

Cloud First

Elijah Jones

I was not looking for any particular type of cloud. I mostly just kept my eyes open for anything that looked particularly cool or interesting. For this particular image I took pictures of the clouds over the mountains from my apartment for several days. The image I picked was the one I found the most striking and interesting to look at. It also has the most clouds so it offers the most opportunity for analysis and confusion.

Circumstances

The location was in Gunbarral Colorado about 10 minutes down the diagonal highway from Boulder. I took the photo from about 20 feet above the ground on the balcony of my apartment. I was facing west towards the mountains and shooting slightly upward so that the mountains are visible in the bottom 8th or so of the photo. I took the photo at 7:54 pm when the sun had dipped below the horizon and there was a lot of color coming from behind the clouds.

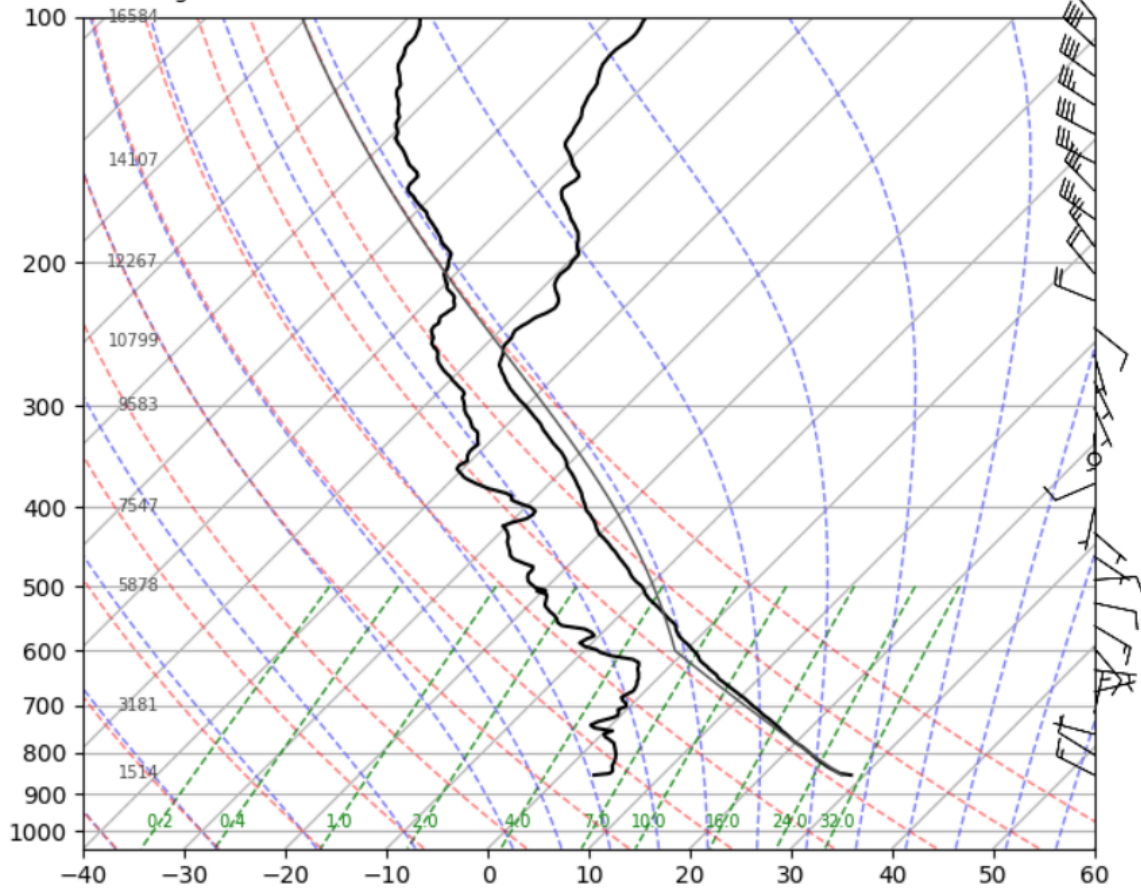
About the Clouds

There are a lot of clouds in my image which is what gives the image an interesting distribution of light and color. The dark clouds frame the colors and light very well. It does make it a little bit difficult to tell exactly what is happening in the clouds though. It was mostly sunny throughout that day from what I remember. There were some clouds but they really began to gather over the mountains in the evening. No substantial wind nor rainfall followed or preceded the image I took but it did appear to be raining some over the mountains. To better understand the type of clouds present I used the Skew-T plot below. Initially I used a different plot that only confused me more. According to that plot there shouldn't really be that many clouds. Then I realized it was from the morning or about 20 hours prior to the time the photo was taken. I was able to get the plot below from the University of Wyoming's data. The plot is from Grand Junction and was taken at midnight on the 7th or about 4 hours after my photos were taken. According to this plot I believe it was relatively unstable that day. This should indicate the formation of clouds between 4km and 12 km because the dew points and temperature get closer together there. This is also supported by how turbulent the wind is between those two heights. I believe this is an indication of the instability. I believe the clouds in my picture based on this are a mix of Altocumulus, cumulus, altostratus and maybe some cirrus at the higher elevations. My only problem here is that I'm pretty sure there should be some kind of rain cloud present. Also I was observing some clouds that looked to be not that high over the mountains. I would assume those are closer to the ground than 4km.

Station 72476 at 00 UTC 07 Oct 2026

GRAND JUNCTION/WALKER FIELD, CO., USA

Latitude: 39.120 Longitude: -108.524



Photographing Techniques

I took the photos using a Canon EOS 80D digital camera with a Canon EF-S adjustable lens that had a max focal length of 55mm or 85.5mm for the 35mm equivalent. The distance between myself and the clouds was most likely somewhere between 12-13km. I shot it with an exposure of 1/10, an aperture of f/11 and an ISO of 400. The image is 6014x4010 pixels. In post processing I increased the contrast of the image and the detail to make the colors pop more. I also increased the global vibrance by about 1.5%. I increased the exposure by about .7 to brighten it up a bit and ran it through something to rescue the grain slightly. Other than that not much post processing was done. The image was pretty by itself and only needed a little tweaking.

Conclusion

The image shows a pretty stunning view of sunset breaking through the clouds right before all the color and light fades away. I'm pretty happy I was able to get that shot because I

was taking pictures for a few days and was really underwhelmed by what I was getting. I'm happy I was able to get a rather chaotic collection of clouds as well. It made it interesting to try and pick apart what was actually happening in the atmosphere. I feel I did fulfill my intent this time. I knew I wanted to get something with Sunset because it looks so incredible over the mountains sometimes and I was happy to be able to find a good day for it. I think next time I'd like to try and get an individual cloud so I can really analyze but that doesn't mean I'm unhappy with the picture I got.