Geoheritage of Huerfano and Las Animas Counties

INTRODUCTION

Lon Abbott, Teaching Professor of Distinction with the Department of Geological Sciences at CU Boulder, and La Veta Trails (LVT), a 501(c)3 nonprofit, are collaborating on a project to highlight the geological heritage significance of public lands and trails in Huerfano and Las Animas Counties.

Geological Heritage (typically shortened to geoheritage) encompasses geological features that are intrinsically or culturally important sites offering information or insights into the Earth's evolution, the history of science, or that can be used for research, teaching, or reference (Brocx and Semeniuk, 2007).

Huerfano and Las Animas Counties are located in Colorado's Spanish Peaks region at the dramatic geographic interface between the Rocky Mountains and Great Plains. These rural counties possess a rich geoheritage that has influenced the many cultures that have called this place home and provides fundamental insights into the geological formation processes of the Colorado Rockies and Great Plains. Because of the region's unique geologic story, it serves as a superb location for this project.

GEOHERITAGE PROJECT

The goal of the LVT/CU Geology partnership is to strengthen environmental stewardship by fostering a sense of place and shared responsibility for protecting the region's unique geoheritage sites. Phase 1 (January–June 2025) includes:

1. Developing a geoheritage page on the LVT website that features descriptions of the geology along three trails that tell different chapters of the region's geoheritage story.
   - **Bartlett Trail** climbs the east flank of Greenhorn Mountain, the highest peak in the Wet Mountains, at the interface between the Rockies and the High Plains.
   - **Dikes Trail** (which isn't actually on a dike) traverses one of the cuestas formed by Rocky Mountain uplift.
   - **West Peak Trail** ascends West Spanish Peak, exploring the solidified magma chamber, the dikes that radiate from it, and remnants of the mile-and-a-half thick stack of sedimentary rocks into which the magma intruded but that erosion has since largely stripped away.
2. Deliver a guided trail walk and presentation about local geoheritage in July, 2025.

CONTACT

For more information, please contact Marilyn Russell:
russellm9999@gmail.com | 719-890-4071

GEOHERITAGE PROJECT TEAM

Lon Abbott, PhD, joined the Geological Sciences department at CU Boulder in 2007. His passion is mountains. His research spans from the world's youngest mountain range in Papua New Guinea to the geologic evolution of the Colorado Rockies, Great Plains, and Colorado Plateau. He loves sharing the amazing stories told by mountains with the public. He has authored three geology books and dozens of articles.

Heloise Lynn, PhD, Geophysicist-Geologist Heloise Lynn has worked evaluating rocks to make maps of structure, faults, and fractures. Her interests focus upon sharing the geologic insights that our surroundings provide.

Nicole Ornstein will be graduating from the University of Colorado at Boulder this May with dual degrees in Environmental Studies and Geographic Information Science with a minor in Geological Sciences. She is passionate about the natural environment and preserving its beauty.

Marilyn Russell, M.Ed. retired from the University of Southern Maine where she served as a Public Policy Research Associate, leading projects focused on improving the effectiveness of services for young children. She is one of the founding members of La Veta Trails and serves as its President.

Funding to support the project has been generously provided by: San Isabel Electric