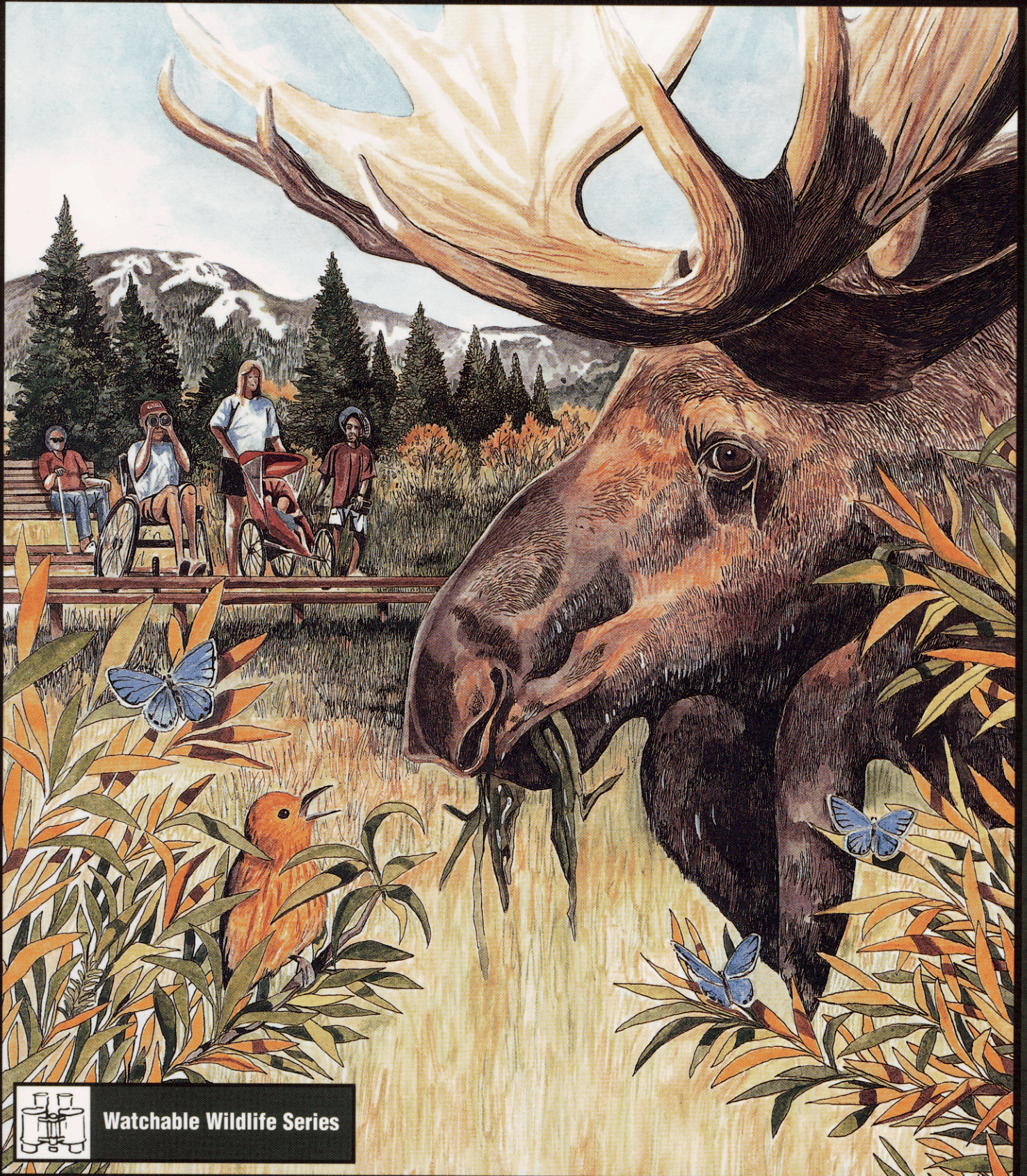


EVERYONE'S NATURE

Accessible Outdoor Facilities and Programs Using Universal Design

by Carol Hunter for the Colorado Division of Wildlife



Watchable Wildlife Series

Everyone's Nature by Carol Hunter
Written for the Colorado Division of Wildlife

Second Printing
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820 Cleveland St. S
Cambridge, MN 55008

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Published in cooperation with the Colorado Division of Wildlife

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Design, typesetting, and other prepress work by Scott Lawrence

All photos by the author unless otherwise noted

Cover art by Paul M. Gray

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 1-59193-023-5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hunter, Carol, 1942-

Everyone's Nature / by Carol Hunter for the Colorado Division of Wildlife

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 1-59193-023-5:\$19.95

1. Parks—Access for the physically handicapped. 2. Parks—Designs and plans. 3. Parks—Access for the physically handicapped—United States. 4. Parks—United States—Designs and plans. I. Colorado Division of Wildlife. II. Title.

Dedication

For the past, I dedicate this volume to my brothers, Don and Wayne, who enjoyed the outdoors and shared the joy with me. And also to my teacher, Darrell, who taught me the importance of the outdoors for all of us, including persons with disabilities.

For the future, I dedicate this volume to my grandchildren: Tamara, Stephanie, Zachary and Hunter. I hope they will always be able to enjoy what the outdoors gives and realize that this gift needs to be treasured, protected and shared.

Acknowledgments

Bob Hernbrode: Chief of Education and Statewide Watchable Wildlife Coordinator for the Colorado Division of Wildlife. Bob was the force behind the creation of *Everyone's Nature*. Others wrote, edited and reviewed it, but Bob made it happen. He asked that I create this tool to help public land managers "do the right thing." He believes that universal design makes sense for facilities and programs so people of all ages and abilities can enjoy the outdoors.

Partners for Access to the Woods (PAW). The Board and Members of PAW gave generously of their time in reviewing the text for accuracy and most current legislation. I also want to acknowledge the many hours they give in promoting *universal design* as an important part of outdoor recreation on all public lands. Each and every one of them is truly appreciated: Tom Deniston, Chairman; Sally Guanella Buckland, Vice Chairman; J. Albert Bauer, Secretary; Sally Hopper, Treasurer; Phil Buckland, Rob Gilkerson, Pat Going, Nancy Hanson, Bill Ivy, Bill Johnson, Bob Knecht, Paul Peck, and Jack Salewski.

Robin Hernbrode: Editor. When I was struggling, she listened to my ideas and gave them a clear and concise form. The best part is that, in the process of editing, she developed a passion for *universal design*. Together, we hope we have created a tool that managers can use to open their public lands to many persons who might have been excluded in the past.

The last acknowledgement is for all the individuals and staff members of public lands who have created designs and programs that already include persons of all ages and abilities. I want to thank them for being so innovative and willing to take risks to create something better for all of us.

To all of the above and those I might have forgotten...

Thank you

Carol



Watchable Wildlife Incorporated believes that the challenges we face in preserving our wildlife and wild places will require everyone's help. No single group can be left behind when it comes to understanding the beauty and complexity of wildlife.

Support comes through understanding and appreciation. *Everyone's Nature* was published to help wildlife professionals find solutions to some of the complicated issues related to accessibility. It is only when everyone can safely view the wonders of wildlife that we will achieve the public support necessary to protect this valuable resource.

We wish to thank our partners in this project whose support made this publication possible:

The Colorado Division of Wildlife
The U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation and
Bureau of Land Management
Partners for Access to the Woods (PAW)

As you use these materials on projects in your area please consider sharing your success stories with us. We will pass this information along to other project managers and planners. Thank you for your interest and support of this and other Watchable Wildlife Programs.

Yours truly,

James Mallman
President

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Universal design includes everyone. Statistics show that each one of us will someday experience one or more disabilities, some temporarily and others on a permanent basis. Even though we are very young, or old, or disabled by fate or accident, we do not want to give up our connections to the natural world outside. *Everyone's Nature* is designed to help wildlife and land management specialists provide opportunities for all visitors to participate fully in outdoor recreation facilities and programs. It explains the concept of universal design and why it makes sense to use this concept for all facilities and programs.

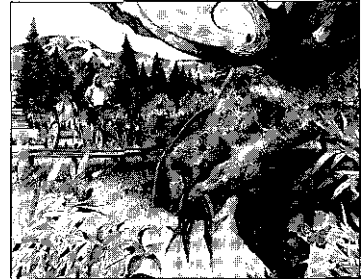
We have often found that a parking area with a designated space and a rest room that is accessible lead managers to conclude that the park or recreation site is wheelchair accessible. However, how entertaining and educational is the experience if the only place with access in an outdoor recreation area is the parking lot or rest room? The main experience is denied because either it has been poorly designed or creative solutions for access have not been tried. *Everyone's Nature* provides simple methods of expanding the experience so visitors of all ages and abilities can participate.

Universal design is simply design that includes persons of all ages and abilities. Even in an outdoor recreation setting, it can address the needs of the whole family. The site design takes into account that granddad uses a cane because of his cataracts; mom pushes a stroller for the baby; brother enjoys a bike; uncle uses a wheelchair; and older sister, who has a developmental disability, can help her dad with the wagon of picnic supplies.

Consider the nature trail with respect to the varying needs of this family. The uncle, in his wheelchair, needs to be able to negotiate all grades and cross slopes with the same ease as his relatives on foot. The interpretive signs placed along the trail need to be located so that he can get close enough to read them. The girl's grandparents need a safe trail with a smooth and predictable surface cleared of any obstacles along its height and width. The interpretive displays need to contain some experiences that emphasize something other than vision and reading.

Using universal design for the trail design makes it easier for the man to use a wheelchair; for the boy to ride his bicycle; for the father to pull the wagon with the picnic supplies; for the mother to push a stroller; and for the grandparents to safely find their way. Universal design maximizes the potential enjoyment of the outdoors for every member of the family.

Universal design means taking into consideration the needs of as many people as possible, and then incorporating those needs into nature trails, visitor centers, overlooks, wildlife viewing areas and interpretive displays. It is a satisfying process as well, for when we begin to look at people as family members and individuals, and not "persons with disabilities," we suddenly recognize them as people we know. At some time in our lives, whether we have grown old, or are recovering from surgery, or have a 25 pound toddler to shepherd along, or are using a chair to extend our world, we recognize the potential users of these facilities as ourselves.



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What Is Universal Design?

Universal design is easy to understand. It is all about taking into account the needs of a wide range of people—as wide a range as possible—when designing everything from interpretive displays to boardwalks and nature trails. To quote Ron Mace, who many consider to be the father of universal design, “Universal design is simply an approach to creating environments and products that are usable by all people to the greatest extent possible.”

Universal design meets all of the legal requirements for accessibility, and then goes a step further, maximizing the experiences and opportunities offered by facilities and programs. The book *Strategies for Teaching Universal Design* teaches us that “Universal design is not a euphemism for accessibility. It is not a catchy phrase to make more palatable the requirements of the ADA Standards for Accessible Design. It is a term that reestablishes an important goal of good design—that it shall meet the needs of as many users as possible.”

Good design makes possible a visit to wild, scenic, historic places whether you are a year old or ninety years old. It accommodates people with wide ranges of age, talent and limitation, opening the door to both the excitement and tranquility of the natural world. Again quoting *Strategies for Teaching Universal Design*, “Universal design is lifespan design.”

The key to creating successful universal design is to become thoroughly familiar with both the legal requirements and the needs of the general public. This requires understanding the law, along with the needs of many different people. With knowledge of both areas, it is possible to create designs that, in addition to meeting the *letter* of the law, will also reflect the *spirit* of the law. Universal design is the spirit of the law in action.

FACILITY AND PROGRAM: TWIN COMPONENTS IN UNIVERSAL DESIGN

What is necessary for any form of interpretation to qualify as a universal design? Both the facility and the program are equally necessary components. The facility includes any manmade structure or improvement to a site. The program refers to services and activities provided at a site. Both must be considered accessible or “barrier-free” (see definitions on page 5) under the letter of the law, as well as the spirit of the law. When the facility and program work together to create a completely accessible, barrier-free experience, universal design has been accomplished.

The elements making up typical visitor centers and nature or interpretive trails can be divided into facility and program components as follows:

Universal design meets all of the legal requirements for accessibility, and then goes a step further, maximizing the experiences and opportunities offered by facilities and programs.

Visitor Center (an Interpretive Service)

Facility

- Parking
- Outdoor Access Route
- Entrance
- Information Desk
- Indoor Access Route
- Rest Rooms
- Drinking Fountain
- Public Telephones
- Bookstore/Gift Shop
- Exhibits/Displays
- Auditorium

Program

- Information Services
- Displays/Exhibits
- Ranger-led Programs
- Audiovisual Programs
- Handouts, Brochures, Maps

Nature or Interpretive Trail

Facility

- Parking
- Access Route or Outdoor Recreation Access Route
- Entrance or Trailhead
- Benches
- Viewing Area
- Telescopes
- Displays/Exhibits

Program

- Interpretive Signs
- Maps (Orientation and Access Profiles)
- Brochures
- Exhibits

Notice that the elements to be considered for both the Visitor Center and Nature Trail show that access for any *program*, be it a slide show in a visitor center or a nature trail with interpretive displays, begins with the *facility*, and facility access begins in the parking lot. Although it seems obvious, this is one of the most frequently overlooked elements. Visitors requiring a wheelchair must be able to exit their vehicles safely, and then gain access to the visitor center or trailhead. Then the individual using a chair, walker, or cane, or pushing a baby stroller, must be able to reach the program site. Each element must be considered for accessibility from the parking lot through the entire list.

With the facility access provided, we can move on to the second set of considerations presented above to evaluate the program access. Program components have many facets. We will consider the kinds of signs that are offered and whether the signs can be read with ease by all ranges of visitors. Often a brochure is a primary vehicle for delivery of information. If that is the case, is that information also available in alternative forms, such as large print, Braille, or audio tape?

Note that exhibits and displays are placed under both facility and program access. Typical exhibits have both components. The exhibit table or display case, for example, will meet a series of requirements for height and design; another set of specifications will determine lettering and lighting used to convey the exhibit's message. A barrier-free, accessible exhibit incorporates all of these elements when it uses universal design.

In summary, the manmade structures, the services and activities at a site must be accessible to a wide range of potential visitors to qualify as a universal design. When evaluating the appropriateness of your facility and your program, start at the parking lot and continue to examine the other elements that could create barriers from there. Universal design

Universal design ensures that people pushing strollers, using wheelchairs or walkers, or guided by canes can receive your message and enjoy the natural world.

ensures that people pushing strollers, using wheelchairs or walkers, or guided by canes can receive your message and enjoy the natural world.

DEFINITIONS:

Barrier-free design "promotes the elimination of physical barriers to access in the design and construction of buildings and sites. In doing so, it focuses on the anthropometrics and spatial needs of the two major categories of people with disabilities: those who have a disability but are ambulatory, and those who must use wheelchairs."¹

RESOURCES

Universal *Access to Outdoor Recreation: A Design Guide*, PLAE, Inc., Berkeley, California, 1993.

Strategies for *Teaching Universal Design*, edited by Polly Welch for Adaptive Environments.

Center for Universal Design
College of Design
North Carolina State University
Phone/TTY: 919-515-3082 or 800-647-6777
www.design.ncsu.edu/cud

ENDNOTES

1.1 *Universal Access to Outdoor Recreation: A Design Guide*, PLAE, Inc., Berkeley, California, 1993.

A Checklist for Outdoor Recreation Facilities

Several checklists have been included in this chapter to help you evaluate an outdoor recreation facility or program to see if it is designed to meet the needs of a wide range of visitors. The heading for each section below includes reference numbers for the Americans with Disabilities Act Guidelines (ADAAG). ADAAG's references are found in parentheses (). If more information is needed, refer to the Access Board's website: www.access-board.gov.

When applicable, the proposed regulation of the Regulatory Negotiation Committee's Recommendations for Accessibility Guidelines: Outdoor Developed Areas (Reg-Neg) are also listed at the category headings below. The references to the Reg-Neg Report are found in brackets [1. For your reference, the entire Text of the Proposed Rule has been included, beginning on page 91. We recommend compliance with these guidelines until the laws are revised and passed.

Each element listed below has its own checklist, either in this chapter or later in this book.

Parking

Access Routes

Rest Rooms

Drinking Fountains

Assembly Area

Orientation Maps (see chapter 5)


State and Specific Destination Access Guides (see chapter 5)

Signs (see chapter 7)

Universally Designed Exhibits (see chapter 8)

Nature and Interpretive Pails (see chapter 9)

Wildlife Viewing Areas (see chapter 10)

 Each element listed on the left has its own checklist, either in this chapter or later in this book. Page number references will help guide you to the location of each checklist.

PARKING (ADAAG 4.6) (✓ page 23)

The parking space, called an "accessible parking space," is where the experience begins for the visitor. For a person who uses a wheelchair, a safe and easy transition from the vehicle to their chair is the beginning of an enjoyable experience. Safety begins with a *level*, firm space for the transition. During the transfer, the person must pick

Visitor Orientation: maps, symbols, access guides, trailheads

Up until now we have talked about facility access without considering the program. But, ultimately, it is the program that outdoor recreation managers and designers want to provide for their visitors. When they address the program needs of persons with disabilities, as varied as those are, they meet the program needs of the general public. No family is free of disability. Some individual family members have better hearing than others; some see long distances better than a brother or sister. And some can walk a country mile with no difficulty, while the same walk might be difficult for one's father, mother, young daughter or son. These family members would not consider themselves as having a disability; nevertheless, good design of a program makes the experience more enjoyable for all of them. That is what universal design for program access is all about.

Programs begin with orientation. Orientation maps and access guides at trailheads, visitor centers, park entrances, and points of interest not only provide visitors with an increased level of independence and comfort but also make their experience at a recreation site more enjoyable. Many persons are uncomfortable asking for directions or other information. Access maps and brochures allow visitors to make their own decisions about what they will experience.

Labels on the maps and guides should take into account that many different groups will use the information presented. Activities that can be touched and experienced not only provide a way for a visually impaired person to participate but also are a high priority for families with young children. Older persons and families with young children may seek access routes that require minimum effort. Similarly, persons who have mobility impairments look for access routes designed for their needs. Orientation maps are also appreciated by foreign visitors who may have difficulty communicating with the staff or others. Many a visitor's comfort level is increased if they know the location of the nearest rest room, or the nearest telephone, concession stand, drinking water or rest area.

Special computer software is now available which enables small parks and recreation areas to design their own orientation maps and access guides. This makes it much easier to have up-to-date information for visitors. There are several different kinds of software packages available to help park managers.

Orientation maps and access guides at trailheads, visitor centers, park entrances, and points of interest not only provide visitors with an increased level of independence and comfort but also make their experience at a recreation site more enjoyable.



Everyone's Nature is an essential guide for maximizing visitor accessibility and enjoyment through universal design at all outdoor recreation facilities and programs. Park managers, designers, interpreters, educators and maintenance supervisors will appreciate the straightforward information. Reproducible checklists found throughout the book help those involved in outdoor recreation assess their program and facility with integrity and confidence.

(Everyone's Nature) is a grand piece of work, bringing together the appreciation of our nation's natural and cultural heritage with the precepts and legalities of universal design. It has been a need for a long while, and now here it is...all in one easily readable, usable book. It will prove to be a widely used catalyst to experiencing our heritage without our design getting in the way of enjoying the delights of each and every place.

John J. Reynolds
National Park Service, retired

Everyone's Nature explains the concept of universal design in practical ways that make sense for use at all facilities and programs. It has a permanent home on my desk. I am at the very beginning of developing a new interpretive sign program, and I know I will use Carol's suggestions and checklists. *Everyone's Nature* is a very positive approach to changing the world of accessibility.

Victoria Atkins,
*Interpretation/Education Lead, Bureau of Land Management,
Canyons of the Ancients National Monument, Anasazi Heritage Center, Dolores, Colorado*

At last, there is a quality source for outdoor accessibility. Here is the answer to all those questions about access to the woods.

Thomas G. Deniston
Past Director, Access Board; Past Member, ANSI A117.1 Committee

Carol has created a book that not only guides interested parties through the assessment of recreational facilities but also serves as an educational tool. We plan to include *(Everyone's Nature)* as a valuable reference in our Design (EPICS) library and to use the book as an integral resource for projects involving designs of recreational facilities.

Bob Knecht
Director of the Design (EPICS) Division, Colorado School of Mines

\$19.95 ▫
Adventure Publications, Inc.
820 Cleveland St. S
Cambridge, MN 55008
1-800-678-7006
ISBN: 1-59193-023-5

