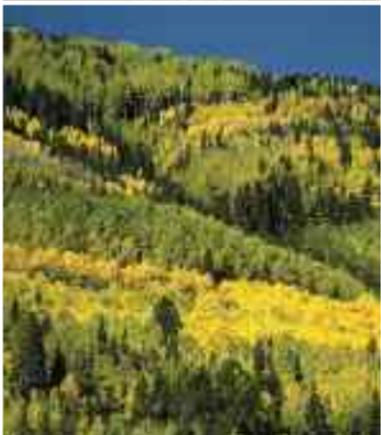
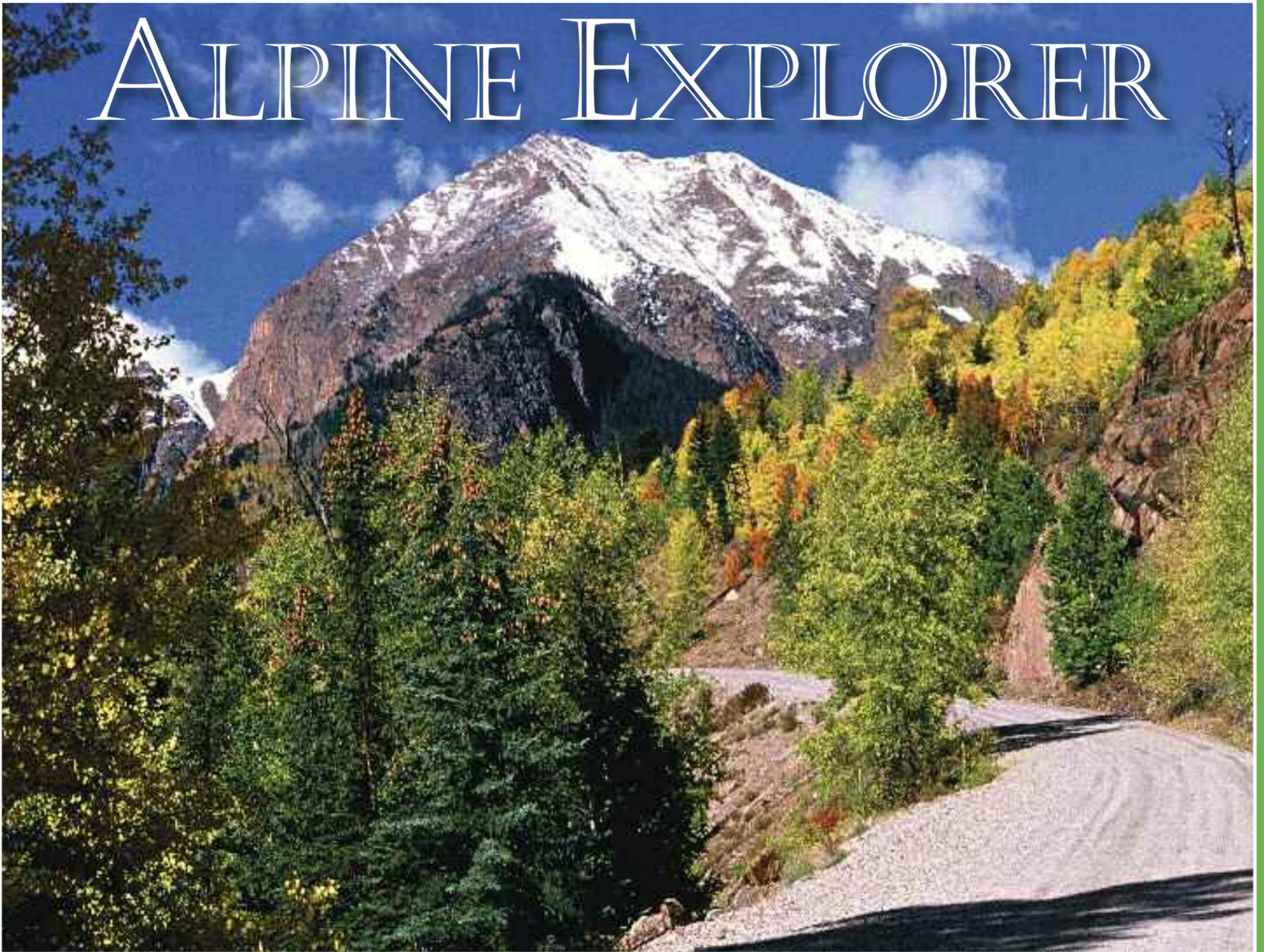


A guide to the natural and historical resources on the Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway

ALPINE EXPLORER



*scenic drives · hiking · history
fall colors · wildflowers · wildlife*



WELCOME TO THE ALPINE LOOP BACKCOUNTRY BYWAY



Uncompahgre Peak (14,309 feet).
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management

Rising high above the Alpine Loop, the mountains insist that you acknowledge their presence. All around, a kaleidoscope of summer wildflowers gathers along the trails, and the sounds of cascading streams are everywhere. The pure, clear air startles you with its crisp bite, even before your gasp reminds you of the altitude. In front of you the road beckons, leading you higher and higher into an alpine tapestry of greens, browns, whites, and blues. As you embark upon your journey, you know this is no ordinary backcountry road. Welcome to the Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway, one of the finest examples of our nation's Backcountry Byway system. Sixty-five miles of road carve through the breathtaking San Juan Mountains, connecting the towns of Lake City, Ouray, and Silverton. This road follows ancient paths worn by Native Americans traversing to their summer camps. In the late 1800s, miners in search of precious metals widened these paths to accommodate mule-and horse-drawn wagons. Today, the remains of ghost towns, mills, and mines are prominent reminders of the 19th century mining era.

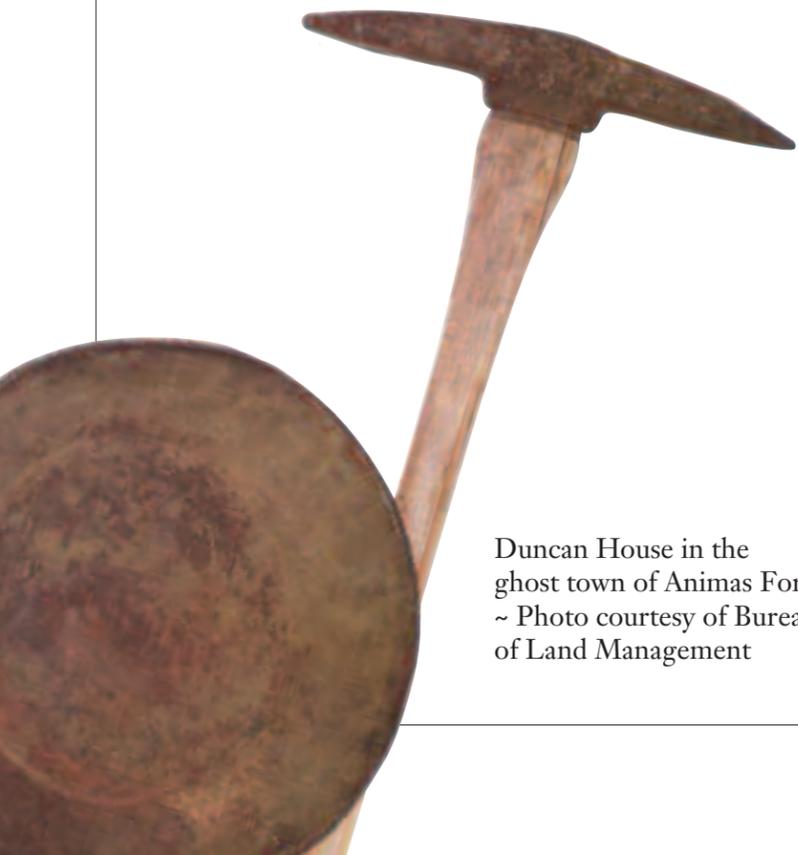


Looking up the Cottonwood Creek valley
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management

Depending on winter snows, the Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway opens by late May or early June and closes around late October. Most of the Loop winds through public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service, although many mines and buildings are on private property. Today's explorers come, summer or winter, in 4-wheel-drive vehicles, ATVs, snowmobiles, mountain bikes, and even 2-wheel-drive cars for a short distance. They explore on foot, horseback, or snowshoes, or ski on the numerous trails. Instead of shovels and gold pans, they carry sketchbooks, cameras, fishing rods, and field guides to help them enjoy the grandeur, scenery, solitude, and wildlife of the remote San Juan backcountry. This gem, the Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway, is your gateway off the beaten track.



Four-wheel-drive vehicles with high clearance are needed on some portions of the Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway. Access to the high country requires drivers to be aware of safety and the need to stay on designated roads, to protect the fragile alpine tundra.
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management



Duncan House in the ghost town of Animas Forks.
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management



RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES



Camping in the alpine tundra.

~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management

From the “lower” elevation of Ouray at 8,000 feet to the breathless heights of Engineer Pass at 12,800 feet, the Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway offers unsurpassed recreational opportunities. Scenic backcountry driving takes the spotlight as the most popular activity. Side roads spread out from the Alpine Loop, offering exploration in places like Corkscrew Gulch, Hurricane Pass, or Glacier Gulch. A spectacular wildflower display in American Basin awaits the traveler, and the blaze of fall color up Nellie Creek dazzles one’s senses.

A four-wheel-drive vehicle is not the only way to access the Alpine Loop. Mountain bikers, ATVerS, and dirt bikers traverse some designated backcountry roads in the summer; snowmobilers and cross-country skiers in the winter. To fully appreciate what the Alpine Loop has to offer, let your feet take you away from the roads. A multitude of trails, ranging from easy saunters to challenging ascents, awaits you around every bend. Trails to five of Colorado’s “fourteener” peaks can be reached via the Alpine Loop.

The high country also provides diverse opportunities for backpacking, camping, and even a bit of horseback riding. You might want to try your hand at trout fishing in the Lake Fork of the Gunnison, Henson Creek, the upper Rio Grande, Lake San Cristobal, and several high country lakes.



Horseback riding is a time-honored tradition in the San Juan Mountains.
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management



Lake San Cristobal near Lake City is the second largest natural lake in Colorado.

~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management



Mountain biking on the Alpine Loop

~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management

Winter sports abound in the gateway towns of Ouray, Silverton, and Lake City.

Local Chambers of Commerce or sporting goods stores will gladly share information about the area. The San Juan Mountains are yours to enjoy but you must treat them with care and respect. By remembering to “Leave No Trace” and “Tread Lightly,” you will preserve their beauty for others to enjoy. The Alpine Loop offers the outdoor enthusiast four seasons of beauty and adventure. It is all waiting for you to enjoy, just around the bend and down the road.

For those preferring to stay on pavement:

- San Juan Skyway connects Silverton, Ouray, Telluride, Dolores, Cortez, and Durango and offers spectacular views and scenery.
- Silver Thread Scenic Byway (all of Highway 149) connects the mining town of Lake City with Creede and South Fork.
- Driving north on U.S. 550 from Ouray, you will arrive in Montrose. From Montrose, Highway 50 (east) skirts the beautiful Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, and joins the West Elk Loop Scenic Byway on its way to Gunnison.



Try your hand at fishing along the Lake Fork of the Gunnison River
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management

RECREATION GUIDELINES



The alpine tundra is extremely fragile. Please stay on designated roads. They offer plenty of challenges for vehicle recreationists.
~ Photo courtesy of BLM

Minimizing the Impacts of Vehicle Use

Most visitors to the Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway arrive by motor vehicle. Surveys indicate that visitors and locals alike are concerned about vehicle damage to vegetation, increases in erosion, and overall impacts of vehicles on the fragile tundra environment.

In response to these concerns, all vehicles, including jeeps, motorcycles, and all-terrain-vehicles (ATVs) are required to stay on designated roads identified on the map. A system of signs shows the types of vehicles allowed and identifies which roads are open to motorized travel.

To camp, picnic, or for photo stops you may park immediately adjacent to a road where your vehicle will not damage the environment. Signs are posted in areas where parking is not permitted.

If you encounter rocks, logs, gates, or other barriers blocking your route, please stay on the main, designated road. These barriers are used to protect private property and to prevent vehicle damage to fragile meadows or tundra. Vehicles are not allowed in Wilderness or Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) as required by law.

ATVs and unlicensed motorcycles can use many of the roads in this area, but not all. A detailed brochure is available from visitor centers that will show the roads open for these vehicles. Colorado law also requires that these vehicles be registered for use in Colorado. See the website at <http://parks.state.co.us/OHV/sandsnowmobiles/OHVprogram/OHVregistrations/>

Mountain Roads

Roads in the high country are steep and rough. Four-wheel-drive vehicles with high clearance are needed to cross mountain passes and to drive most secondary roads. Some roads are passable by two-wheel-drive vehicles to a point, but you will not be able to drive the entire route between Silverton and Lake City without a high-clearance vehicle. Please use common sense to determine which routes are suitable for your vehicle and your level of comfort.

Roads on the Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway are steep and narrow, and may have blind curves. Please drive slowly and watch for other vehicles on the road. In the mountains, uphill traffic has the right of way. On narrow roads watch for pullouts to allow vehicles to pass. Loose gravel and rocks may be encountered at any time. Most of the roads have a rock base that holds up well even in heavy rains, but the rocks may be slippery. Watch for changing weather and adjust your speed accordingly.

Enjoy the Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway,
but please travel responsibly.

~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management



Dovetail construction of a log cabin in Burrows Park.
~ Photo courtesy of Interpretive Design, Durango, CO.

Protecting Cultural Resources

Little is known about the prehistory of the Alpine Loop. Archeologists, however, have located a number of archeological sites in the high-altitudes of the San Juan and La Plata Mountains. Some sites are encased in the fragile tundra and can be easily damaged by human activities. Other sites are exposed to the elements and are subject to the illegal collection of artifacts.

The condition of historic structures ranges from intact buildings such as the Tom Moore Boardinghouse near Eureka to seemingly barren meadows at the Argentium or Henson townsites. Most structures are in various states of decay and can be easily damaged by vandals or heavy snowfall. As with most accessible yet unsupervised sites, damage caused by visitors is accelerating the decay and loss of irreplaceable artifacts along the Alpine Loop. Most of the mine shafts and structures are unstable and present hazards such as poison air to recreational visitors.

In addition, many of the historic mines and mills are privately owned and are on private property. Trespassing on private land is illegal. Please remember, all sites, structures, artifacts, and historical remains on public land are protected by the Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979.

Please treat all sites and structures with caution and respect, so that your adventure will be safe and others can enjoy the rich cultural history of the Alpine Loop for many years to come.

Drive courteously and watch for people, wildlife, and bicyclists on the road. Always expect the unexpected. Please remember:

- Uphill traffic has the right-of-way
- Stay on your side of the road on blind curves.
- Stay on designated roads.
- Do not park on narrow portions of the roads. Find a turnout or a wide spot in the road.



RECREATION SITES & TRAILS

	Restroom
	Fishing Area
	Trailhead

 TH Trails				
A	Bear Creek Nat. Rec. Trail	4 miles	Moderate	Historic trail up Bear Creek to Engineer Pass
B	Whitmore Falls Trail	.1 mile	Easy	Trail to Whitmore Falls overlook
C	Matterhorn Creek Trail	7 miles	Moderate	Trail to Uncompahgre Wilderness, Wetterhorn Peak (14,015'), Matterhorn Peak (13,590'), and Uncompahgre Peak (14,309')
D	Nellie Creek Trail	 2 miles	Moderate	Four-wheel-drive vehicle needed to drive 5 miles to the trailhead. Trail to Uncompahgre Peak (14,309')
E	Alpine Gulch Trail	6 miles	Moderate	Bridge across Henson Creek. Wet crossings of Alpine Gulch. Trail connects to the Williams Creek Trail
F	Crystal Lake Trail	4 miles	Moderate	Starts at IOOF Cemetery, access to Crystal Lake, Thompson Lakes, and Larson Lakes
G	Bent Creek (access)	 .1 mile	Easy	Fishing access to Lake Fork of the Gunnison
H	Cataract Gulch Trail	 4.1 miles	Moderate	Waterfalls, access to Colorado Trail & Continental Divide Nat'l Scenic Trail.
I	Cuba Gulch Trail	4 miles	Moderate	Trail connects with trail network for loop hikes (see map)
J	Silver Creek Trail	 5 miles	Moderate	Trail to Redcloud Peak (14,034') and Sunshine Peak (14,001')
K	Grizzly Gulch Trail	 4 miles	Moderate	Trail to Handies Peak (14,048')
L	Cooper Lake Trail	4 miles	Moderate	Cooper Creek to Cooper Lake
M	American Basin Trail	2 miles	Moderate	Sloan Lake 1 mile, Handies Peak 2 miles
N	Highland Mary Trail	 3 miles	Moderate	Trail connects to Whitehead Peak Trail, access to Weminuche Wilderness
O	Whitehead Peak Trail	 5 miles	Moderate	Trail connects to Highland Mary Trail, access to Weminuche Wilderness
P	Colorado Trail (from Molas Pass)	1.5 miles	Easy to overlook - east	Durango 74 miles, Denver 400 miles, access to Weminuche Wilderness
Q	Boulder Gulch	6 miles	Moderate	Access to Storm Peak Speed Skiing Area
R	Waterdog Lake	4 miles	Moderate	Trailhead northeast of Lake City (near water treatment plant)
S	Williams Creek	7 miles	Moderate	Trail connects with Alpine Gulch Trail

Campgrounds & Picnic Areas

C1	Wupperman Campground (Hinsdale County)	 	Located on Hinsdale County Road # 33, south of Lake City
C2	Red Mountain Gulch Picnic Area (Hinsdale County)		Located on Hinsdale County Road #30, south of Lake City
C3	Williams Creek Campground (USFS)	 	Located on Hinsdale County Road #30, south of Lake City
C4	Mill Creek Campground (BLM)	 	Located on Hinsdale County Road #30, south of Lake City
C5	Molas Lake Campground (Town of Silverton)	  	Located off Hwy 550, south of Silverton
C6	South Mineral Campground (USFS)	  	Located off Hwy 550, on Forest Road #585, west of Silverton
C7	Lost Trail Campground (USFS)	 	Located off SR 149, on Hinsdale CR #520, southeast of Lake City
C8	Amphitheater Campground (USFS)	 	Located on Hwy 550, south of Ouray

Scenic Vistas & Rest Stops

S1	Slumgullion Earthflow		Geologic overlook
S2	Capitol City		Historic site, abandoned townsite (some private homes)
S3	Animas Forks		Historic site, abandoned townsite
S4	Maggie Gulch		Jeep route, historic buildings
S5	Mayflower Mill/Arrastra Gulch		Historic tours of the mill by the San Juan County Historic Society
S6	Sunnyside Reclamation Site		Historic overlook
S7	Windy Point Overlook		Natural history & scenic overlook
S8	Rose's Cabin		Historic site (private land), restroom downstream .25 mile
S9	Sound Democrat Mill		Historic site, restored mill, walking tours

THE HISTORY CHANNEL



History expresses itself at every bend of the Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway. Miners developed roads a hundred years ago that are now traveled by today's visitors. The rugged terrain of the San Juan Mountains required engineering designs for roads and tramways used to transport ore and supplies. Eleven town sites were established between 1875 and 1885 along the Alpine Loop, serving as centers for economic and social activities.

Success and failure, resourcefulness and waste, determination and vulnerability are evident in the many remnants of 19th century mining structures. Take, for example, Capitol City, founded by George Lee in 1877. Lee believed his town was so ideal that it would become the capital of Colorado. Lee's dream was never realized since Capitol City, at its peak, had only 400 hardy residents when the burgeoning city of Denver boasted almost 25,000 people.

Consider the Sound Democrat Mill, built in 1906 at an elevation of nearly 12,000 feet in the Eureka Mining District. The Sound Democrat is one of the most complete stamp mills remaining on public land, though its original owners walked away from it after only nine years of operation. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) stabilized the structure and replaced the roof in the mid-1990s so that it might last another hundred years.

Life in these mining towns required fortitude. Residents of Animas Forks weathered a blizzard in 1884 that lasted 23 days and dumped 25 feet of snow. Imagine being trapped in your own home for days on end and tunneling to visit your neighbor or go to the outhouse.



The Columbus Mine near Animas Forks, circa 1890. ~ Photo courtesy of San Juan County Historical Society



Aerial trams with wire cables revolutionized mining in the San Juan Mountains. ~ Photo courtesy of San Juan County Historical Society

Many still visible exploration pits and tunnels give evidence of extensive prospecting. The Hidden Treasure, Ute-Ulay, Golden Fleece, Little Giant, and Pride of the West mines are only a few of the more than 70 mines with lodes that beckoned 19th century entrepreneurs. These historic structures call to us today as we ponder the lives of folks who followed the lure of gold and silver to the lofty peaks of the San Juan Mountains.

As we explore these historic treasures, we must do so with caution. Private land rights must be respected. Camping or building fires within 100 feet of any mine or structure is prohibited. The mill timbers, glass, machinery, and other historic items are artifacts protected by federal law. Enjoy these national treasures, but please leave them as you found them.



Pack train with mining supplies leaves Ouray ~ Photo courtesy of Ouray County Historical Society



Rose's Cabin on Henson Creek was a roadhouse that provided meals and overnight accommodations to travelers. ~ Photo courtesy of Lake City Museum — Hinsdale County-Historical Society, Wright Collection



Miners at the Susquehanna Tunnel high on Hazelton Mountain in the 1880s.
 ~ Photo courtesy of San Juan County Historical Society

Metal tram towers were installed by the Shenandoah Dives Mining Company to transport ore from the Mayflower Mine to the Mayflower Mill.
 ~ Photo courtesy of San Juan County Historical Society



The Silver Lake Mill on the Animas River in 1904.
 ~ Photo courtesy of San Juan County Historical Society

Aerial trams transported silver ore from the Empire Chief Mine to its stamp mill in the valley.
 ~ Photo courtesy of Hinsdale County Museum, Hinsdale County Historical Society



Pack train with ore at the Old Lot (Loutt) Mine in Poughkeepsie Gulch.
 ~ Photo courtesy of San Juan County Historical Society



Freight wagon on the Red Mountain Toll Road at Bear Creek.
 ~ Photo courtesy of Ouray County Historical Society

POINTS OF INTEREST

Animas Forks, Tellurium, Rose's Cabin, Stoiber Mansion, Ute-Ulay, Empire Chief, Otto Mears, Stony Pass, Alferd Packer ... all are names that help tell the history of the San Juan Mountains. Today, you can follow the routes used by the prospectors, miners, and settlers that ventured into the mountains to seek their fortune. Imagine, if you will, their hardships as you marvel at their successes and failures on the 65-mile Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway.

These Points of Interest may help you enjoy your adventure and appreciate your historic heritage. The Points of Interest and recreational amenities are keyed to the map in the center of this booklet.

1 The community of **Mineral Point** was established in 1873. During its peak in the 1880s it had a population of about 100 people. The remains of the **San Juan Chief Mill** can be found in the area.

2 **Engineer Pass**, at 12,800 feet, is situated on the rim of two extinct volcanic calderas. The pass offers spectacular views of the surrounding peaks, with Uncompahgre Peak (14,309') to the east and Mt. Sneffels (14,150') to the west. Otto Mears, the "pathfinder of the San Juans," built the Lake City-Silverton Toll Road over Engineer Pass. The first stagecoach (wagon) crossed this pass in 1877.

3 **Frank Hough Mine** was owned by John S. Hough, a good friend of Kit Carson. Hough ran for Governor of Colorado in 1880.

4 **Palmetto Gulch Powderhouse** is a rock structure built in the 1880s to store dynamite and gun powder for use in the **Palmetto Gulch Mine**.

5 **Palmetto Gulch Mill**. In the late 1800s the Palmetto Gulch Mining and Milling Company produced 25 tons of ore per day from the Palmetto Gulch Mine. Only scattered debris from the mill can be found today. Note the ecological change as you travel through an Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir forest to the alpine tundra above treeline.

6 **Rose's Cabin** was named for Corydon Rose, who built a roadhouse at this location in 1875. The cabin had 22 small rooms on the second floor and provided meals and overnight accommodation to travelers. The cabin had a restaurant and bar and there was a 60-stall stable nearby. (Restroom)



Empire Chief Mill in 1929.
~ Photo courtesy of Hinsdale County Museum
Hinsdale County Historical Society



"Snowshoeing" at Mineral Point in 1866.
~ Photo courtesy of Fort Lewis College — Center for Southwest Studies

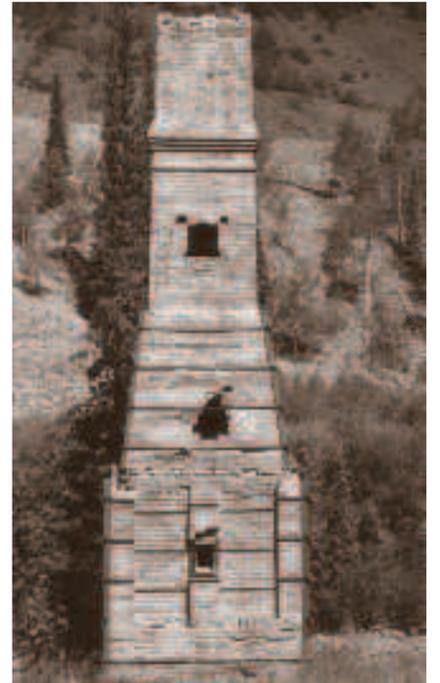
7 **Empire Chief Mine, Mill, and Boarding House**. The mine was originally discovered in 1885 and like many in the Galena Mining District, it changed hands numerous times before closing in 1930. In 1929, an avalanche killed four workers that were in the bunkhouse and in the main office building. The mill was stabilized in 2002 but destroyed by an avalanche in 2008.

8 **Rose Lime Kiln** was built in 1881 by George S. Lee, a local businessman and investor. An ash-free lime was produced in this kiln and used as a cement additive. The kiln was named after Rose Lee, the daughter of George and Mary Jane Lee.

Rose Lime Kiln on Henson Creek
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management



Capitol City Charcoal Kiln
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management



9 **Capitol City Charcoal Kiln** was built in 1877 and is believed to be the oldest standing charcoal kiln in Colorado. Wood placed in the oven was reduced to charcoal used to fuel the George B. Greene and the Henson Creek smelters in Capitol City.

10 Originally called Galena City, **Capitol City** was renamed in 1877. The community had a number of stores and hotels, as well as a post office, charcoal kilns, and an ore smelter. Capitol City boasted a population of about 400 people, including George Lee, an influential investor and businessman, who built a brickhouse that became known as **Lee's Mansion**.



Lee's Mansion, circa 1900. The house and outhouse were built of brick, adding a sense of permanence to Capitol City.
~ Photo courtesy of Hinsdale County Museum — Hinsdale County Historical Society



The Ute-Ulay Mine, circa 1900.
~ Photo courtesy of Hinsdale County Museum — Hinsdale County Historical Society, C. E. Wright Collection



Italians such as the Guadagnoli family were forced to leave Lake City as a result of a miner's strike against the Ute-Ulay Mine. ~ Photo courtesy of Hinsdale County Museum — Hinsdale County Historical Society

11 Ute-Ulay Mine was discovered in 1871, making it one of the earliest mines in the Galena Mining District. By 1880, the nearby town of **Henson** was platted. In the 1890s, power for the mine was supplied by the 118-foot-high **Henson Creek Dam**. In 1899, miners protesting poor living conditions at the Ute-Ulay mine called for a mine strike. In response, the governor brought in National Guard troops and the strike was quickly ended. Settlement agreements with the union required that Italians, who were heavily involved in the strike, leave Hinsdale County.

12 Alferd Packer Historic Site. In February 1874, five companions of Alferd Packer were massacred at this site. Nine years later, Packer was found in Wyoming and brought to Lake City to stand trial for murder and cannibalism. Although Packer was sentenced to hang, he was retried and sentenced to 40 years of hard labor. He served 15 years in prison in Cañon City and was paroled in 1901. Packer died in 1907, maintaining his innocence even on his death bed.



Alferd Packer was the only person ever found guilty of cannibalism in the state of Colorado. ~ Photos courtesy of the Colorado Historical Society



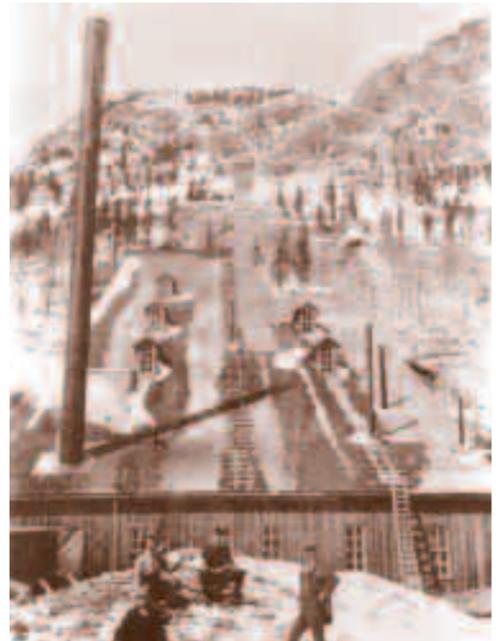
13 Originally called the Hotchkiss Claim, the **Golden Fleece Mine** was discovered by Enos Hotchkiss in 1874 while building the **Saguache & San Juan Toll Road** over Cinnamon Pass. The mine produced ore that assayed at \$40,000 per ton.



Miners in front of the Golden Fleece Mine, circa 1880s.
~ Photo courtesy of Hinsdale County Museum — Hinsdale County Historical Society

14 The community of **Carson** was founded in 1882 and flourished in the 1890s. It is one of the best preserved ghost towns in the San Juan Mountains.

15 The community of **Sherman** was established in 1875, adjacent to the **Black Wonder Mine and Mill**. In 1881, the **Sherman House** provided "Good accommodations for Travelers, Liquors, Wines, St. Louis Beer, and Cigars." Planks from a suspension flume are visible from the shelf road above Sherman. The flume was used to transport water from the Lake Fork of the Gunnison River to the Black Wonder Mill.



The Black Wonder Mill near Sherman in 1895.
~ Photo courtesy of Denver Public Library — Western History Department

16 Throughout its history, **Burrows Park** was home to a number of small communities, including **Argentium, Burrows Park, and Tellurium (Whitecross)**. The population of the valley shifted from community to community, depending on which mines were active and the location of the Post Office.

17 American Basin is one of the most scenic alpine valleys in the San Juan Mountains. In midsummer, wildflower displays are wonderful. If you look closely, you may notice an alpine rock glacier on the north-facing slope at the end of the valley.

18 Tabasco Mill & Tram is prominently located at this site near treeline. Ore from the Tabasco Mine, near Cinnamon Pass, was transported 1.7 miles to the mill for processing. Notice several wooden tram towers that are still standing as you head toward Cinnamon Pass.

19 Cinnamon Pass at 12,620' is one of the highest passes in the San Juan Mountains. Looking east you can see Handies Peak (14,048'), Redcloud Peak (14,034'), and Sunshine Peak (14,001') — three of Colorado's "fourteeners."

MORE POINTS OF INTEREST



The Gold Prince Mill in Animas Forks in 1904. The mill was later dismantled and rebuilt in Eureka.
~ Photo courtesy of San Juan County Historical Society

20 Animas Forks was originally named Three Forks. It was developed in 1873 at 11,200 feet in elevation. By 1876 there was a sizable hotel, a general store, saloon, post office, and thirty cabins. In 1904 the **Gold Prince Mill** was built and the **Silverton Northern Railroad** was extended from Eureka and terminated in Animas Forks. An aerial tram was also installed to transport ore from the Gold Prince Mine in Placer Gulch to the mill. (Restroom)

21 Bagley Mill was built to process ore from the ill-fated **Bonanza, Frisco, or Bagley Tunnel**. A 1,000 foot tunnel was driven through Houghton Mountain, but valuable ore was never reached. The Mill was prefabricated by the San Juan Lumber company in Durango. Support beams were erected, numbered, dismantled, and reassembled on this site.



Numbered posts can still be seen in the interior of the Bagley Mill.
~ Photo courtesy of Interpretive Design, Durango, CO



Old Hundred Mill in Cunningham Gulch, circa 1890.
~ Photo courtesy of San Juan County Historical Society

22 Sound Democrat Stamp Mill in Placer Gulch was built in 1905 to crush and process gold and silver/lead ore from the **Sound Democrat Mine and the Silver Queen Mine**. A self-guided, walking-tour brochure of the Sound Democrat Mill is available on-site or from local visitor centers.



The Sound Democrat Mill was stabilized and the roof replaced by the Bureau of Land Management. With care, many of these mining structures will last another 100 years.
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management

23 The community of **Eureka** was laid out in 1874 but prospecting in Eureka Gulch dates back to the 1860s. The town's growth was linked to the development of the prosperous **Sunnyside Mine**. The **Silverton Northern Railroad** was extended from Arrastra Gulch to Eureka by Otto Mears in 1896 to handle ore from the **Sunnyside Mill**. The Sunnyside Mine began to produce ore in 1873 and closed in 1938, after changing hands many times. The Sunnyside Mine reopened in 1960 after the 6,233-foot American Tunnel was driven through the mountain from Gladstone. In 1978, miners in the Sunnyside Mine bored through the bottom of **Lake Emma**. Their actions drained the lake and flooded the mine but fortunately no one was injured in this accident.

24 In 1893, the community of **Middleton** attracted a number of miners to over 100 mining claims in **Minnie Gulch** and **Maggie Gulch**. (Restroom)

25 The community of **Howardsville** was settled at the mouth of **Cunningham Gulch** in 1874. Although never platted, Howardsville became the first county seat for San Juan County. Howardsville was also the site of the first Sunnyside Mill, which at the time was the largest mill in the United States.

26 The **Old Hundred Mine, Mill, and Boarding House**. The Old Hundred Mine was first developed in 1872 by Reinard Niegold. Niegold found that ore at the highest elevation had the highest gold and silver concentrations. The mine was sold in 1904 to the Old Hundred Mining Company. The new company developed ore at the lower elevations, built boarding houses, retooled the mill, and operated three separate trams to haul ore from various levels to the mill for processing. Today tours of the Old Hundred Mine allow visitors to see the inner workings of a historic gold mine.



Old Hundred Boarding House
~Photo courtesy of San Juan County Historical Society

27 **Stony Pass**, at 12,588 feet, is located on the Continental Divide. To the east are the headwaters of the mighty Rio Grande. To the west is Cunningham Gulch, named for Major Cunningham, who led a group of miners into the area from Chicago in the early 1870s. Between 1871 and 1882, Stony Pass was the primary route to the mineral-rich San Juan Mountains. This route fell into disuse in 1882, when the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad extended its line from Durango to Silverton.



Wagons and freight had to be dismantled and packed over Stony Pass.
~ Photo by William Henry Jackson, courtesy of U.S. Geological Survey

28 **The Little Giant Mine**, in **Arrastra Gulch**, was developed in 1871, making it the first mine in the San Juan Mountains. The gulch soon became home to a number of prominent mines, including the **Silver Lake Mine**, **Iowa-Tiger Mine**, **Mayflower Mine**, and the **Wilfley Mine**. Some of the most innovative mining techniques in North America were developed here including wire-rope aerial trams, wilfley tables, and tailing reprocessing.



The Iowa-Tiger Mill in Arrastra Gulch processed 150 tons of ore per day from the Iowa-Tiger Mine.
~ Photo courtesy of San Juan County Historical Society

29 **The Mayflower Mill** was built in 1929 by the Shenandoah-Dives Mining Company, to process ore from the **Mayflower Mine** as well as other mines in the area. Except for a few years in the 1950s, the Mayflower Mill operated nearly continuously for over 60 years. It processed over 10 million tons of ore that yielded over 1.5 million ounces of gold and 30 million ounces of silver before it closed in 1991. Today, tours of the mill are conducted by the San Juan County Historical Society. (Restroom)

30 **Silver Lake Mine** and the first **Silver Lake Mill** were developed in the late 1880s. As mining continued, the owners, Edward and Lena Stoiber, built the **Silver Lake Mill #2** on the Animas River and installed aerial trams and angle stations to transport ore from the mines to the mill for processing. The **Silverton Northern Railroad** built a siding at the mill to haul ore concentrates from the mill to a smelter in Durango. The Stoibers built their home below the mill, a gracious mansion that they called **Waldeim**.

31 **Titusville Mine** operated from 1886 to 1893 with a small mining camp and an 8,000-foot aerial tramway into Kendall Gulch.



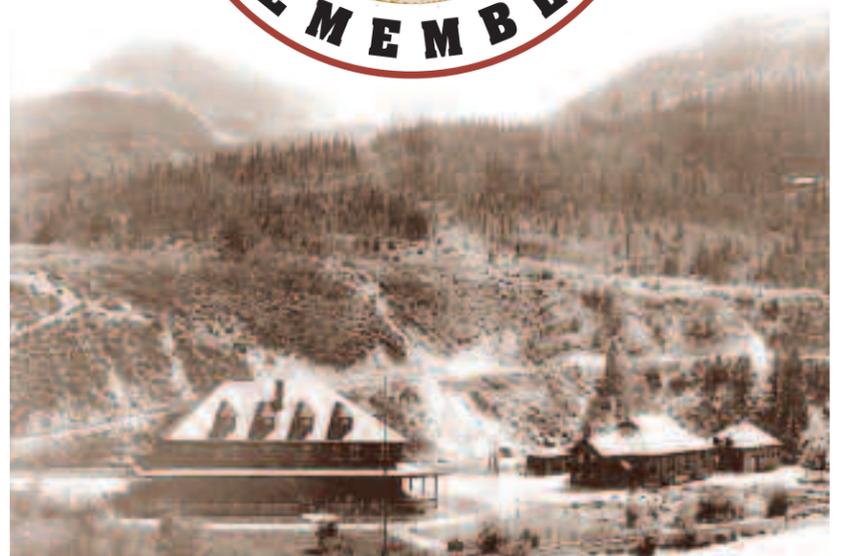
Hillside Cemetery
~ Photo courtesy of Freda Carley Peterson

32 **Hillside Cemetery** is on the north side of Silverton. The first person interred in the cemetery was four year old Rachel Elizabeth Farrow in 1875.

33 The community of **Gladstone** was settled around 1893 in support of the **Gold King Mine**, **Sunnyside Mine (American Tunnel)**, and **Lead Carbonate Mine**. In 1899 the **Silverton-Gladstone Railroad** was built from Silverton to Gladstone to transport concentrated ore from the mills to smelters in Durango and Pueblo. Nearby **Storm Peak** was the site of the International Speed Skiing Championships in 1982 and 1983. World records were set for men at 129.3 m.p.h. and women at 120.3 m.p.h.



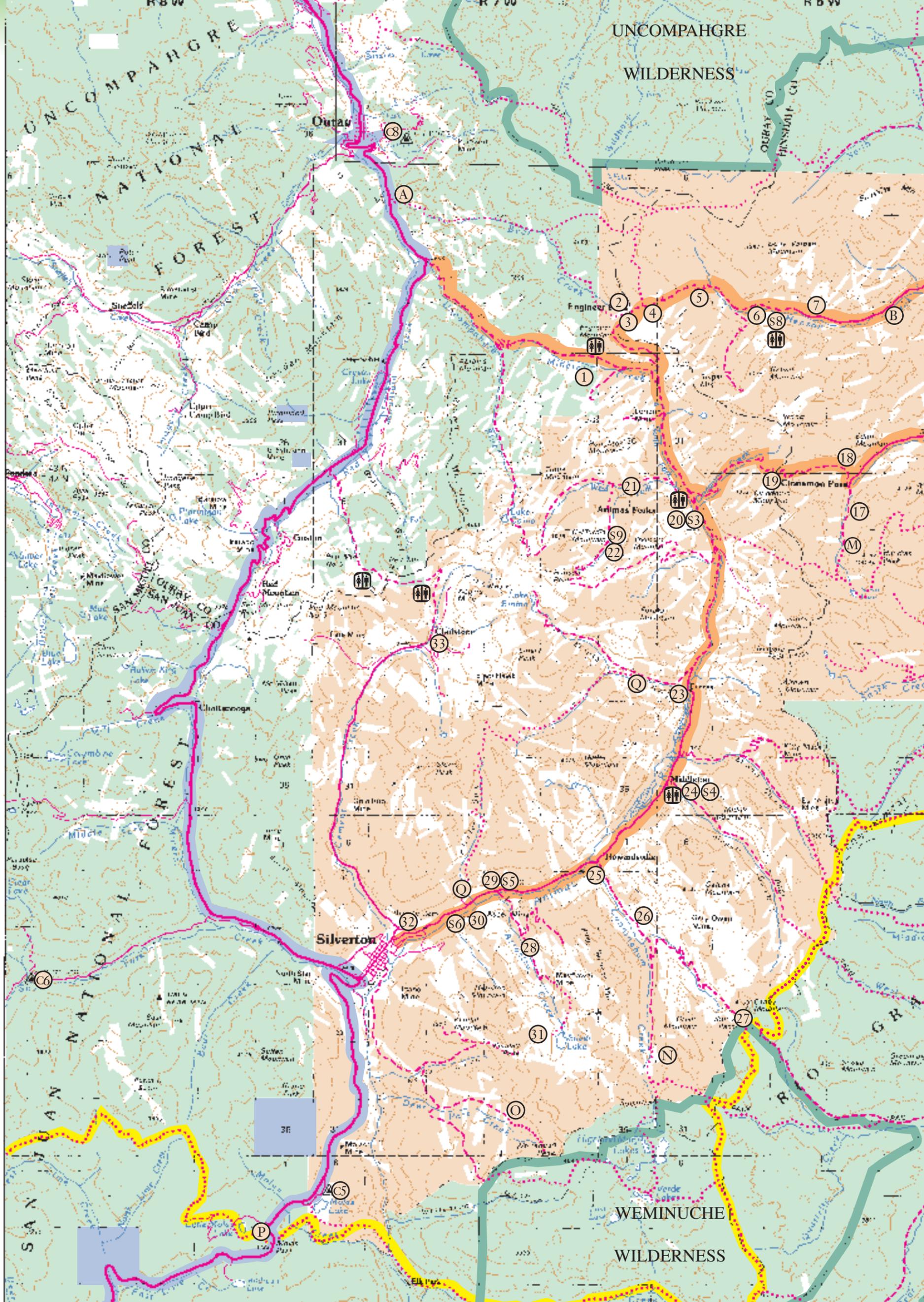
Cultural resources are not renewable.
Sites, artifacts, and historical remains are
protected by the Archaeological Resource
Protection Act of 1979.



Waldeim was built by Edward and Lena Stoiber.
~ Photo courtesy of San Juan County Historical Society

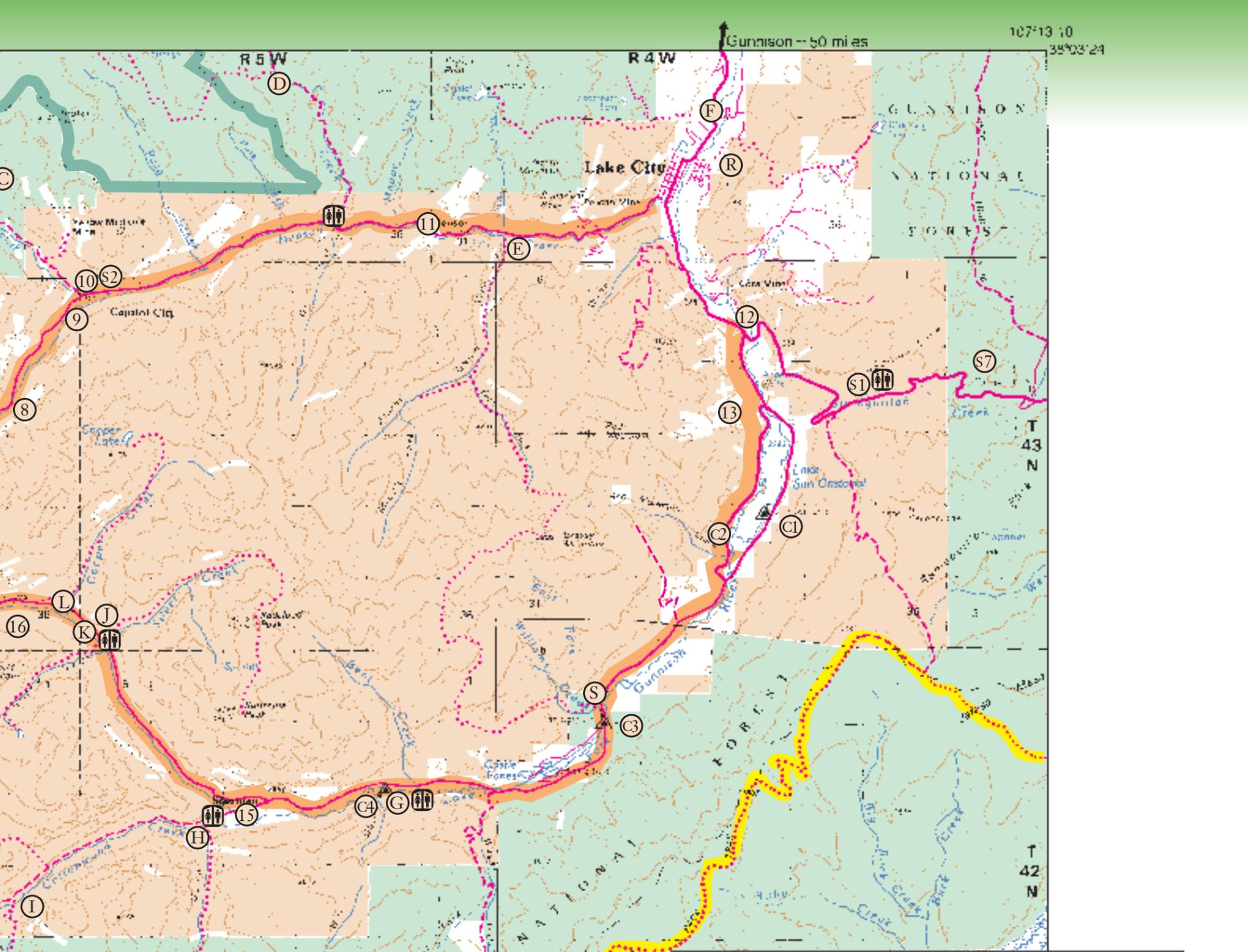
107°47'03"
38°03'24"

Montrose - 34 miles



37°43'13"
107°47'50"
Durango - 37 miles

*The center fold Map correlates with the numbers and the points of interest on pages 8,9,10 & 11



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR - BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

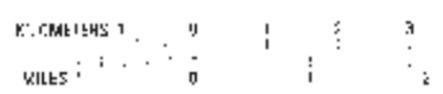
ALPINE LOOP RECREATION MAP

COLORADO



- PAVED ROAD — Open year round
- GRAVEL ROAD — Generally suitable for 2WD vehicles, not maintained in winter
- DIRT ROAD — 4WD vehicles recommended; not regularly maintained
- TRAIL — Horseback or foot traffic only
- SAN JUAN SKYWAY
- ALPINE LOOP BACKCOUNTRY BYWAY
- COLORADO TRAIL
- WILDERNESS AREA BOUNDARY
- PUBLIC LANDS — Administered by the Bureau of Land Management
- NATIONAL FOREST LANDS
- STATE LANDS
- PRIVATE LANDS
- POINT OF INTEREST
- ROADSIDE TOILET
- DEVELOPED RECREATION SITE

ELEVATIONS SHOWN IN METERS



LOCATION MAP - COLORADO

CONVERSION TABLE

THE NATURAL WORLD



The Alpine Tundra —
“The Land Above the Trees”
~ Illustration by Krista Harris,
Interpretive Design

The natural world is like a book, written with many details for us to enjoy and learn. We can appreciate those benefits however, only if we know how to read the book. We invite you to look beyond the scenic grandeur of the region and consider the natural processes found in this area. This investigation will help deepen your understanding and enjoyment of this special place.

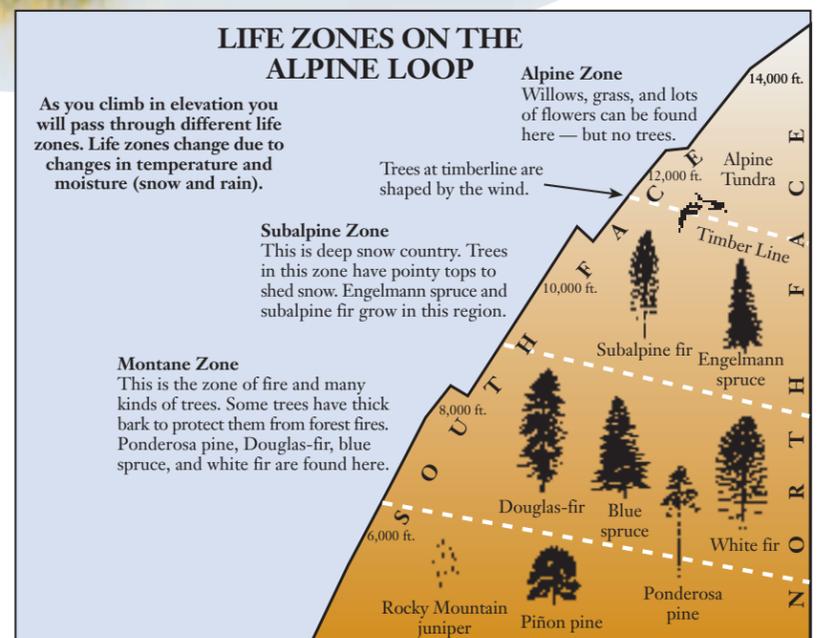
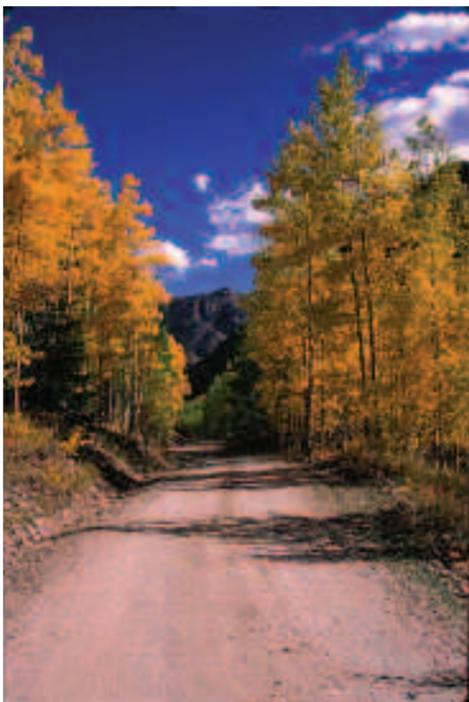
The environment in the San Juan Mountains is affected by a variety of interrelated factors, such as climate, physical features, and biological factors. The height and shape of the mountains affect the climate, the amount of snow and rain that falls, the temperature of the days and nights, the intensity of the sunlight, and the amount and intensity of the wind. The rocks that form these mountains have unique chemical compositions that carry into the soil and water. The soil and climate in turn, affect which plants can grow here and the animals that can live in the habitat created by those plants. There are very few places in North America that have the same combination of factors that create the ecosystems found on the Alpine Loop. The different ecological zones are evident as you travel here.

Aspen Forest

Aspen forests occur in the lower parts of the area at elevations from 8,000 to around 10,500 ft. where there is enough moisture to sustain them. These deciduous trees with their characteristic white bark often grow in dense stands. They reproduce by spreading their roots widely and sprouting new trees along the way. As a result, all trees in that stand are clones. Genetically they are exactly the same. These forests support many grasses and shrubs underneath them, so they are popular with a variety of mammals and birds. The bark is alive and helps transfer nutrients and moisture throughout the tree. It is easily scarred by careless visitors that hack them with axes or pound nails into them. Like a cut on your skin, these wounds open the tree to disease or fungal infection that can eventually kill the tree.

In the fall, the drop in temperature causes physiological changes that turn the leaves to golden yellow, orange, and red. Fall colors are usually at their best around mid-September. This is a wonderful time of year to visit the Alpine Loop.

Sunlight dances through the aspen leaves.
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management



Spruce/Fir Forest

Spruce and fir forests occur at higher altitudes than an aspen forest — 9,500 to 11,500 ft. The key species are Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir. These are typically older forests that often have less grass and shrubs. This forest is popular with some wildlife species, such as elk, as it provides hiding cover. Tree seedlings sprout only in shady areas, so it is common for spruce to grow under the shade of aspen trees, then slowly take over the area by shading out the aspens. You will notice that spruce and fir forests are usually found farther down the north-facing slopes, while aspen trees are found higher up south-facing slopes.

Subalpine Meadow

Subalpine meadows are interspersed between aspen and spruce forests. The soil and moisture factors here don't favor the growth of trees, so the vegetation is dominated by grasses, sedges, shrubs, and short willows. This is a favorite place for elk, deer, bighorn sheep, and other herbivores to graze.



Dusky penstemon (*penstemon whippleanus*)
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management

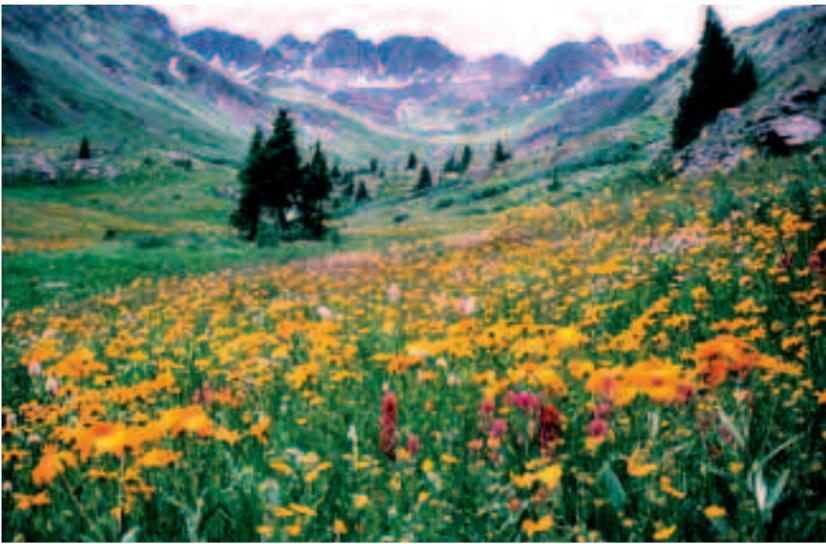
ALPINE TUNDRA

Alpine tundra is the ecosystem above treeline, usually above 11,500 feet in Colorado. It is found in only a few places in the lower 48 states, mostly in the Rocky Mountain states. Here the soils are thin, the weather is harsh, and the growing season is very short. That is why almost all of the plants develop their flowers at the same time leading to a spectacular display of wildflowers that are popular with visitors. The best time to see this display is in late July and early August.

The plants are low-growing grasses and herbs that remain close to the ground, to keep warm and avoid the drying and chilling effects of the wind. Even with this adaptation, much of the moisture that falls here as snow and rain evaporates before plants can use it. This ecosystem is easily disrupted by humans. Many scars left by miners 120 years ago are still evident. Today with so many visitors we need your help to avoid human impacts from recreation use to this fragile environment.

Please follow these simple guidelines to take care of these special places:

- Keep your vehicle on designated roads.
- Hike on maintained trails whenever possible, do not cut switchbacks.
- Enjoy the wildflowers, but please do not pick them. Leave them for others to enjoy.



Orange sneezeweed in American Basin



Alpine wildflowers often carpet American Basin in late July and early August.
~ Photos courtesy of Bureau of Land Management



Marsh marigold (*Caltha leptosepala*)



Red paintbrush (*Castilleja rhexifolia*)



Elephanthead (*Pedicularis groenlandica*)



Moss campion (*Silene acaulis*)



Elegant columbine (*Aquilegia elegantula*)



Fringed gentian (*Gentianopsis themalis*)

WATCHING WILDLIFE



Bull elk or Wapiti
~Photo courtesy of
James Kehr,
South Fork

The ecosystems found on the Alpine Loop support a variety of birds and mammals. High-altitude ecosystems tend to have fewer species of wildlife than areas at lower elevations. In addition, some species have special adaptations that allow them to live in harsh conditions. Here is a quick glimpse of the more notable or common wildlife species found on the Alpine Loop.

Elk or Wapiti

Elk are a large member of the deer family. Bulls can weigh up to 1000 lbs. They often graze on the high meadows early in the morning, then retreat to the cool shade of the forest during the day. They try to stay away from people, so it is unusual to see them from your car. Those who hike or camp in the backcountry have a better chance of spotting them. In the winter, elk move to lower elevations to find food. This critical winter range is also a popular area for human development, which makes it harder for these animals to survive.

Mule Deer

Mule deer are larger than the whitetail deer found in other parts of the country. They get their name from their large, oversized ears. It is common to see them in the lower elevations in open fields or around the edge of towns. They also rely on winter range at lower elevations for their survival when the snow flies.



~ Photo USDA Forest Service



Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep

Bighorn sheep are uncommon in the area but can be seen east of Handies Peak. They prefer to graze in open meadows, but they like nearby steep, rocky cliffs to escape from predators.

~ Photo courtesy of James Kehr, South Fork

Moose

Moose were reintroduced into this area in the 1990s and are doing well. They are larger and darker than elk and are often seen as solitary individuals browsing in the willows adjacent to rivers and streams. They can be aggressive, so if you are lucky enough to see one please, observe it from a distance.



~ Photo courtesy of James Kehr, South Fork

Black Bear

Black bears are present but not numerous. They can weigh up to 500 pounds and range in color from black to cinnamon brown. They are attracted to the smell of human food and garbage. When camping in bear country keep your camp clean and your food tied up in a tree away from camp. Never leave food out to attract bears or other wildlife, as it encourages them to seek food from people. If they become a problem they are often shot. Please remember, a fed bear is a dead bear.

Coyote

Coyotes are very adaptable animals and can be found at all elevations. Coyotes in the Rocky Mountains can be so large and healthy that some people mistake them for wolves. If you camp along the Alpine Loop, it is not unusual to hear coyotes yipping and howling at night. Their smaller cousins, the red fox and gray fox, can also be seen in the area.

Beaver

Beavers are nature's engineers. They create many of the ponds you see along the streams. These ponds are essential in reducing erosion along



~ Photo USDA Forest Service

waterways and creating rich streamside meadows. Beaver are most active at night, but you may see them swimming in their ponds early in the morning or late in the afternoon. The mound of mud and branches you see in the middle of their pond is their den, which has an underwater entrance to keep predators away.

Yellow-Bellied Marmot

Marmots are large rodents that are related to woodchucks. They are brownish in color, about two feet long, and commonly seen at higher elevations. They are also called a "whistle pig" for their sharp chirp they use as an alarm call.

Pika

Pika are small relatives of the rabbit. They are found only in or near high-altitude, rocky talus fields. Their gray fur blends perfectly with the rocks, so you will often hear their one note call before you see them. They spend all summer gathering meadow grass that they store as hay piles among the rocks. In winter they do not hibernate, but build tunnels under the snow to access their hay piles.

Our Winged Fauna

Birds are not as diverse at high-altitudes as they are in low elevations. Still, there are plenty of birds and they are easier to see than most other types of wildlife. Watching birds is a good excuse to look at your world a little closer. If you go slowly and quietly enough to see birds, you will likely see many other interesting things. How many of these common species of birds can you find on your trip?



Mountain bluebird
~ Photo by H.P. Harris Jr./VIREO

- In an aspen and spruce forest, it is common to see black billed magpies, mountain and black-capped chickadees, white-breasted nuthatch, dark-eyed junco, downy and hairy woodpeckers, robins, townsend's solitaire, yellow warbler, broad-tailed hummingbirds, mountain bluebirds, gray and steller's jays, and blue grouse.
- Along streams, watch for dippers and common mergansers.
- On lakes and ponds watch for canada geese, mallards, and blue- or green-winged teal.
- Soaring overhead, watch for red-tailed hawks, violet green swallows, tree swallows, and ravens.
- On the alpine tundra watch for water pipit, horned lark, white-crowned sparrow, rosy finch, and ptarmigan.

PLEASE BE AWARE

The Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway is a beautiful place to relax and enjoy breathtaking scenery, but as is the case with any wild area, there are a few things that could jeopardize your safety. Here are some safety tips to make your journey more enjoyable.

Altitude

For visitors not accustomed to high altitude, outdoor activities in the mountains of Colorado can cause discomfort. Most of the roads in the Alpine Loop start at 8,000 feet and can go as high as 13,000 feet, and some trails ascend 14,000-foot peaks. The air is thinner than at lower elevations, and your body reacts to the lower oxygen levels. Simple tasks can result in breathlessness, and you may experience difficulty sleeping. Hiking at high altitudes may cause headaches and nausea, or more serious symptoms of altitude sickness.

These symptoms can generally be avoided by drinking plenty of water and taking it easy for a few days until you adapt to higher altitudes. If you experience any difficulties, stop and rest awhile. If symptoms persist, head downhill until you feel better and give yourself additional time to acclimate.

Water

Mountain streams often appear to be clean and refreshing, but they may be unhealthy to drink. Heavy metals from historic mining operations contaminate many of the streams. In addition, the creeks may also be contaminated by bacteria or protozoans, such as Giardia, that can make you very sick. Giardia is spread by contamination from human and animal fecal waste and it can thrive in clear, cold streams and lakes.



If you must drink from a stream, water must be boiled for ten minutes or filtered with a commercial filter that guarantees Giardia removal. A better precaution is to bring plenty of water with you from town. Also remember that in cool temperatures, there is a tendency not to drink much water when you hike. With dry air and strenuous activities, it is important to drink fluids so that you will not dehydrate. Dehydration can cause headaches and fatigue, and can contribute to hypothermia. So, even if you are not thirsty, drink plenty of fluids.

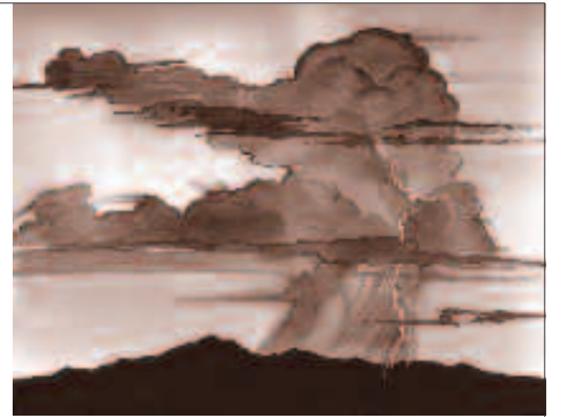
Firewood

Before you light a fire, please make sure that there are no fire restrictions in effect. There are no restrictions on gathering dead and down firewood for campfires on public land along the Alpine Loop. If wood is scarce near your camp, however, you may want to gather it as you explore during the day or purchase firewood from a vendor in a nearby community before you enter the Alpine Loop. Do not use live trees for your campfire.

Local residents may obtain a firewood permit for home use from a BLM or Forest Service office in Lake City, Silverton, Gunnison, Creede, or Durango.

Weather

High elevations tend to have unpredictable weather. Summers are generally cool, with temperatures ranging from 50° - 75° during the day. It is not unusual, however, to experience snow or sleet, even in the middle of summer. Nights are cold, with temperatures that can be below freezing.



Always be prepared for changing weather. A day that starts out sunny and warm can quickly become cloudy and cold. Carry several layers of clothing, including rain gear — even on a day hike. Windproof clothing is especially needed on high peaks.

Afternoon thunderstorms are common in the high country. Hikers and climbers should start early in the day when ascending peaks and should avoid peaks and high ridges when lightning may strike.

The thin air at high elevations blocks less ultraviolet light. To avoid sunburns, use sunscreen and wear a hat and sunglasses, especially when hiking in the snow.

Outdoor Travel Involves an Inherent Degree of Risk. Safety is Your Responsibility.

- Let others know your travel plans.
- Plan your route and carry essential equipment and water — even on a day hike or ride.
- Know your physical limitations.
- Keep track of the time and know when to turn back.
- Travel with a companion.
- Keep track of the weather and be prepared for changing conditions.
- Treat all water before drinking.
- Stay calm if you get lost.
- Dial 911 in the event of an emergency.



Historic Sites

Mines, mills, and other historic buildings along the Alpine Loop offer a glimpse of life as it was over a hundred years ago. Most of the structures remaining are unstable, due to damaged foundations or rotting timbers and floors.

For your safety :

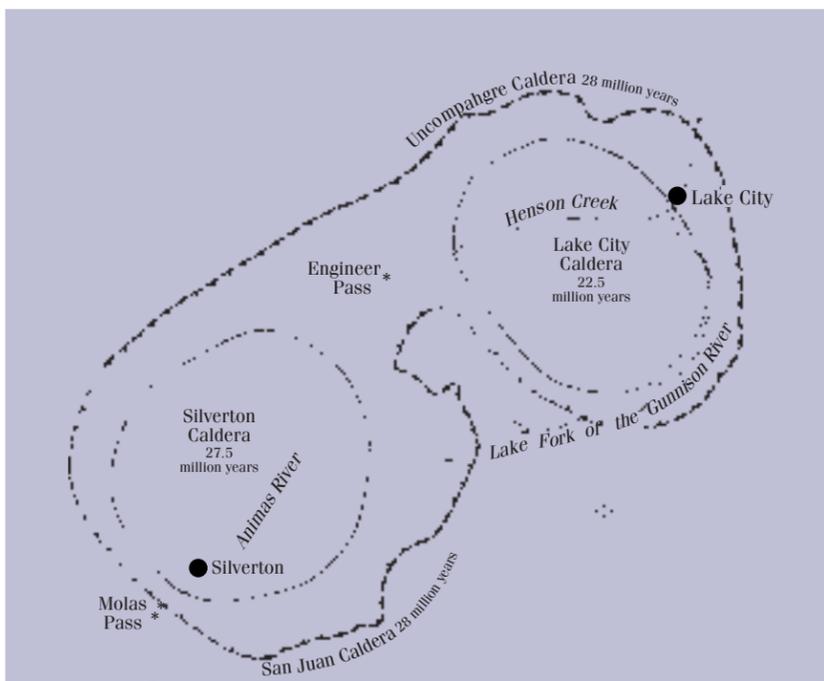
- Stay out of mine and mill buildings, tunnels, and shafts. Buildings and mines are unstable and may collapse at any time. Mine tunnels may contain concentrations of poisonous gases and unstable explosives may be stored on site.
- Please respect private property. Most mines and mill sites are privately owned.
- Watch for nails and rusty metal.

GEOLOGY & MINERALS

The San Juan Mountains are one of the richest and most intensely mineralized regions in the southern Rocky Mountains. In over 100 years of active mining, this area has produced more than \$750 million worth of silver and gold and other base metals, such as copper, zinc, and lead. Mining in the San Juan Mountains, however, had very ancient beginnings.

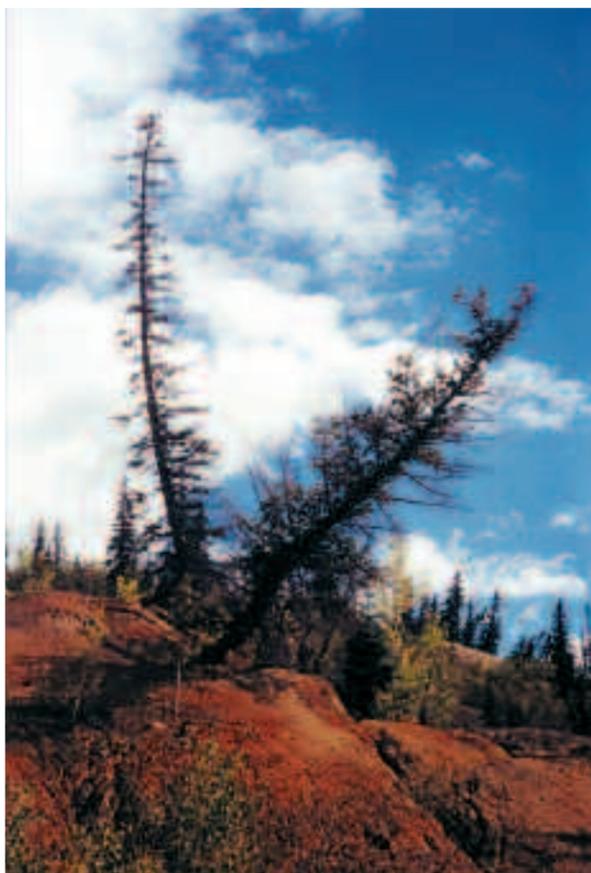
Twenty to thirty-five million years ago, volcanic activity dominated the region. Mountains rose and great accumulations of volcanic rocks were deposited. Subsequent collapse of the volcanoes created a number of immense craters, including two in this area, now called the Silverton and the Lake City calderas. The volcanic activity and the collapse resulted in numerous faults and fractures that shattered the surrounding rock, creating ideal areas for mineral slurries to be injected into these fractures. This resulted in heavily mineralized zones that prospectors discovered before the turn of the twentieth century.

After the mountain-building phase, the San Juan Mountains experienced millions of years of erosion. Erosion of these faulted and fractured zones initially created steep, V-shaped valleys. More recently, however, glaciers scoured out the drainages, resulting in U-shaped valleys such as American Basin and Cunningham Gulch. The last major glaciers in the San Juan Mountains melted about 15,000 years ago.



Twenty to thirty-five million years ago, this region was dominated by volcanic activity.

Portions of the Slumgullion Earthflow are still moving downhill, as indicated by the large number of leaning trees. ~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management



Rock glaciers, such as this one in American Basin, are remnants of the region's glacial history.

~ Illustration by Paula Seay, Interpretive Design

Other geomorphological features that are visible along Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway —

- **Talus Slopes** are an accumulation of loose rock found at the base of most cliffs.
- **Alluvial Fans** form at the mouth of drainages where small creeks intersect a larger creek. The loss of energy from the small creek deposits rock debris and creates a fan-shaped debris pile.
- **Rock Glaciers** are composed of talus material deposited on top of a small glacier a remnant of our past glacial period. Although they look like a normal talus slope, closer examination reveals that they display entirely different features. Viewed from above, they resemble a small glacier with a headwall, lateral moraines (sides), and a terminal moraine (end). Rock glaciers are most often found on a north-facing glacial cirque or a north-facing slope that has been oversteepened by past glacial activity. Protection from direct sun exposure is critical to maintain the ice core that binds the rock fragments. Rock glaciers can be found in American Basin, Horseshoe Basin, and Kendall Basin.
- **Landslides** are the result of rock, soil, and debris that have been dislodged from the underlying rock through freeze/fracture action, supersaturation, collapse, or tectonic movement. Some of the best examples of landslides have occurred in the Lake City area. One landslide, the **Slumgullion Earthflow**, broke away from Mesa Seco as the soil became supersaturated with moisture. During four successive landslides, the Slumgullion Earthflow has "flowed" four miles downslope to block the Lake Fork of the Gunnison River and form Lake San Cristobal — the second-largest natural lake in Colorado. Parts of the Slumgullion Earthflow are still moving.



Slumgullion Earthflow is the result of four successive landslides. ~ Photo by Whitman Cross, 1905, courtesy of U.S. Geological Survey

RECLAIMING THE LAND

Abandoned Mined Lands Reclamation

The residents of Silverton are as active today preserving their history as were the miners who swarmed into San Juan County in the 19th century to rip apart the mountains in search of gold and silver. In 1993, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed plans to clean up old mine tunnels and tailings that pollute the Animas, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison River basins. Partners included federal, state, and county government agencies, local environmental groups, private land owners, and members of the public. These groups played a vital role in planning and funding water quality improvements and historic renovations in the Animas River, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison River drainages, while maintaining local control.

In the Upper Animas River Watershed for instance, over 1500 abandoned mines have been inventoried on public lands, with an additional 3000 privately owned mines. Water flowing through the heavily mined terrain and tunnel shafts into Cement and Mineral Creeks, as well as the Upper Animas River, collects zinc, aluminum, iron, and other minerals that leach from tunnels and tailings. As a consequence, wildlife habitat and fisheries have been heavily impacted or destroyed in the last hundred years. The BLM and Forest Service have actively pursued site remediation at the Forest Queen, Lackawanna Mill, Joe and John Tunnel, Lark Mine, May Day Mine, Bonner Mine, and Brooklyn Mine. Portals have been sealed, French drains and pipes divert runoff water away from mill tailings to lined pits, and riparian areas have been restored. Today water quality is monitored and native trout are returning to the Upper Animas River.

Private mine owners are also assisting with the cleanup. The Sunnyside Gold/Echo Bay Mining Company, the largest employer of Silverton residents until it closed in 1992, spent over one million dollars each year between 1992 and 2000 to clean up tailing piles at the American Tunnel and Mayflower Mill. Today tourism is the economic mainstay of the region. Residents are proud of their mining heritage, as well as the natural beauty of the Alpine Loop.

Similar reclamation efforts are being carried out along Henson Creek, west of Lake City. Dangerous tunnels and shafts are being closed, tailings are being relocated to areas where they will not threaten streams, and runoff is being controlled.

Today it is costing millions of dollars to clean up the impacts of past mining operations. Miners 120 years ago were so focused on short term gains that they did not care about nor understand the long term consequences of their actions. Perhaps we should ask ourselves if we are making the same mistakes today. What are we doing today for short term gains that might result in long term impacts that future generations will have to clean up?



Heavy equipment was used to remove and relocate tailing piles.
~ Photo courtesy of USDA Forest Service



Water discharge from abandoned mines can contaminate streams with heavy metals. The orange-colored stain is the result of iron dissolved in the water.
~Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Land Management

RECLAMATION-BEFORE AND AFTER



Mine tailings in 1994 in the Red Mountain Mining District, west of Silverton, before reclamation.
~ Photo courtesy of Idarado Mining Company



The same tailings in 1996 after reclamation.
~ Photo courtesy of Idarado Mining Company

A WINTER WONDERLAND

The San Juan Mountains are a dramatic backdrop for recreationists during the summer. These same mountains take on a whole new character when they are blanketed with snow. From December through April the communities of Lake City, Ouray, and Silverton provide recreational opportunities for winter enthusiasts including snowmobiling, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, ice climbing, ice skating, winter camping, hot springs, and downhill skiing.

Snowmobiling

Maps and information about snowmobile areas are available at the Lake City and Silverton Visitor Centers. Please be considerate of other trail users, as well as wildlife you may encounter.

- The Molas Pass Winter Recreation Area, located ten miles south of Silverton, offers extensive areas for snowmobiling. Snowmobile rentals and guide services are available at the Molas Lake Park.
- The Lake City Continental Divide Trail system provides 80 miles of regularly groomed trails, spectacular scenery, and relatively low avalanche danger. This system ranks among the best in Colorado. Snowmobile rentals and guide services are available.
- The Alpine Plateau Trail System is located northwest of Lake City.



Ice climbing opportunities abound in the Ouray Ice Park and in the Lake City and Silverton Area.
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management

Downhill Skiing

Downhill ski areas can be found in Lake City, Ouray, and Silverton. Each community operates a small “poma lift” ski area. In addition, the Silverton Ski Area, eight miles northwest of Silverton on Highway 110A, is available for expert backcountry skiers.

Ice Skating

Ice skating rinks can be found at the Ouray Rotary Park in Ouray in the park in Lake City, and the Kendall Mountain Recreation Area in Silverton.

Hot Springs

Hot springs offer a wonderful treat on a cold winter day. Commercially operated hot springs can be found in Ouray and Ridgway.

Ice Climbing

Ice climbing opportunities are available in Ouray Ice Park in Box Canyon at the Lake City Ice Park and near Eureka (north of Silverton.)

Winter Camping

With proper equipment, winter camping can be done throughout the San Juan Mountains and along the Alpine Loop. Please come prepared for changing weather and watch out for avalanches.



Cross Country skiers along Cottonwood Creek.
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management

Cross Country Skiing and Snowshoeing

- Groomed snowmobile trails along the Continental Divide and on Alpine Plateau provide great opportunities for cross country skiing and snowshoeing. Here you share the trails with snowmobiles, but usually they are not so numerous that they detract from your experience. There are several yurts along the Continental Divide operated by the Hinsdale Haute Route; call (970) 944-2269 for reservations. In addition, skiing is popular along Cottonwood Creek, Henson Creek, and the Lake Fork sections of the Alpine Loop, near Lake City.
- The Molas Pass Winter Sports Area offers cross-country skiing and snowshoeing at Andrews Lake. The Andrews Lake area is closed to snowmobiles. In addition, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are popular in Mineral Creek and along Cement Creek, near Silverton.



Snowmobiling is a popular winter activity.
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management

Winter Safety Tips

- Check the current avalanche forecast for this area: (970) 247-8187
- Learn to recognize unstable snow conditions, such as hollow, “whumping” sounds as the snow collapses beneath you; cracks running out from your skis; or recent slides.
- Avalanches are most common on slopes of 30 to 45 degrees.
- Most avalanches occur during or soon after a storm.
- Steep slopes or chutes that are clear of trees are likely places for slides to occur. Use extra caution in these areas.
- Snow slides easiest when a layer of new snow falls on a layer of hard, old snow.
- If you must traverse avalanche-prone terrain, travel one at a time while others in your group watch, in case a slide occurs.

NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES

An important part of any visit to the area is the delightful small communities that are the gateways to the Alpine Loop. Lake City, Silverton, and Ouray provide many amenities to help you enjoy your trip such as lodging, restaurants, groceries, gas, vehicle rentals, outfitters, visitor information, and much more. In addition, they all share a history that is rooted in the mining boom of the late 1800s. The Victorian influence of that time is still evident in many of the older buildings.

Lake City

Lake City was founded in 1874, when toll road pioneer Enos Hotchkiss built a cabin here. By the end of 1875, the population had grown to 500 (more than today). Wagon roads, stagecoach service, and even the railroad helped the area boom during the late 1800s. When the price of silver dropped in 1893 activity in town dropped off sharply. By the early 1900s only a few mines continued to operate, but tourist resorts were opened to take advantage of the rich beauty found in this area. That tradition continues today. You can visit the museum or take a historical walking tour through town to see the well-preserved architecture of those early days.

Some of the special events in Lake City include

The Lake San Cristobal Run (5K/10K)	June
The Local Artists Show	June
The Solstice Run (50 mile)	June
Lake City Arts and Crafts Fair	July
Fall Arts & Crafts Show	September
Wine and Music Festival	September



Visitors enjoy the Victorian charm of Lake City.
~ Photo courtesy of Bob Stigall, Lake City

Ouray

Ouray has perhaps the most scenic setting of any town in Colorado. It is nicknamed the Switzerland of America. Ouray was named after the famous Chief of the Ute Tribe who negotiated the Brunot Treaty in 1874. Even in the days of the Utes the area was a magnet for people because of the hot springs that dotted the valley. Today, this amenity is still available to visitors at the Hot Springs Pool and at several hotels in town. Mining activity in the late 1800s was just as feverish here as it was in the other towns. Today, Ouray calls itself the Jeep Capitol of Colorado because of the many four-wheel-drive roads in the area and the variety of businesses that rent jeeps or take visitors on jeep tours. The historical museum has many interesting displays, particularly on the mining history of the area, and the entire town has been designated a National Historic District.

Some of the special events in Ouray include

Memorial Day Celebration	May
Ouray Chamber Music Festival	June
Artists Alpine Holiday	August
Oktoberfest and Jeep Raffle	September

Silverton

Silverton was a boomtown that sprang up in 1874, soon after the Brunot Treaty was signed with the Utes. Tales of silver by the ton gave it the name that sticks today. The principal access route in the early days was from Del Norte up the Rio Grande Valley, over Stony Pass, and down into Silverton. In 1882, the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad arrived from Durango. It was the first to use narrow gauge tracks to adapt to the tortuous terrain. You can still experience this historical route, as the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad makes several trips daily for visitors during the summer. By 1883, Silverton had 1500 residents. Blair Street was the wildest part of town, with as many as 37 saloons and bordellos. Bat Masterson was brought in from Dodge City to help keep the peace. Only a few mines were rich enough to continue into the 1900s. Today, Silverton serves travelers arriving by train or those driving on the Million Dollar Highway.

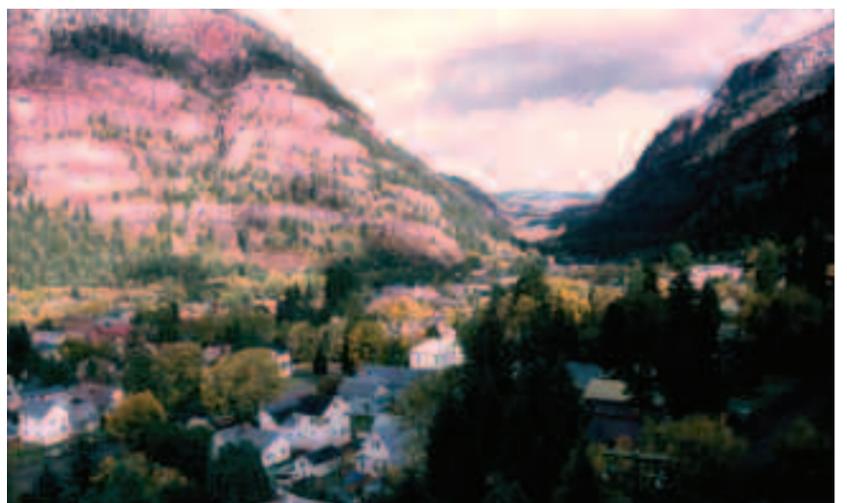
Some of the special events in Silverton include

Folk Music Festival	June
Hardrock 100 (Run)	July
Blair Street Arts & Crafts Festival	July
Hardrock Mining Days	August
Rocky Mt. Brass Band Festival	August
Railfest	August
Bordello Ball	October



Blair Street Arts & Crafts Festival in Silverton
~ Photo courtesy of Silverton Chamber of Commerce

Please check with the local Chamber of Commerce in Ouray, Silverton and Lake City to obtain the most current information and a schedule of events.



A view of Ouray's historic downtown district. Each of the communities near the Alpine Loop hosts Fourth of July celebrations.
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management

NEARBY ATTRACTIONS



Take a ride on a scenic and historic narrow gauge railroad.
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management

Adjacent to the Bureau of Land Management administered Alpine Loop Back Country Byway are federal lands including the **San Juan**, Uncompahgre, Gunnison, and Rio Grande National Forests. These public lands provide outstanding opportunities to explore southwestern Colorado. Pick up a Forest Service map to locate camping areas, picnic areas, hiking trails, jeep roads, and fishing hot spots.

Public lands also provide areas for solitude and unconfined types of recreation in the **Uncompahgre Wilderness, Mt. Sneffels Wilderness, La Garita Wilderness, Powderhorn Wilderness,** and **Weminuche Wilderness**. The Weminuche Wilderness at 493,000-acres is the largest in Colorado. It has nearly 250 miles of developed hiking trails. Motorized or mechanized vehicles or equipment are not allowed in wilderness.

For those more inclined to enjoy scenic driving, the 263-mile **San Juan Skyway** and the 120-mile **Silver Thread Scenic Byway** have been recognized for their beauty and nationally significant landscapes. Watch for wildlife, scenic vistas, mining structures, and a glimpse of the history of southwest Colorado.



Mesa Verde National Park, west of Durango was once the home of the Ancestral Puebloan people, who lived in cliff dwellings in massive sandstone alcoves. **Canyons of the Ancients National Monument**, west of Cortez, was also the homeland of the Ancestral Puebloan people. Here you can see numerous village sites on the mesas and canyons where they grew crops of corn, beans, melons, and squash.

Uncompahgre Peak, at 14,309 feet, was sculpted by glaciers during the Pleistocene Ice Age.
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management



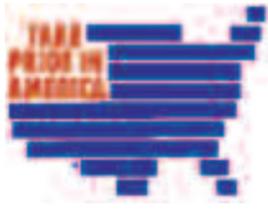
Lowry Pueblo, Canyons of the Ancients National Monument.
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management



Dillon Pinnacles, Curecanti National Recreation Area
~ Photo courtesy of Bureau of Land Management

WE NEED YOUR HELP

Take Pride in America



As you visit public lands, you should take pride in the beautiful scenery and diverse history found in America. While sight-seeing, camping, hiking, or driving for pleasure, please remember to use public land carefully so that future generations may also enjoy them.

Historic landmarks, buildings, and structures, like those found on the Alpine Loop, are not replaceable and must be treated with care and respect.

Historic Structures on the Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway Need Your Help.

- Do not camp or build campfires within 150 feet of any mine or mill structure.
- Do not use mine or mill lumber in campfires.
- Do not remove lumber, glass, machinery, or any other artifact.
- Please pack out your garbage.
- Do not write on historic structures — graffiti is vandalism
- Many historic structures are on private property. Please respect private property.

This is your public land ... Take Pride in America.

Tread Lightly

Whether they ride a motorcycle, ATV, or jeep, recreationists are learning that if they cause too much impact with their sport they may be restricted from the areas they like to ride. Tread Lightly is a national partnership between vehicle enthusiasts and land managers to educate riders and protect their sport, by teaching people to enjoy the great outdoors while minimizing their impacts. Here is their advice:

- Learn and follow the vehicle designations for the area you are riding in. In this area, all vehicles must stay on designated roads. No cross-country travel is allowed. The map in this brochure shows the designated routes.
- Even when roads are open, you should stay off them when they are soft and wet and could be torn up by your vehicle.
- Obey gate closures, signs, and private property rights. Remember that vandalism costs tax dollars.
- Spark arresters must be on the vehicle, as well as a working muffler.
- Try to minimize the noise and dust you generate to avoid disturbing wildlife and other visitors.
- Watch your speed on these narrow roads. Stay on your side around blind curves.
- Pack out all your trash.

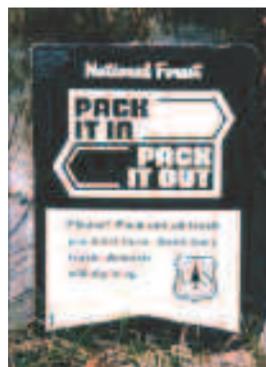


Aspen damaged by carving into the bark and trash strewn camp sites are examples of misuse. A little good sense and common courtesy to the land, wildlife, and other visitors will go a long way in making sure that what is available today will be there to enjoy tomorrow. Tread Lightly and leave a good impression.

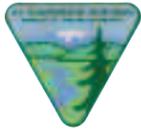
~Photos courtesy of Bureau of Land Management

Vehicle use is not the only type of recreation that can cause impacts. Campers and backcountry visitors have done their share of damage too. Leave No Trace is a national program developed to teach campers how to reduce their impact. Here are some tips to reduce camping impacts and to maintain those special qualities we go to the woods to find.

- **Plan Ahead and Prepare.** Do your homework and know what to expect. Bring the proper equipment. Repackage your food to minimize trash. Travel quietly in small groups. Be prepared to hang your food to keep it away from bears.
- **Camp and Travel on Durable Surfaces.** In popular camping spots, concentrate your use on areas that are already impacted. Stay on maintained trails. Use established camps and fire rings. Camp away from trails and water. In remote areas, spread out your use and erase all evidence of your visit. Avoid camping where impacts are just beginning show. Do not camp in any spot for more than fourteen days.
- **Pack It In—Pack It Out.** Reduce the litter you bring. Burn only the litter that will be consumed completely. This does not include cans, glass, or foil. Do not bury trash — animals will dig it up. Carry out all your non-burnable trash. Be extra clean in bear country.
- **Properly Dispose of Waste You Can't Pack Out.** Use restrooms when available. To dispose of human waste in the backcountry, dig a cat hole 6 to 8 inches deep at least 150 feet from water and cover with soil when you are done. Minimize the use of soap when you wash and use a biodegradable soap. Waste water from washing should be poured into absorbent ground at least 150 feet from any water source to avoid contamination. Dispose of fishing and hunting waste appropriately.
- **Leave What You Find.** Leave wildlife, plants, flowers, rocks, historical artifacts, and other objects of interest undisturbed for others to enjoy. Minimize alterations of the areas you use. Do not cut vegetation, drive nails into trees, build camp "furniture," dig drainage trenches, or carve on trees. Avoid disturbing wildlife and other visitors with loud noise. Keep your pets under control at all times.
- **Minimize the Use and Impact of Fire.** Cook with a stove as much as possible. It is more efficient and causes less impact. Don't feel like your camp always has to have a fire. If you must build a fire, use an existing fire ring rather than building a new one. Keep your fire small. Choose only dead and downed wood that is no bigger around than your wrist, so it burns completely. Don't leave your fire unattended and be sure it is out completely before you leave. Clean up the fire ring so it is ready for the next visitor. Check to see if there are any fire bans in effect.



FOR MORE INFORMATION



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Gunnison Field Office
210 W, Spencer Ave. Suite A
Gunnison, CO 81230
(970) 641-4940
<http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/sjplc.html>

San Juan Field Office
Tres Rios Field House
29211 Highway 184 Dolores, CO 81323
(970) 247-4874

Silverton Public Lands Center
1246 Blair Street
Silverton, CO 81433
(970) 387-5530



USDA FOREST SERVICE

Uncompahgre National Forest
2505 South Townsend
Montrose, CO 81401
(970) 240-5300

San Juan National Forest
15 Burnett Court
Durango, CO 81301
(970) 247-4874

Rio Grande National Forest
3rd and Creede Ave.
Creede, CO 81130
(970) 658-2556

Gunnison National Forest
216 N. Colorado St.
Gunnison, CO 81230
(970) 641-0471



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Curecanti National Recreation Area
102 Elk Creek
Gunnison, CO 81230
(970) 641-2337
<http://www.nps.gov/cure>

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Ouray Chamber Resort Association
Visitor Information Center
P.O. Box 145
Ouray, CO 81427
(970) 325-4746 (800) 228-1876
www.ouraycolorado.com

Lake City / Hinsdale County Chamber of Commerce
Visitor Information Center
800 Gunnison Ave. P.O. Box 430
Lake City, CO 81235
(970) 944-2527 (800) 569-1874
<http://www.lakecityco.com>

Silverton Chamber of Commerce
Visitor Information Center
P.O. Box 565
Silverton, CO 81433
(970) 387-5654 (800) 752-4494
www.silvertoncolorado.org



Alpine Loop
Scenic Byway



Sunshine Peak from Burrows Park.
~Photo Courtesy of Bureau of Land Management



BROCHURE

To order a colorful brochure about southwest Colorado, go to the Southwest Colorado Travel Region web-site www.swcolotravel.org



MAPS AND REFERENCES

A variety of recreational guides, history books, and maps are available. Local bookstores or sporting goods outlets are a good source for 7.5-minute topographic quad maps. Maps needed to cover the Alpine Loop Backcountry Byway include:



Ouray
Wetterhorn Peak
Uncompahgre Peak
Lake City
Ironton
Handies Peak
Redcloud Peak
Lake San Cristobal
Silverton
Howardsville
Snowden Peak

Maps and other publications on this area are available at agency offices, visitor centers and from these Interpretive Associations:

San Juan Mountains Association
P.O. Box 2261
Durango, CO 81302
(970) 385-1258
www.sjma.org

Interpretive Association of Western Colorado
2250 Hwy 50
Delta, CO 81416
(970) 874-6695

www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/gfo/recreation/information/wcia.html



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