COLORADO

THE CENTENNIAL STATE *Became a state August 1, 1876 (38th)*

On average, Colorado is the highest state in the country. The Rocky Mountains run down its middle, with wide, flat plains to the east and canyons and mesas, or flat-topped hills, to the west.



A State Named for a Color

Colorado is a Spanish word that means colored red. Spanish explorers gave the name to a river that ran reddish brown with silt, or fine mud. In 1861 the name was given to the land where that river begins. Colorado became a state in 1876, 100 years after the Declaration of Independence. That is why it is called the Centennial State.



Pikes Peak or Bust

In July 1858, a small group of prospectors found gold in a small creek beside the South Platte River. About 100,000 people set out for the Rocky Mountains. Their slogan was Pikes Peak or Bust, though the gold lay about 85 miles north of that mountain. Camps nearby, where Cherry Creek meets the river, grew into the city of Denver.



A City in a Cliff

About 800 years ago, Ancestral Pueblo people built stone villages under the rock overhangs of Mesa Verde. The largest, Cliff Palace, has about 150 rooms. Their families had farmed the flat land above for centuries. By 1300, after a long drought, they had moved south. Their descendants include the Pueblo peoples of New Mexico and Arizona.



How to Build a Sand Dune

The tallest sand dunes in North America are nowhere near an ocean. Long ago, a lake in the San Luis Valley drained away and left sand behind. Winds from the southwest blow that sand across the valley until it hits the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and piles up. The tallest dunes rise about 740 feet.



The Fourth Graders' Dinosaur

The first Stegosaurus bones known to science were dug up near Morrison, Colorado, in 1877. This plant eater lived about 150 million years ago and had spikes on its tail. In 1980, a class of fourth graders in Thornton began asking lawmakers to honor it. Two years later, Stegosaurus became the state fossil.



A Fort Made of Mud

In 1833, brothers Charles and William Bent and their partner Ceran St. Vrain built a fort of adobe, or sun-dried mud brick, beside the Arkansas River. The river was then the border with Mexico. Cheyenne and Arapaho people came to trade buffalo robes, and wagon trains on the Santa Fe Trail stopped to rest and make repairs.

BY THE NUMBERS

Population	About 6 million (20th most)
Size	About 104,100 square miles (8th largest)
Highest point	Mount Elbert, 14,440 feet
Counties	64
Neighbors	Wyoming, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Utah, Arizona at one corner

DID YOU KNOW?

- Colorado has more than 50 peaks taller than 14,000 feet, more than any other state. Climbers call them fourteeners.
- A brass marker on the 13th step of the State Capitol in Denver shows the spot one mile above sea level.
- The Cumbres & Toltec steam train crosses the line between Colorado and New Mexico 11 times.
- Katharine Lee Bates wrote the words to "America the Beautiful" after a trip up Pikes Peak in 1893.

FIND IT ON THE MAP

1. Which city is the capital?
2. Which city is closest to Mesa Verde?
3. Which town is famous for growing sweet peaches?

Answers: 1. Denver 2. Durango 3. Palisade