recently showcased in the cover story of the January 1995 issue of *Folio*: the industry's leading trade publication for magazine management.

As you'll plainly see, *Around Boulder* offers readers the same award-winning quality as the rest of the magazine. Stitched into the center of each issue of *FLATIRONS* and distributed separately statewide as its own publication, *Around Boulder* contains a wealth of information, including a six-month calendar of events, an exclusive "Our Town" shopping, dining and service directory, as well as a unique "Mountain Escapes" lodging section for anyone planning to visit Steamboat or Vail this spring or summer.

Every *Around Boulder* also features a cover story spotlighting one of the area's premier amenities or attractions. In this issue, we present an informed overview of the multiple uses and overuses of Boulder's Mountain Park System, which is under more pressure today than ever before. Writer and recreationist David Kirby explains why climbers, hikers, kayakers, cyclists and others are being asked to make compromises to help preserve the region's most popular natural amenity.

Elsewhere in these pages, you'll find out how dedicated restaurateurs Silvano and Elvira DeLuca have created a genuine labor of love — an authentic Italian

trattoria, Caffè Antica Roma — on the Pearl Street Mall. Obviously, we can't cover everything there is to see and do in one issue. Rather, we offer a selective blend of subject matter to help residents and visitors alike better enjoy our wonderfully diverse community.

If you're reading this in the center supplement of *FLATIRONS Magazine*, please enjoy the host of other fine editorial features found throughout the publication, showcasing some of the best and brightest of Boulder's journalists and photographers.

You can also learn much about Boulder and Colorado's Front Range from the stunning display advertisements that grace these pages, most designed by our award-winning art department, showcasing the region's top businesses. These companies share *FLATIRONS Magazine's* high standards of excellence in their products and service, and are well worth a visit or a phone call.

See you *Around Boulder!*

The Publishers

Recycled Paper



es, it's true. The magazine you hold in your hands is printed entirely on recycled paper (Mira Gloss Book, manufactured by International Paper). The paper stock is comprised of 50% recycled fibers, with 20% added post-consumer waste. The printing inks used contain a percentage of soy base. Our printer meets all current mandatory and optional federal Resource Conservation Recovery Act (RCRA) standards.

We challenge our fellow publishers in Colorado and across the nation to join us in becoming more eco-responsible. By saving this issue, to re-read and share with other readers, you are also being a friend to the environment. Thank you.

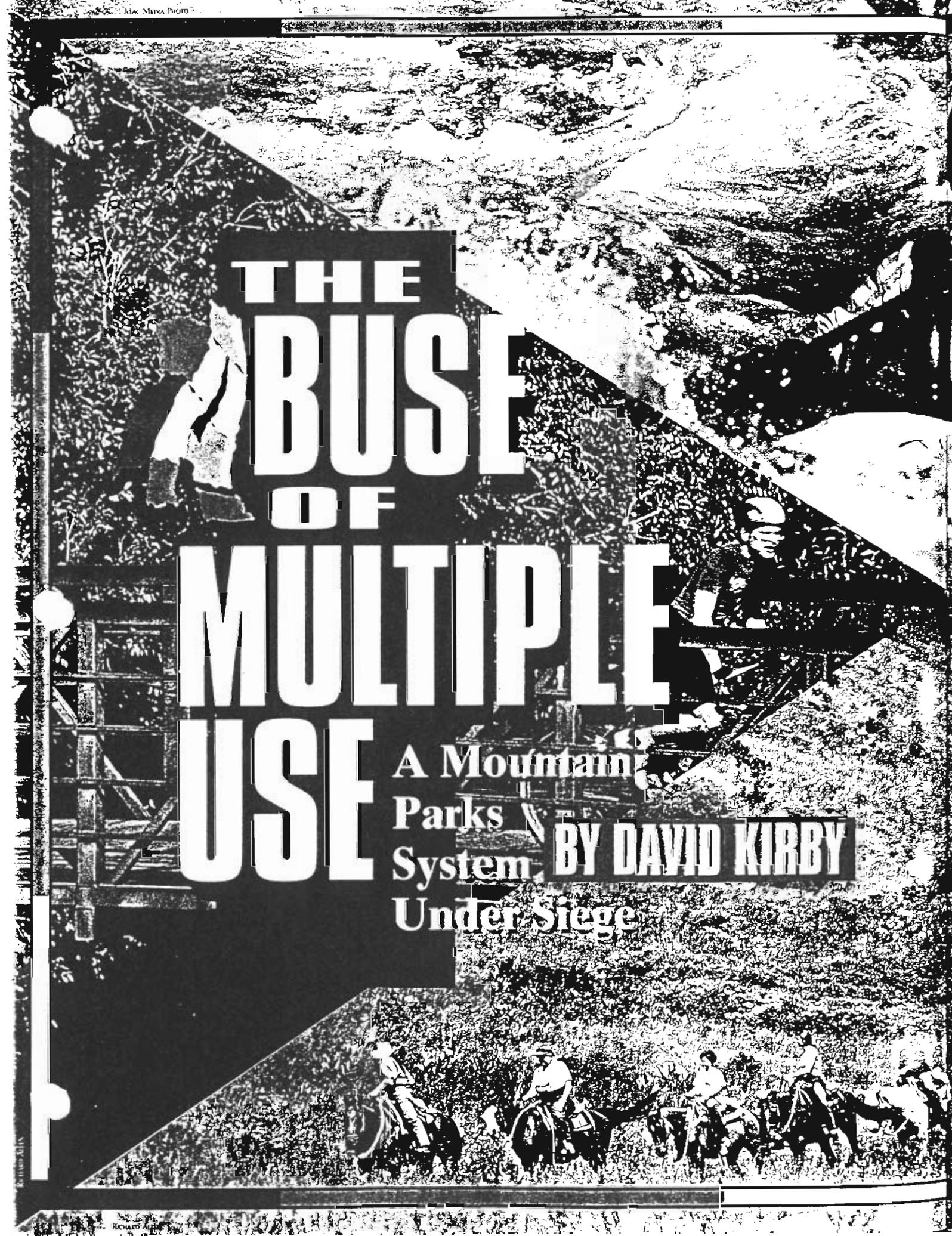


FLATIRONS—The Boulder Magazine recently won the Gold Ozzie Award for Best Overall Design in North America. CEO and publisher Michael Barry (L), creative director Laurie Fetterolf and executive editor Rolly Wahl show their delight upon receiving this prestigious award and others.

THE ABUSE OF MULTIPLE USE

A Mountain
Parks
System
Under Siege

BY DAVID KIRBY







VEN ON A CHILLY, gray Sunday afternoon, the Mt. Sanitas trailhead is a busy place. Two trails lead north from this point. The wide and gently sloped Mt. Sanitas Valley trail snakes between the smaller eastern and larger western hogbacks, carrying a healthy flow of foot traffic.

But there's just as much action on the other, steeper mountain trail. Within minutes, you encounter runners, dog walkers and hikers. As the trail starts to climb and wind around the back of the hogback, the careful work of the City Open Space Department comes into view. Dozens of logs imbedded into the trail provide a crazily spaced staircase effect, designed to minimize the effects of erosion. Once around the back, the route winds north, tucked beside plates

of Lykins Formation rock. The hand of man has come down with surgical precision here: The trail is deep and clear of debris, and beside it are

stretches of 2 x 4 planks designed to hold back the fragile soils, carefully netted to keep them from sliding down into the trail itself.

It is a strange semblance of a mountain environment — wild and scenic, yet planned and manipulated, carefully framed and nurtured, like the beauty of a wild animal's gait behind the bars of a wildlife exhibit.

If you stand on the trail and let your eyes wander over the short stretch you've just come, you can visualize the pitch of the slope, the lazy recline of the hillside plunging down to Sunshine Canyon, and, momentarily, you can imagine the natural state of this dramatic place, and the trail becomes something more like a scar.

But at the same moment you pause to reflect. With a growing community of nearly 100,000 just over the rocks, this beautiful place could be a tangle of ephemeral, knotted trails, none maintained, an assault of little armies, one set of footprints at a time, year after year. Cast in this light, the trail seems a logical, probably enlightened enterprise.

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"If there weren't a town here, this whole area would probably be a national park."

—JIM CRAIN, CITY OF BOULDER OPEN SPACE DIRECTOR

Such is the dilemma of the Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks system. Colorado's Front Range is one of the fastest growing regions in the United States, and the Boulder city open-space system is one of the few municipally administered open space/mountain park systems in this region.

"If there weren't a town here, this whole area would probably be a nation-

al park," observes Jim Crain, open space director for the City of Boulder. "There's really a unique combination of ecosystems here. It's a treasure, and it's our mission to both make it accessible for recreational use and attempt to preserve it at the same time. It's a delicate balance, and it requires hard choices sometimes. People don't always want to hear that, but it's true."

A mile or so up Boulder Canyon, where the creek bends north away from Highway 119, a dusty parking lot is more often than not packed on a sunny weekend afternoon. Across the highway, on the north side and around the pyramid, clutches of tourists and day hikers who have come up the creek trail are shading their eyes, watching climbers negotiate pitches on and around Elephant Butte. It's slow, almost excruciating work, a comically poor excuse for spectator sport.



MARK DEHROD, OPEN SPACE IMAGES



BRUCE BOROJANSKI, OUTSIDE IMAGES

"I can't believe how crowded it is," says Jeff, a burly climber who's already made his way down. "I was over at the Flatirons earlier today, and there wasn't a soul."

Jeff has the climber's tools of trade — clanging carabiners, ropes, climbing shoes. But no chalk bag.

"I don't use it," he shrugs, "but I know a lot of people do. You can usually tell the ones who need it, or think they need it. You just watch 'em. They get to a spot between pitches and out it comes. It's a habit, like smoking. I don't really think it helps much. It does sort of mess up the rock too."

To Bolt or Not To Bolt

BUT THE ODD CHALK smudge is not the only issue facing the climbing community. There is, for example, the issue of bolting. In Eldorado Canyon, just south of town and world-famous amongst climbers for its

more than 1,000 registered climbs, an advisory board has been formed by local residents and climbers to weigh and consider the environmental impact of countless rock hounds. To bolt a new route, a climber must submit an application to the board, and sometimes it's not granted. More commonly the board hears requests to *re-bolt* a route.

"It's worthwhile to remember how quickly bolting came into popularity," notes Ann Wichmann, director of the 7,000-acre Boulder Mountain Parks system. "It came over from France in the early 1980s and immediately took hold in the Northwest. Then it came here about 1988 or 1989."

It is a strange semblance of a mountain environment — wild and scenic, yet planned and manipulated.

"We frankly didn't know about it until the climbing community brought attention to themselves. We banned it because there was just too much of it going on, without any regulation or review or anything like supervision.

"We saw something like 200 new routes appear practically overnight, some of them exerting pressure on birds-of-prey nests," she continues. "We contacted the climbing community as best we could. We wanted to engage them in dialogue over the issue, and, frankly, some of them came away asking themselves if bolting wasn't really environmentally detrimental. I think we changed some minds.

"We are looking at ways to address the old-bolt issue. We obviously don't want unsafe conditions up there. But first I think we need to assess what the damage was from those years, attempt to bring it back, and then, perhaps, slowly relax the regulations against it."

A Creek Runs Through It

FOR THEIR PART, climbers generally have the luxury of enjoying their sport more or less by themselves.

The local paddling community, at least those who take advantage of the kayak course west of Eben G. Fine Park on Boulder Creek, is usually not that fortunate. It's not unusual to see yakkers-in their helmets, noseplugs, face masks and life-jackets-getting passed in a rapid by tu-



BILL DOWNS/OUTLINE PUBLISHERS

(Opposite Page) Climbers are divided over the use of chalk and bolting.

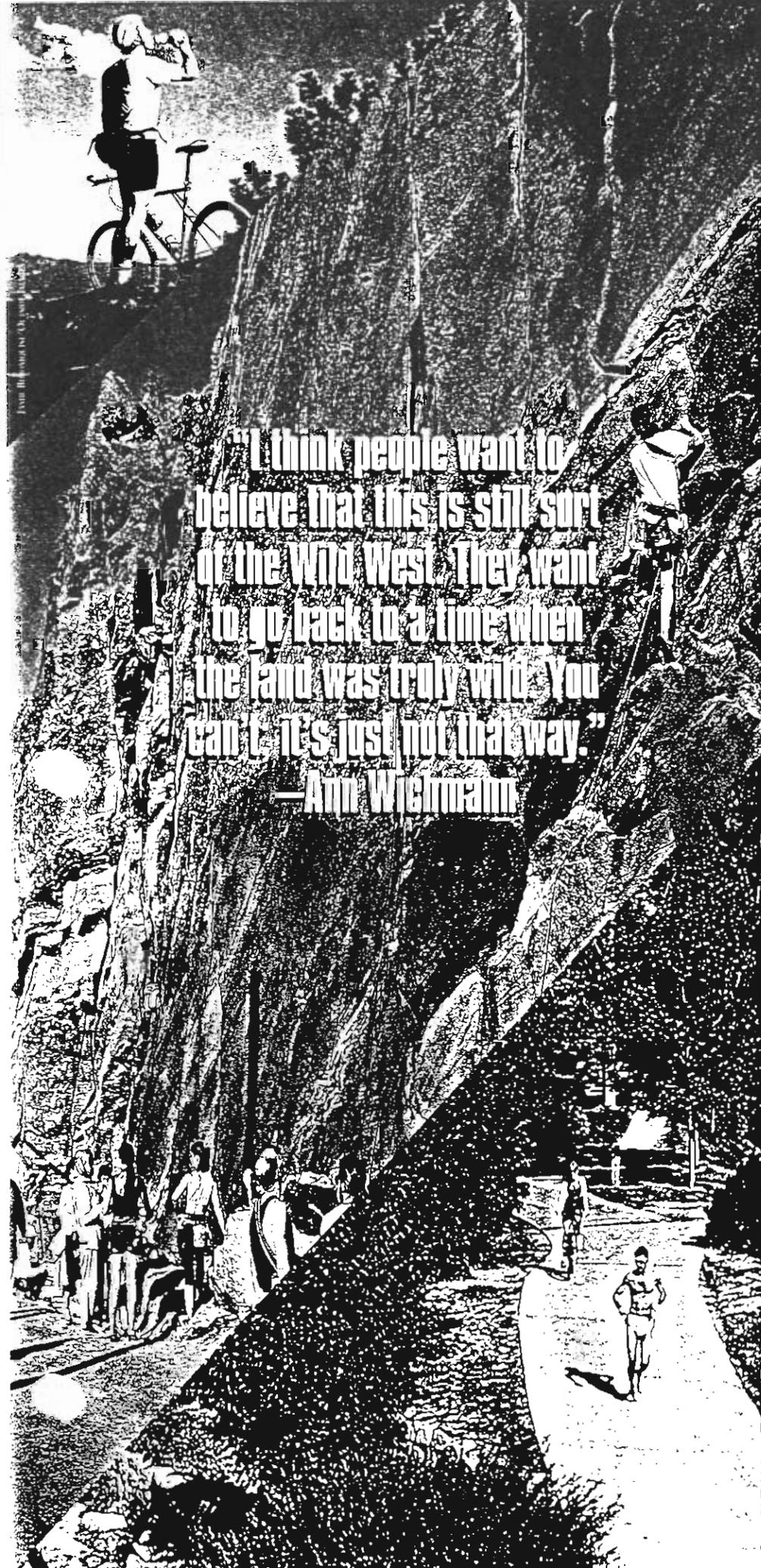
Kayakers (L. and R.) shore water with tubers (below) when the creeks run high.



NICK BROWN - OUTLINE PUBLISHERS



Bill Dowds - Outline Publishers



"I think people want to believe that this is still sort of the Wild West. They want to go back to a time when the land was truly wild. You can't, it's just not that way."
—Ann Wichmann

bers in cutoffs, cheap shades and old high-tops, mall beverages hoisted high.

Boulder Creek, like most creeks its size, has many personalities, ranging from the benign trickle of fall and winter flows to the frighteningly powerful torrents that roar down with mid-spring runoff. Boulder Creek can be unforgiving at its highest flows. But Mark says that safety has not yet fallen behind in the swelling popularity of river sports.

"The equipment has gotten better and easier to use, and I have this belief that most people who get into this sport usually overprepare for it, which is what they *should* do.

"As far as the course goes, one of the great things about it is that it's runnable at even extremely low flows, essentially any time of year when it's not iced over."

The course was built several years ago by Boulder's Greenways Director, Gary Lacy, with help from the city, Boulder Outdoor Center and a number of paddling supplier sponsors. It is an example of a growing number of essentially urban kayak courses that are starting to appear all around the country.



All Mountain Parks trails are off limits to cyclists.

Its charms come from carefully designed rapids, no required permits and pretty good accessibility from Eben G. Fine Park. And while it offers a modest and forgiving whitewater experience, the radical paddling constituency can find tougher runs within minutes of Boulder, ranging from the merely difficult to the genuinely dangerous.

The upper creek, beneath the Public Service power plant, offers a technical and bouncy ride for the more experienced, as does Cache La Poudre, west of Ft. Collins. West of Golden, Clear Creek offers the ideal playground for the militantly unhinged, especially at high flows. But the Boulder Creek course is the perfect place to get started in whitewater recreation.

The Cycling Dilemma

BEGINNING MOUNTAIN BIKERS, those interested in getting their machines off road, are not so lucky.

Apart from the Flagstaff Road/Walker Ranch trail beyond Flagstaff Mountain, all mountain park trails (and 60 percent of open space trails) are off limits to mountain bikers, an ironic degree of prohibition for one of America's premier cycling cities.



Mountain Parks Director Ann Wichmann: "I think there is still a great deal of hope in the future of these resources."

"Essentially," explains Jim Crain, "we decided to ban cycling from most of the trail system to minimize user conflicts. I know it wasn't the most popular decision, but cyclists, I think, are aware of the environmental issues behind it."

"To tell you the truth, I really don't think cyclists were guilty of significantly more damage to the trails than hikers or horse-back riders," observes Tom LeCount, a longtime Boulder cyclist. "High use is high use."

"I'd say, initially, the cycling community was pretty ticked off when Mountain Parks closed their trails to bikes, but it was probably necessary. Most riders who really want to get off road don't have to go too far. There's the Switzerland Trail, Sourdough and a lot of trails in the Jeffco system that are close. It was too bad, but not the end of the world.

"Still, it would be nice, some evening after work, to be able to ride Enchanted Mesa, or even Mesa Trail," LeCount says, wistfully.

Hard Choices

IT ALL COMES DOWN to numbers, says Jim Crain, and those numbers are staggering. The city open-space system sustained somewhere between 3.5 and 3.75 million user-visits last year, an increase of 12 percent over the year before, which was up about the same over 1991.

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PARKS

"Basically, you have a population of three million people who have access to this system, and it just was never designed to accommodate those numbers. The system is 27 years old, but most of what's been happening lately, growth issues especially, have been recent phenomena, in the last five to seven years.

"People think we live in a rural environment, and we don't. We live in an urban environment that's nestled right up against what used to be wilderness. As long as other towns along the Front Range do not offer an open space system, the burden falls to us."

Ann Wichmann agrees. "I think people want to believe that this is still sort of the Wild West. They want to go back to a time when the land was truly wild. You can't; it's just not that way.

"When there's a lot of mountain lion activity in the mountain parks, for example, I always get two different kinds of phone calls. One kind says we should eliminate

*"As long as other towns along
the Front Range do not offer
an open space system,
the burden falls on us."*

—JIM CRAIN

all the lions, so that people can enjoy their run without worrying about attacks. The other call is from people who want to learn more about them, how to avoid them, how to live together with them."

She is, however, not pessimistic. "As far as hard choices go, I think there is still a great deal of hope in the future of these resources. There's still so much to discover and experience. It's really a question of educating the users of the system — about what they can do to help preserve it, about the effects of their presence or misuse of the resource.

"There's still so much we need to do to really learn how it all works together, and how we can enjoy it without loving it to death." ▲

David Kirby is a longtime Boulder writer.

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