

## Quick Trip to Weston Pass, Colorado

### August 16, 2016

I first crossed Weston Pass back in 1975, while on a Colorado State University field trip with a group of entomology students and Dr Robert Simpson and Dr Karolis Bagdonas. The pass has always stuck in my mind as a challenging dirt road and a beautiful mountain area. At the time, I was collecting aquatic insects, and for some reason, I still remember collecting Simuliidae (black flies) larva in the small stream at the pass. I had a chance to go back over Weston Pass 5-10 years ago after spending a few nights in a cabin at Twin Lakes, nearby on the west side. It was still a challenging dirt road, and that time it was wet, and the places where railroad ties were placed across the road to provide a more "solid bed" in the wetter areas of the road, the ties seem a little rotten. We did make it up and over the pass and down the east side. The dirt road down the east side of the pass is well maintained as Park County Rd, #5.

I had an opportunity to go up and over Weston Pass again yesterday. Besides being a beautiful area to go for a long daytrip, I've have recently made a few trips to the Breckenridge, CO areas to collect alpine grasshoppers. Hoosier Pass has been the usual destination, being a few miles south of Breckenridge. At the north end of this series of mountain ranges is Copper Mountain Ski Area. A few week ago, I took the easy way into the alpine meadows there, by signing up for a \$17, "lift ticket and lunch" at Copper Mountain Ski Area. After lunch, I hit the alpine trail to collect grasshopper, and ended up walking all the way down to the base of the ski area. They always say walking down a mountain trail is harder than walking up, but "they" lie.

My grasshopper interest in this series of ranges, is Mount Lincoln, just south of Hoosier Pass is the type locality for a number of grasshopper species, including *Melanoplus nubicola*, and home range for *Melanoplus betangi*. It still remains, that I have been unable to find either of these species in the ranges between Weston Pass in the south and Copper Mountain in the north. The best thing about not finding what you are looking for, is there is still reason to go back and keep looking. Any reason, is a good reason to spend a day in the mountains.

Cathy and I left Fort Collins by 6 am, and made it to Fairplay, CO by 10. A good town to stock up for picnic supplies (Subway sandwiches) and head up to Weston Pass on Park Co Rd 5. Co Rd 5 follows the South Fork South Platte River, so this water ends up heading to Denver. We had already crossed the Continental Divide twice, to end up back in the same watershed as we started from. This is a good dirt road and about any car can make it up this pass from the east. Weston Pass is at 11,921 ft and is true alpine meadows, being above treeline. To my surprise, there is now a commercial hut (<http://westonpasshut.com/>) at 11,900' elevation, and claims to be the highest lodging in Colorado.

On the drive up Weston Pass, I collected grasshoppers at a couple locations. Same on the west side, going down. Found a nice place for a short hike and rocks to sit on for our picnic lunch. At lower elevations, the clearwingd grasshopper (*Camulla pellucida*) and clubbedhorned grasshopper (*Aeropedellus clavatus*) were most common. In the alpine and sub-alpine meadows *Melanoplus alpinus* and *Melanoplus marshalli* were common. *M. marshalli* is one of the short-winged (flightless) grasshoppers that are commonly found at high elevations. Often single mountain ranges in the western US, with have will have its unique resident species, but *M. marshalli* can be found throughout the

mountains of Colorado, ne Utah and sw Wyoming. It seems to be the only resident, flightless grasshopper of this area in the Mosquito, Tenmile, and Gore Ranges from Copper Mountain to Weston Pass, at least as far as I can find. I'm beginning to believe that there is a problem with Mt Lincoln as the type location for *Melanoplus nubicola*. There are no specimens in the CSU collection from this area and specimens are in the collection from the mountain southwest of there. At least there are still reason to get on the road and keep going to the mountains!



Up Park Co Rd 5, east side of Weston Pass.



At Weston Pass, Tim McNary.



West side of Weston Pass, Cathy McNary