Dear Kileleni Team member,

I have returned home to Texas after a week in Colorado prepping for your Leadership Experience and found

everything in the Arkansas River Valley as beautiful as ever with lots of snow capping each peak and deep into the mountain valleys. The aspen at lower elevations were just starting to bud out to their lime green colors,

wildflowers were just starting to form, river water was flowing from rain and snowmelt with levels rising

daily. All my senses were alerted by the sights, smells and sounds of nature exploding everywhere, whether in town or in the wilderness.

My attempted summit hike of Mount Shavano was made more difficult by the amount of snow still sitting in the shaded forests during the first few miles of ascent. At tree line, just as I attempted to cross the east-facing slope of small rocks, I decided to turn back after 100 yards of carefully traversing the soft snow and occasional ice-crusted drifts. I could see the ridge which is the next landmark towards the summit, but realized a few more days of warmth and sunshine are needed to melt enough snow to make it safe enough for a solo attempt to cross. So, I decided to turn back and enjoy the down-hike, the scents of the ponderosa forest and

the views of the distant town of Salida under the towering Sangre de Cristo Mountains further south.

While I did not achieve the physical summit last Friday, I did get to experience again the wonderful weary feeling of hiking at altitude and was reminded that it truly is the journey towards the summit that is the key. While leaders always aim for the highest point, often there are very good reasons we may not achieve what we had originally intended. Yet the goal of ‘the summit’ was and remains worthwhile.

Over the next three weeks we are hopeful the snow will continue to melt on Mt. Shavano so that we can safely reach the 14,231’ summit. If weather conditions do not allow that, then we will have an alternative mountain or destination goal upon which to challenge ourselves and thoroughly enjoy the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of the day.

Kileleni!

Patrick Steenberge