



It is the last day of July, 2008. There is normally nothing special about this date, but here in Canon City it is a day of major significance: It is the last day---at least for a few months---that anyone may venture into the unique and priceless geological wonder that Canon City calls "The Hogbacks." At the behest of the local Skyline and Hogbacks Preservation Committee, the City Council has closed the area to prevent further damage, pending a November Referendum seeking authority to declare it an "Open Space". The Hogbacks and Skyline Drive have been a part of my life since 1945, when my family moved to 521 Floral. We moved to Illinois in 1946, but over the years I continued to visit Canon City and the Hogbacks. In 2004 I retired here and bought a house next to the Hogbacks on 5<sup>th</sup> St. So the Hogbacks and Skyline Drive have been part of my life for 63 years. And tonight is my last opportunity to walk in them for months----or maybe forever. (We really need to pass the November Referendum.)

I put on my hiking shoes and head down the alley. After only 150 steps I start up into the gap between the two Hogbacks at the alley's end and over the familiar storm water embankment. It has been many months since I last took this walk. I gave it up because of the presence of motorcycles, which destroyed the quiet solitude I used to find as I hiked among the Hogbacks. And they destroyed far more than the solitude---they did enormous damage to the Hogbacks themselves----damage that will take nature and the work of many volunteers many years to restore. The gut-wrenching distress I feel every time I survey the damage has been another factor in no longer going in there, but tonight I must. I must take one more walk---a walk back in time, a walk back through a lifetime of memories.

I stand on the berm. It is early evening. Only 2 hours of daylight remain. At midnight the ban begins, and so does a flood of memories. I look down on the barren "Baby Backs" between the big Hogbacks and the Dakota Ridge we call Skyline Drive. The voracious machines have eaten all the sparse vegetation and ground up the small pieces of limestone, the tiny fossils, and the occasional sharks' teeth. The Baby Backs are nude and nothing but humps of bare dirt. Below me are abandoned truck tires, wheels and all, and pieces of carpeting. (We need to organize a Volunteer Clean-up Committee). On the Skyline flank are deep ruts, dug by hundreds of churning, mud-caked wheels. There are trails and ruts everywhere on the visible hogbacks, as well as on those that are out of sight. I swallow hard, wipe a tear, and start north toward Floral. More trash---soda cans, broken beer bottles---and

everywhere devastation. The fascinating and symmetrical Hogbacks are branded, like huge steers, with ruts that resemble Golden Arches. How much work will it take to fill *one* of those in, I wonder? Could a Scout Troop or the Garden Park Students do *one* in a weekend? Maybe, if they all brought their dads, and had their moms provide a picnic lunch and loads of lemonade. But that is only one rut!!! How long will it take to do them all? Years! (Maybe Volunteer groups could each **Adopt a Hogback!!**)

I come up over a Baby Back and encounter the new barbed wire fence at the very bottom of Skyline Drive. I see the back of a new sign. "NO TRESPASSING". Good. The City has done the job well. Very well---and on schedule. There are mixed emotions. As part of the Hogback Committee I have succeeded in banning myself from these mountains of memories. Tomorrow I can't do this. That's OK. These unique formations will be here long after I am gone, and maybe---just maybe---they will be preserved for the generations to come. Already six generations of my family have played here, starting with my Great-Grandparents, my mom's parents and my mom, nearly a century ago. Then me. And most recently my sons and grandsons scrambled over the Hogbacks and up the side of the Skyline Drive. Straight up, as I did when I was their age. The other day, my daughter-in-law reported hearing four year old Louie ask seven year old Jakob, "Do you remember when we were at Grandpop's and we were on the Hogback and our heads touched the sky?" I remember the song, "Memories are Made of This!"

Now I'm just north of the last hairpin curve on Skyline Drive. Behind me a car stops and a couple emerges to look more closely at the Hogbacks, in the fading light. On a Baby Back about in line with Mystic two motorcyclists stand by their machines----mercifully silent----talking and looking around. I wonder what they are thinking and saying? What are they feeling? Are they proud of the destruction? Or remorseful? Are they angry at the closure or do they understand? Will they respect the law? Then, with a roar, they fade off to the North in a cloud of dust. Are they the last ones to ride in the Hogbacks? I hope so. I somehow expected company tonight. Am I the only resident taking a nostalgic walk? Maybe I am just the last one. Either way, I am all alone.

I'm standing where I often stood as a child, looking up at the spot where the old mine went into the flank of the Skyline Drive. It went back through solid rock, its ceiling marked with graffiti by hundreds of smoky candles. Then, in the rear it became layers of sedimentary sandstone, shored up by wooden posts, which I carefully avoided for fear of the roof falling. For an eight year old, exploring that old mine with a kerosene and burlap torch was a great adventure. The place always had a cool breeze that came down from the open pit near the top, and it had a unique musty odor. I can never forget that smell. Nor can I forget my caution around those old pilings. I hear they finally did collapse and a man was killed. The City filled it all in, top and bottom. Good job. It is hard to find the lower entrance location. I scramble

up the rocky slope to that spot and look up to the overlook area. From this point I went up many times as a child. I did it again 20 years ago. But I have not attempted it the past four years. It looks steeper than it did even 20 years ago!!!!

The sun is disappearing behind Skyline Drive. Well?? Well!! Man, I'm 71 years old. I have Parkinson's. I have a bad hip. I'll be 72 before this opens again, if it does. (Please, Canon City, vote "YES" on the November referendum!!) But I have wanted to try this again for four years. Am I nuts? Well, I don't have much time to debate with myself. Getting dark. About a half hour left. That's enough time. Barely! So go for it! So up I go. Hand over hand, carefully picking my way over the treacherous rocks and cacti. This was easier 63 years ago when I weighed 60 pounds, but I'm getting there. Hmm. Just when you think this is untouched nature, there is a rusty tin can, a deer skeleton and a broken bottle. And an errant golf ball. The top is near. Those three young folks on the top are in for a shock, as I pop up from behind a huge rock. Sure enough. "Where in the world did you come from?" "Down there." "Wow!" "My sentiments exactly!" "Wanna ride down?" "Thought you'd never ask!"

