

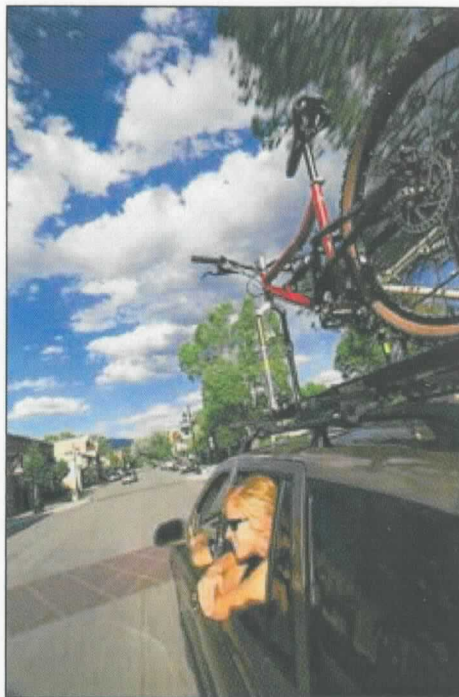


Carbondale, Colorado (Population 5,500)

The Ultimate Rocky Mountain Hideout By Melissa Wagenberg

Home both to ranchers in white cowboy hats and sporto types in fleece, quaint Carbondale is set at the confluence of the Crystal and Roaring Fork Rivers and is anchored to the south by 12,953-foot (3,948-meter) Mount Sopris. The classic Rockies town is also home to new-school cool: A 13,000-square-foot (1,208-square-meter) skateboard park just opened, and a white-water park is in the works.

Sopris, towering 6,783 feet (2,067 meters) above Main Street, claims what is perhaps Colorado's greatest continuous vertical gain. Hike it via the Mount Sopris Trail, stopping to swim en route (14 miles round-trip; White River National Forest; +1 970 963 2266), or explore the peak by bike on the Hay Park Trail (30 miles, or 48 kilometers, round-trip). Ajax Bike and Sports has rentals (\$40 a day; +1 970 963 0128).



CARBONDALE CRUISING
 All racked up in town.

Around now, the last of the season's real white water is flowing on the Class III-IV Shoshone stretch of the Colorado River (Blazing Adventures; \$85 for a full-day float trip with lunch; +1 970 923 4544; www.blazingadventures.com). Climbing season runs through October an hour northwest in Rifle Mountain Park, which claims one of the nation's most challenging collections of limestone sport climbing routes. For more information and directions, stop by Glendale rock shop Summit Canyon Mountaineering, 15 miles (24 kilometers) from Carbondale (800 360 6994 [U.S. and Canada only]; www.summitcanyon.com), or simply follow the traffic out of town on Saturday morning. Anglers should splurge on a fly-fishing float trip down the Roaring Fork River with Alpine Angling (\$395; 800 781 8120 [U.S. and Canada only]; www.alpineangling.com), or just join the locals casting for trout on the Roaring Fork under the Highway 133 bridge.

Visitor Vitals: Carbondale is three and a half hours from Denver, under an hour from Vail's Eagle Airport, and 45 minutes from Aspen. Stay at the Thunder River Lodge (\$48 and up; +1 970 963 2543; www.thunderriverlodge.biz) and rise early for breakfast at the Village Smithy (+1 970 963 9990; www.villagesmithyrestaurant.com). Mi Casita (+1 970 963 5866) is one of the town's many authentic Mexican joints. Six89 (+1 970 963 6890; www.six89.com) serves a raved-about ahi tuna carpaccio. (There's an abbreviated menu on powder days, when the staff hits the hill and races back in time for dinner service.)