June Nature Walk

# Copeland Falls best this time of year in early morning

By Ruth Carol Cushman and Glenn Cushman

Tons of water crashed over the lip of Copeland Falls in Wild Basin.

More than enough, you would think, to crush the small gray bird weighing only a few ounces who bobbed up and down on a rock in the midst of the spray. Yet this American dipper posed only briefly before flying back to its mossy nest behind the waterfall. Famous for walking underwater to find bugbits for dinner, dippers — also known as water ouzels — raise their babies behind the falls.

The dipper was not the only wonder we witnessed on our waterfall walk.

A kaleidoscope (collective noun for butterflies) of little blue butterflies puddled in the mineral-rich mud nearby, and yellow swallowtails cruised the creek corridor. A golden-mantled ground squirrel scurried about the rocks. And gardens of larkspurs, blue penstemons and golden banners flourished in the mist, defying our current drought.

One advantage of slowing down in old age is that you take time to savor the moment and appreciate the minutiae. Along the 0.3-mile walk from the parking lot we stopped to listen to ruby-crowned kinglets and remembered the hermit thrush who built a nest here last year. We found coralroot orchids and remembered the hundreds of fairy slipper orchids that have crowded the woods in the past. We watched a tiny baby mouse try to find a hole and rejoiced (along with Walt Whitman) that a mouse is miracle enough.

When we were younger, we charged on up the trail — possibly the best waterfall trail in the county — often bypassing Copeland Falls in our hurry to get to the more dramatic sights above. Calypso Cascade is 1.8 miles from the parking lot; Ouzel Falls (where we have found rare brownie lady's slippers), 2.7 miles; and Ouzel Lake, 4.9 miles. Still more lakes lie even higher.

Botanist William Cooper named these falls and many other Wild Basin features when he mapped the area in 1911 and sold his map for only 15 cents. He named Copeland Falls for John B. Copeland, a local pioneer and farmer. Calypso Cascade, he named for Calypso bulbosa orchids or fairy slippers once abundant along the trail. And Ousel (the word Shakespeare used) is derived from the Old English word osle, meaning a black bird.

RUTH CAROL CUSHMAN — COURTESY PHOTO,
Copeland Falls, as seen from the side.

There's so much to see on the short road from the entry station to the parking lot that we drive slowly (pulling over for faster cars). Last year, we watched a gamboling fawn in a meadow while its mom nursed a second fawn. We have watched red-naped sapsuckers, red-breasted nuthatches and western tanagers from a picnic table where we stop for lunch. And moose have occasionally appeared. This year's moose was a "ghost moose," so called because it had scratched off most of the dark outer hairs in an effort to relieve the itching caused by ticks.

That leads to a warning: Do a tick check when you get home, as the little buggers are abundant this year.

Colorado's waterfalls are at their thunderous, tumultuous best in June when the snow melt sends torrents of water down from the mountains. North St. Vrain Creek, which feeds the waterfalls along this trail, is now so wild it looks like one continuous waterfall. So now is the time to go.

The trail begins at the south end of the Wild Basin Ranger Station parking lot and crosses several small streamlets as it ascends gently to Copeland Falls. The connecting trails to the falls are a bit steeper and may require some scrambling in a few spots.

To reach Wild Basin in Rocky Mountain National Park, take U.S. 36 north from Boulder to Lyons. Turn left onto South St. Vrain Canyon Road (Colorado 7) and continue to the Wild Basin turnoff near Allenspark. Turn west onto a road that dead-ends in 2.3 miles at the parking lot.

Early morning is the best time to see wildlife, and if you arrive at the entry station before 9 a.m., you don't need a reservation. Whenever the station is open, however, you need to pay an entrance fee or show a park pass. Between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. you need a timed entry permit available at https://www.recreation.gov/timed-entry.

*Ruth Carol and Glenn Cushman are the authors of Boulder Hiking Trails, available on Amazon.*

Wicked Gravity

# Amity's all-in approach to climbing

FELIPE NORDENFLYCHT — COURTESY PHOTO

Amity on the penultimate pitch of the PreMuir Wall (5.13c) on day 10 of her 12-day ascent. Here she climbs early in the morning to avoid the sun.

## An intense work ethic and total commitment have been the climber's trademarks

Chris Weidner

Seven days into their attempt on El Capitan's PreMuir Wall, Amity (who goes by her first name) and her climbing partner Brent were still 10 pitches from the summit. They had free climbed every one of the 24 pitches so far, but one of the route's hardest sections loomed above them: a steep, smooth corner 140 feet long, resembling an open, featureless book.

Unusually high November temperatures last year turned the granite into an oven from 7 a.m. until sunset, so the pair resorted to climbing at dawn, and by headlamp at night.

During the day they would roast in Brent's portaledge, counting the hours until dark.

After two days camped beneath this pitch, Amity gave it a desperate, all-out effort and sent it — just barely — on her first lead attempt. Brent struggled, fell repeatedly and eventually admitted defeat. From here on up, Brent would support Amity in her ambition to free climb the entire route.

The second-to-last pitch (5.13c) is the sting in the tail, lurking two pitches from the top where conditions remained miserably hot. Amity fell off several times, exhausted, while her partner felt antsy to get off the wall. For a moment, quitting sounded euphoric.

But Amity pushed through her nearly crippling fatigue and discomfort in order to keep trying. Two friends rappelled down to replace Brent, who escaped upward, and on day 12, Amity topped out, having freed every pitch from bottom to top.

Her intense work ethic and total commitment have always been trademarks of Amity's climbing. The Loveland native, 33, has built a reputation — and a career — around free climbing some of North America's most demanding traditional lines and big walls. These climbs require more than strength and endurance; they demand self-confidence, extraordinary motivation and a unique ability to suffer.

"My climbing superpower is to be able to try really, really hard when it counts," she said. Those traits have been part of Amity's personality from the beginning. As a 6-year-old, the fence in her backyard proved too alluring to ignore. She would climb it, then walk across the top, 6 feet in the air, like a balance beam. That's when her parents signed her up for gymnastics.

**'My climbing superpower is to be able to try really, really hard when it counts... Part of being willing to put in work is a willingness to be uncomfortable'**

*— Amity, Climber*

Throughout middle school and high school she trained five hours a day, five or six days a week, squeezing classes and homework somewhere in between. She advanced to Level 10, the tier just below Olympic-trials qualification, before suffering career-ending stress fractures in her lumbar spine.

One afternoon, she collapsed in pain after her floor routine, unable to move. Gymnastics meant everything to her, yet that was the last time she would ever do it. Back pain has been a constant for her ever since.

Her former gymnastics coach recently told her, "You were always here to do the work. It wasn't necessarily about winning. You were just here to put in effort in a way that most kids aren't."

It's no wonder she's drawn to the long, labor-intensive, grueling objectives many climbers choose to avoid. She has become well known for excelling at the grind.

"Part of being willing to put in work is a willingness to be uncomfortable," she said.

Amity is the first to admit that pure climbing power is not her greatest strength.

What sets her apart, she says, is her capacity for sustained effort — climbing hard pitches, hauling heavy bags and remaining focused throughout long days on the wall.

At the same time, she deliberately chooses objectives that expose her weaknesses as well as showcase her strengths.

Despite her long list of accomplishments, Amity remains keenly interested in the few projects she hasn't completed.

Routes like Cobra Crack — an overhanging finger crack in Squamish, B.C. — have required far more time and persistence than any climb she's ever attempted. Rather than discouraging her, those setbacks have become fuel. "To me, failure is just as motivating as success," she said.

This year bears the same cadence as the previous eight years that she's climbed full-time, living in her van. "I'll choose a goal, put the work in, try to do it, then rinse and repeat," she said. "I'm genuinely excited to keep doing what I'm doing."

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