PIKES PEAK
Summit Visitor Center

Yearly, nearly a million people ascend to the summit of Pikes Peak, where they are rewarded with views that inspired "America the Beautiful." The careful placement and sensitive design of this new visitor center at 14,115 feet, the highest facility of its type in the world, places the focus on the stunning landscape, allowing boundless sky and views to take center stage.

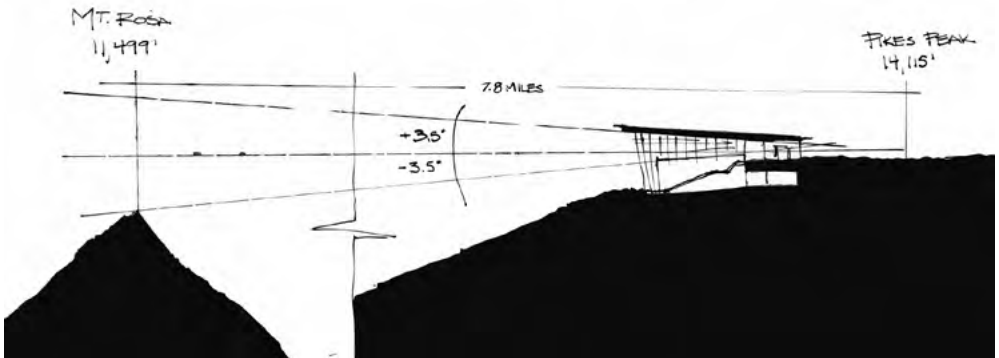
Embedded into the mountainside, the low-rise structure is seemingly carved from the southeast side of the peak. Its form and materials, with stone inspired by Pikes Peak granite, evoke the crags and rock formations found above the trees. From below, the building appears as a building of the mountain rather than one on the mountain, yet as visitors arrive at the summit it emerges as a clear destination.

Cascade, Colorado
Cultural / Institutional

Through siting, the use of natural materials, and an extensive network of walkways and overlooks, the design creates rich, deep connections between visitors and the natural environment.

"The summit of the Grand Peak, which was entirely bare of vegetation and covered with snow...I believed no human being could have ascended to its pinnacle."
Zebulon Pike

Entering from the peak, visitors are awed by the framed view of Mt. Rosa, the summit that Zebulon Pike climbed in 1806. The architecture of the pavilion highlights the relationship between the two landforms; the viewing angle from the upper lobby to Mt. Rosa slopes down 3.5-degrees, with the same angle echoed by the roof's upward slope.

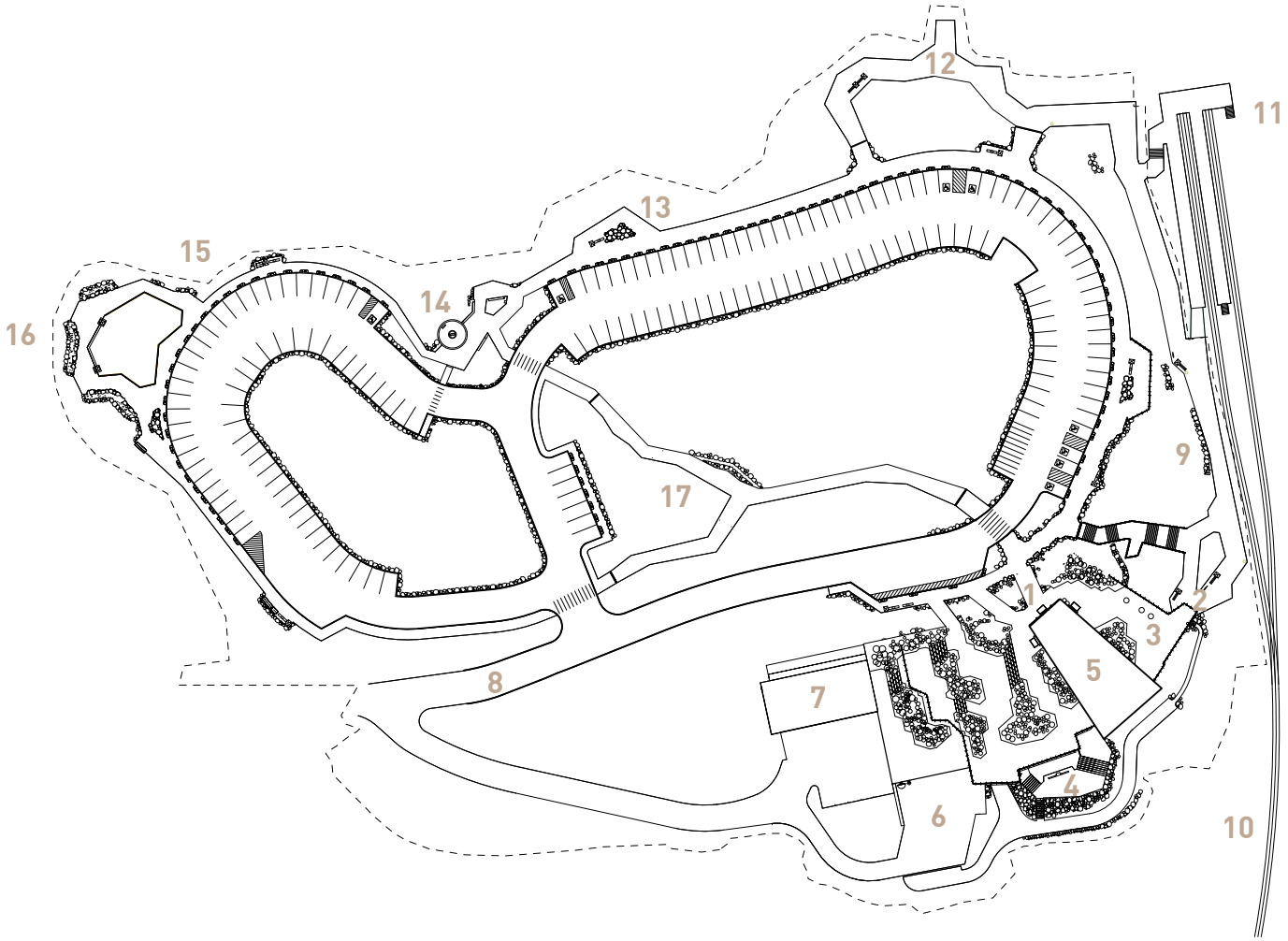


SITE PLAN

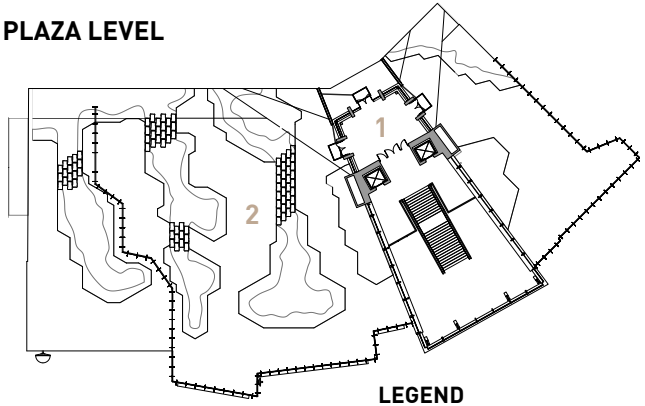
LEGEND

1 Upper Level Entrance
2 Lower Level Entrance
3 Roof Terrace
4 Dining Terrace
5 Visitor Center
6 Plant & Utilities
7 High Altitude Research Lab
8 Pikes Peak Highway
9 Historic Summit House Wall
10 Cog Railway
11 Barr Trail Access
12 North Overlook
13 Central Overlook
14 Summit Marker
15 Devil's Plaground Trail
16 West Overlook
17 Elevated Walkway

Scale: 1/128" = 1'-0"
0 20 40 80 160
NORTH



PLAZA LEVEL



Scale: 1/32" = 1'-0"
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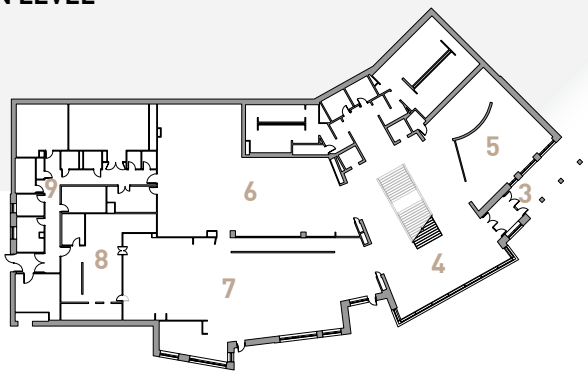
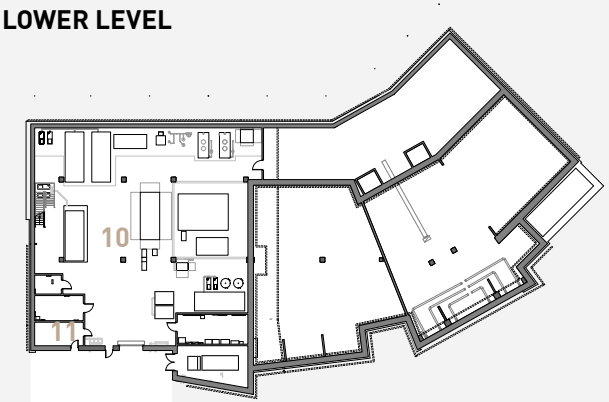
NORTH

MAIN LEVEL



LOWER LEVEL



LEGEND

1 Upper Entry
2 Roof Plaza
3 Lower Entry
4 Lobby
5 Exhibit
6 Retail
7 Dining
8 Kitchen
9 Admin
10 Mechanical
11 Shelter

Stairs to the main level appear to fold down out of the mountain, as visitors descend to the main floor to access exhibits, dining, a gift shop, and restrooms. Warm, rustic colors and natural materials, including locally-sourced timber, further connect the interior to the landscape.

With modern amenities and expanded opportunities to engage with the history, ecology, and natural beauty of the summit, the new, sustainable visitor center allows Pikes Peak—once considered impossible to climb and now an iconic American destination—to continue to inspire for generations to come.

Two accessible roof decks, an elevated viewing platform, and a network of protected walkways stage a series of opportunities to experience the drama of the landscape all while protecting this fragile ecosystem. Visitors who wish to wander the summit can follow a series of fully accessible walkways, which are designed with gradual elevation changes and resting areas to mitigate the fatigue that can occur at high altitude.

Exterior materials were chosen for extreme durability and were subjected to year-long exposure testing at the peak. Final material selections included natural materials with through-body solid composition including stone, integrally colored concrete, and weathering steel that remain functional and weather gracefully. Curtainwall assemblies required custom engineering and laboratory testing for hurricane and missile projectile force conditions. The exposed sides of the curtainwall received hurricane shutters that close in high wind conditions to protect the glazing.

Environmental stewardship is central to the design, and the team embraced the challenge to create a highly sustainable building in one of the most difficult settings imaginable. The visitor center is designed to meet the Living Building Challenge and LEED Silver and aiming to achieve net zero energy and waste. Most importantly, the building provides refuge for all in the event of a severe weather change in this unpredictable climate.

The visitor center and the surrounding site are designed to foster a sense of connectedness and stewardship while minimizing the building's visual and environmental impact. With appropriately scaled structures, intentional pedestrian walkways, and interpretive elements, the design reflects respect for visitors, the natural landscape, and cultural history.