Colorado

The Official Guide to the Scenic and Historic Byways

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The Colorado Scenic and Historic Byways Program is a statewide partnership intended to provide recreational, educational and economic benefits to Coloradans and visitors. This system of outstanding touring routes in Colorado affords the traveler interpretation and identification of key points of interest and services while providing for the protection of significant resources. For more on Colorado Scenic & Historic Byways, visit www.coloradobyways.org.

Visit Colorado's official tourism website at www.colorado.com.
For Colorado road conditions visit www.cotrip.org.

26 Scenic and Historic Highlights

Colorado's 26 scenic and historic byways unite communities and the stories of their collective past. Along their varied course, these highways and backroads unveil myriad tales of Ute Indians, silver seekers, opportunistic settlers, ambitious entrepreneurs and crafty engineers. They also reveal the story of the Rocky Mountains and their remarkable creation, and how today, much of this wild landscape is still untrammeled by humankind.

More than just suggested road trips, these byways are a catalyst for the preservation of Colorado's culture, history and natural wonder. Uniting communities under a common project, the byways continue to bring people together (both locals and travelers) and connect them with the land.

Eleven of Colorado's 26 byways are designated as America's Byways, meaning they are nationally recognized for their outstanding scenic and historic attributes. In fact, only one other state has as many nationally designated byways as Colorado. Here are just 26 of the can't-miss experiences waiting for you on a Colorado byway.

1. **Encounter the captivating tales of fortunes won and lost during Colorado's silver and gold booms.**
   FOUND ALONG: Alpine Loop, Gold Belt Tour, Guanella Pass, Mount Evans, Peak to Peak, San Juan Skyway, Silver Thread, Top of the Rockies

2. **Put in a raft or kayak and head down some of the nation's most famous whitewater runs.**
   FOUND ALONG: Cache la Poudre-North Park, Collegiate Peaks, Colorado River Headwaters, Dinosaur Diamond, Mount Evans

3. **Investigate the geologic wonders of Colorado, which include windswept sand dunes, granite and sandstone canyons, and volcanic walls hundreds of feet tall.**
   FOUND ALONG: Flat Tops Trail, Highway of Legends, Los Caminos Antiguos, Pawnee Pioneer Trail, Unaweep Tabeguache, West Elk Loop

4. **Enjoy full RV hookups, miles of shoreline and photogenic wildlife at a number of Colorado's state parks.**
   FOUND ALONG: Cache la Poudre-North Park, Collegiate Peaks, Dinosaur Diamond, Frontier Pathways, Highway of Legends, Los Caminos Antiguos, Peak to Peak, San Juan Skyway, Santa Fe Trail, Tracks Across Borders

5. **Stand in wonder before the works of the Ancestral Puebloans, see insect species found nowhere else, gaze into an improbable chasm or see the birthplace of the Colorado River at one of Colorado's four national parks.**
   FOUND ALONG: Colorado River Headwaters, Los Caminos Antiguos, San Juan Skyway, Tracks Across Borders, Trail of the Ancients, Trail Ridge Road, West Elk Loop

6. **See the petrified remains of ancient forests, fossils as large as a dinosaur (or as small as a gnat) and visit a land wholly untouched by civilization for hundreds of years at some of Colorado's eight national monuments.**
   FOUND ALONG: Collegiate Peaks, Dinosaur Diamond, Gold Belt Tour, Lariat Loop, Tracks Across Borders, Trail of the Ancients

7. **Watch Colorado's state mammal — the bighorn sheep — as they seek sanctuary among rocky cliffs.**
   FOUND ALONG: Gold Belt Tour, Guanella Pass, Mount Evans, Trail Ridge Road, Unaweep Tabeguache

8. **Engage four-wheel drive and take a rugged road through the backcountry.**
   FOUND ALONG: Alpine Loop, Gold Belt Tour

9. **Feel the surge of steam power as you travel aboard a scenic and historic railroad.**
   FOUND ALONG: Gold Belt Tour, Guanella Pass, Los Caminos Antiguos, San Juan Skyway, Tracks Across Borders

10. **Travel along routes originally forged by pioneers as they heeded the call to go west.**
FOUND ALONG: Pawnee Pioneer Trail, Santa Fe Trail, South Platte River Trail

11. **Soak your road-weary muscles in the therapeutic waters of a mineral hot spring.**
FOUND ALONG: Collegiate Peaks, Colorado River Headwaters, Los Caminos Antiguos, San Juan Skyway, West Elk Loop

12. **Colorado may be landlocked, but its significant acreage of open water has anglers, motorboaters, sailers and waterskiers raving about the state's lakes and reservoirs.**
FOUND ALONG: Cache la Poudre-North Park, Colorado River Headwaters, Frontier Pathways, Guanella Pass, Highway of Legends, Santa Fe Trail, Tracks Across Borders, West Elk Loop

13. **Learn about the intricate lives of Ancestral Puebloans and the Fremont, some of the first people to settle Colorado.**
FOUND ALONG: Dinosaur Diamond, San Juan Skyway, Trail of the Ancients, Unaweep Tabeguache, Tracks Across Borders

14. **Visit a historic fort where pioneers and American Indians traded, and regiments were posted.**
FOUND ALONG: Frontier Pathways, Los Caminos Antiguos, Santa Fe Trail, South Platte River Trail

15. **Cross the Continental Divide, where water courses starting on the eastern side eventually reach the Gulf of Mexico, and water courses beginning on the western side flow toward the Pacific Ocean.**
FOUND ALONG: Silver Thread, Top of the Rockies, Tracks Across Borders, Trail Ridge Road

16. **Travel over or near the sky-touching peaks of mountains measuring more than 14,000 feet — aptly named "fourteeners."**
FOUND ALONG: Alpine Loop, Collegiate Peaks, Guanella Pass, Los Caminos Antiguos, Mount Evans, Peak to Peak, San Juan Skyway, Top of the Rockies, Trail Ridge Road

17. **See the fossils and footprints of dinosaurs.**
FOUND ALONG: Dinosaur Diamond, Gold Belt Tour, Lariat Loop, Santa Fe Trail, Unaweep Tabeguache

18. **Hike sections of the nearly 500-mile Colorado Trail, a route that connects Denver to Durango through often-remote wilderness.**
FOUND ALONG: Collegiate Peaks, Silver Thread, San Juan Skyway, Top of the Rockies

19. **Follow famous rivers, such as the Cache la Poudre, Colorado, Arkansas and Rio Grande, that satiate the land.**
FOUND ALONG: Cache la Poudre-North Park, Collegiate Peaks, Colorado River Headwaters, Los Caminos Antiguos, Santa Fe Trail, Silver Thread, Top of the Rockies, Trail Ridge Road

20. **Reconnect with why you love to ride by taking your bicycle or motorcycle for a spin under the wild Colorado sky.**
FOUND ALONG: Every byway

21. **Experience the flora and fauna of multiple life zones, all within the course of only a few miles.**
FOUND ALONG: Colorado River Headwaters, Frontier Pathways, Highway of Legends, Mount Evans, Los Caminos Antiguos, San Juan Skyway, Trail Ridge Road

22. **Partake in succulent cantaloupe, peaches, apples and cherries picked straight from the source.**
FOUND ALONG: Dinosaur Diamond, Gold Belt Tour, Grand Mesa, Santa Fe Trail, West Elk Loop

23. **Encounter land sacred to Ute, Arapaho and other American Indian tribes.**
FOUND ALONG: Flat Tops Trail, Frontier Pathways, Los Caminos Antiguos, Pawnee Pioneer Trail, San Juan Skyway, Santa Fe Trail, Tracks Across Borders, Trail of the Ancients, Trail Ridge Road

24. **Bring your binoculars and see upwards of 400 bird species statewide, including sage grouse, lark bunting and great-horned owls.**
FOUND ALONG: Cache la Poudre-North Park, Los Caminos Antiguos, Mount Evans, Pawnee Pioneer Trail, Santa Fe Trail, South Platte River Trail, Trail Ridge Road, West Elk Loop

25. **Cut over corduroy, tread through an evergreen grove or zoom down a tubing hill to enjoy the winter-sports playground lining Colorado's byways.**
FOUND ALONG: Colorado River Headwaters, Grand Mesa, Peak to Peak, San Juan Skyway, Top of the Rockies, West Elk Loop

COLORADO'S STATE PARKS

Colorado has one of the nation's top networks of state parks. These publicly owned lands are superb for fishing, mountain biking, hiking, horseback riding, wildlife watching and boating, and they also double as convenient places to stay with great facilities. Here are just five superb parks within easy reach of a byway that are worth checking out. You can find more on Colorado's State Parks by visiting www.cpw.state.co.us or calling 303-297-1192.

1. **Colorado State Forest State Park (Cache la Poudre–North Park)** – This preserve is the largest state park in Colorado, and its visitor center has interpretive displays on the park's most unique residents — moose. Cabins and yurts are available for overnight stays.

2. **John Martin Reservoir State Park (Santa Fe Trail)** – Surrounding an enormous body of water, this state park is a pleasure boater's paradise and an incredible place for birdwatching. Species include wood ducks, wild turkey and the rare piping plover.

3. **Trinidad Lake State Park (Highway of Legends)** – For geology buffs, this park is a must-see for its K-T Boundary, which marks the dividing line between the Mesozoic and Cenozoic geologic eras. The park's hiking trails are also good places to spot roadrunners.

4. **Navajo State Park (Tracks Across Borders)** – A 15,000-acre reservoir makes this park ideal for fishing, boating and swimming, especially with mellow temperatures year-round. Campsites dot the wooded landscapes that harbor deer, bald eagles and other wildlife.

5. **Ridgway State Park (San Juan Skyway)** – From grand views of jagged Mount Sneffels to fly-fishing for trout in the Uncompahgre River below the dam, this state park boasts a unique blend of scenery and recreation.

WHERE TO WATCH WILDLIFE

From a lone mountain goat foraging among the tundra to a flock of 8,000 snow geese filling the prairie sky, a wide array of wildlife can be seen across the entire state. Here are six noteworthy sites:

1. **Georgetown Reservoir Viewing Station (Guanella Pass)** – Located on the outskirts of Georgetown, this observation point allows travelers the best chance to spot the state mammal, the bighorn sheep.

2. **Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge (Los Caminos Antiguos)** – Visit this sanctuary in March to see thousands of migrating sandhill cranes feeding in the grasses and soaring in enormous flocks.

3. **Pawnee Buttes (Pawnee Pioneer Trails)** – This pair of buttes is also a great place to see herds of pronghorn and the Colorado state bird, the lark bunting.

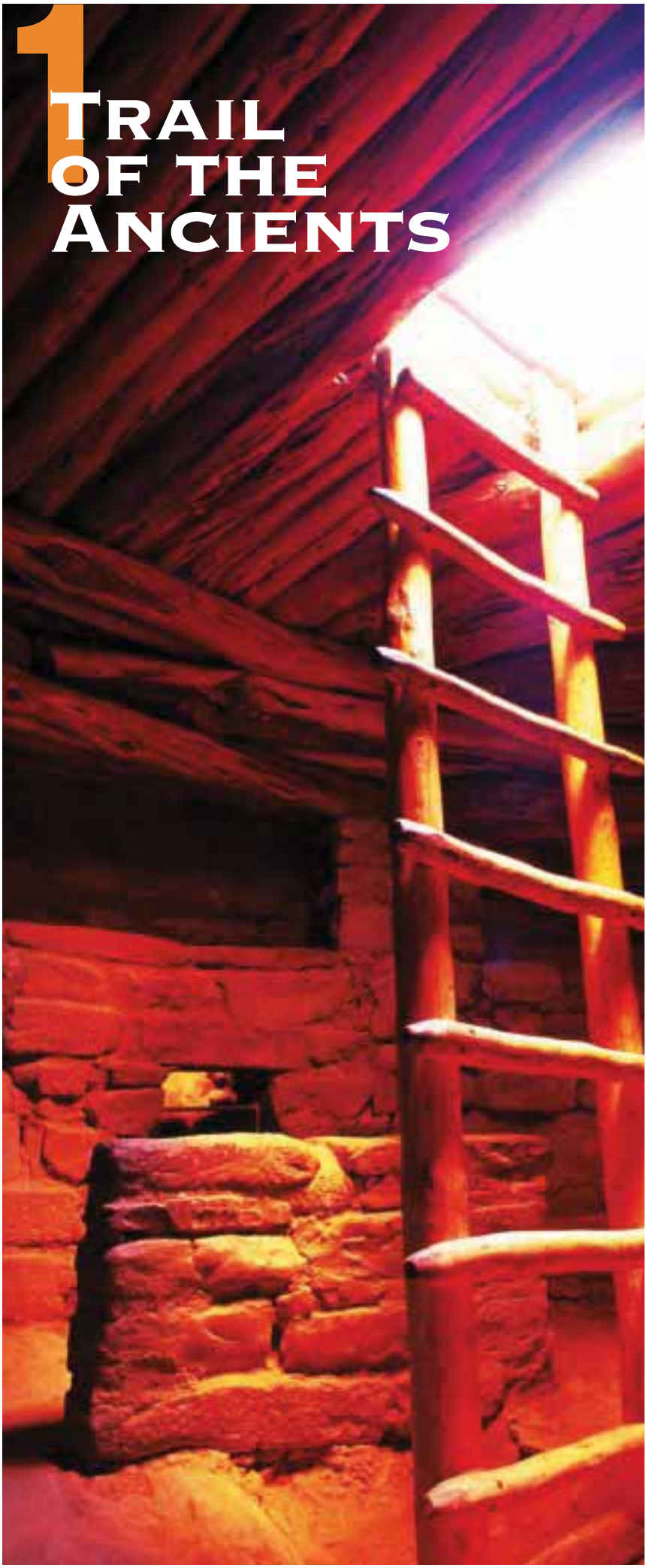
4. **Summit Lake (Mount Evans)** – This pristine tundra lake is one of the most reliable places to see mountain goats and white-tailed ptarmigan.

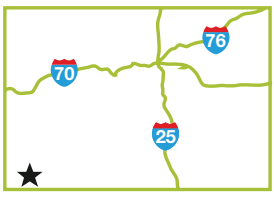
5. **Moraine Park (Trail Ridge Road)** – This U-shaped, glacier-carved valley lies beneath Trail Ridge Road and is one of the best places in North America to hear bugling elk during the fall rutting season.

6. **Horsethief Canyon State Wildlife Area (Dinosaur Diamond)** – This unique riparian habitat on the Colorado River near Fruita is great for seeing desert bighorn sheep, collared lizard and countless waterfowl.

Look for this brown binocular sign along the byways. It indicates wildlife viewing areas.

1 Trail of the Ancients



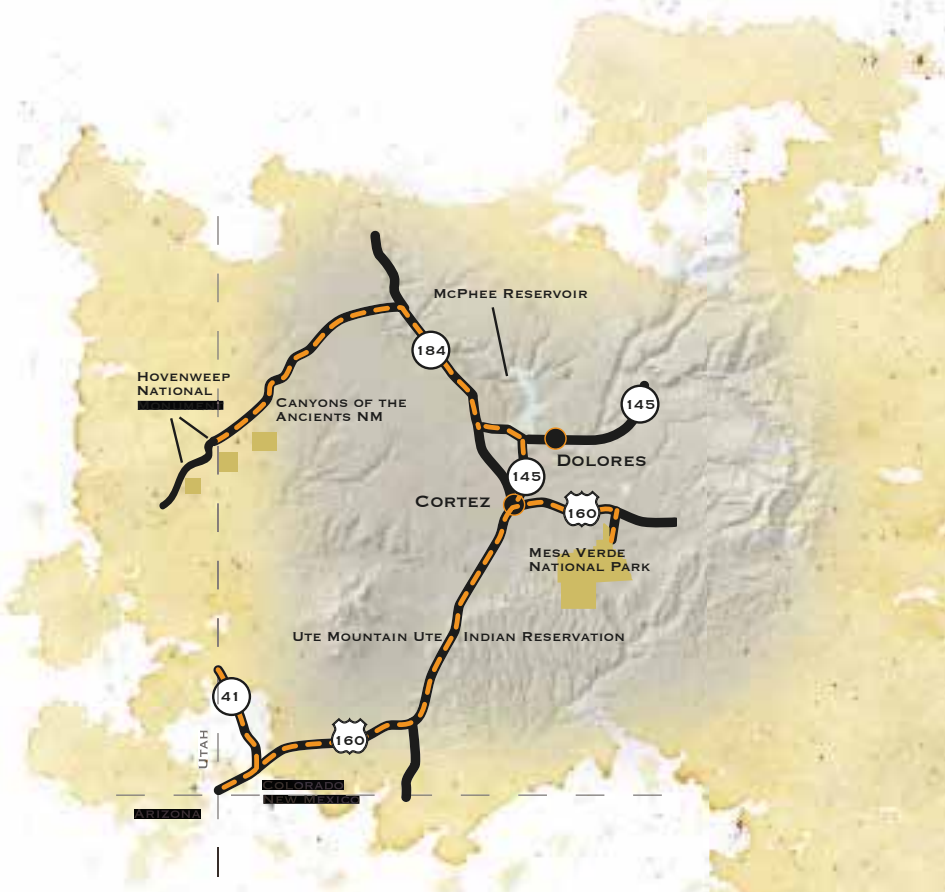


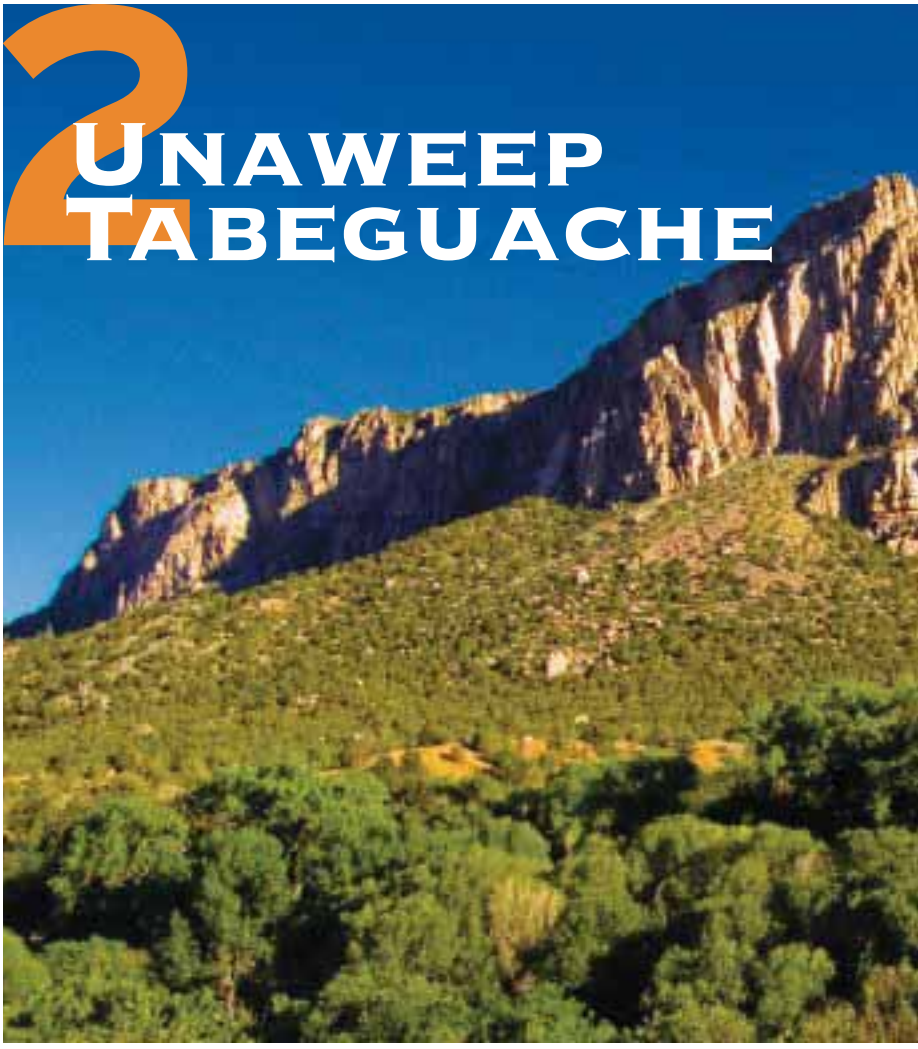
Southwest Colorado

AMERICA'S BYWAYS®

The roots of the Ancestral Puebloan People run deep on this slice of the Colorado Plateau. Visitors find cliff dwellings perched in high canyon alcoves and rock art decorating the sun-baked sandstone. Mesa Verde, the first national park set aside to preserve the achievements of humankind, is the big draw along the Trail of the Ancients. A World Heritage Site, the national park has more than 4,000 archaeological sites, 600 of which are cliff dwellings. Further information about the Ancestral Puebloans can be found at the Anasazi Heritage Center near Dolores. The center displays artifacts and lets visitors scrutinize a number of them under microscopes. It also serves as the official visitor center to the Canyon of the Ancients National Monument, a primitive reserve nearby that harbors more than 6,000 archaeological sites including towers, villages, kivas and check dams. The final leg of the byway visits Hovenweep National Monument, loops through Utah and returns to the town of Cortez via the Four Corners, the only place in the United States where four states meet in one spot.

Distance: 480 miles • Allow 9 hours
(Note: Mileage and time includes Utah's portion).
Total elevation gain: 4,750–8,571 feet

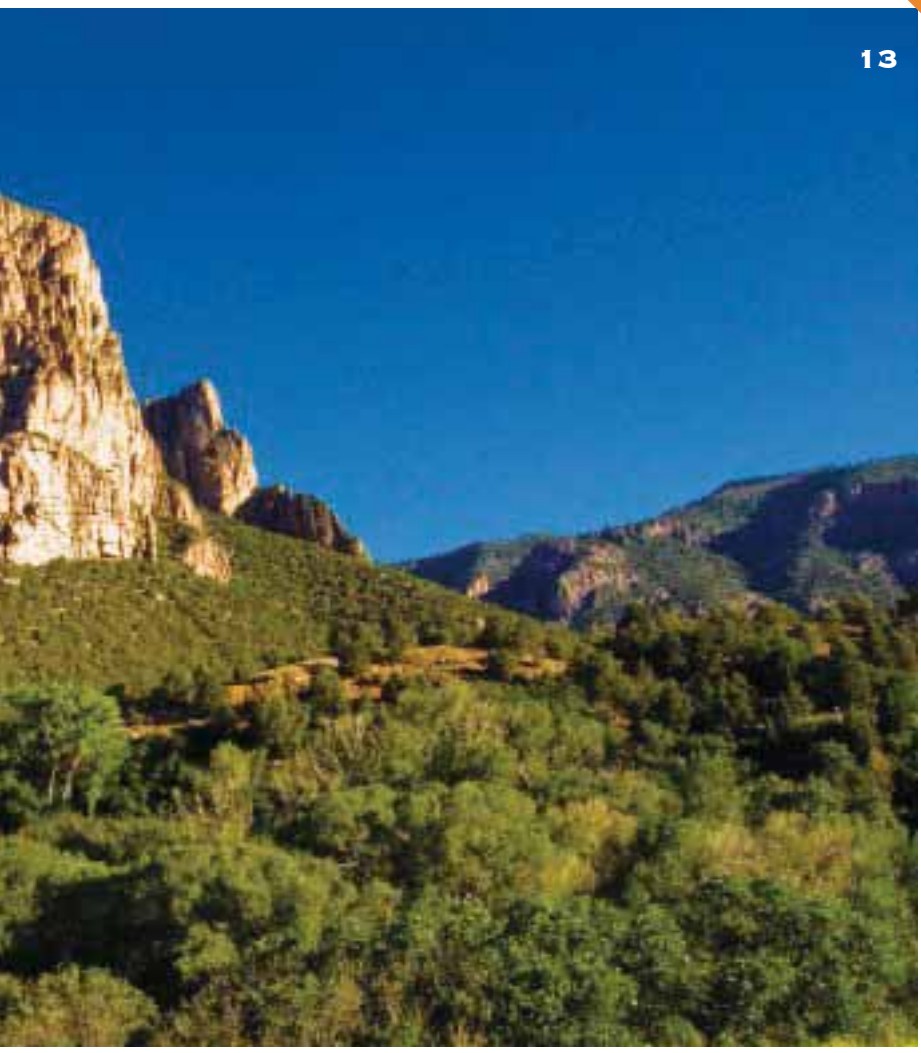


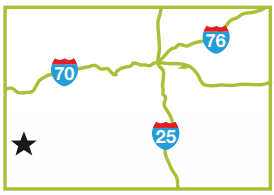


2 Unaweep Tabeguache

Few road trips contrast nature's patient force with the boom-and-bust quickness of mankind's adventures better than this byway. On the one hand is the magnificent Dolores River Canyon, a little-known sandstone canyon that reaches depths of 2,000 feet. A counterpoint to the patient carving that made this canyon can be seen literally hanging from its canyon walls. Constructed in 1891, and bankrolled by mining interests, the Hanging Flume was a precarious aqueduct used to carry water to the mines dotted throughout the area. It originally carried water for up to seven miles, where it was used to animate hydraulic mining equipment. It can be seen just outside the former site of Uravan, near the midway point of the journey. Uravan has an intriguing history of mining, but not of the standard silver and gold variety that Colorado is so known for. The uranium used in the once top-secret Manhattan Project was mined here. Look for interpretative signage along the way that details the Dominguez and Escalante Expedition, which took place from 1776 to 1777 and was led by two Spanish friars who passed through the region in search of a passageway from the missions in New Mexico to those in California.

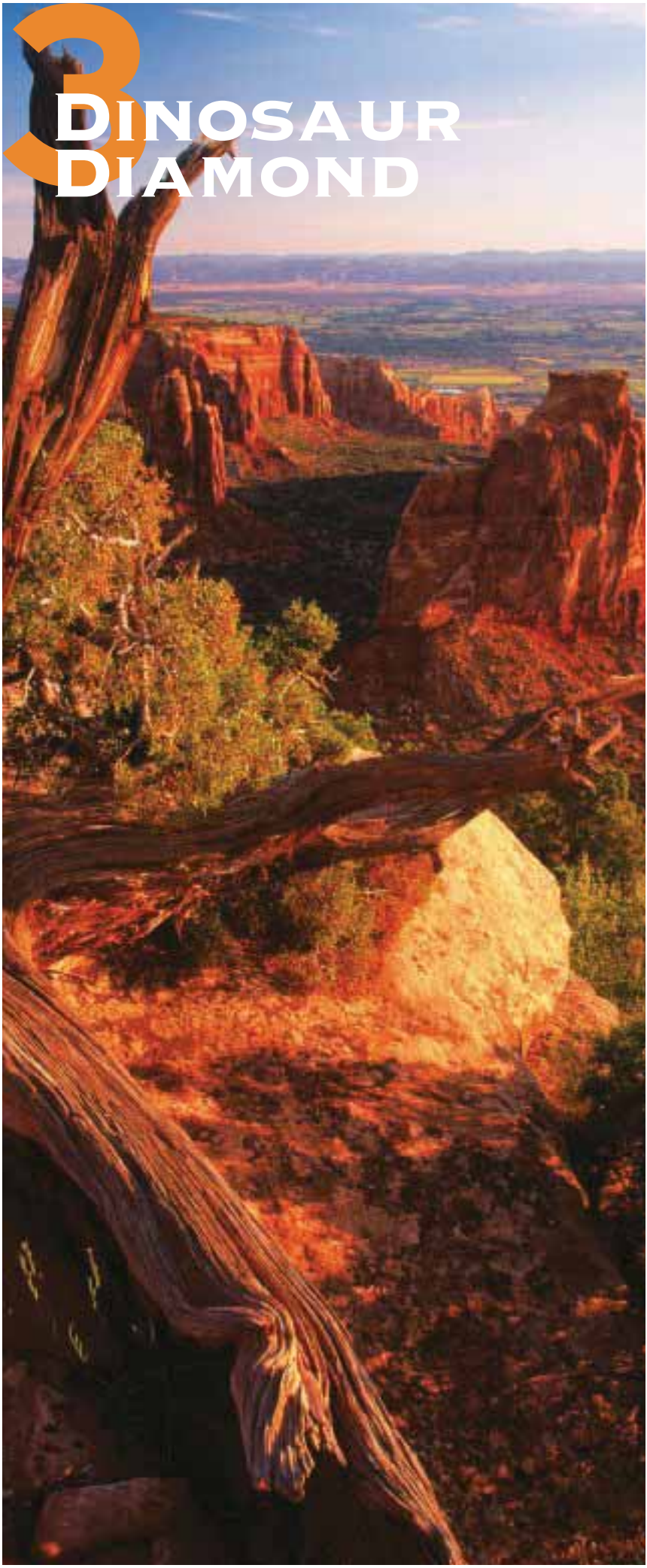
Distance: 133 miles • Allow 3 hours
Total elevation gain: 4,715–7,480 feet

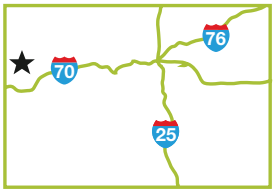




Southwest Colorado

3 Dinosaur Diamond



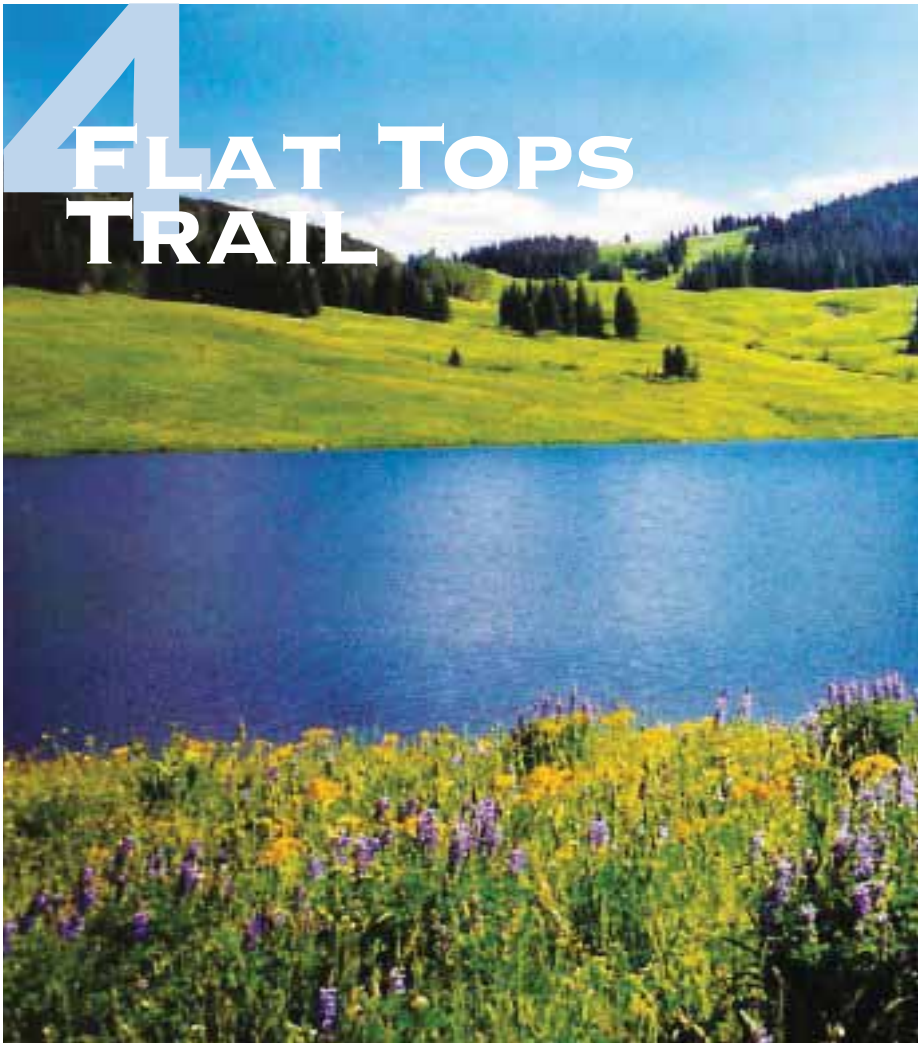


Northwest Colorado

AMERICA'S BYWAYS®

The landscape through which this byway passes once shook under the footfalls of titans. Dinosaurs were abundant in this area and have since left their mark on the land in the form of fossils and footprints. Just north of the town of Dinosaur lies Dinosaur National Monument, which was created to preserve 210,000 acres of prime canyon country, some of which is speckled with dinosaur tracks and fossils. But footprints and fossils do not comprise all of the historical evidence along this byway. Fremont Indians once settled in this arid landscape, and just south of Rangely, visitors can encounter more than 50 examples of their rock art in Canyon Pintado, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. While much of this byway continues into Utah, its Colorado segment concludes in the Grand Valley, where mountain biking, vineyards and Colorado National Monument draw visitors year-round. With its sandstone mesas and canyons, Colorado National Monument is a classic slice of the Colorado Plateau — the same region that includes Arches and Capital Reef National Parks in Utah.

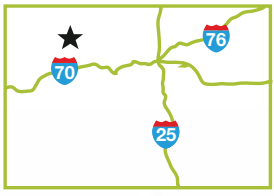
Distance: 486 miles • Allow 2 to 3 days
(Note: Mileage and time includes Utah's portion).
Total elevation gain: 4,498–8,268 feet



4 Flat Tops Trail

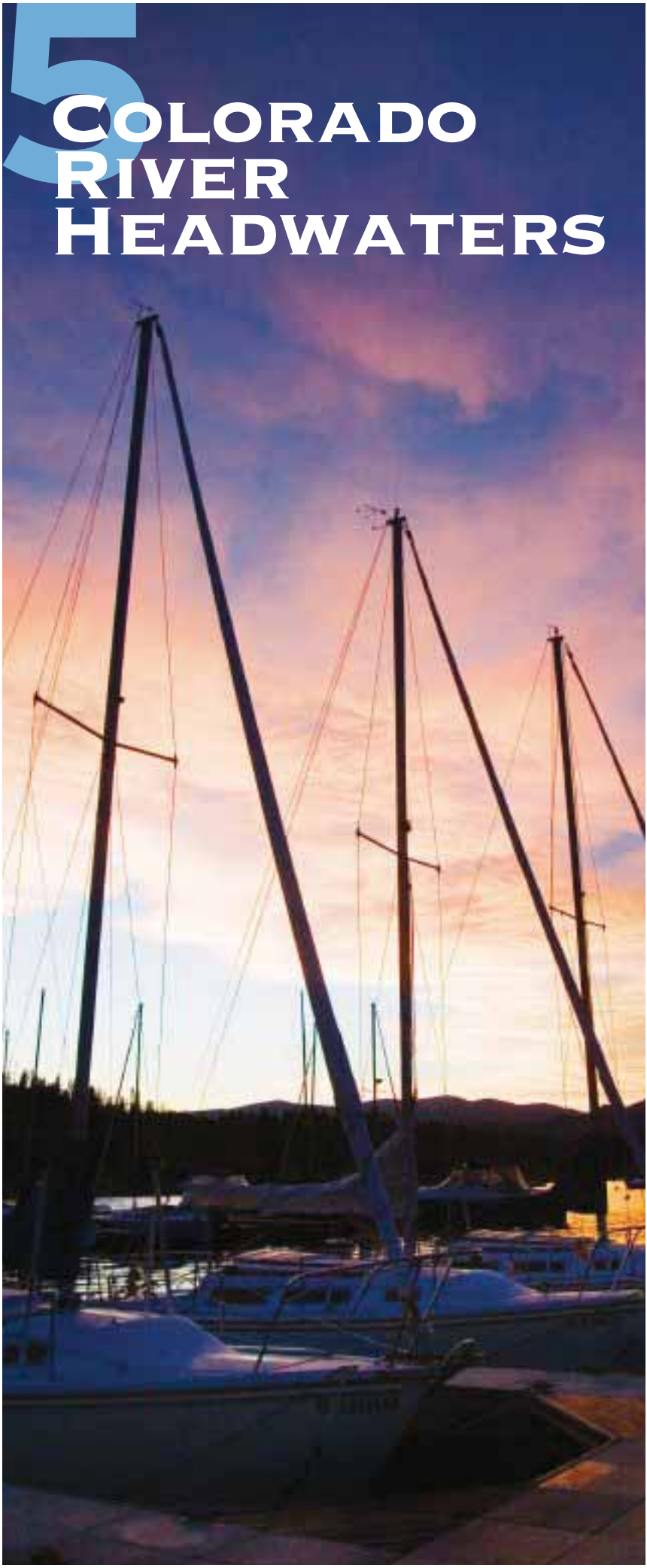
One of this byway's top historic sites is the Flat Tops Wilderness, which is often credited as being one of the places that inspired the ethos of preservation in the West. In the early 1900s at Trappers Lake, a short drive just off the byway, Arthur Carhart was so moved by the beauty of the scenery, he promoted the idea of preserving the land in its raw state. He wasn't the only one who appreciated the area's attributes — Teddy Roosevelt hunted elk here. Before the area was at the forefront of the preservation movement, it experienced a significant conflict between white settlers and Ute Indians who had lived on the land for centuries. At the White River Museum in Meeker, learn about the Meeker Massacre of 1879, in which tensions between whites and Indians exploded in armed conflict. The museum is located within the original late-1800s officer's quarters and showcases the area's heritage. The town of Meeker — in addition to Buford and Yampa — is a great place to take in the atmosphere of an authentic ranching town.

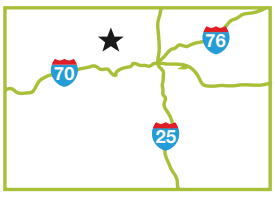
Distance: 82 miles • Allow 2 hours
Total elevation gain: 6,249–10,343 feet
(Note: Much of the byway is a two-wheel-drive dirt road. Watch out for sheepherders and sheep. The portion from Buford to Yampa is closed in winter.)



Northwest Colorado

5 Colorado River Headwaters



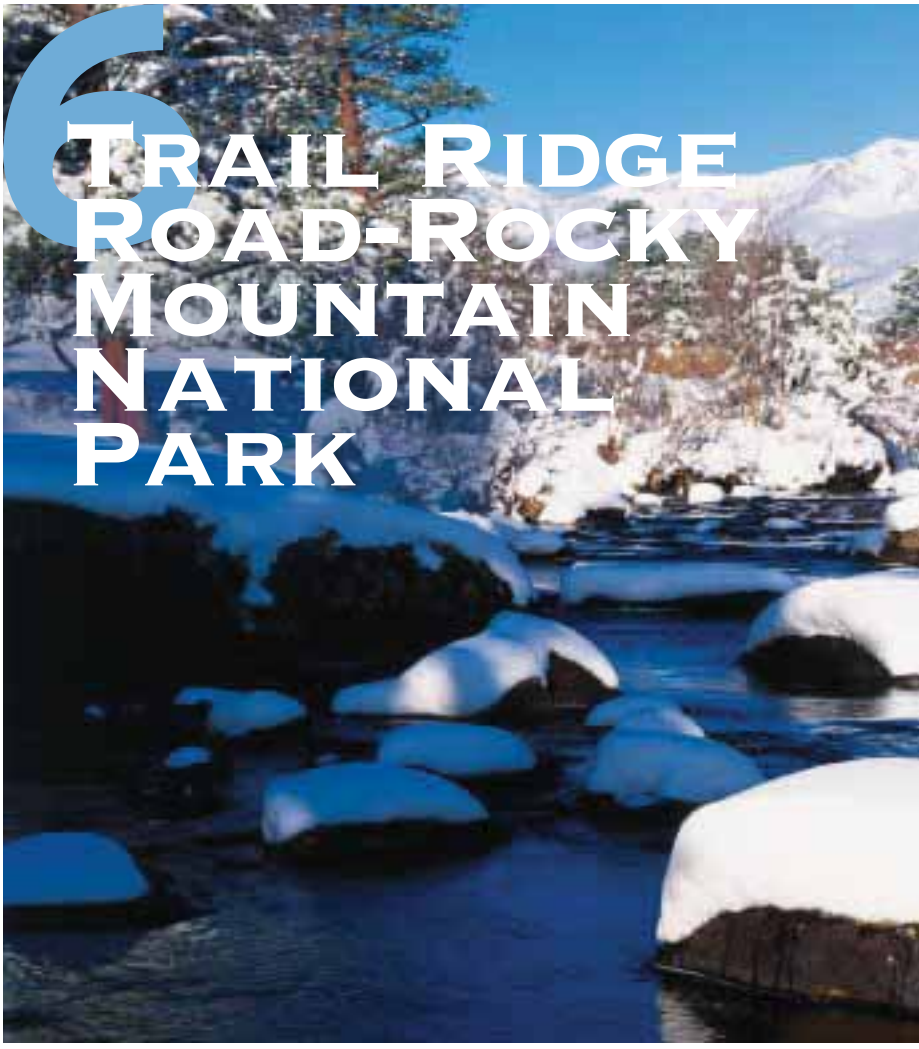


Northwest Colorado

AMERICA'S BYWAYS®

America's great canyon-carver — the Colorado River — has its humble beginnings high in the mountains of its namesake. This route traces the upper reaches of the river and connects a series of ranching communities. Grand Lake takes its name from Colorado's largest natural lake, where residents have been holding an annual sailing regatta since 1912. To the north of Grand Lake, in the heart of Rocky Mountain National Park, the Colorado River begins as a stream of snowmelt, but by the time the byway crosses it near Hot Sulphur Springs, the river has gained considerable size. As the Grand County seat, Hot Sulphur Springs has played a big role in the area's history, much of which can be discovered at the Grand County Museum. Further downstream lies Kremmling, which serves as a gateway to Gore Canyon, a stretch of the Colorado that is legendary among kayakers and rafters. The byway eventually merges with a maintained dirt road that follows the river through an arid valley to State Bridge.

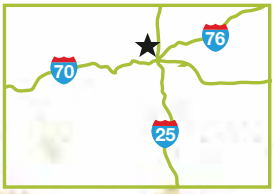
Distance: 80 miles • Allow 2 hours
Total elevation gain: 7,050–8,369 feet



6 Trail Ridge Road-Rocky Mountain National Park

As the highest paved through-road in North America, Trail Ridge Road was a landmark achievement for its day. From 1929–1932, the Civilian Conservation Corps could only build the road three months at a time due to the heavy snows. However, this byway's human history starts well before the national park was founded. Trail Ridge derives its name from the numerous prehistoric pathways that crisscross its treeless expanse. Primarily utilized by Ute Indians, these rough routes were thoroughfares for hunting and gathering in summer months. Today, hikers can follow one of these paths, the Ute Trail, which the National Park Service maintains. However, the delights for travelers of this byway are not reserved to just the high-altitude reaches. In Estes Park, visitors can tour (or stay the night) at the Stanley Hotel, which was built by F.O. Stanley of Stanley Steamer fame and was an inspiration for Stephen King's *The Shining*. Other historic sites include the Beaver Meadows Welcome Center at the park's east entrance and the Grand Lake Lodge at the western terminus of the byway.

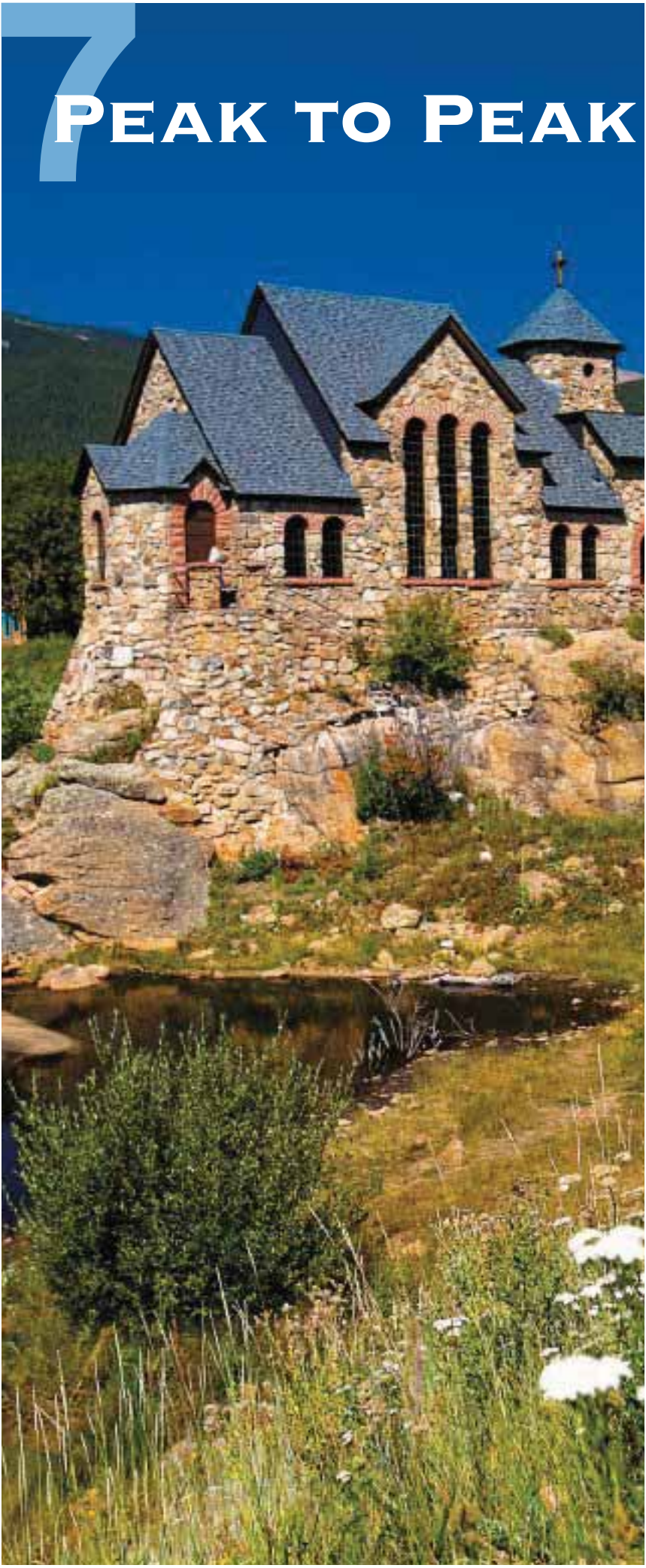
Distance: 48 miles • Allow 2–3 hours
Total elevation gain: 7,522–12,183 feet
(Note: In winter, the byway is closed between Many Parks Curve and the Kawuneeche Visitor Center.)

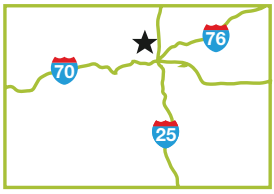


Front Range Colorado

America's Byways®

7 Peak to Peak

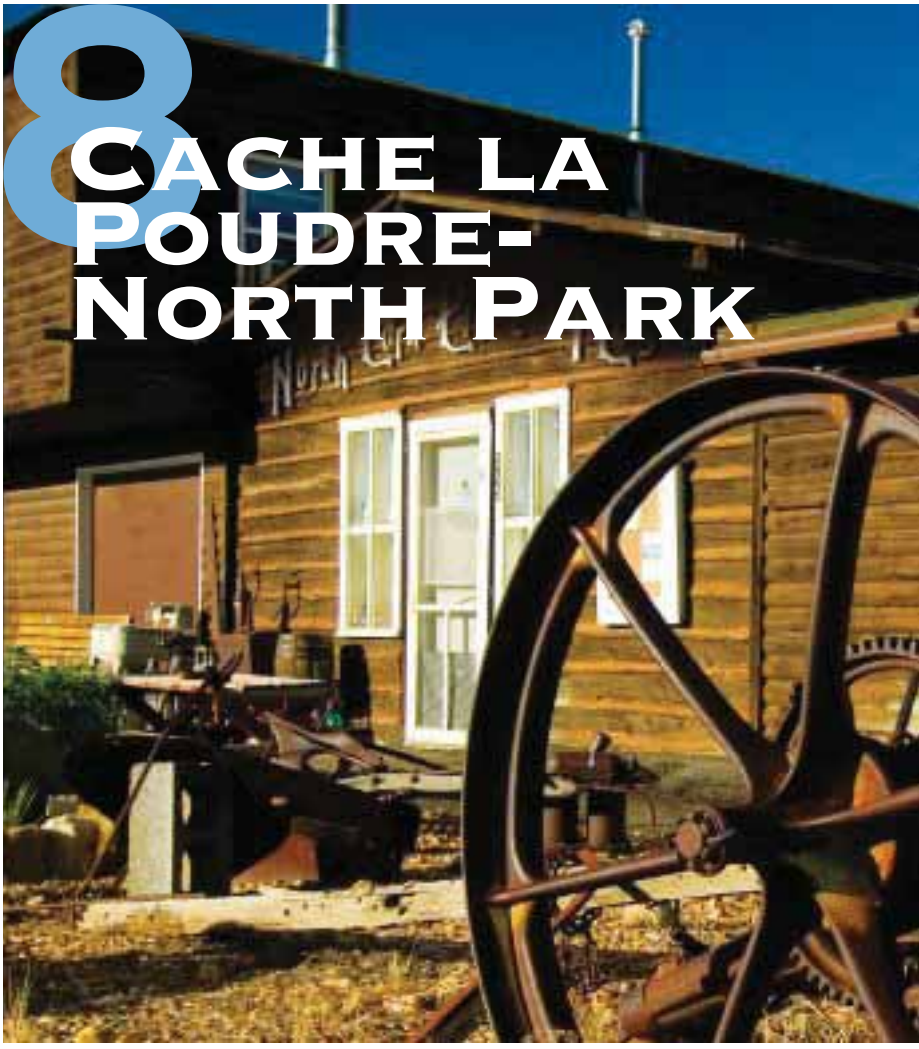




Front Range Colorado

This route brings travelers up close and parallel with the Continental Divide for a tour of ghost towns and Victorian-era opulence. The Central City-Black Hawk corridor encompasses two towns that flourished after gold was discovered in 1859. Nearby Quartz Hill was dubbed "the richest square mile on earth," albeit with a bit of hyperbole. The decadent Central City Opera House (built in 1878) remains a big draw for performing arts lovers in the summer. Both towns today have casino gambling. The byway heads north out of the historic district and takes in views of the James Peak and Indian Peaks Wilderness Areas as it approaches Nederland. The former mining town of Nederland claims a still-working earthmover that helped build the Panama Canal — the Bucyrus Steam Shovel. Farther along, the Peak to Peak Highway approaches Longs Peak and Rocky Mountain National Park before descending into Estes Park. Here, a stroll through the charming downtown completes the journey, or serves as a springboard for adventures into the adjacent national park.

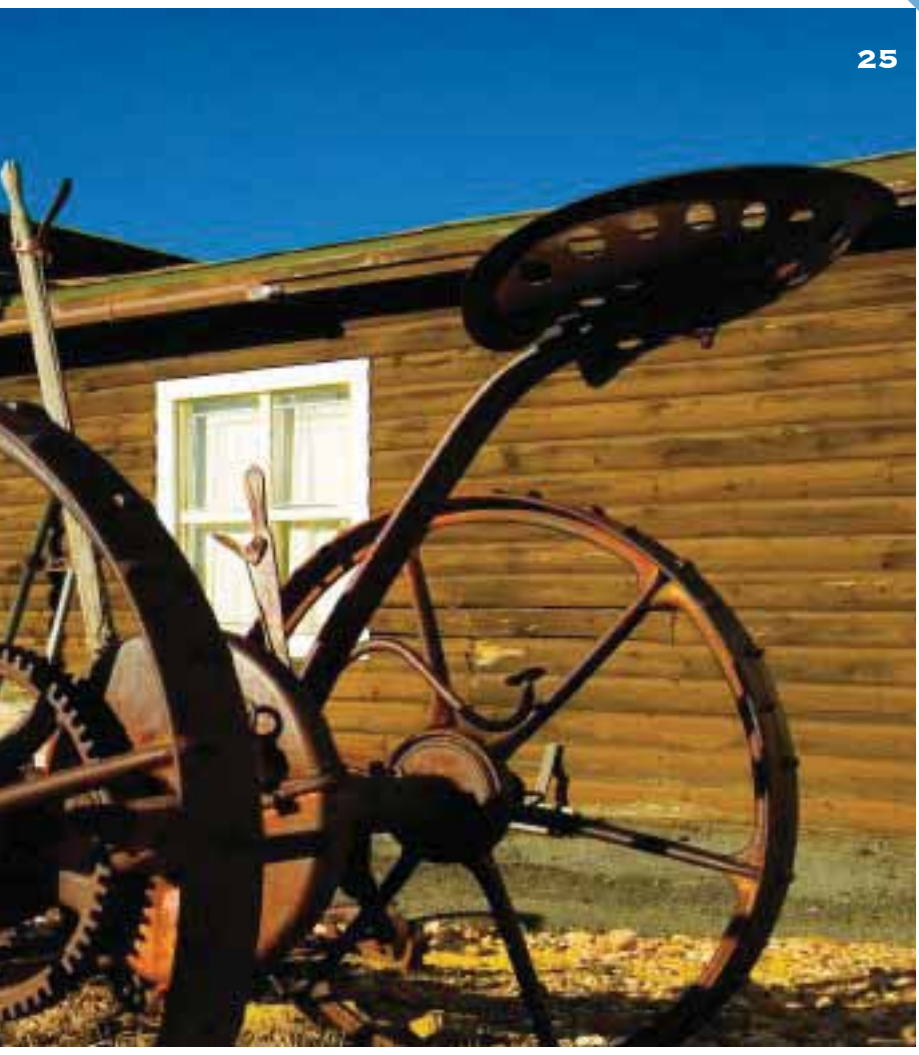
Distance: 55 miles • Allow 2 hours
Total elevation gain: 7,522–9,258 feet

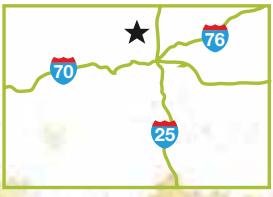


8 Cache la Poudre-North Park

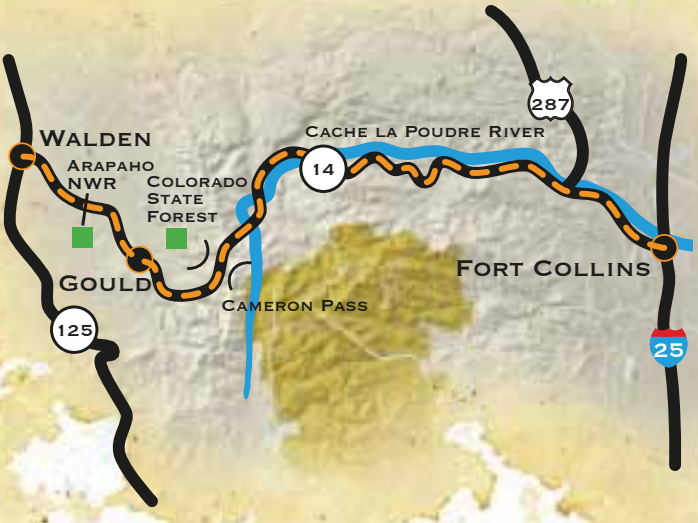
This byway travels along one of America's few federally designated Wild and Scenic Rivers — the Cache la Poudre. Tumbling through a wild granite canyon, "the Poudre" has long been utilized by farmers in and around Fort Collins and has been loved by whitewater thrill-seekers for decades. As the byway crosses between the Never Summer and Medicine Bow Mountains, it descends through the piney hills and willow-covered riparian habitat of Colorado State Forest State Park, the most reliable place in Colorado to see a moose. While this 101-mile-long route is rich with natural beauty, it is also bookended by two communities with fascinating local history. Fort Collins — Colorado's fifth-largest city and home to Colorado State University — has a rich agrarian heritage, which is detailed at the Fort Collins Museum and the Cache la Poudre National Heritage Area. At the opposite end of the byway in North Park lies Walden, a town so remote it is the only incorporated community in Jackson County. Here, travelers can stop at the North Park Pioneer Museum in summer and learn about the Ute Indians, ranchers and loggers who decorate the area's past.

Distance: 101 miles • Allow 3 hours
Total elevation gain: 4,984–10,276 feet

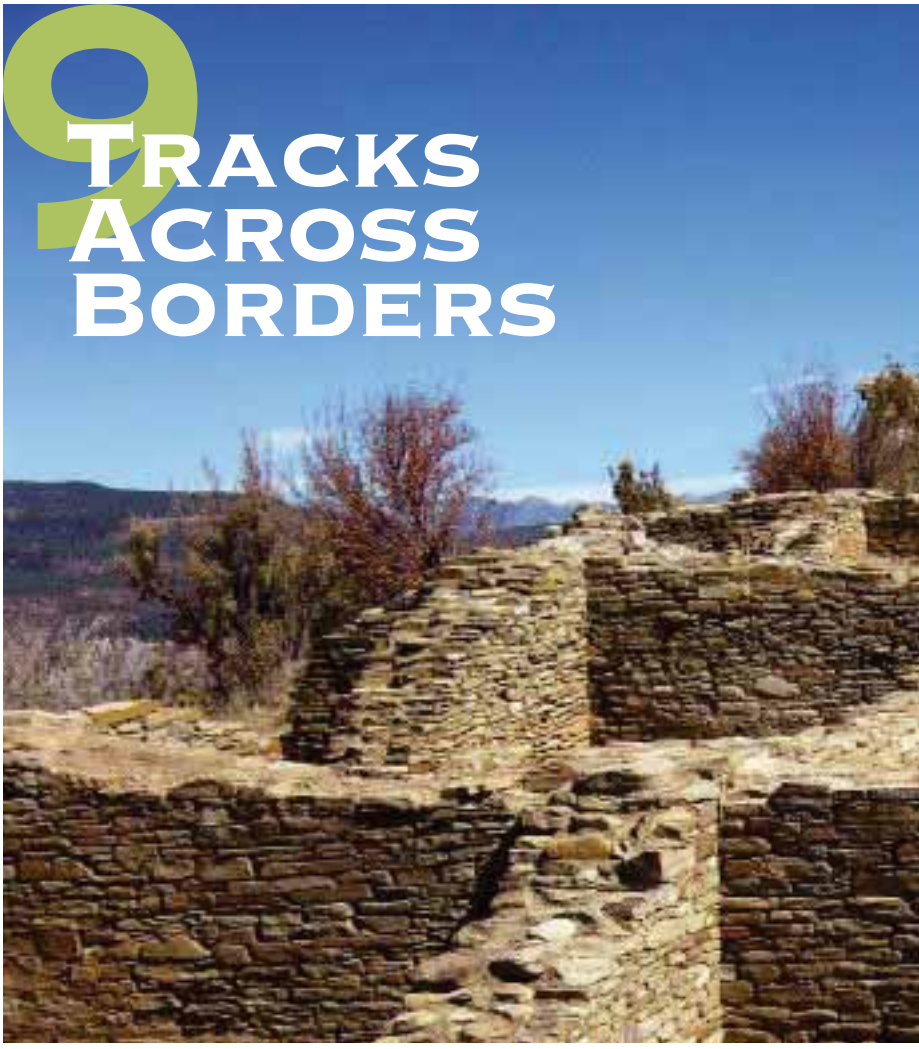




Front Range Colorado

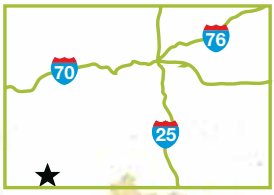


9 Tracks Across Borders



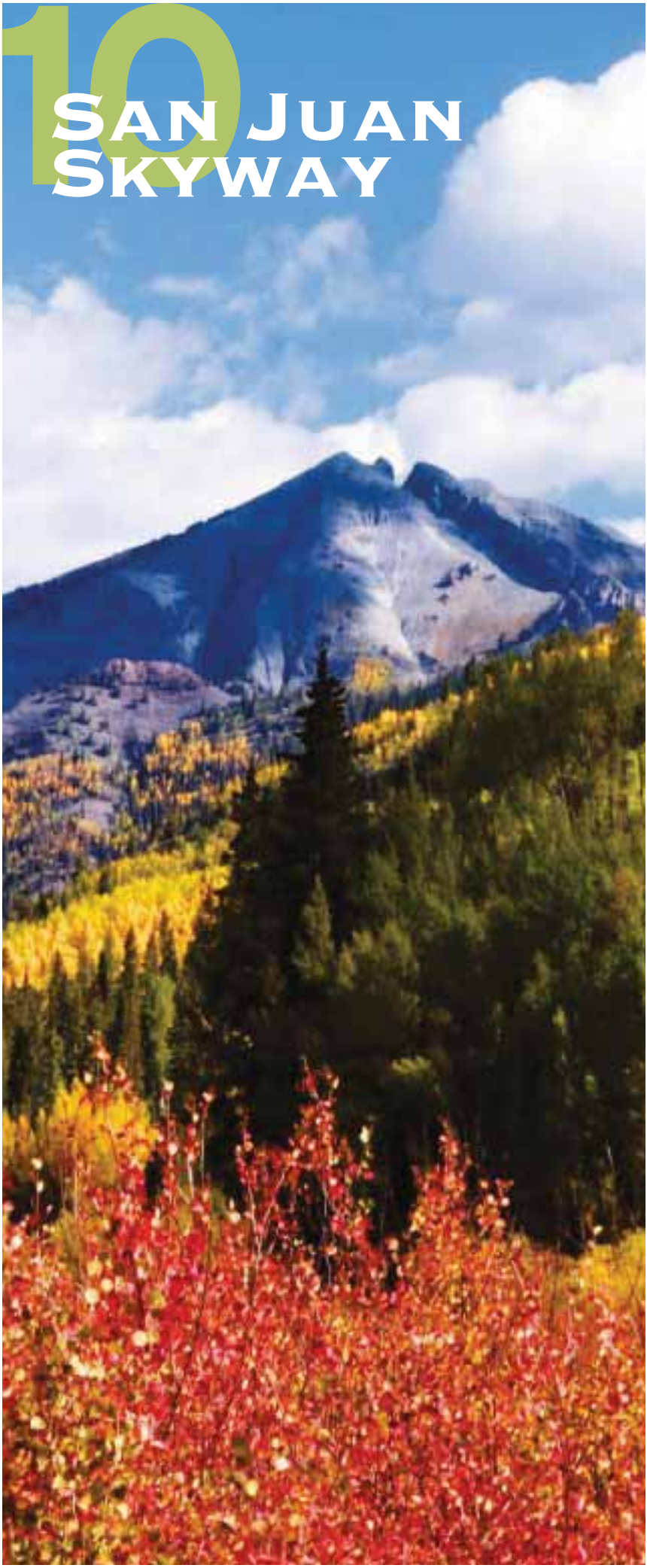
The state's newest scenic byway, this southwest route offers dramatic mountain scenery and ties to the development of the famed Denver & Rio Grande Railroad. Begin in Durango, a city established along with the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad in the 1880s. Visit the museum dedicated to this railway, then stroll the shops, restaurants and hotels housed in the town's preserved late-19th-century buildings. From Durango, drive east on U.S. 160; get your camera ready for breathtaking views of the snow-flecked La Plata Mountain Range. Continue toward Ignacio on CO Hwy. 172 for a stop at the Sky Ute Casino Resort. From Ignacio, take Hwy. 151 to Arboles — less than 25 miles away, Chimney Rock National Monument is a must-see that's known for its twin rock structures. Or, spend time at Colorado's answer to Lake Powell: Navajo State Park, which boasts a large reservoir, visitor center, campgrounds and cabins. The byway ends in Chama, New Mexico, where you can take a ride on the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad and complete the story of Colorado's narrow-gauge history.

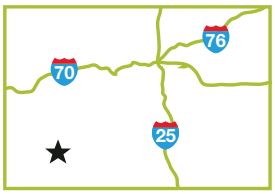
Distance: 125 miles • Allow 4–5 hours
(Note: 89 miles in Colorado)
Total elevation gain: 6,522–7,871 feet
(Note: Travel in inclement weather on gravel portions of the byway is not advised.)



Southwest Colorado

10 San Juan Skyway





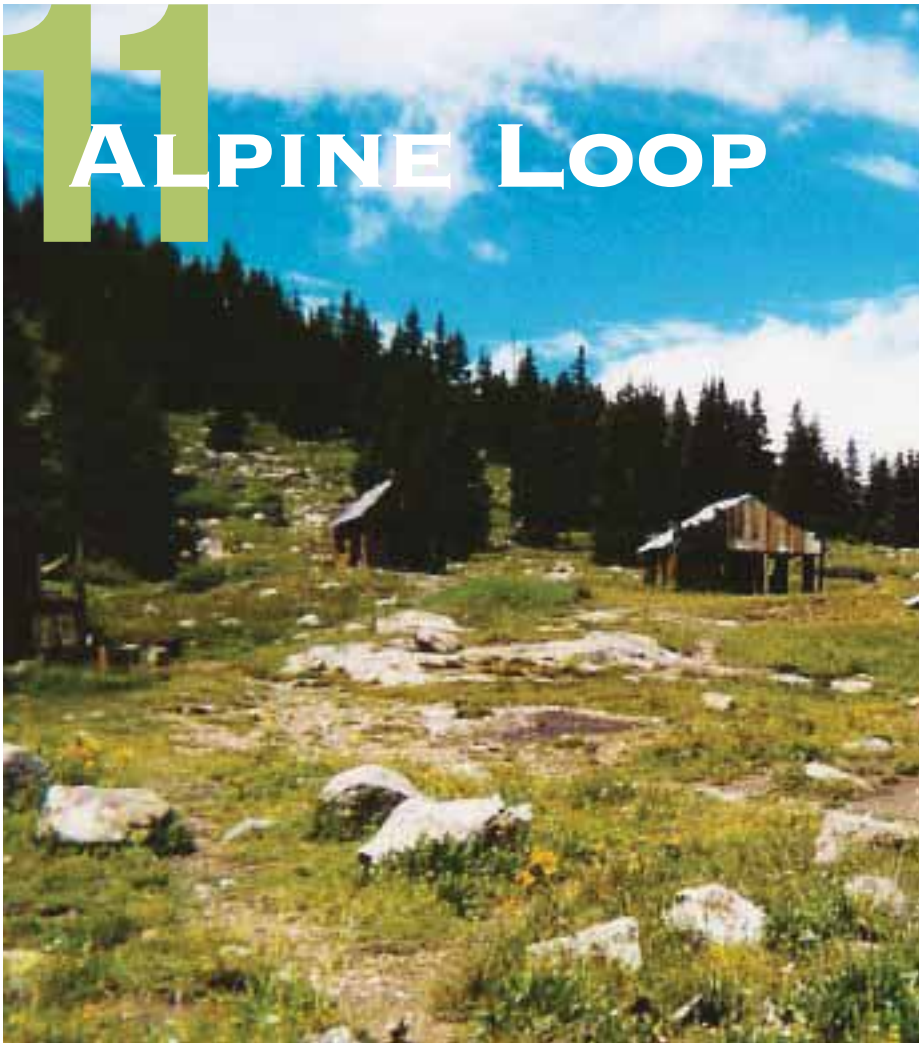
Southwest Colorado

America's Byways®

Traveling through the dazzling, multihued San Juan Mountains, with stops at historic towns of great significance, the San Juan Skyway is often considered one of America's finest drives. Begin in Durango, a town that got its start as a railroad center. A vestige of this era is the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, which connects the town to its silver-boom neighbor to the north, Silverton. The byway leaves Durango and reaches Silverton via two verdant passes that take in views of the Weminuche Wilderness. Between Silverton and Ouray, the byway follows the "Million Dollar Highway," a historic road that clings to cliffs and is famous worldwide for its scenery. After a stop in the Victorian- and Queen-Anne-bedecked town of Ouray — whose hot springs are worth a dip — the San Juan Skyway wraps around the northern edge of the San Juan Mountains, passing one of Colorado's most postcard-worthy views: Mount Sneffels as seen from Dallas Divide. An hour later, drivers arrive in Telluride, famous for its festivals, skiing and Bridal Veil Falls. The loop then bears south to Mesa Verde National Park, a World Heritage Site that is famous for the cliff dwellings of the Ancestral Puebloan people. The route then returns to Durango.

Distance: 236 miles • Allow 7 hours
Total elevation gain: 6,200–11,018 feet

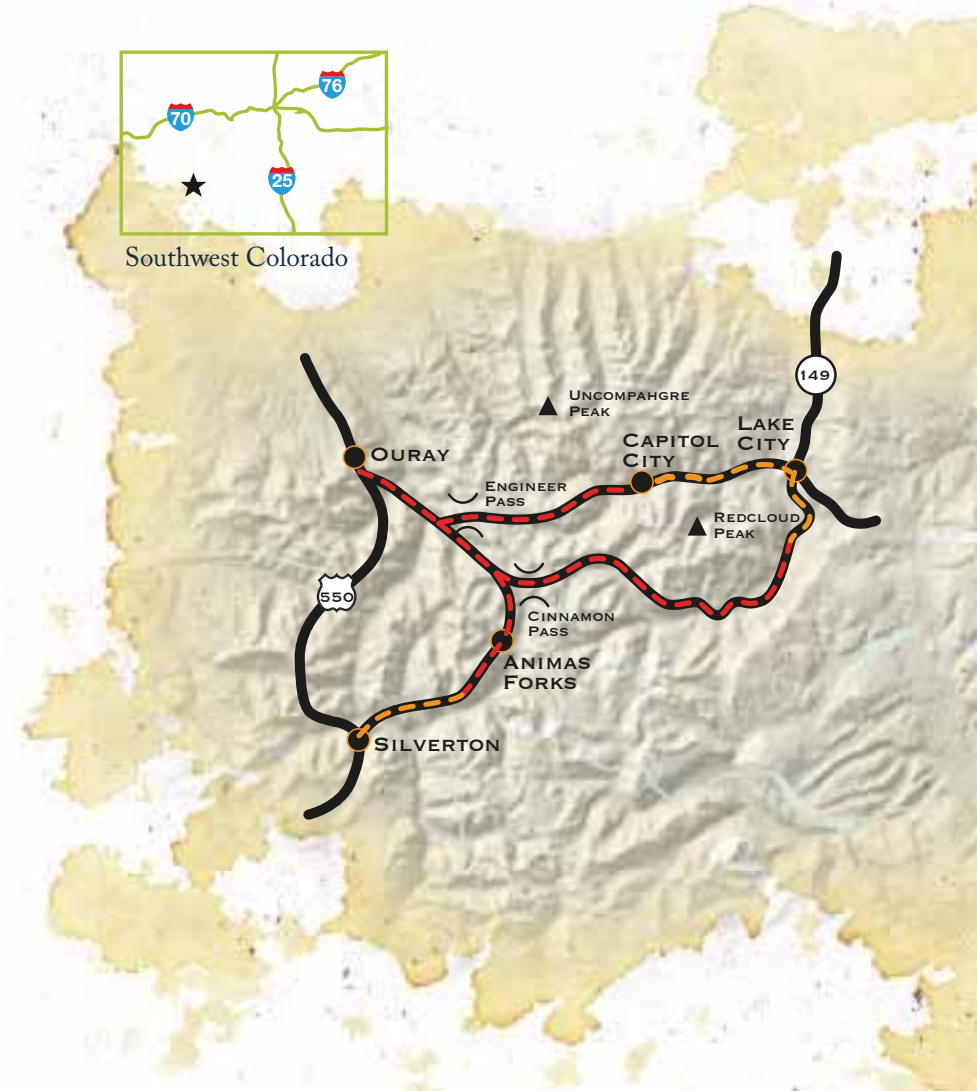
11 Alpine Loop



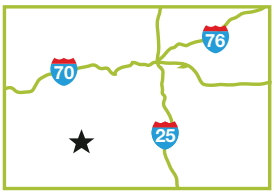
The Alpine Loop is unlike any other byway in Colorado. The route passes over mining roads established in the late 1800s, taking in wildflower meadows, and numerous historic sites and districts. Begin in Silverton, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is noted for its quaint Main Street, famous Town Hall, and the Old Hundred Mine and Mayflower Mill on the outskirts of town. Above the mine sits the Old Hundred Boarding House, a weathered two-story dormitory that precariously clings to Galena Mountain. The byway also stops at a series of intriguing ghost towns, including Animas Forks (where a 23-day blizzard in 1884 dropped 25 feet of snow) and Capitol City (a diminutive mining town that aspired to be the state capital). Depending on the route you take, the byway ends in either Lake City or Ouray (both of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places). Lake City is the Hinsdale County seat and has a museum devoted exclusively to the county's past. Ouray — named after the Ute Chief Ouray — is nestled in a box canyon and has long been a sanctuary for hot springs lovers and ice climbing.

Distance: 63 miles • Allow 7 hours
Total elevation gain: 7,706–12,840 feet
(Note: Four-wheel drive is required for a majority of this byway, and it is closed from September through May.)

Southwest Colorado



12 Silver Thread



Southwest Colorado

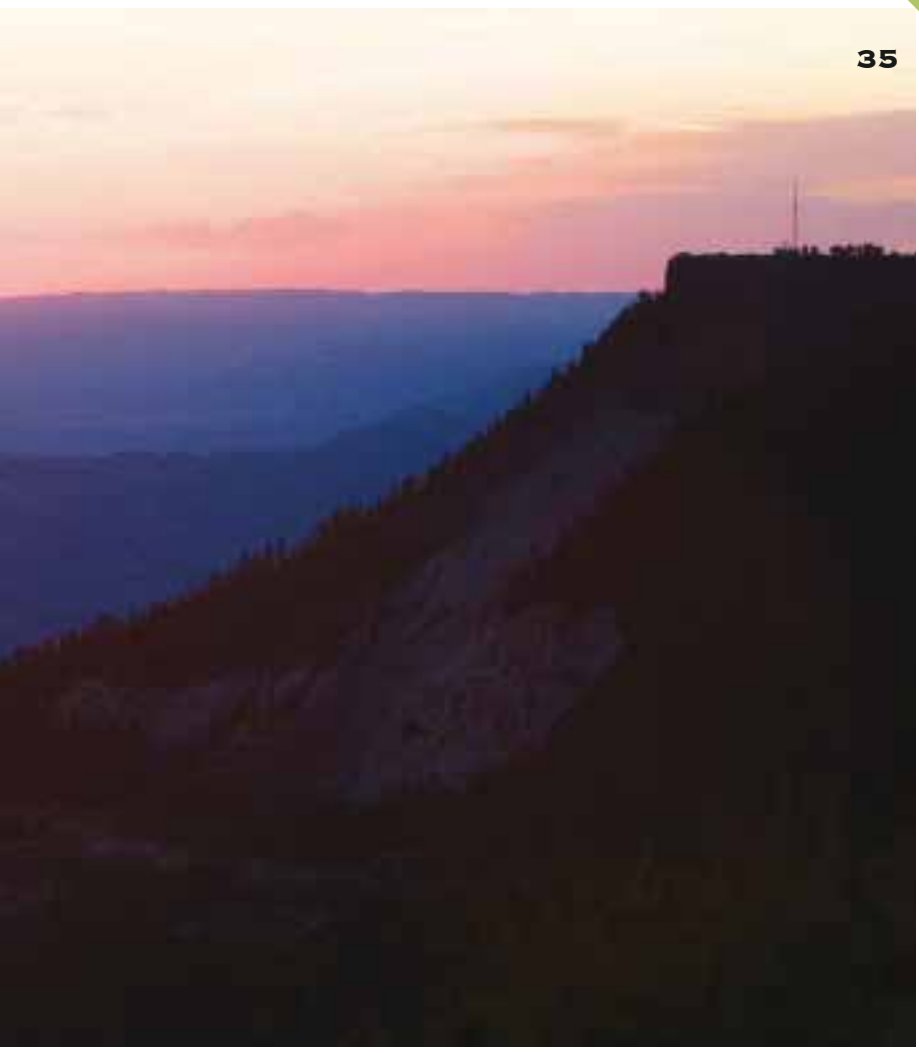
From the beginning, this highway feels wonderfully isolated as it leaves behind Blue Mesa Reservoir and winds through vast tracts of public lands. It eventually enters the San Juan Mountains and the historic town of Lake City. The Hinsdale County Museum offers walking tours along the wood-plank sidewalks of downtown. Another must is the Hinsdale County Courthouse, which hosted a speech by suffragette Susan B. Anthony in September 1877, and held the murder trial of cannibal Alferd Packer in 1883. The highway climbs over Spring Creek Pass and takes in views of the still-moving, slow-as-molasses landslide known as the Slumgullion Earthflow. At Creede — one of the last towns in Colorado to experience a silver boom — travelers can break from the highway and tour the Underground Mining Museum or catch a show at the award-winning Creede Repertory Theater. Drivers then follow the Rio Grande River to the byway's conclusion at South Fork.

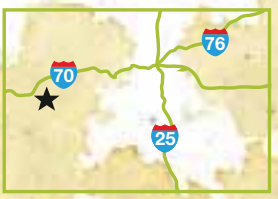
Distance: 117 miles • Allow 3 hours
Total elevation gain: 7,500-11,361 feet

13 Grand Mesa

Traversing the world's largest flattop mountain, this route is a playground in the sky and offers travelers more than 300 stream-fed lakes on the mesa with thriving trout populations. Crossing the footprints of convicts, farmers and American Indians, the byway reveals a timeline of the mesa's human history. The log-constructed Grand Mesa Visitor Center — located in the Land O' Lakes region — features interpretive exhibits and trails. Near the midway point, a spur off the main road leads to an impressive vista known as Lands End. An observatory here was built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Prisoners from the state penitentiary in Cañon City wielded picks and shovels to cut the original climb to this vantage point. Another site of interest on the Lands End Road are the Raber Cow Camp Cabins, which are restored and listed on the State Register of Historic Properties. Back on the main route, the byway zigzags around a series of idyllic lakes created by glacier melt that filled the mesa's numerous volcanic depressions following the last ice age. The route descends to Cedaredge, which is well-known for its apples and the annual Apple Fest held in early October.

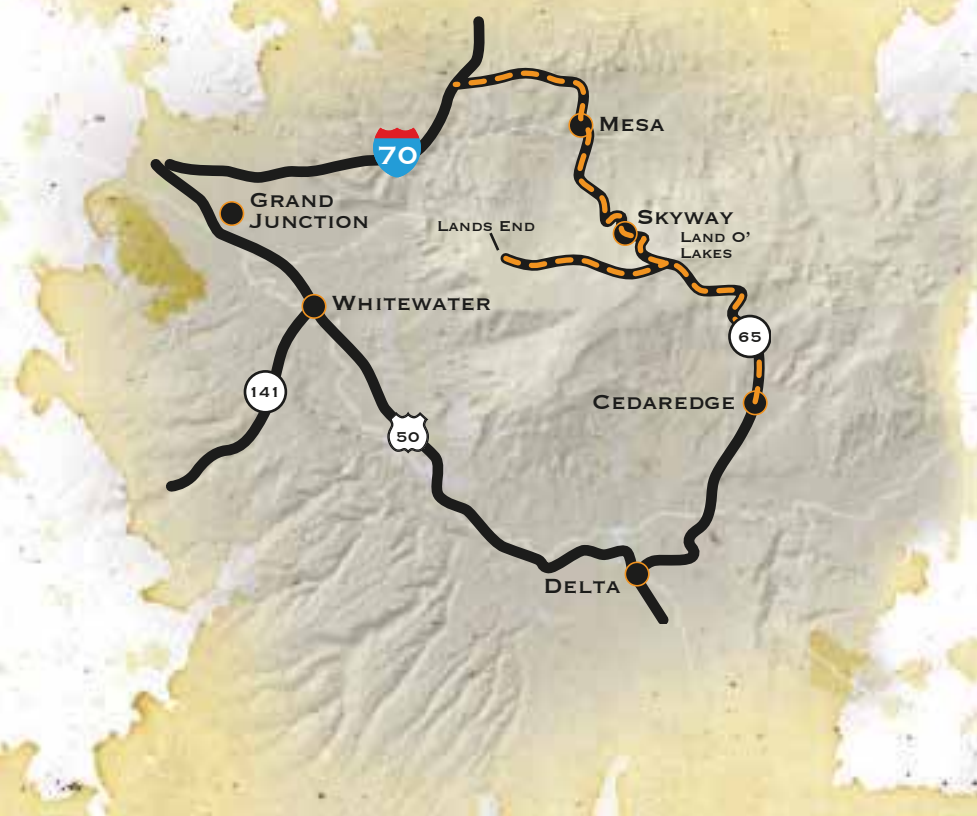
Distance: 63 miles • Allow 2 hours
Total elevation gain: 4,780-10,500 feet



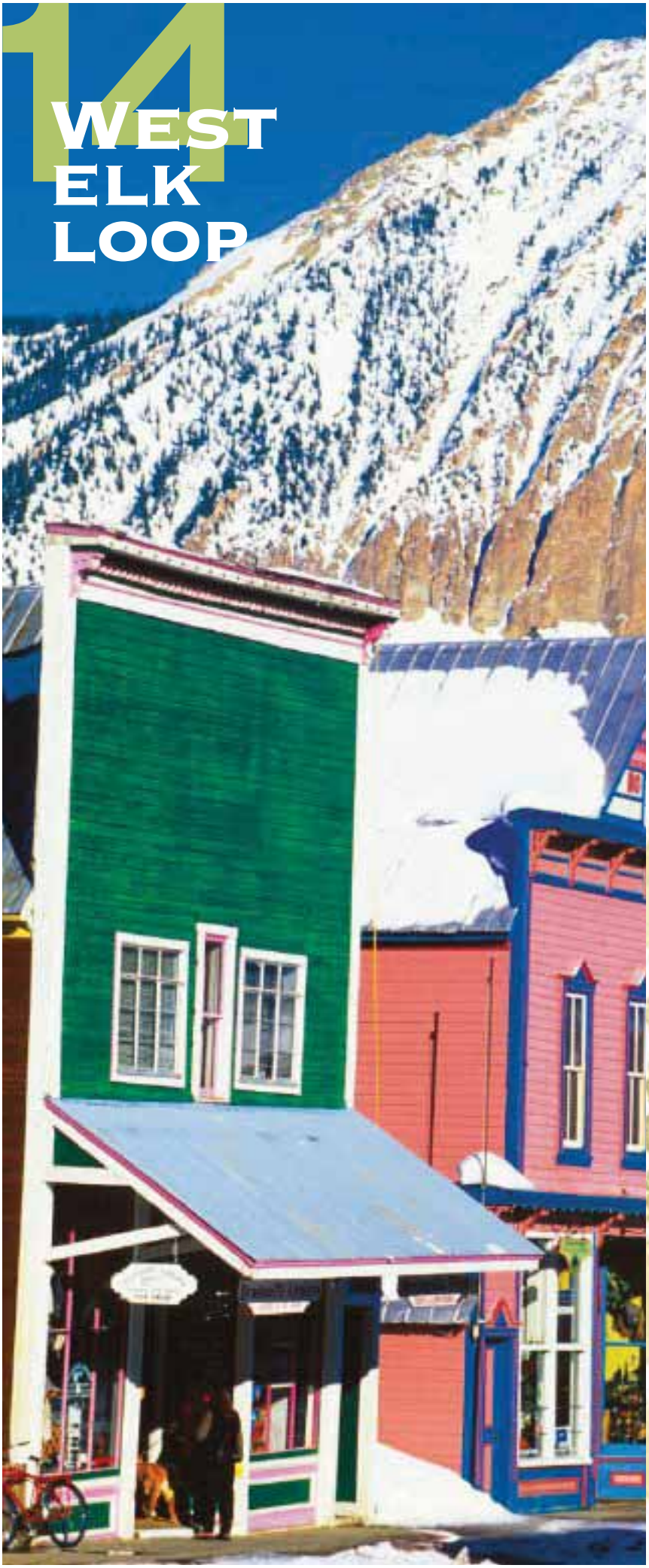


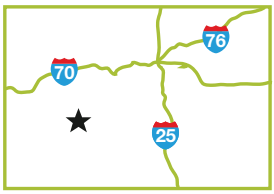
Northwestern Colorado

AMERICA'S BYWAYS®



14 WEST ELK LOOP



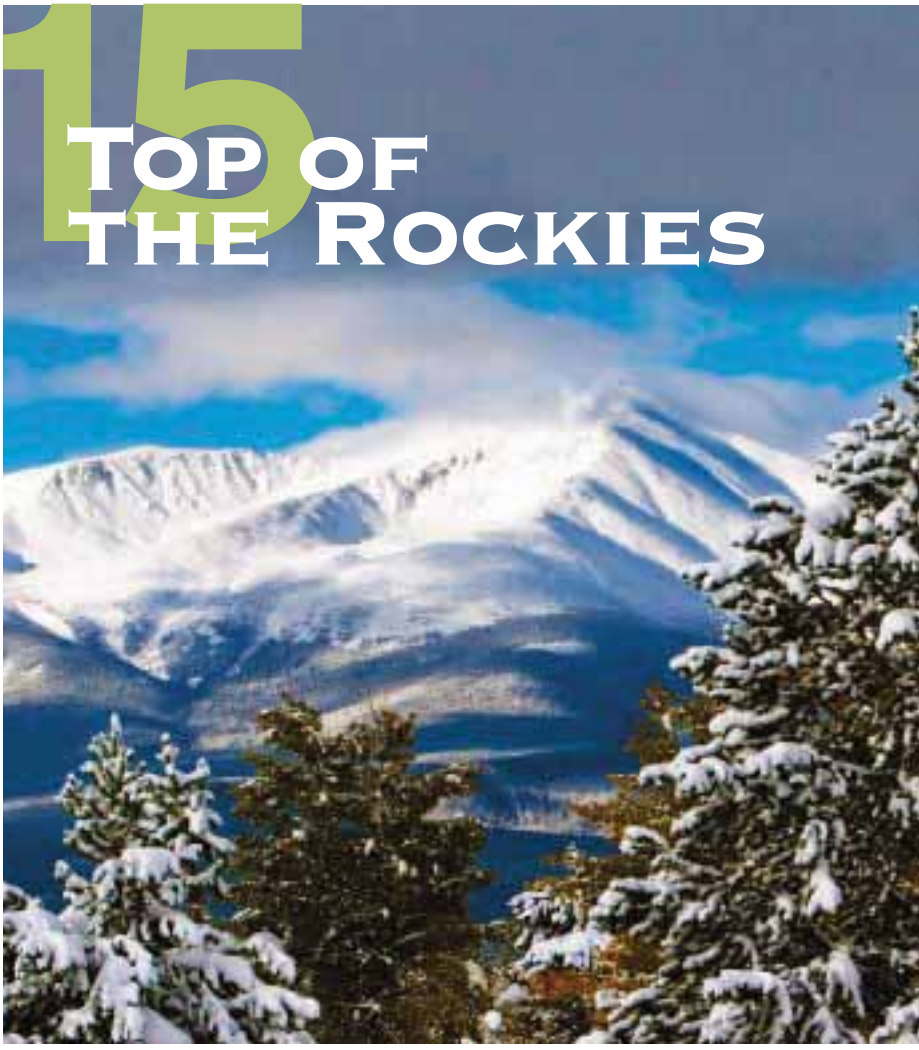


Southwest Colorado

Starting in the Roaring Fork Valley in Carbondale, the West Elk Loop heads up the Crystal River, offering a stop in the historic hamlet of Redstone, where the 42-room Cleveholm Manor can be toured. After crossing McClure Pass, the byway drops into the North Fork Valley, a region synonymous with farm-fresh cherries and apples. From the town of Hotchkiss, the route bends to the south and skirts the North Rim of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison, a 2,700-foot deep chasm, that is now preserved as a national park. Next up is Gunnison, which is equal parts college town and ranching community. The byway then heads north to Crested Butte which is famous for its preserved Victorian architecture (and renowned ski resort). The circuit is completed by crossing over Kebler Pass, an area that locals cherish in September when massive groves of aspen bear bright gold foliage.

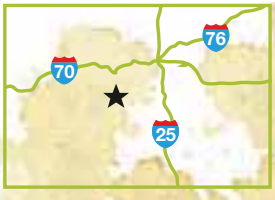
Distance: 205 miles • Allow 7 hours
Total elevation gain: 5,351–9,980 feet
(Note: The portion over Kebler Pass is closed in winter.)

15 Top of the Rockies



Crossing the Continental Divide three times, passing Colorado's two highest peaks and uniting two of the most famous towns in the Rockies, this byway is in rarified air. The first leg stretches from Copper Mountain to Leadville, a rustic town that was home to get-rich-quick barons and silver-boom divas. Now a National Historic Landmark District, Leadville was at the forefront of the 1879 silver boom. Victorian houses, ramshackle mines and the Tabor Opera House make the town a fascinating place to visit. The second leg of the byway passes beneath Mount Elbert (14,440 feet) and Mount Massive (14,421 feet) and crosses the Continental Divide at Independence Pass. The long descent into the Roaring Fork Valley leads to Aspen, a ski town synonymous with the Hollywood jet-set. However, Aspen began as a silver mining camp, and by 1891, it had surpassed Leadville in silver production. The third and final leg returns to Leadville and crosses Tennessee Pass before passing Camp Hale, a former training ground for the Army's 10th Mountain Division, en route to Minturn.

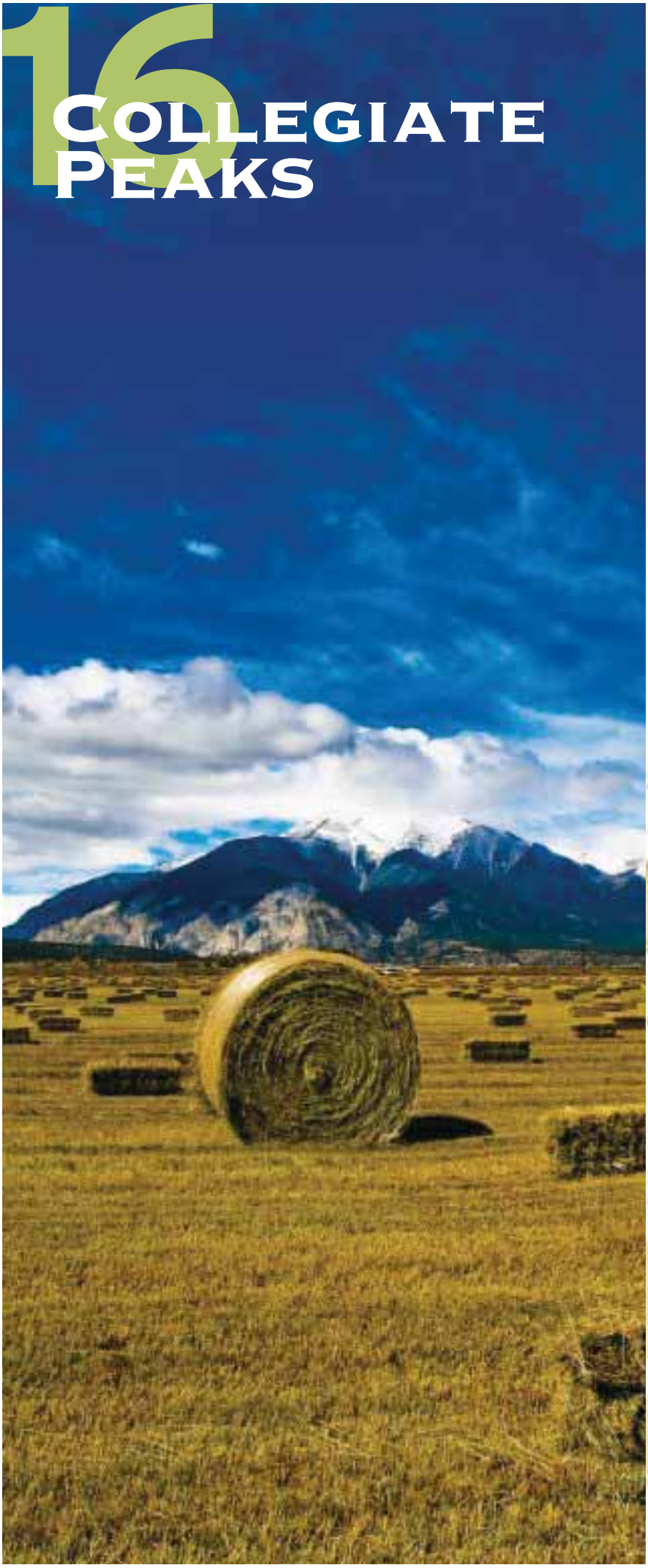
Distance: 115 miles • Allow 4–5 hours
Total elevation gain: 7,775-12,095 feet
(Note: Vehicles over 35-feet in length are prohibited over Independence Pass. The pass is closed in winter.)

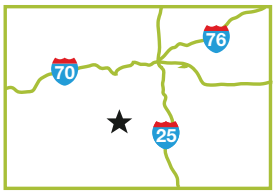


AMERICA'S BYWAYS®

South Central Colorado

16 Collegiate Peaks



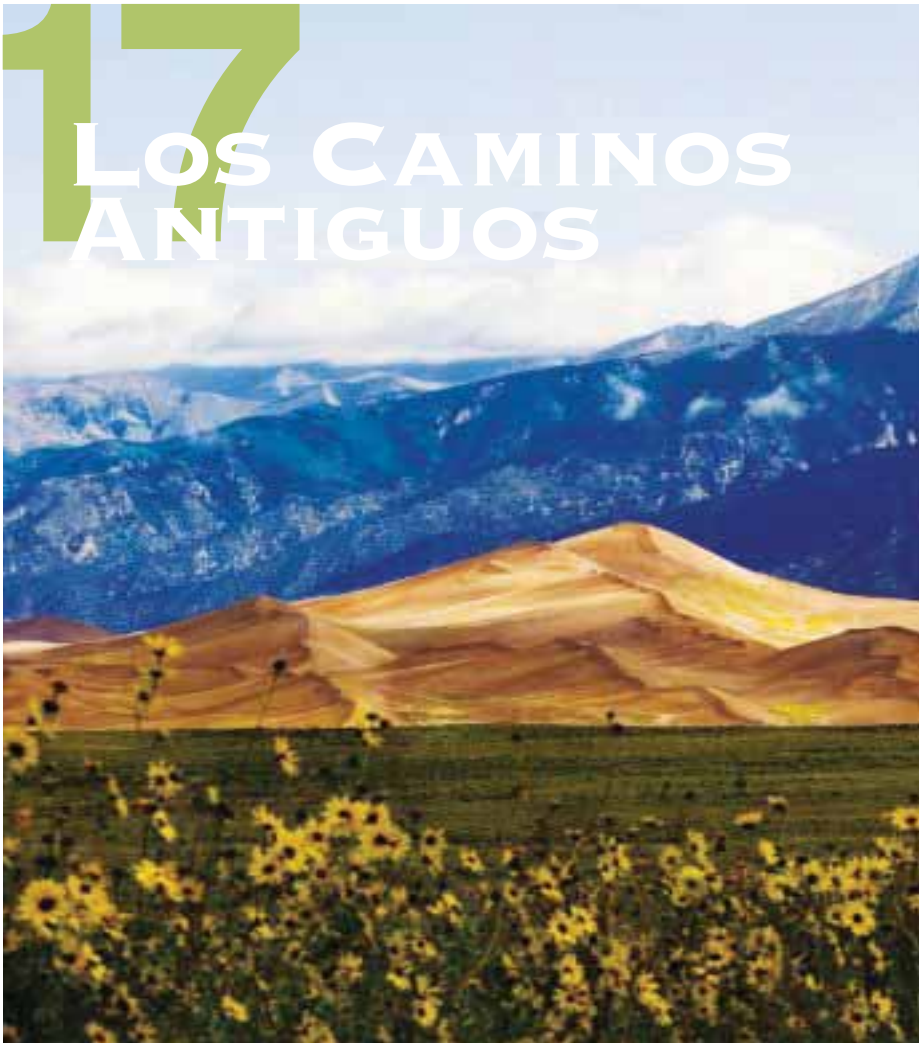


South Central Colorado

To the west of this byway stands the apex of North America — the highest concentration of 14,000-foot peaks from Alaska to Panama. To the east, four historic travel routes (the Arkansas River, the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad, the highway and a stage coach road) parallel the journey. Therein lies the magic of the Collegiate Peaks Byway. At Buena Vista's Turner Farm — with its farmhouse, barn, and working apple orchard — travelers can gain an understanding of the historic backdrop of the Upper Arkansas River Valley. The highway follows the river downstream to Salida, one of Colorado's largest districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In addition to its eclectic galleries, cafes and restaurants, Salida offers travelers the unique experience of listening to live music at a rehabilitated historic steam plant. Salida also has one of the byway's three hot springs (the other two, Mount Princeton and Cottonwood, are outside Buena Vista). The route goes west to Poncha Springs where the 1882 Poncha Springs School House is home to a local history museum.

Distance: 57 miles • Allow 2 hours
Total elevation gain: 7,036–7,954 feet

17 Los Caminos Antiguos

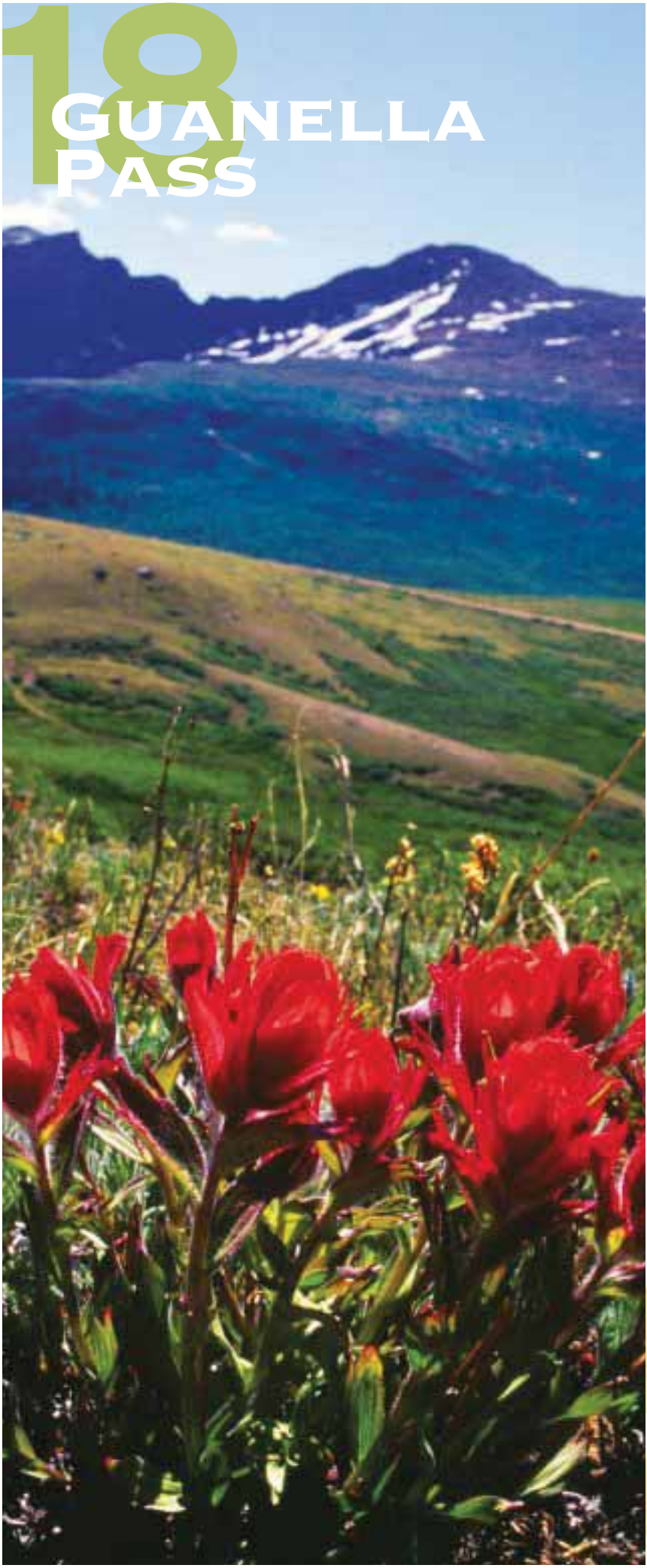


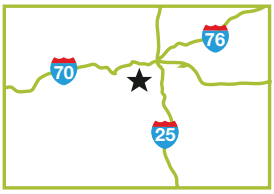
Colorado's cradle of Hispanic culture lies in the San Luis Valley, a mystical basin where sandhill cranes feed in the marshes, and North America's tallest sand dunes press up against the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Beginning in Alamosa, the byway heads north and east to Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve, where sand dunes reach heights of 750 feet and harbor seven species of insect not found anywhere else. Proceeding south, the byway arrives in the town of Fort Garland where a tour through the Colorado Historical Society's Fort Garland Museum chronicles the past of a former military garrison. Further along, the byway passes Colorado's oldest town — San Luis. Hispanic culture and Catholic traditions run deep in this community. Visitors can see the last remaining active commons (a communal grazing area) in the United States, or stop by R&R Market, the oldest continuously operating business in Colorado. The byway then crosses the valley to the west and reaches Antonito, the whistle stop for the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad. Here, visitors can ride the highest and longest narrow gauge rails in the United States all the way to Chama, New Mexico.

Distance: 129 miles • Allow 3 hours
Total elevation gain: 7,500-10,230 feet

South Central Colorado

18 Guanella Pass



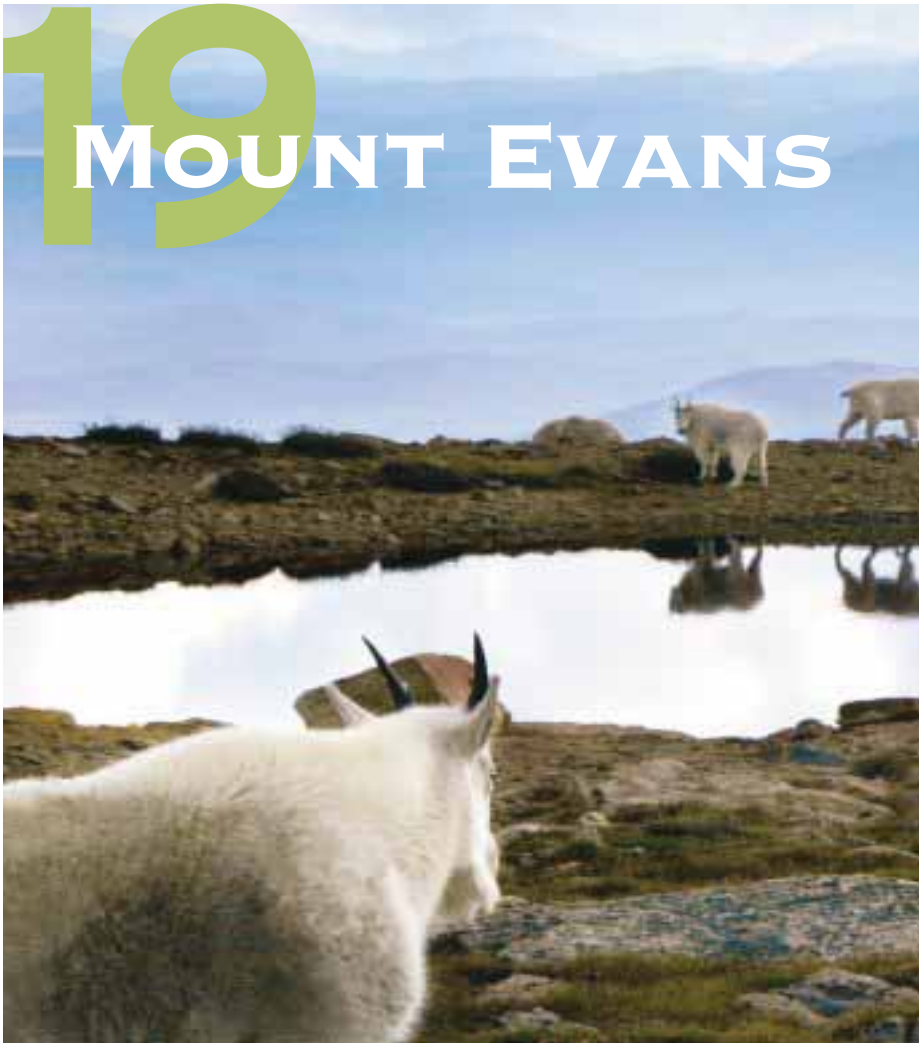


Front Range Colorado

This former burro trail gives outdoor enthusiasts from nearby Denver easy access to raw, high-altitude wilderness and 14,060-foot Mount Bierstadt. But it also offers a town built around one of Colorado's earliest silver rushes. At the byway's beginning lies the Georgetown-Silver Plume National Historic Landmark District. The Hotel de Paris Museum in Georgetown paints a vivid portrait of the luxury that the silver boom afforded, and chronicles the dramatic life story of the hotel's founder. The Hamill House and Energy Museum add to the town's appeal. Up the valley is Silver Plume and the Colorado Historical Society's Georgetown Loop Railroad. Chugging along a narrow gauge track through coniferous forest, the railroad eventually crosses the Devil's Gate High Bridge and offers the option of touring the Lebanon Silver Mine. Back in Georgetown, the byway climbs up toward 11,669-foot Guanella Pass. Bighorn sheep, golden eagles and mountain goats can all be seen en route to the pass.

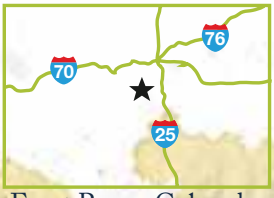
Distance: 22 miles • Allow 1–2 hours
Total elevation gain: 8,519–11,669 feet
(Note: A portion of this byway
is closed during winter.)

19 Mount Evans

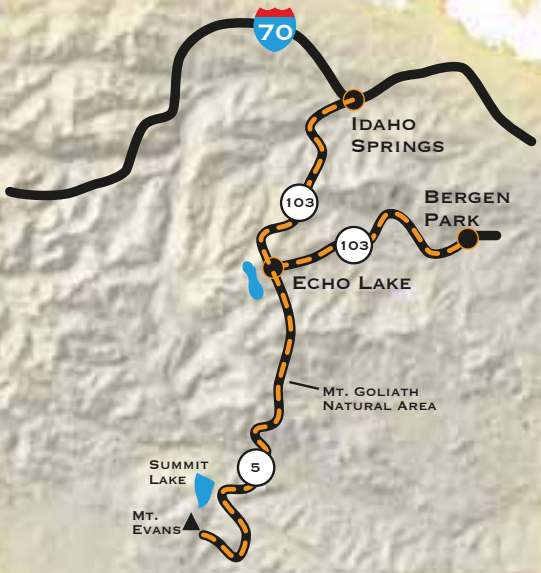


Colorado's highest byway happens to also be the highest paved road in North America. At the end of its 49-mile course, the highway reaches the summit of 14,264-foot Mount Evans. But before travelers can savor the cherry on top of this road-trip sundae, they have plenty of sights to see. In Idaho Springs, visitors can explore the mining heritage of a former gold camp. Between the Argo Gold Mill, the Underhill Museum and a tour of the downtown (guides can be picked up at the Idaho Springs Heritage Museum), the town is full of historic encounters. The byway leads south out of town and quickly rises through coniferous forest. Echo Lake Mountain Park offers picnicking and fishing for trout. The highway continues to rise, twisting and turning into the treeless expanse of the alpine ecosystem. Mountain goats and bighorn sheep are common sightings. At the top, views stretch across the entire Front Range, including 14,110-foot Pikes Peak to the south. The route returns to Echo Lake and then travels a scenic stretch to Bergen Park. Along the way, travelers can look north for an amazing view of 14,255-foot Longs Peak.

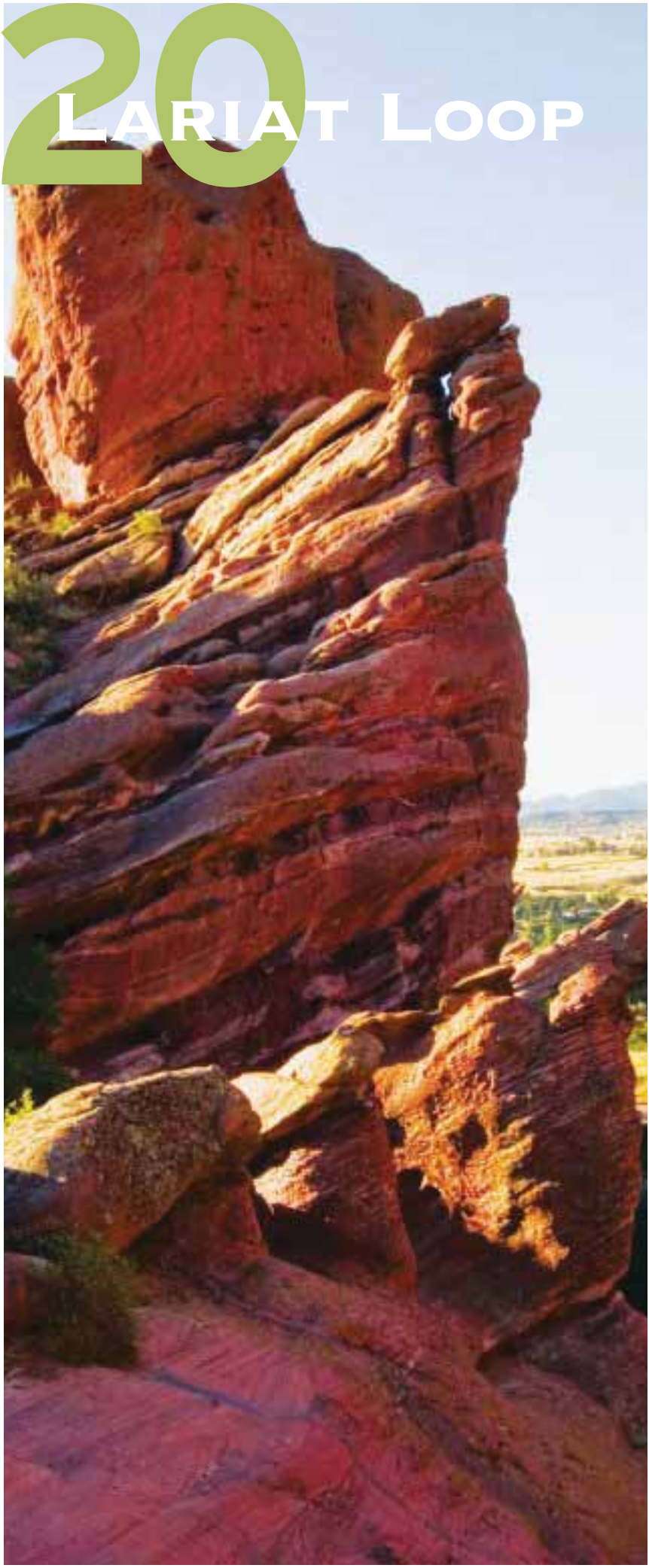
Distance: 49 miles • Allow 2 hours
Total elevation gain: 7,540–14,264 feet
(Note: The byway is closed in winter from Echo Lake to the summit.)

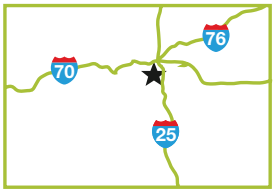


Front Range Colorado



20 Lariat Loop





Front Range Colorado

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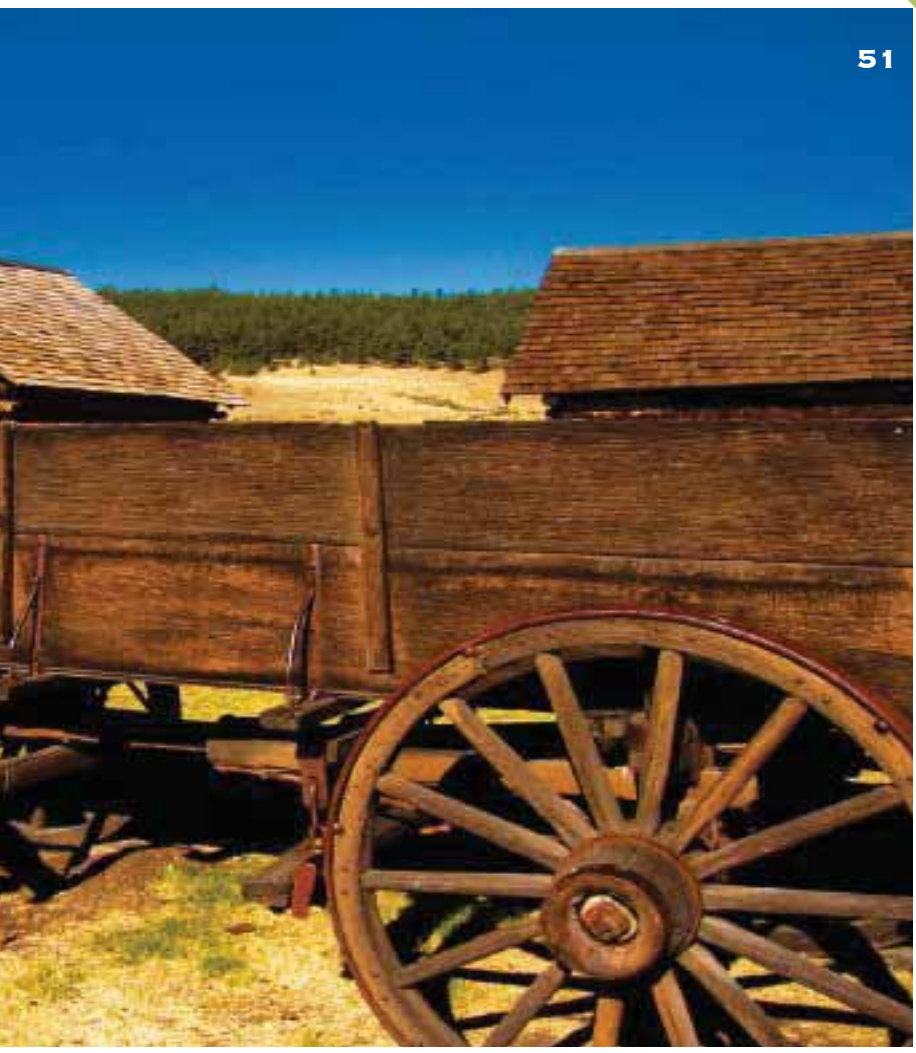
This scenic circle was one of the original drives developed by the city of Denver in the early 1900s to help Coloradans experience nearby mountain parks. The byway begins with drama as it follows the old Lariat Trail (known as Lookout Mountain Road), which rises 2,000 feet from the historic downtown of Golden to the top of Lookout Mountain. Views of Denver's skyline and a stop at the Buffalo Bill Grave and Museum offer impressive scenery and intriguing history in short order. The route continues, weaving its way to mountain parks as well as Evergreen Lake. Visitors can get a taste of that era's comfy summer-home living at the nearby Hiwan Homestead Museum, which includes a restored 17-room log mansion. As the byway comes down out of the mountains it winds through the town of Morrison and passes Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre, one of the world's foremost outdoor concert venues. The byway continues to the north and makes a stop at Dinosaur Ridge, a segment of the 220-foot tall Dakota Hogback where dinosaur tracks are visible in the hardened stone.

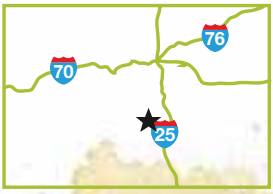
Distance: 40 miles • Allow 2 hours
Total elevation gain: 5,675–7,800 feet

21 Gold Belt Tour

This byway has great variety, and its diversity of Rocky Mountain ecosystems is set against backdrop of the "greatest gold camp in the world." Cripple Creek (a National Historic Landmark District) and Victor anchor a mining region that yielded 23.5 million ounces of gold between 1891 and 2005. Highlights include the Gold Coin Mine in Victor and the Cripple Creek District Museum. Cripple Creek also features casino gaming. In Cañon City, explore the area's penitentiary past and present at the Museum of Colorado Prisons. Afterward, a stop at the Royal Gorge is a must. Cutting 1,200 feet into the plateau, the Arkansas River has formed one of America's most impressive canyons. At 1,053 feet, the suspension bridge that crosses the gorge is among the highest in the world and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. To complete the circuit, drivers proceed north along High Park Road to Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. Petrified sequoia trees and a fossil record of more than 1,700 different organisms — including 1,500 species of insect alone — make this one of America's most significant fossil beds.

Distance: 131 miles • Allow 6-7 hours
Total elevation gain: 5,187–9,695 feet
(Note: Four-wheel drive is required on the Upper Shelf Road.)

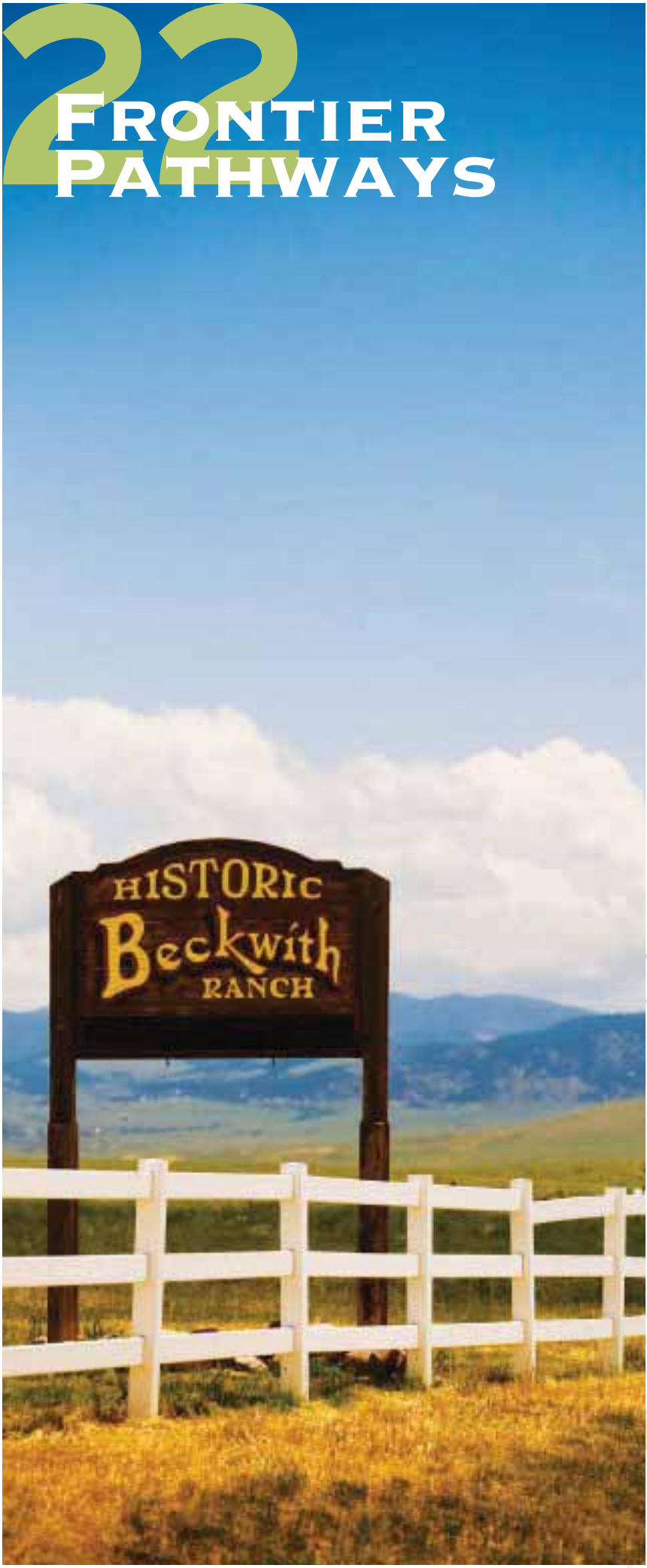


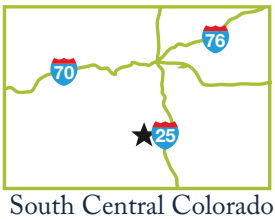


South Central Colorado

America's Byways®

22 Frontier Pathways



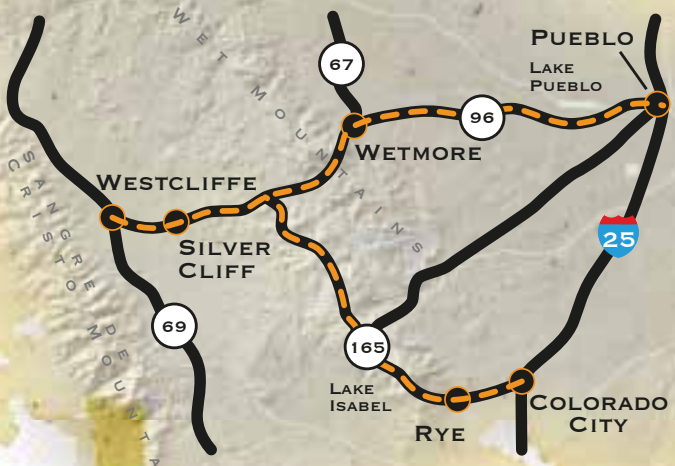


South Central Colorado

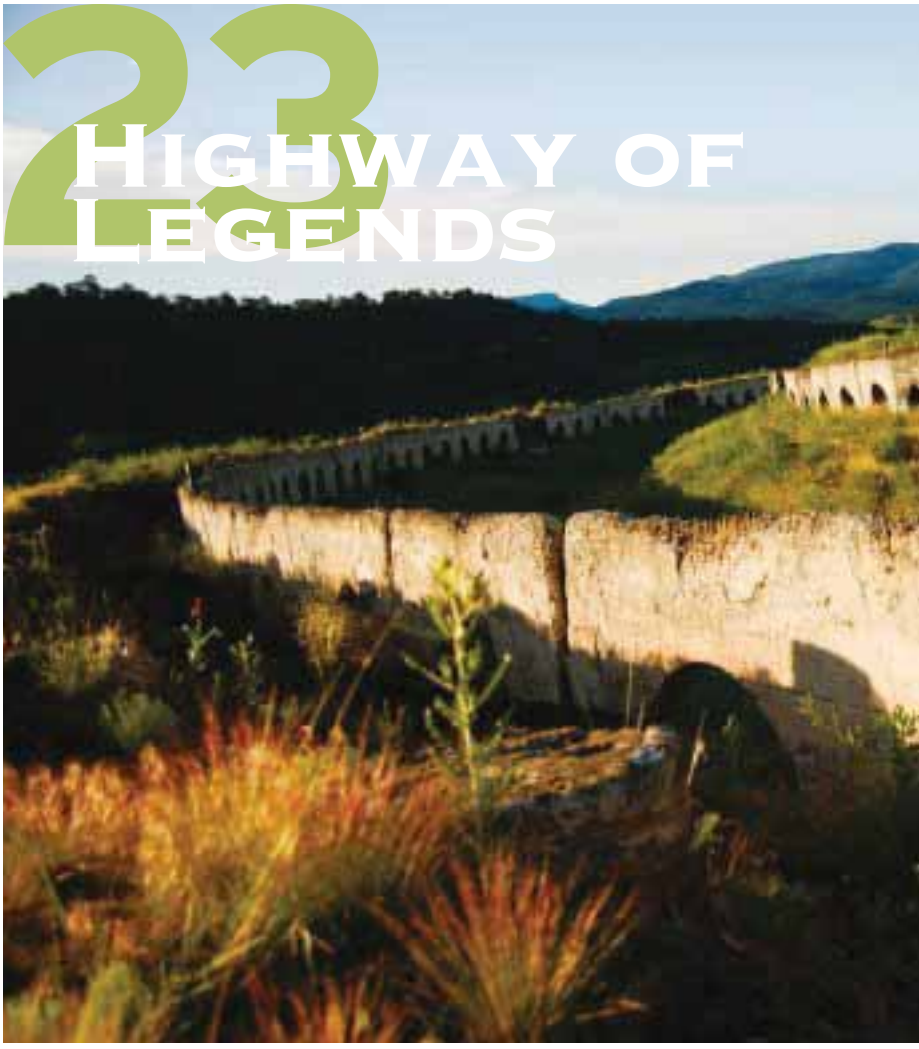
AMERICA'S BYWAYS®

This "Y"-shaped route traces the progression of Colorado's life zones, as well as the evolution of making a living on the frontier in the 1800s. The history lesson begins in Pueblo, where History Colorado's El Pueblo Museum documents the life of a mid-19th-century trading post. The Union Avenue Historic District seamlessly blends this city's cattle-and-railroad past with its sophisticated present by offering shops and restaurants among historic buildings. The byway heads west of the city and climbs through Hardscrabble Canyon into the Wet Mountains and down into the Wet Mountain Valley. The mammoth, saw-toothed peaks lining the valley's western horizon are the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, a row of peaks that stretch to Santa Fe, New Mexico. Throughout much of the drive, travelers pass ranches that have been in operation for more than 100 years. Silver Cliff and Westcliffe have long served as town centers for the ranching community. One stop of note is the historic Westcliff Schoolhouse, which has a museum devoted to life on the frontier. From here, the byway returns toward Pueblo, but veers south at McKenzie Junction toward the towns of Rye and Colorado City. Take a detour to the Squirrel Creek Recreational Unit within the San Isabel National Forest. One highlight is Davenport Campground, which was one of the first Forest Service campgrounds and has been rebuilt to showcase its original 1920s design.

Distance: 103 miles • Allow 4 hours
Total elevation gain: 4,695–9,350 feet

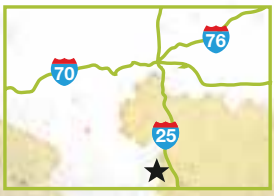


23 Highway of Legends



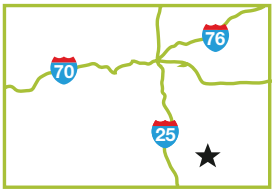
Traveling a wide arc around the two summits of the West and East Spanish Peaks (13,626 and 12,683 feet), the Highway of Legends takes the path less traveled between Trinidad and Walsenburg. The byway leaves Trinidad and passes through the productive coal-mining region of Cokedale, where a series of arcaded coke ovens rise along the road. Fishermen will want to seek out the alcoves of Trinidad Lake State Park, where they can hook into both warm- and cold-water species of fish. Meanwhile, just up the road at Bosque del Oso State Wildlife Area, nature lovers can look for signs of black bear along the tranquil South Fork of the Purgatoire River. From atop Cucharas Pass, drivers can travel east over Cordova Pass to Aguilar or descend Colorado 12 to the towns of Cuchara, La Veta and Walsenburg. Along this stretch, the highway provides spectacular views of the numerous volcanic walls known as the Great Dikes of the Spanish Peaks. Further on, La Veta offers a quaint setting to dine, relax and tour the Fort Francisco Museum, which showcases the area's history.

Distance: 110 miles • Allow 4–5 hours
Total elevation gain: 6,025–11,743 feet
(Note: The portion over Cordova Pass is gravel and closed in winter.)



Southeast Colorado

24 Santa Fe Trail

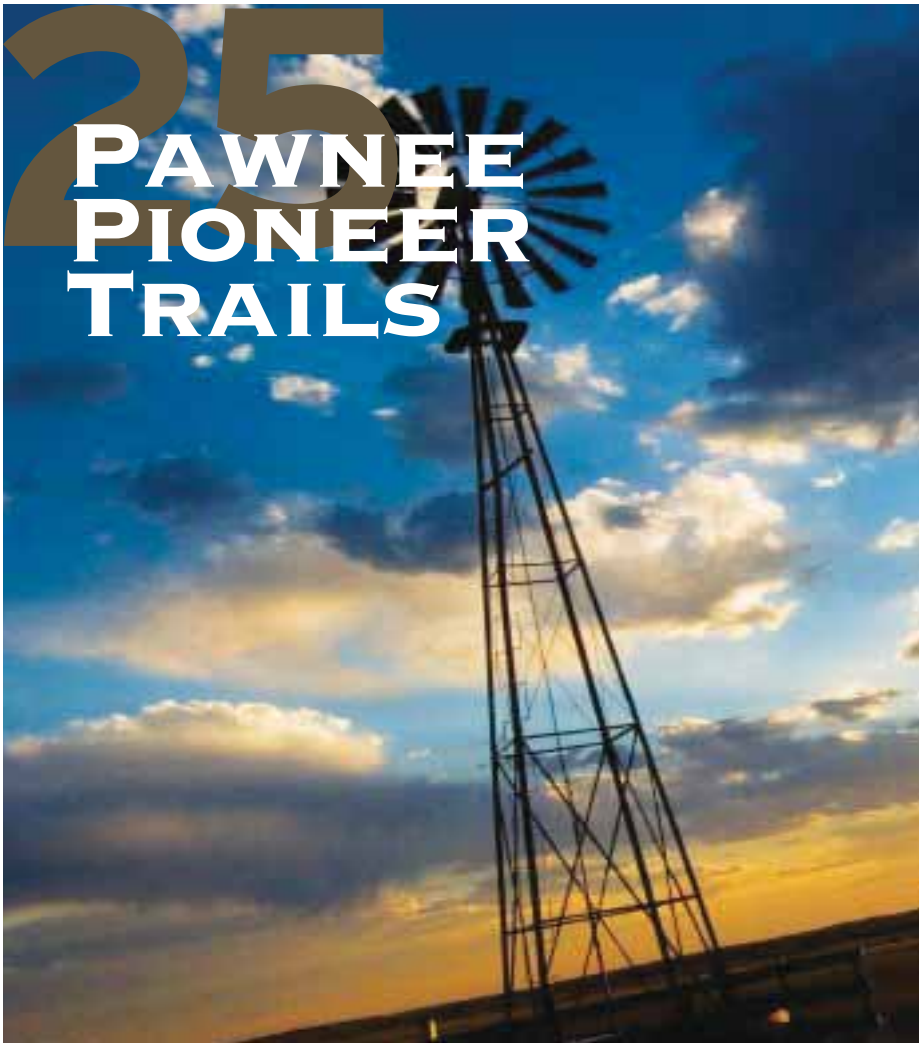


Southeast Colorado

AMERICA'S BYWAYS®

Following roughly the same route as the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail, this byway shows the lasting effects the trail had on settling this part of the west. At Boggsville, visitors can tour a series of restored historic structures that comprised an agrarian community from the mid-1800s. Just beyond Las Animas is Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site, where a massive adobe fort once served as a center of commerce, a meeting place and shelter from attacks and inclement weather. The atmosphere of the old trading post has been meticulously re-created so that visitors can gain a better understanding of life along the Santa Fe Trail. Beyond La Junta, the byway veers southwest through the Comanche National Grassland, an area full of plains wildlife including coyotes and countless red-tailed hawks. At Trinidad, the byway reaches History Colorado's Santa Fe Trail Museum. The adjacent Baca House and Bloom Mansion offer a counterpoint by chronicling the life of two prominent Trinidad families who lived here during the late-19th century. In the center of town, the El Corazon de Trinidad National Historic District preserves a collection of historic buildings and brick streets that served as southern Colorado's financial and cultural hub in the days of the Old West. The byway presses on south over Raton Pass, which is a National Historic Landmark.

Distance: 184 miles • Allow 4 hours
Total elevation gain: 3,397–7,800 feet

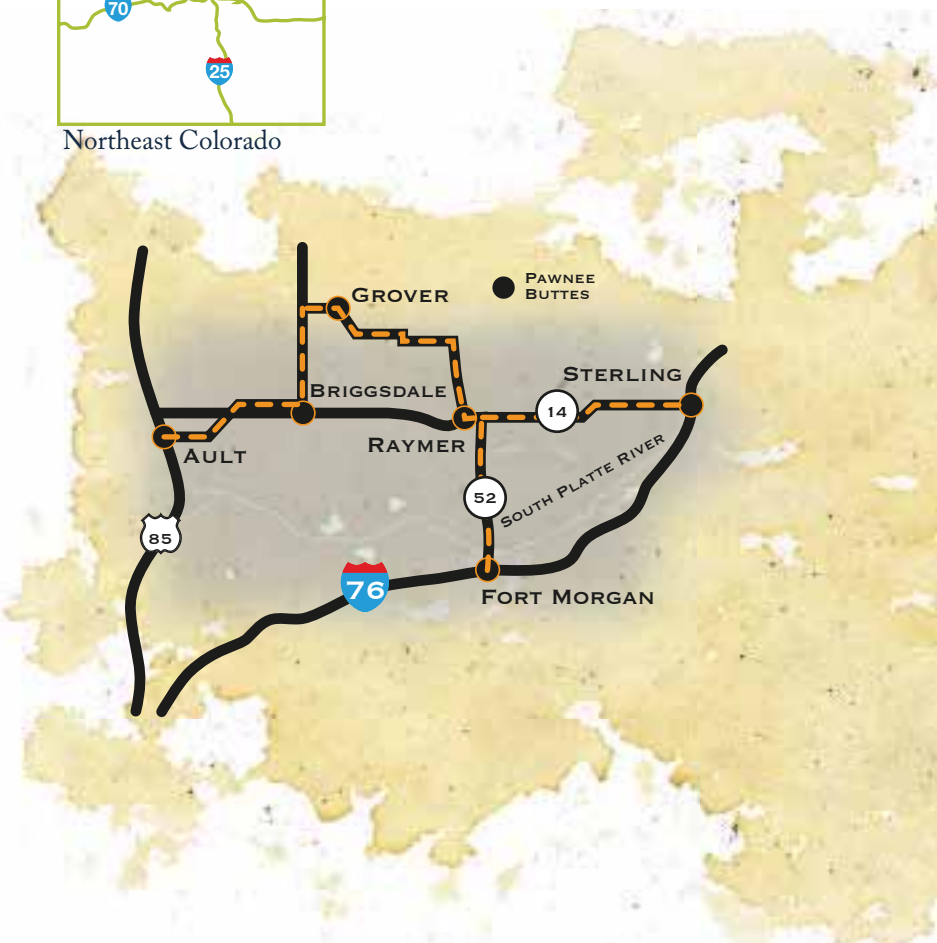


25 Pawnee Pioneer Trails

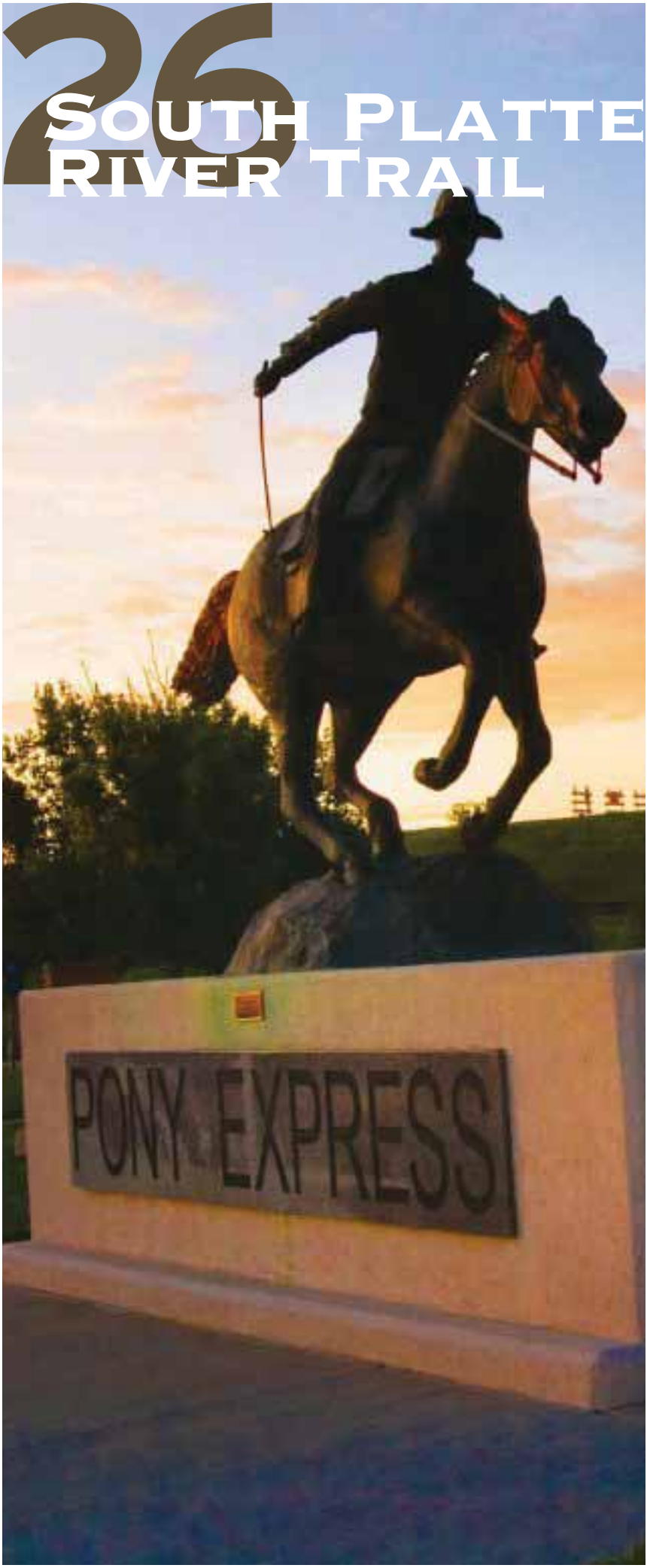
Once a thoroughfare for ambitious settlers, entrepreneurs and migrating herds of bison, the plains of Northeast Colorado have changed quite a bit in the last two centuries. But this byway (which at times leaves the pavement behind and crosses through wild grasslands) is a blast from the past. Visitors can gain some perspective on the region's history at the Overland Trail Museum in Sterling, which details the customs and culture of the Plains Indians as well as the trail that brought settlers to Colorado. The southern terminus of the byway lies in Fort Morgan, which was once home to big-band leader Glenn Miller. His life and influence on popular music — as well as the town's military history — are chronicled at the Fort Morgan Museum. As the byway travels off I-76 into the plains, it enters the Pawnee National Grassland, a massive tract of short-grass prairie where pronghorn antelope and numerous songbirds thrive. Rising in the distance and appearing as an anomaly on the rolling terrain of the plains are the dual mesas of the Pawnee Buttes. Not only are the buttes a popular spot to hike on the plains, but paleontologists have discovered numerous fossils there as well.

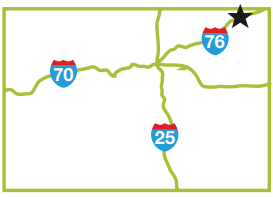
Distance: 128 miles • Allow 3 hours
Total elevation gain: 3,935–4,940 feet
(Note: Frequent truck traffic along the unpaved county roads. Look out for flying dirt and rocks.)

Northeast Colorado



26 South Platte River Trail

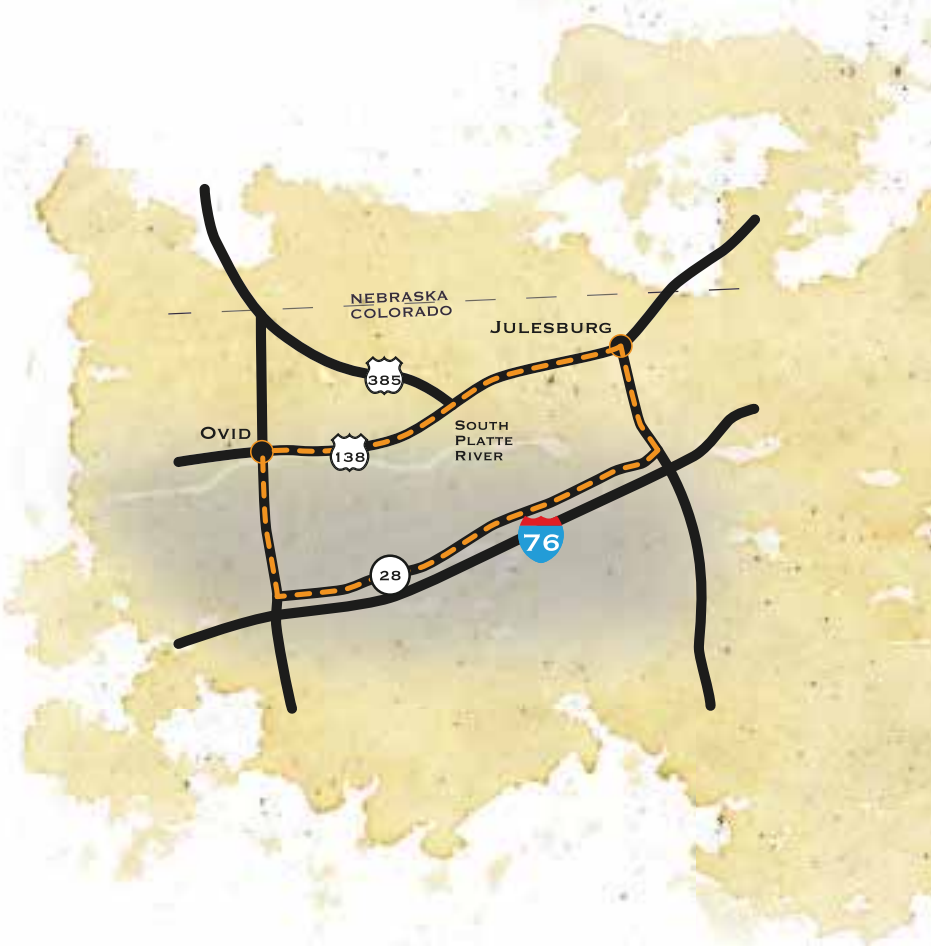




Northeast Colorado

The South Platte River Trail stewards a fascinating history along a mere 19 miles. At the heart of this byway, as the name implies, is the South Platte River. As one of the few reliable sources of year-round water, the river was a natural guide for settlers who were venturing west along the Overland Trail. Julesburg is a settlement that was built, razed, rebuilt and abandoned three separate times within roughly the same geographic location over three decades. Interpretive signage indicates not only where the town's original sites were located, but also where Colorado's only Pony Express station was situated. A monument to the hard-galloping mail carriers can be found along the route, just southeast of Ovid on County Road 28. Another historic site of significance is Fort Sedgwick, commemorated with interpretive signage at its original locale. Built in 1864, it was arguably the most important military installment along the Overland Trail. The byway ends where it begins, in Julesburg.

Distance: 19 miles • Allow 1 hour
Total elevation gain: 3,477–3,521 feet



Byway	Gas	Food	Lodging	Portions Require Four-Wheel Drive	Portions closed in winter	National Historic Districts	Ancestral Puebloan History	American Indian History	Mining History	Hispanic History	Agricultural/ Ranching History	National Parks	National Monuments & Historic Landmarks
Alpine Loop	◗	◗	◗	✔	✔	✔			✔				✔
Cache la Poudre–North Park	✔	✔	✔			✔					✔		
Collegiate Peaks	✔	✔	✔			✔		✔	✔		✔		
Colorado River Headwaters	✔	✔	✔					✔	✔		✔	✔	
Dinosaur Diamond	◗	◗	◗			✔		✔	✔		✔		✔
Flat Tops Trail	◗	◗	◗		✔			✔			✔		
Frontier Pathways	✔	✔	✔			✔			✔		✔		
Gold Belt Tour	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔		✔	✔		✔		✔
Grand Mesa	◗	◗	◗		✔						✔		
Guanella Pass	◗	◗	◗		✔	✔			✔				✔
Highway of Legends	✔	✔	✔			✔		✔	✔	✔	✔		
Lariat Loop	✔	✔	✔			✔					✔		✔

Los Caminos Antiguos	✔	✔	✔			✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Mount Evans	◗	◗	✔		✔	✔			✔				
Pawnee Pioneer Trails	◗	◗	◗					✔			✔		
Peak to Peak	✔	✔	✔			✔			✔		✔	✔	✔
San Juan Skyway	✔	✔	✔			✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Santa Fe Trail	✔	✔	✔			✔		✔	✔	✔	✔		✔
Silver Thread	✔	✔	✔			✔		✔	✔		✔		
South Platte River Trail	✔	✔	✔					✔			✔		
Top of the Rockies	✔	✔	✔			✔			✔		✔		✔
Tracks Across Borders	◗	◗	◗	✔	✔			✔	✔				✔
Trail of the Ancients	✔	✔	◗			✔	✔	✔		✔		✔	✔
Trail Ridge Road–Rocky Mountain National Park	◗	✔	◗		✔	✔		✔	✔		✔	✔	✔
Unaweep Tabeguache	◗	◗	◗						✔	✔	✔		
West Elk Loop	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔			✔		✔	✔	

◗ = Limited Service (implies long stretches exceeding 30 miles without this service)

Amenities found along the route

Roads

Historic Areas

Recreation Areas

Byway	State Parks	Wildlife Areas	Wilderness Area Access	Dinosaur Tracks and Fossils	Fall Color Viewing	Picnicking/ Camping	Hiking	Fishing	Bicycling
Alpine Loop		✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Cache la Poudre-North Park	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Collegiate Peaks	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Colorado River Headwaters		✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Dinosaur Diamond	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔		✔
Flat Tops Trail	✔	✔			✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Frontier Pathways	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Gold Belt Tour	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔		✔
Grand Mesa		✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Guanella Pass		✔	✔		✔	✔	✔		✔
Highway of Legends	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Lariat Loop		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Los Caminos Antiguos	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Mount Evans		✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔

Byway	State Parks	Wildlife Areas	Wilderness Area Access	Dinosaur tracks and fossils	Fall Color Viewing	Picnicking/ Camping	Hiking	Fishing	Bicycling
Pawnee Pioneer Trails	✔	✔	✔				✔	✔	✔
Peak to Peak	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
San Juan Skyway	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Santa Fe Trail	✔	✔	✔	✔				✔	✔
Silver Thread		✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
South Platte River Trail		✔							✔
Top of the Rockies		✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Tracks Across Borders	✔	✔			✔			✔	✔
Trail of the Ancients	✔	✔	✔				✔		✔
Trail Ridge Road–Rocky Mountain National Park		✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Unaweep Tabeguache	✔	✔	✔				✔	✔	✔
West Elk Loop	✔	✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔

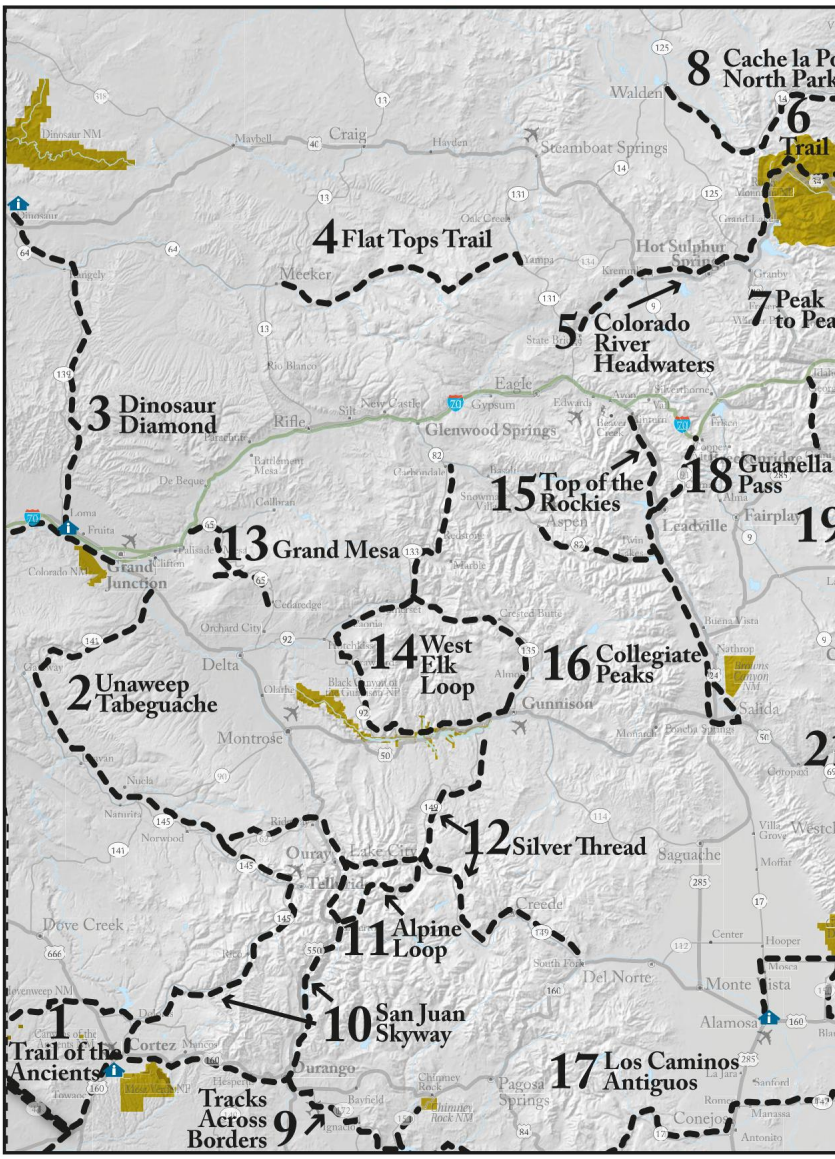
◗ = Limited Service (implies long stretches exceeding 30 miles without this service)

Amenities found along the route

Roads

Historic Areas

Recreation Areas



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Funded in part by the National Scenic Byway Program, Federal Highway Administration.
Lenore Bates – Scenic Byways Program Manager

COLORADO TOURISM OFFICE

This project is partially funded by the Colorado Tourism Office.
Cathy Ritter – Director
Laura Grey – Heritage & Agritourism Director

HISTORY COLORADO/ STATE HISTORICAL FUND

This project is partially funded by a State Historical Fund grant award from History Colorado.
Steve Turner – Director

COLORADO PARKS & WILDLIFE

This project is partially funded by Colorado Parks & Wildlife.
Gary Thorson – Deputy Director
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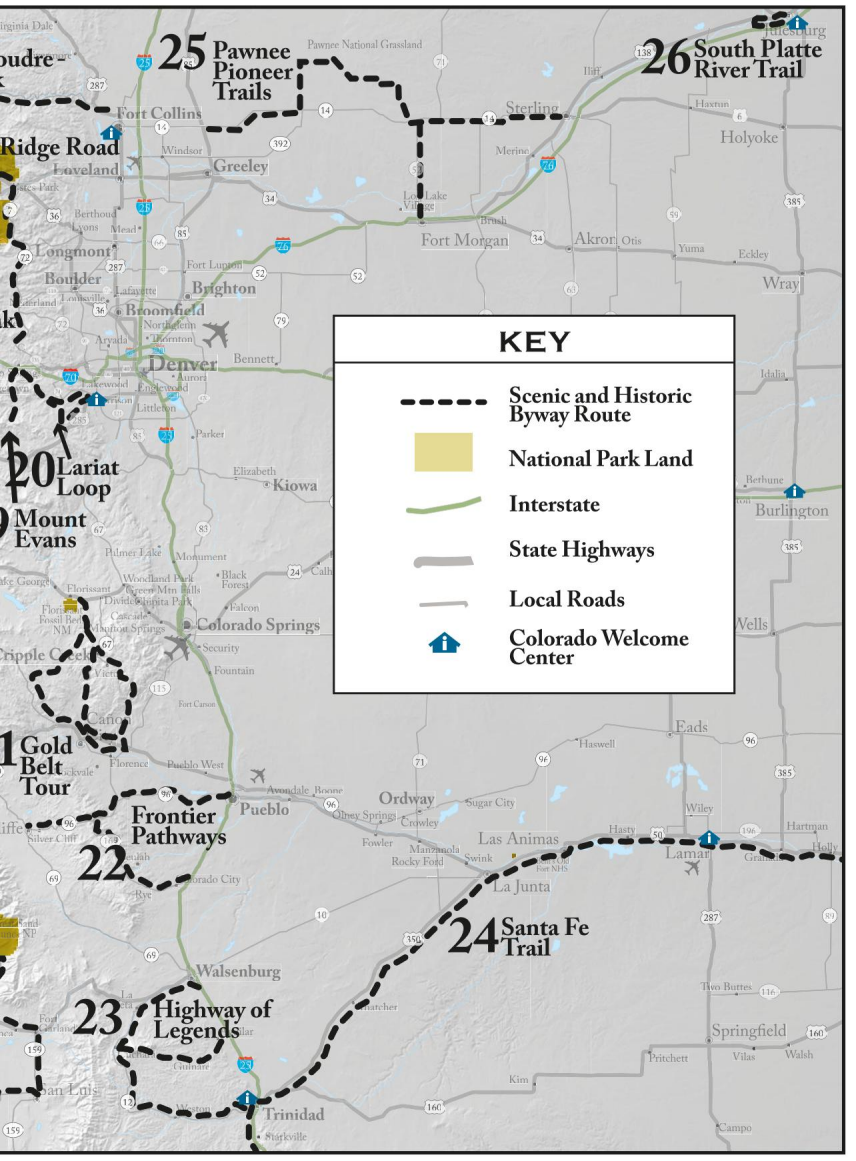

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