

Palmer Lake Historical Society, Feb. 17

## Adventures on the Pikes Peak Cog Railway

By Sharon Williams

Palmer Lake Historical Society presenter Mel McFarland readily beguiled his audience on Feb. 17 with little-known history interspersed with the humorous questions and comments from tourists that he experienced during his almost 20-year career with the Pikes Peak Cog Railway.

McFarland's easy, entertaining manner delighted the passengers during his 5,000 roundtrips up and down Pikes Peak serving interchangeably as a conductor and later an engineer.

Construction of the unique railway began in 1888 and was completed in 1891. At the time, it was the highest of its kind in the world at 14,115 feet. China now holds that title with a passenger train traveling to a 16,000-foot elevation, designed with pressurized, climate-controlled cars.

The first cog train built in the U.S. was at Mount Washington, N.H. Besides the Pikes Peak train, the only other existing cog train in the U.S. is in Michigan. It goes down into an old quarry.

With invited guests, the first train to go up the Peak broke down at timberline and did not make it to the top. The second train to attempt the steep climb was successful in carrying a church choir from Denver. Because the cog railway was the highest of its kind when it was built, no one was aware that the first three locomotives used weren't capable of making it to the summit. Since then, new and improved models were changed out in a trial-and-error period for several years until they could determine what was reliable for the demanding ascent, descent, altitude, and climate

changes.

Today, during the height of summer tourist season, there are 12 train trips scheduled daily to the top of Pikes Peak. Four smaller trains each carry 80 passengers and four larger trains each carry 216 people. Roundtrip takes three hours and 16 minutes, with allowance of 45 minutes at the summit.

There are now a couple of trains that run during the winter season as well.

With the recent dedication of the new summit house, the Pikes Peak Cog Railway also has a new name: the Broadmoor, Manitou and Pikes Peak Railway.

McFarland is an artist, photographer, amateur railroad enthusiast, author, and contributor of many articles published in newspapers throughout the Pikes Peak Region. After 27 years as a middle-school teacher, Mel worked as a conductor and engineer with the Pikes Peak Cog Railway from 1996 until his retirement in 2015.

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Palmer Lake Historical Society monthly programs are presented at 7 p.m. every third Thursday of the month at the Tri-Lakes Chamber of Commerce Community Room, 166 Second St., Monument. The Thursday, March 17 program, "The Night of a Thousand Heroes," will be presented by Tracy Beach. Based on her book, the program will consist of a short historical lecture on the disastrous June 1921 Pueblo flood, including a display of flood artifacts.

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Above: Featured program presenter Mel McFarland shared history mixed with amusing stories of his days with the Pikes Peak Cog Railway. Photo by Bonni Russert. Caption by Sharon Williams.

High Altitude Nature and Gardening (HANG)

## Spring hummingbirds and pollinators

By Janet Sellers

More than 70 percent of the world's flowering plants rely on pollination to produce seeds and fruit. We can create landscapes at home to support our pollinators and our planet just by knowing what to plant, where, and when our favorite pollinators need them most. And it is a fun and interesting endeavor for us all. Food, water, shelter, and space are things everyone can provide to support pollinators, which include bees, beetles, flies, moths, butterflies, hummingbirds, and even bats!

We commonly see four species of hummingbird breeders in Colorado, and we can see all four in our area some years, but our state has recorded up to 11 species. We mostly have the broadtail in spring and rufous mid- to late summer on its way back from its Canada nesting grounds. The calliope heads straight to above 8,000-foot territory most years. The black chinned and broadtail nest widely all over Colorado, and we see plenty of the broadtail in our area.

The first period noted for attracting hummingbirds in Colorado is usually mentioned as mid-April to the end of May, but we can get ready toward the end of March to tempt the early-bird scouts. Before nectar is available from flowers and blossoms, hummingbirds may drink sap holes created by sapsuckers (woodpeckers), and breeders need protein, often pirating bugs to eat and silk from spider webs for their nests. A female may catch as many as 2,000 insects a day.

### Creating habitat

Right now, hummingbirds are on their way north

from Mexico headed as far north as Canada. In Colorado, we have a couple of peak periods for attracting hummingbirds and if we get ready in time, they'll come to our landscapes to set up housekeeping. The male hummingbird scouts arrive by the end of March or beginning of April, looking for good food and water sources, and then will look to attract the females when they arrive sometime in April or early May. Our Colorado hummingbird season is, at earliest, late March-April till September, weather and resources permitting.

When providing habitat, according to the Colorado State University Extension, "location of the garden is extremely important. Most pollinators generally prefer sunny areas, and large connected habitats are better than small patchy ones. It is important to have a variety of flowering species planted as groups/swaths in the landscape rather than as single plants. This allows the pollinators to work one area more thoroughly and efficiently, rather than having to move around a great deal to find plants of the same species."

The main thing that birds need, particularly hummingbirds, is water, a safe attractant that does not entice bears or other creatures that might be interested in nectar feeders. The second period is the return migration around the Fourth of July through October.

### Hummingbird landscaping

Planting for flowering throughout the season will give the most opportunity to watch the pollinators, and the easy-care, "lazy gardener" early and midseason flowering plants I have in my garden are Rocky Mountain penstemon, wallflower, pasqueflower, blue flax,



Above (L to R): Dandelions and the purple pasqueflowers are some of the earliest flowers to bloom and support pollinators. Dandelions especially support creating high nutrient content in the soil and will only grow where there is a lack of nutrients. When the nutrients are restored, dandelions will not grow in that area. Photos by Janet Sellers.

and flowering fruit trees including crab or lady apples and chokecherries. Also, yarrow in white, purple, and yellow, asters in white, yellow, and purple, blue harebells, blanket flower, gaillardia, and salvias. Flowering trees in my neighborhood also include willows, black locust, linden, and honey locust.

Janet Sellers is an avid lazy—aka nature-focused—gardener, using Mother Nature's methods for the local "high desert forest" climate. Share your wisdom and send your local gardening tips to  
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On the Trail (in memory of Tim Watkins)

## Hiking season is all year long

By Steve Pate

Hiking season? That would be all year! The "season" is not just during the spring bloom of flowers, fall colors, and the aspens turning. Snowscapes add a different character to familiar trails, the ability to easily see tracks in snow, and some challenges you might not experience during warmer months.

Most experienced hikers in our local mountains are adaptable to weather changes and know how to layer up when it's cold and add traction when needed to deal with packed snow and ice (include micro spikes in your pack from October through at least April). Bring gloves, a warm hat, and the usual gear—

water, first aid, flashlight, rope, matches, knife, navigation, and food and shelter for longer treks.

Another piece of equipment you might consider if you plan to be off the grid—no cell phone service, remote areas—is an emergency satellite communicator. Many experienced local hikers carry a Garmin InReach which can let designated people know they are OK and don't need assistance. Conversely, if some unforeseen incident disables you, most satellite communicators also have an emergency SOS button that will summon Search and Rescue (SAR) to the GPS coordinates transmitted via satellite. These devices, InReach, Zoleo, SPOT, and others, can also connect to

your cell phone via Bluetooth. While you can't make phone calls using your phone, you can send/receive text using the Bluetooth connection from phone to satellite communicator.

If you should ever need SAR assistance in the back country, purchasing an annual hunting or fishing license and some other permits helps fund SAR. SAR teams are mostly volunteers, but 25 cents of these license fees go toward paying for specialized rescue equipment, training, and to help maintain equipment.

I find hiking on snow-packed or icy trails easier than loose gravel on steep terrain with micro spikes