THE GEORGETOWN LOOP

A CAPSULE HISTORY AND GUIDE

GEORGETOWN LOOP
LOOP
MINING & RR PARK

FRONT COVER: *A color photolithograph of the 1890s lends a sense of ethereal majesty to the high bridge at Devil's Gate.* BACK COVER: *Society photographer David Diaz Guerrero captures another kind of color and drama shared by anyone who rides the Georgetown Loop railroad.*

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A CAPSULE HISTORY AND GUIDE

Georgetown Loop Historic Mining and Railroad Park

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THE ERA OF GOLD

Gold! As the first rumors of gold strikes in western Kansas Territory drifted across the nation in 1858, scores of fortune seekers left their homes and families to journey across the Great Plains to the base of the Rocky Mountains. Here, where William Green Russell and a small party of prospectors had panned a few hundred dollars of gold from one of the creeks that emptied into the South Platte River, a considerable population grew in a matter of weeks. A new rush was in the offing, and reports from the Pikes Peak gold fields promised unlimited wealth.

The Griffith Brothers Two brothers, George and David Griffith of Kentucky, arrived in the settlement of Auraria, which had sprung up at the junction of Cherry Creek and the South Platte River, in the fall of 1858. Joining others who were busy setting aside lots and

Most of the early gold was easily recovered. "Free gold"—that found in a pure state, exposed by erosion or the elements—took various forms, from nugget to powder, or "flour," gold. Placer gold, mixed in dirt or sand near the surface of the ground, was frequently washed by rain into creek beds.

FACING PAGE: *Striking a conventional pose, this miner pans for "color" in a streambed.*

Most of Colorado's Fifty-niners came from the East, but many were veterans of the California gold fields. These "yonder siders"—from the "yonder side" of the snowy range—brought not only picks and pans but frontier-proven legal institutions for the crowded boom towns that arose during the rush.

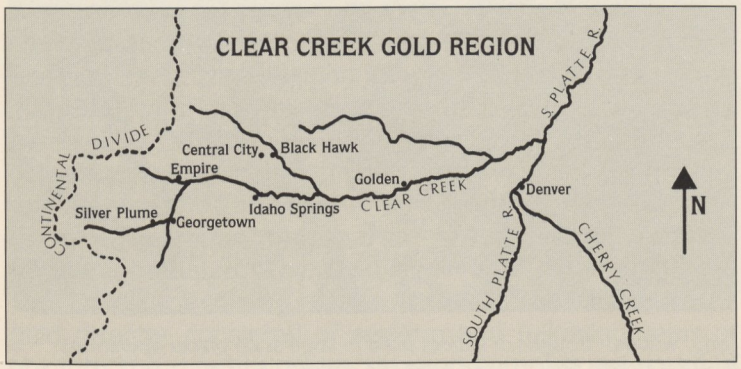
"Prospecting for Gold in the Pike's Peak Region" (1859 engraving)

building cabins, the Griffiths wintered in this sister community of Denver City while awaiting the chance to venture into the mountains to the west. Meanwhile, a few impatient prospectors were already working the canyons. In the early months of 1859 two secret strikes were made along the two forks of Clear Creek, the first by George A. Jackson and the second by John H. Gregory. When news of these discoveries finally broke, the exodus of so-called argonauts from the Front Range settlements inaugurated the great gold rush of 1859 and crowded the inclines of Clear Creek Canyon with diggers and panners.

Finding the Gregory diggings near present Central City overcrowded, the Griffiths switched to the south fork and followed Clear Creek upstream from George Jackson's discovery at present Idaho Springs. In company with like-

minded prospectors, they arrived at a high, spacious valley which narrowed at its south end into a steep and formidable canyon. Here they stopped, perhaps tested the stream, and decided to prospect. Two days later, on June 17, George Griffith hit pay dirt on the lower mountainside. In short order the brothers built a cabin and began working the surface ore, digging out and washing about fifty cents to a dollar a pan and throwing the waste earth down the slope.

Word of George Griffith's strike traveled to neighboring gold camps and attracted other fortune seekers. Several lodes were discovered that summer but none approached the reputed $500 worth of gold that the Griffiths extracted from their claim. At the end of the season they returned to Kentucky, leaving behind a small but growing settlement that came to be known as "George's Town." While in the East, however, they learned that the pyrite which they had tossed on the waste pile of their mine had contained valuable ore. Thus they returned



Placer mining, employed by most miners in the early years of the Colorado gold rush, involved the separation of gold from the sand and gravel in the beds of streams. Early gold seekers in search of free gold would search, or "prospect," the edges of streams for "color," a telltale sign of deposits nearby or upstream.

Washing was the universal method of gold recovery in placer mining. Prospectors initially located color by panning, or swirling a small amount of sand and gravel in water in a broad-brimmed pan. Heavier than its surrounding material, gold sank to the bottom as lighter sand washed away. Rockers, which employed a cradlelike frame in which sand was cleaned of mud and clay, increased the volume of deposits examined for color.

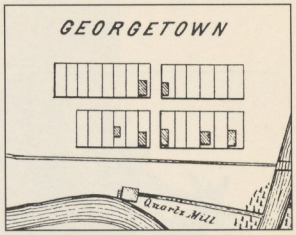
in the spring of 1860, accompanied by other members of their family, to mine their claim in earnest. Before long, they had organized the Griffith Mining District and, along with other miners, established an informal code of law.

The Griffith Mining District Much of Colorado's territorial mining law was based on the codes created in early mining districts like the Griffith. As soon as several miners established themselves in an area, they called an open-air meeting to organize a mining district whose boundaries they defined by reference to familiar landmarks. The Georgetown miners appointed legal officials from among their number. George Griffith became the

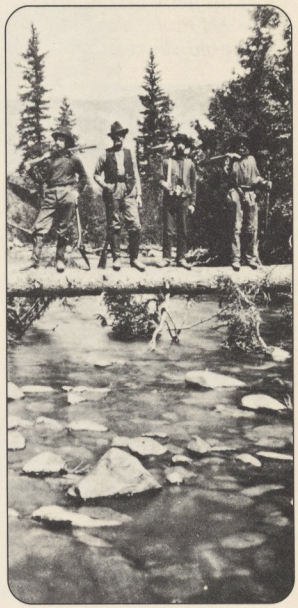
Long, wooden troughs or sluices used in large-scale placer operations diverted stream flow to wash sand free of gold particles.

recorder (or registrar of mining claims) and David assumed the job of district manager. In general, mining claims varied from district to district, but the Griffith District miners established gulch or placer claims at 100 feet up a gulch or stream, lode claims at no more than 100 feet long and 50 feet wide, mill sites or water claims at no more than 300 feet long, and ranch claims at 160 acres.

Before long, Georgetown grew from an unpretentious scramble of huts and tents to a more organized town with 640 acres of platted streets and a few permanent buildings. During the summer, the Griffiths built a twenty-mile toll road between Georgetown and Central City to haul supplies. Since their primary concern in this link to the outside world was mining, one of the first big loads hauled over the road was machinery for a planned six-stamp mill. Yet, even as the Griffiths erected their mill, William Davidson of the Hall-Davidson Company opened a three-stamp mill nearby, which was in operation by April 1861.



ABOVE: *Earliest plat of Georgetown.* BELOW: *Prospectors cross a log bridge spanning a promising stream.*



From Placer to Hard Rock Not as rich in placer deposits as California's had been, Colorado's mountain streams soon gave up their smaller quantities of placer gold. In fact, the opening of the mills in Georgetown effectively marked the end of placer mining in the valley. Although a few die-hard prospectors continued to ply the watercourses, hard-rock mining, with its attendant underground dangers and demand for greater skills and costlier equipment, began to separate the experienced miner from the casual fortune seeker.

Hard-rock mining, which attacked the source of the gold directly, consisted of seeking and following veins of ore into the mountainsides through complex networks of

ABOVE AND BELOW: *A prospector's company was sometimes his mule, sometimes other gold seekers.*

connecting tunnels and shafts. This kind of mining relied upon shrewd or hopeful guesswork and an eye to the cheapest way of getting the ore out. In underground lode mining, gold usually appeared in combination with quartz. Ores found within 100 feet of the surface generally milled and assayed well, but below this they became more refractory or difficult to separate, mixed with other minerals and of a lower grade.

Initially, mines were owned by the discoverer, who filed the claim and started the mining operation. However, as miners followed their veins deeper into the mountainsides, the costs of further development, equipment, labor, and materials went beyond the means of single owners, who sold their holdings to investors. Many mines in the Georgetown area were purchased by companies, frequently from eastern cities, which incorporated and issued stock to raise the capital necessary for mining operations.

Decreasing Returns The Griffith Lode paid well through the 1861 season, but by fall the Griffiths noticed that less valuable quantities of gold were being recovered at the mill. Most of the ore, it seemed, went to the tailings pile, resisting all efforts to separate it mechanically from its surrounding matrix. Although seventy-five new leads (pronounced "leeds") of ore had been discovered and claimed in the spring of that year, extraction was becoming increasingly difficult. As the people of Georgetown faced this one big problem plaguing all the miners and mill operators throughout the Colorado mining region, many became discouraged. So also did the Griffiths, who stopped operating their mill in September 1862 and sold out to the Georgetown Gold Mining Company. They also sold their

Miners display their hand tools outside a newly developed mine.

remaining claims and properties in Georgetown and left the valley.

By 1864 the gold boom was over. The increasing costs of mining operations and the decreasing ore quality combined to force many lode mines into closing. The highly speculative atmosphere of the early 1860s ended in April 1864 with the collapse of several large mine companies near Central City. Believing themselves duped by tales of fabulous mine wealth, eastern investors pulled out and financiers considered Colorado gold mining a bad risk. Gold went bust, and many miners left Georgetown, following stories of new discoveries elsewhere in the Rockies.

SILVER AND STABILITY

Silver—the Neglected Metal Ironically, the year 1864 marked both the collapse of the gold mining industry in Colorado and the beginning of a new bonanza. As investors, disenchanted with the dwindling returns at the mill sites, withdrew from the region, mines lay idle and hopeful prospectors revived the search for deposits of high-grade surface ore which had attracted them five years earlier. Working without "golden blinders," as one writer has put it, they now found silver. One party of prospectors, headed by Robert W. Steele, worked several deposits on McClellan Mountain and were astonished to find that the grey-white material they discovered was high-grade silver ore, worth over $800 per ton. News of the Belmont strike spread through the ranks of frustrated gold seekers and sparked the first of the Colorado silver booms.

The Belmont discovery was not, however, a revelation on the order of the 1859 gold rush. Rather, it was guided by economic realities following the Civil War and the willingness of Colorado's miners to tap whatever veins the national mood encouraged. For decades the country had been on a bimetal standard, accepting both gold and silver as legitimate currency, but the high value of gold as currency discouraged the circulation of silver coins. Paper

Robert W. Steele

FACING PAGE: *A crew of hard-rock miners gathers at the portal of a productive mine.*

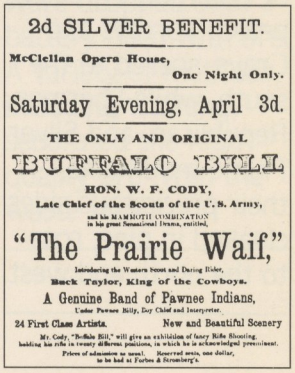
currency inflated rapidly during the years of the war, and investors became leery of these government-issued greenbacks. Thus they turned to silver, which had immediate cash value as legal specie.

The silver phase of Georgetown's history brought a new sophistication as thousands of bonanza seekers poured into the town. The miners, some of whom had come to Colorado from the Comstock Lode of Nevada and the Mother Lode of California, were experienced men who quickly realized why previous mining attempts in Georgetown had been futile. This new awareness led to the formation of the Argentine Mining District, which represented the area's silver claims just as the Griffith District had represented gold. Mining for silver began in earnest.

Miners followed veins of ore by digging shafts and adits—or tunnels with one entrance—through the earth. Shaft mines, which were vertical, used hoists to raise the ore from the depths to the surface. Adits, driven horizontally into the mountainsides, required the same drilling and blasting equipment as shaft mines in an effort to intersect veins of ore. Timbered for support, adits were laid with rail track for ore cars.

This postcard view depicts silver miners at an unknown site.

Georgetown was home to the Corner Band in 1890.



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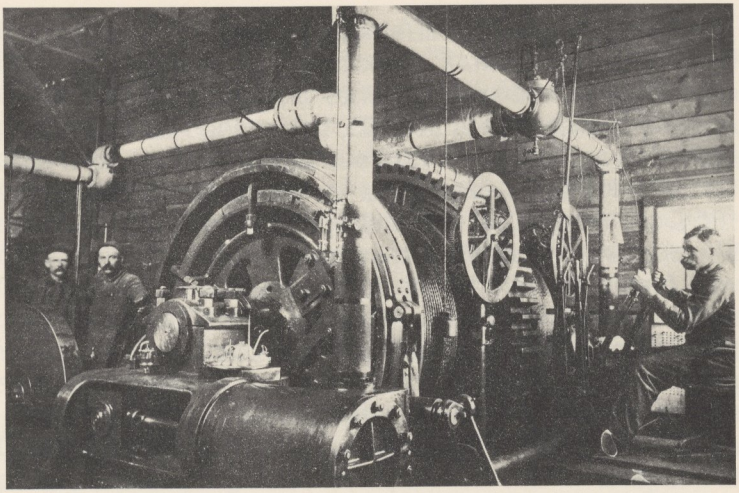
Colorado's Silver Queen Rapid growth came to Georgetown with the silver rush. Cabins appeared, followed by frame cottages and public buildings, all made with lumber from a local sawmill. Hotels and churches went up, and schools opened as families began to settle in the region. A new settlement called Elizabethtown grew nearby and was officially merged with Georgetown in 1867. Stores opened their doors and a newspaper was established. Lawyers arrived to settle claim disputes and augment the legal system of the miners' court, which had been founded as part of the mining district. By the end of 1866, observers reported that Georgetown was growing faster than any other Colorado community.

Georgetown was different from other camps. Its natural setting alone marked it apart. The valley, nearly 9,000 feet in elevation, was seldom far from snow. Two of Colorado's greatest peaks, Torreys and Grays, soared to the south, while Sherman, Republican, and Silver Plume mountains, their precipitous sides cloaked in pine, rose to the north and west.

In 1868, a decade after the first Colorado gold strike, Georgetown's population was 1,500. Early that year, the territorial legislature of Colorado granted a town charter, removing Georgetown from the authority of the miners' court and establishing a governmental and judicial system. With the influx of people into the area, Georgetown was designated the Clear Creek county seat. The town hosted such national figures as General Ulysses S. Grant, professor Asa Gray of Columbia University, artist Thomas Moran, explorer Ferdinand V. Hayden, and Mrs. Marshall Field. The silver business continued to boom, and the *Colorado Miner* proudly counted forty loaded mule teams on the town's streets in a single day. As mining interests moved up the valley, the new town of Silver Plume was founded in 1870. Closer to the mines of upper Clear Creek, Silver Plume soon became a milling center.

LEFT: *A loaded jack train halts on the streets of Georgetown.* ABOVE: *The new town of Silver Plume was surrounded by mines and mills.*



Colorado's mining technology was among the nation's most advanced.

Ore, or metal-bearing rock, was crushed in stamp mills whose iron stamp heads of 400 to 1,000 pounds were dropped onto a battery filled with ore. A variety of methods, including washing, separated the high quality ore from the waste rock.

Processing the Ores Milling was an important component of the mining industry. As lode ores became more complex and the grade of ore lessened, methods were needed for reducing the total bulk of ore before it could be shipped out of the valley. Local mills near the mine sites met this need in part because they broke down the large pieces and separated ore with marketable metal content from the tailings. Because only the better ore was transported to markets, the lower transportation costs from reduced tonnage realized substantial savings. Yet, while early mills in the Georgetown area crushed and separated the ore, the complexities of silver extraction required additional steps in ore processing. New inventions were pioneered, some in Georgetown, in an attempt to isolate the metal and produce bullion.

In desperation mill operators tried crushing the rock to a fine powder, even though this procedure meant cutting in half the daily tonnage they could accept. Others turned to reduction furnaces, hoping to unlock the metal by blasting it with high-temperature heat.

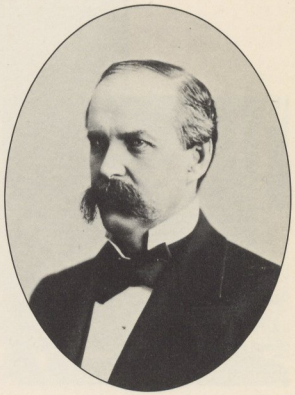
The first, albeit small, amount of bullion was produced by Lorenzo Bowman, a black miner with many years of experience in the galena mines and plants of Missouri. Arriving in Clear Creek in 1865, he founded Bowman and Company on Leavenworth Mountain. According to tradition, Frank Dibbon, one of the few to "rediscover" silver in 1864, had made a bet with mill operator Caleb Stowell that he could smelt bullion within twenty-four hours. Dibbon was forced to admit defeat, but Bowman took on the wager and in less than a day successfully produced the first silver bullion. Smelting operations by Bowman's simple melting procedure continued for a short time in Georgetown but were not the answer—the increasing complexity of the silver ore required more sophisticated techniques.

In 1867 the Georgetown Silver Smelting Company was incorporated and built a large facility with elaborate roasters and a large stack, but it, too, failed in its attempts. Then, taking an eclectic approach, the Brown Silver Mining Company built a large smelting works near the Brown Mine and installed a variety of furnaces—blast, reverberatory, and cupelling—to master the refractory ore. It processed ninety tons of ore in 1868, producing over 22,000 ounces of silver, but became idle the following year. Thus, for the most part, smelting was a failure in Georgetown, and mine owners had to be content with sending the concentrates of galena to smelters in other cities, among them St. Louis, Omaha, Chicago, and Pittsburgh.

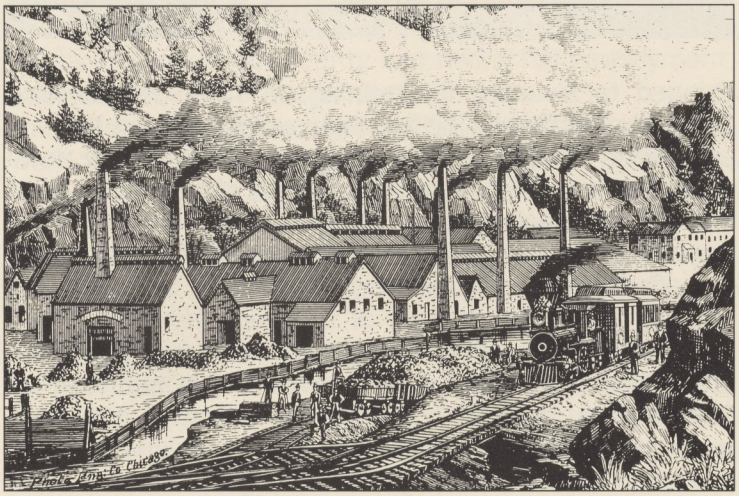
Silver Breakthrough Help for the faltering Colorado silver industry at large came in the late 1860s from

the work of Nathaniel P. Hill. A chemistry professor at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, Hill had visited the territory in 1864 to investigate mining claims purchased by eastern investors. Throughout his visit, he examined mines and spoke with mill workers and operators about the problems of ore processing. Interested in mining himself, Hill purchased mining property in Colorado. Due to his own problems, he sent samples of Colorado ore to Swansea, Wales, the world's leading center of copper smelting at the time. Tests revealed that the Welsh process could be adapted successfully to reduce some of Colorado's ores.

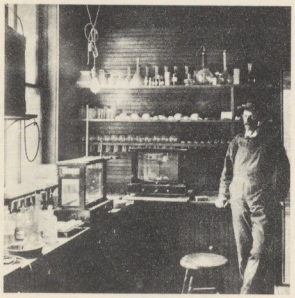
Hill established the Boston and Colorado Smelting Company and began operations in Black Hawk in 1868. The plant produced a gold-silver-copper matte that was then



Nathaniel P. Hill



Boston and Colorado Smelter at Black Hawk



ABOVE: *Small assay offices evaluated ore samples through chemical tests.*
ABOVE RIGHT: *Stacks of silver bars at the Boston and Colorado Smelter reflect Colorado's mining and milling prosperity.*

shipped to Swansea for refining. In 1873 the Swansea Smelter, operated by Richard Pearce, opened near Empire, processing eight tons of ore a day. By 1876 the Black Hawk plant was a significant center of metal refining. A success from its very beginning, the Hill process was a major factor in overcoming the greatest technological impasse in the early Colorado mining industry.

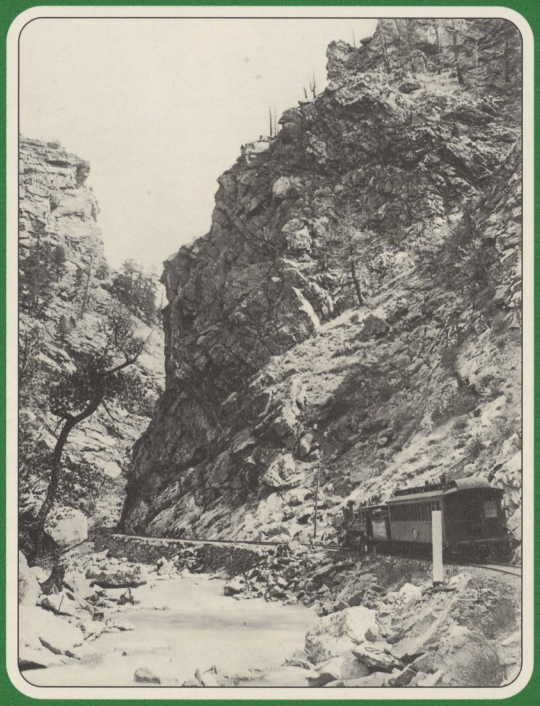
Prosperity—and a Problem Concurrently, silver production in the Argentine District, which had reached $600,000 in 1869, approached $1 million in 1871 and topped $2 million in 1873. Although a government act demonetized the metal by abandoning the bimetal standard and removing silver's equivalence with gold, a clause

Before the 1870s, horse-drawn wagons were the major form of mountain transportation.

in the act provided for the subsidized purchase of silver by the government to keep the market price at reasonable levels. In October the bank of Georgetown closed briefly, but by December the county had nearly full employment, good wages, and record production.

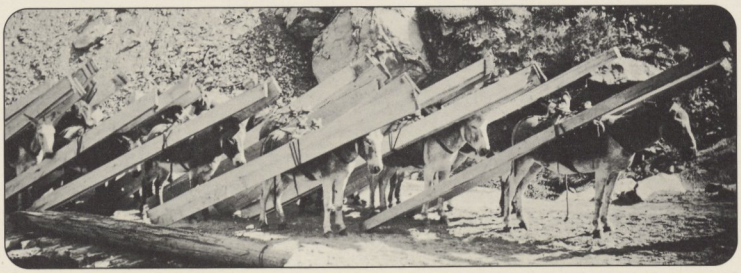
Indeed, Georgetown seemed to have all the amenities of an eastern town with one major exception—and this could endanger its survival. The large ore yields and heavy shipments to processing centers strained its existing transportation systems. Wagons and animals provided the only means of marketing the mine and mill products, and these were not adequate to accommodate the volume. Shipping prices rose steadily, reducing the profit margin for an industry faced with increasing problems of metal extraction from low-grade ores. A railroad was the only realistic solution, and in October 1871 representatives from the town met with officials of the Colorado Central Railroad.

THE STRUGGLE FOR A RAILROAD



Highways of Iron In 1860, when the Griffiths were building their wagon road from Georgetown to Central City, Americans knew that centuries of animal-powered transportation were drawing to a close. Unlike the empires of old, the American continent was being transformed by highways of iron. In the space of a single generation, the steam-powered locomotive had become the nation's foremost vehicle of civilization. Railroads, crossing the Alleghenies at various points, connected a multitude of key commercial towns in the interior with larger centers back east. From these trunk lines, which terminated at or near the Mississippi River, branch lines went out in every direction, linking not only important points of geography but also the sources of expanding national wealth in agriculture, industry, and commerce.

Georgetown was in the flush of its life and the world appeared to rush in and experience, even if briefly, some of its glory. Still, it lacked the one improvement that would ensure its survival—a railroad link to the outside world.



FACING PAGE: *A train passes Inspiration Point on Clear Creek.* LEFT: *A jack train is loaded with lumber.*

"Miners are unable to get their quartz hauled to the mills, and as a consequence the stamps ... are gradually shutting down."

ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS, 1873

Union Pacific crews lay track for the transcontinental railroad.

The Transcontinental Railroad During the 1850s, while the railroad was establishing its supremacy in the East, Americans had little reason to doubt that rails would soon extend from coast to coast, fulfilling the manifold promises of Manifest Destiny. Among these were the long-held dream of a western trade route to China, the geographic consolidation of American empire, and the potential settlement and resource exploitation of the newly won territories of the West. Despite deepening sectional differences between North and South, government-sponsored survey expeditions in the 1850s sought out the most favorable and economical railway routes through the long chain of the Rocky Mountains.

With the nation poised in 1860 to extend a pioneer railroad across the greater part of the continent, local boosters in the gold region of the Rockies worked feverishly to bring the proposed transcontinental line through central Colorado. Not only would this solve the immediate problem of high shipping costs for both outgoing ores and incoming necessities of life, but it would also secure the

permanence—and perhaps greatness—of strategically located cities along its route. Indeed, Colorado's first territorial governor, William Gilpin, envisioned Denver as a future "Cosmopolis" of America and the hub of a world-wide railroad system.

Denver-Golden Rivalry Not every Colorado promoter, however, shared the second view. William A. H. Loveland, a Fifty-niner and a champion of Golden City in its commercial rivalry with Denver, believed that a trans-western railroad leading up nearby Clear Creek Canyon and over the Continental Divide would establish the primacy of Golden as the capital city of Colorado. No less important, it would tap the rich ores of Central City, Idaho Springs, and Georgetown. To this end, when Congress authorized an overland mail route through Colorado in 1861, Loveland and other citizens of Golden sponsored a survey expedition to find a new and feasible railroad pass over the Rockies. Captain E. L. Berthoud, accompanied by the legendary Jim Bridger, satisfied the hopes of his backers, but the news of a mountain route across Berthoud Pass was overshadowed in the East by the advent of the Civil War.

Three years later, when the Union Pacific Railroad finally began its westward push from Omaha, Loveland revived his plans and announced in February 1865 the formation of the Colorado and Clear Creek Railroad—later known simply as the Colorado Central. Hoping that the approaching Union Pacific would connect with his rails at Golden, he brought a number of Union Pacific directors into his company. Nevertheless, he and other Colorado promoters were understandably disappointed when it became clear that the transcontinental would bypass the

W. A. H. Loveland

Captain E. L. Berthoud

Compared to standard gauge track, which measured 4 feet 8½ inches wide, the 3-foot narrow-gauge required less grading and used smaller, cheaper equipment. More important, the smaller trains were able to negotiate tighter curves and steeper grades.

Colorado Central locomotive, 1883.

central mining region entirely in favor of a speedier, less costly route through Wyoming.

For several years following the end of the Civil War, a complicated struggle ensued between Golden and Denver to form the most advantageous railroad link to the main lines of east-west traffic. In the end, Denver prevailed with the completion of two lines in 1870—the Denver Pacific, connecting with the transcontinental line to the north, and the Kansas Pacific to the east. Meanwhile, the mining communities of Clear Creek Canyon continued to haul their ore expensively in wagons that lumbered over roads which they had once hoped would be laid with track. But Loveland had not forgotten his decade-old dream of building up—and perhaps over—the wall of the Rockies.

Railroad Up Clear Creek In 1871, with bonds from Clear Creek and Gilpin counties, Loveland began construction of a narrow-gauge railroad up Clear Creek Canyon. The line reached Black Hawk in December 1872, and the benefits of the railroad were felt immediately as lower freight costs reduced the price of goods and increased the

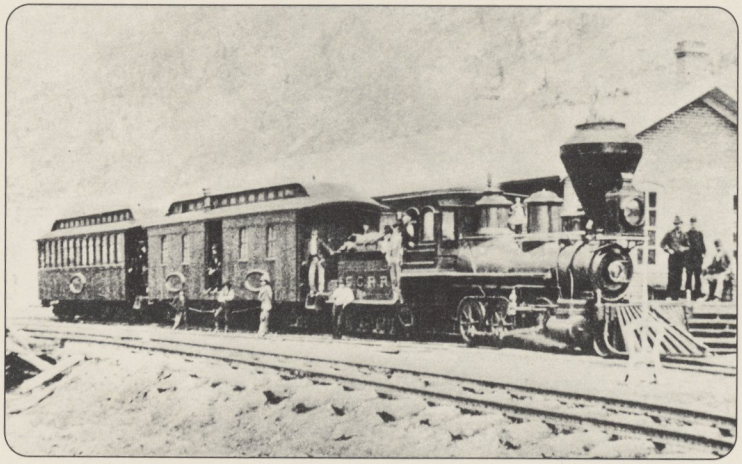
ABOVE: *Railroad crews work beside the waters of Clear Creek in 1872.* LEFT: *Loveland's railroad line from Golden to Georgetown ran a narrow gauntlet through the sometimes sheer canyons of lower Clear Creek.*

margins of profit from mines and mills. Several months later the line reached Floyd Hill, but the Panic of 1873 hurt the railroad industry and the company halted construction until the national economy recovered. Facing creditors who threatened receivership, Loveland was able to retain the Colorado Central and continue building under the terms of an agreement with the Union Pacific Railroad.

"As train time came on, people again filled the Depot... patiently awaiting the arrival of the first of four trains that were steaming up the valley... to the Silver Queen."

COLORADO MINER
AUGUST 14, 1877

By 1873, eastern financier Jay Gould had acquired control of the Union Pacific and was interested in increasing its assets in Colorado. In 1876 he assumed command of Loveland's Colorado Central, placing Loveland in charge of the line and supplying the necessary funds to complete the route to Georgetown. By June 1877 the railroad reached Idaho Springs, and in August the citizens of Georgetown welcomed the long-awaited Colorado Central Railroad.



Earliest known photograph of the Georgetown depot, 1878.

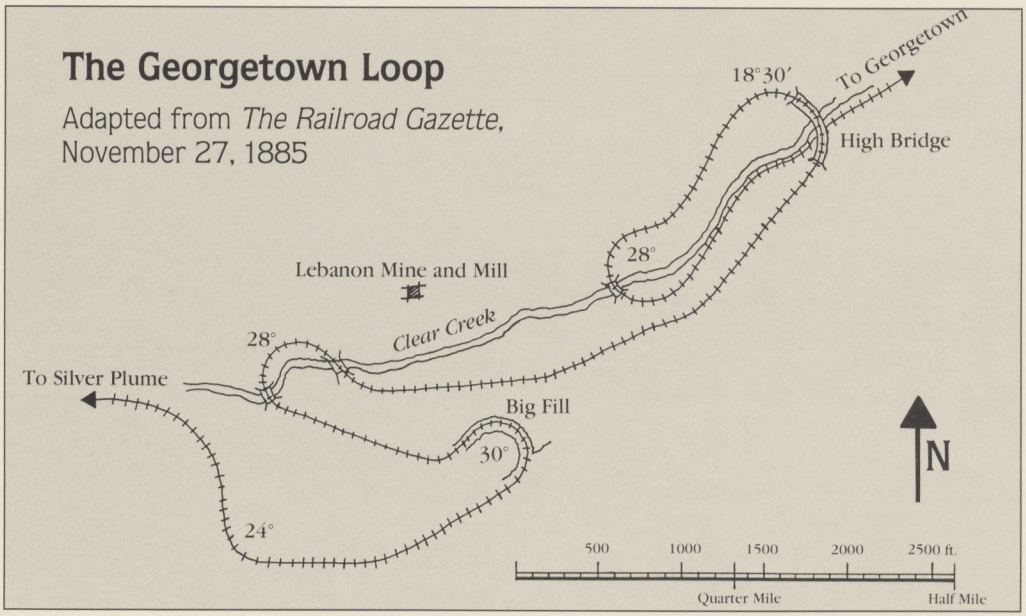
Leadville Strike Georgetown hardly had time to enjoy its status as the "Silver Queen of Colorado," however, before news of large and much more promising silver strikes were announced across the Continental Divide. Until 1877, Leadville had been little more than a small camp of huts called Oro City. Near the end of that year,

smelting tests on carbonate lead-silver deposits proved the extremely rich nature of the ore. The strike was one of the greatest to date, second only to that of Nevada's Comstock Lode. Production in 1879 approached $9.5 million, and by 1880 Leadville's population neared 14,000. Georgetown could not compete but was determined to survive.

From Georgetown to Silver Plume The race of the railroads to follow the path of the miners to Leadville is a colorful chapter in the state's history (see page 33). Three companies entered, each determined to profit from the bonanza. Jay Gould of the Union Pacific proposed two routes to be constructed simultaneously to Leadville, one from the south and one from Georgetown west over Loveland Pass. In 1878 surveyors began plotting the line through the Clear Creek Valley.

The first section of the track posed the greatest obstacle to the builders. Just west of Georgetown, the valley narrowed and rose 638 feet in less than two miles. The average grade was over 6 percent—too great for most locomotives—and the canyon walls were too steep for a system of switchbacks to gain altitude. Union Pacific chief engineer Jacob Blickensderfer studied the situation for several years, beginning in 1879, and eventually suggested a simple but stunning solution to the problem. A system of curves and bridges reduced the grade in most places to an approximate 3 percent average, with several steeper segments. The line included three hairpin turns, four bridges, and a 30-degree horseshoe curve at the 75-foot-high "Big Fill" before nearing Silver Plume. The key element in the plan was the high bridge at Devil's Gate, the

Jacob Blickensderfer

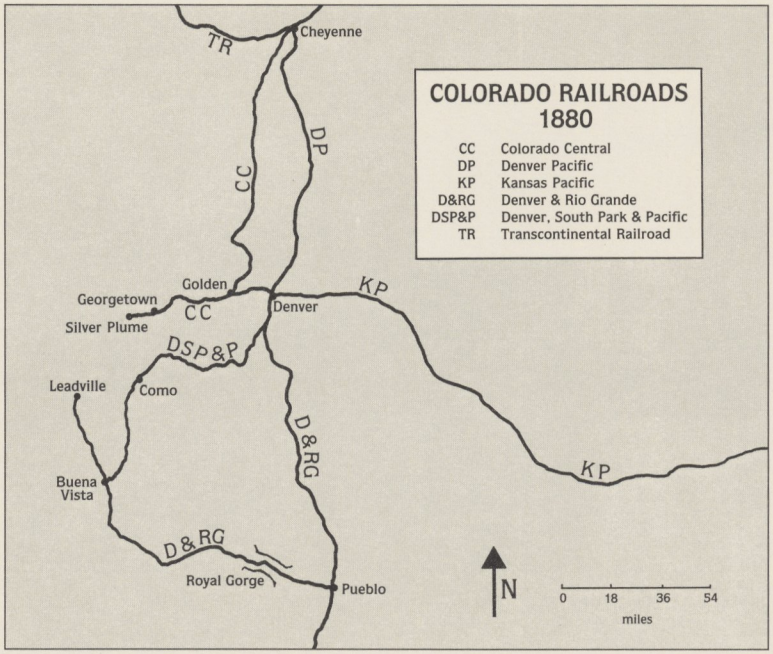


valley's narrowest point, at which the track looped over itself in a helix spiral to gain an additional 75 feet in elevation.

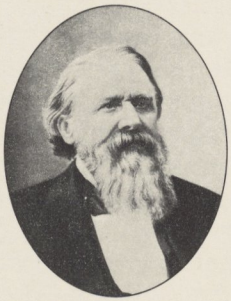
In 1881 the Georgetown, Breckenridge and Leadville Railroad was organized as a subsidiary of the Union Pacific. Grading on the Georgetown to Silver Plume line began the next year, with workers moving from both towns toward the site of the high bridge. By December 1882, under the supervision of Union Pacific engineer Robert Stanton, the rail bed was ready, and tracks and low bridges were placed the following spring.

ABOVE, LEFT AND RIGHT: *Trains pause on the high bridge and the Big Fill.*
RIGHT: *Travelers stand by a Colorado Central locomotive on a journey up Clear Creek Canyon.*

In October 1883 work on the high bridge began. Construction problems and negotiations between Stanton and the bridge company delayed completion until January 1884. Two months later, the first trains arrived in Silver Plume. Before the Loop was completed, however, the Union Pacific had acquired another railroad company with a line into Leadville from the south. Gould's interest in pushing the Georgetown, Breckenridge and Leadville over the mountains faded, and the line ended permanently a few miles past Silver Plume.



Gen. William J. Palmer



John Evans

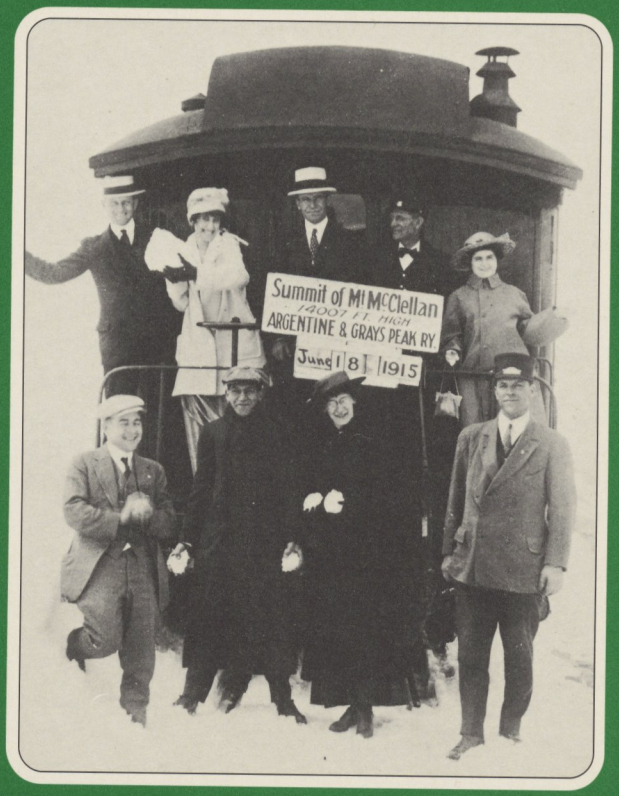
HIGH COUNTRY RAILROADS

By 1879 Leadville's silver boom had become a magnet for Colorado's competing railroad systems. Initially, three railroads entered the race. In the south, William Jackson Palmer's Denver and Rio Grande (D&RG) fought a "war" with the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe for control of passage through the Royal Gorge of the Arkansas River. In 1880, after two years of litigation, the D&RG became the first railroad to enter Leadville.

Meanwhile, driving west along the upper South Platte River, John Evans's Denver, South Park and Pacific (DSP&P) met Palmer's line at Buena Vista. Enjoying a short-lived prosperity from this connection with Leadville, the DSP&P soon became part of Jay Gould's massive railroad empire. Sold to the Union Pacific in 1880, it was one of two possible routes by which Gould planned to tap into the Leadville commerce. The first, using DSP&P track, would begin at Como and cross Boreas and Fremont passes. The second, relying upon the Union-Pacific owned Colorado Central, would extend west from Georgetown, cross Loveland Pass, and turn south into Leadville.

By the time the DSP&P reached the Cloud City in 1884, the Georgetown-Leadville route had not been completed beyond Silver Plume. Denied a purposeful destination, the line never reached the Divide, but it did beget the idea and construction of the Georgetown Loop.

RIDING THE HIGH LINE



The Golden West Tourists visiting the Rocky Mountains in the late nineteenth century came to see a West depicted by painters, journalists, photographers, and dime novelists. Anything west of the Mississippi River was thought to be wild, rugged, and romantic by Europeans and easterners alike. The mountains, the Indians, and even the hardships of mining were romanticized. Travel guides of the period spoke of exploring the "mysteries" of gold and silver mines as one of the fascinating attractions of a trip. Abandoned flumes, ditches, and water wheels were compared to ancient Roman aqueducts, and mills were regarded as picturesque.

The Great Loop Georgetown had first accommodated tourists in 1866 with the opening of several small hotels. Soon the Barton House welcomed guests. By 1870 Green Lake, several miles from town, became a small resort with the attraction of scenery and opportunities to view mining operations. When the railroad reached Georgetown in 1877, the mountain community had become a center for tourists.

The building of the Georgetown Loop, however, marked the beginning of a much larger tourist boom which developed around railroad excursions. Completed

"The 'Loop' ... is the wonder of all beholders, attracting thousands of visitors every season, and exciting universal admiration for the genius that conceived and built it."

HALL, *HISTORY OF COLORADO*, 1890

FACING PAGE: *A happy group of excursionists enjoys high-altitude summer snow aboard an Argentine Central car.*

just as the silver industry entered its decline in the Clear Creek area, the railroad realized the attraction of the High Line and took advantage of the tourist trade. Although visitors wrote home to family and friends about the spectacular scenery with its deep valleys and awe-inspiring mountain peaks, the highlight of the trip was the train ride itself. Throughout the 1880s and into the early 1900s traffic was high. Round-trip excursions out of Denver were no more than three dollars. With seven trains a day at the height of its popularity, the Georgetown Loop was Colorado's Scenic Wonder.

William H. Jackson's famous view of the Loop was an effective railroad publicity tool.

The Colorado and Southern Railroad promoted special one-day excursions through the mountains to the new Silver Plume pavilion. As late as 1926 visitors rested at this picnic spot.

Promotional material appeared almost immediately. William Henry Jackson's photograph of four trains on the Loop, each facing a different direction of the compass, and his many views of the Devil's Gate high bridge aided the advertising effort. Guidebooks, pamphlets, postcards, and souvenirs were popular and available everywhere. In 1899 the Colorado and Southern Railroad, which had assumed control of the line, built a tourist pavilion at the west end of Silver Plume to encourage further picnicking and recreation.

Points of Interest The trip from Denver was enhanced by stops along the route so that passengers could view scenic vistas or examine interesting natural features, such as rock formations like Hanging Rock, Inspiration Point, or Mother Grundy. Regularly the train

"One scarcely ever [rides] the Colorado Central without meeting eastern people who are enjoying their first trip through the great canon. We envy them their sensation of wonder, surprise and delight at the rapidly unfolding panorama as the train rounds point after point in the tortuous course of the canon."

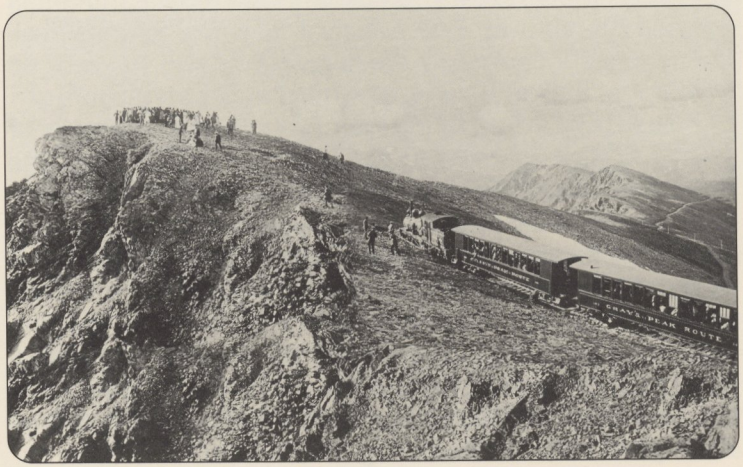
GEORGETOWN COURIER, 1877

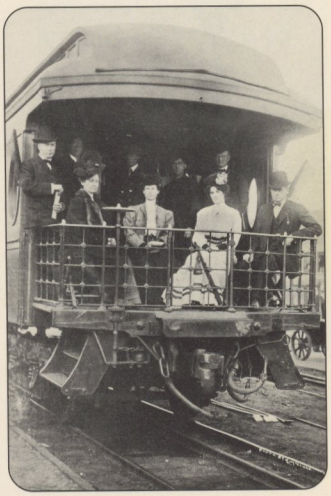
Tourists stand beneath Hanging Rock on their way to the Loop.

paused at the Beaver Brook Pavilion for refreshments. The next great scenic adventure, of course, was the view of the Georgetown valley from atop the high bridge, an adventure that thrilled tourists as much by the precarious crossing as by the panorama beyond. After an hour in Silver Plume, the train departed for the return trip. One Wisconsin visitor stated that she could "not bear to miss one crag, one neck creaking canyon height, one fleck of

foam, one syllable of music from the stream." Returning to Denver, filthy with dust and coal soot, the young woman apologized for her appearance to her hostess, who replied, "Never mind, my dear, we have *all* been around the Loop."

From the Silver Plume Pavilion connections were made with two additional attractions. The Argentine Central Railroad was completed in 1906 as an access line to mines on Mount McClellan owned by the Waldorf Mining





ABOVE: *The Argentine Central's observation platform offered spectacular views.* LEFT, TOP AND BOTTOM: *Tourists gather for photographs on the summit of Mount McClellan.*

Company of the East Argentine Mining District. The line was an instant tourist attraction, a fact soon realized by the mining company. Tours of the Belmont Mine with its ice crystal formations, views of the Rockies from above 14,000 feet in railroad cars with open sides and revolving chairs, and sunset and moonlight excursions drew further crowds. Realizing that tourism was the salvation of the railroad, the Colorado and Southern promoted the "Gray's Peak Special" excursion trips over the Loop and up the Argentine Central, billed as the highest railroad in North America.

Sunrise Peak gondola riders, c. 1910.

Another side trip from Silver Plume opened in 1907. The Colorado Mines and Aerial Tramway Company built a tramway from the pavilion to the top of the highest point of Leavenworth Mountain, known as Sunrise Peak. Foundations were laid in 1906 and towers up to sixty feet tall were installed shortly thereafter. In operation by July 1907, the forty-six-minute round-trip tour involved a mile-and-a-half gondola ride of over 3,000 vertical feet. The Sunrise Peak Aerial, with its twenty-six gondolas traversing spans of up to 485 feet, became the area's third major attraction.

The Panic of 1907, however, brought the beginning of a slow decline in tourism in the Georgetown area. The Argentine Central Railroad was sold in 1909 to the Gray's Peak Scenic Development Company, which began the first Sunday excursions. National promotion for the trip called it "a must" for visitors to the Rocky Mountains. However, within two years, financial problems prevented the line from operating during the 1911–12 season. Four years later, a dance pavilion, restaurant, and accommodations at the Leavenworth Mountain overlook were built in a final attempt to save the dwindling tourist interests.

A west-bound train passes under the newly completed Devil's Gate high bridge in this 1884 view taken by Colorado's premier railroad photographer, William H. Jackson.

"It is but two miles distant in a direct line, yet four miles of railway is necessary to span the distance... which it does by going up, coming back on itself, tying a knot and performing gyrations beside which a lamp post, seen through convivial glasses, is a staid and sober creation."

PROMOTIONAL BROCHURE

DECLINE – AND A NEW BEGINNING

The Booming Eighties The decade of the 1880s should have been perfect for the silver mining industry. The smelting problem which had plagued the industry in the 1860s had been remedied, and active smelters were opening in Denver and Leadville. By 1880 rail service was well established to several mining regions, with other towns awaiting completion of new lines. Mechanical drills, steam-driven hoists, improved milling techniques and machinery, and a skilled labor force seemed to ensure success for Colorado silver mines. In 1881 Colorado led the nation in the production of silver.

Panic of 1893 Even as production increased, however, silver prices slowly fell. In 1873 the federal government demonetized silver, but the Bland-Allison Act of 1878 brought a limited amount back into circulation. Still, Colorado politicians championed the cause of unlimited coinage. The resulting Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890 did not accomplish this, but it did increase the amount of silver that the government purchased at market value. Prices rose initially, only to slump in 1892. By July 1893 silver yielded only sixty-two cents per ounce. As the price continued to decline, eastern politicians blamed payments for silver as the major cause of the decline of the

Perhaps too much energy had been spent on the Georgetown Loop. The line never did cap the Divide, nor did it ever reach the Pacific.

FACING PAGE: *Bridge abutments stand abandoned near the Lebanon Mine, c. 1960.*

gold reserve. Their victory, the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, narrowed even further the already declining profit margins of the Colorado's silver mining industry.

Quiet during the 1940s and 1950s, Georgetown's streets evoke the presence of the past.

Twentieth-Century Mining Mining continued in Georgetown well into the twentieth century, as new metals were discovered in the region. Zinc was shipped out of Georgetown in 1899, continuing until a 1907 price decline again slowed the industry. That year gold mining and the reprocessing of mill tailings began anew and produced at a low level for several years. World War I munitions factories opened a new market for metals available in the area, including lead, zinc, and copper, but the metals market dropped dramatically after 1918. Small-scale mines operated at a decreasing rate until the 1940s. Then, during World War II, the demand for manpower on the battlefields or in supplies production and federal legislation prohibiting valuable-metals mining during the war years prompted the final closing of Georgetown's once prominent and rich gold fields and silver mines.

Mining and Railroads Built to serve mining interests, the railroads were directly affected by the failing silver industry. The ongoing income from hauling ore decreased, and inept and unethical management of railroad companies increased deficits. The Union Pacific, faced with severe financial shortfalls, was reorganized in 1890 as the Union Pacific, Denver and Gulf Railroad, but the new corporation continued to lose money and fell into receivership in the late 1890s. The company holdings were acquired in 1899 by a new railroad, the Colorado and Southern.

Tourism after 1900 The Colorado and Southern took advantage of tourist interest in the Loop and successfully promoted the excursion from Denver for several years. Yet for all its popularity the Loop trip was not profitable, relying as it did upon the undependable tourist market. The trains still hauled ore, but the declining mining industry compounded railroad losses. Low-user lines, including the section from Silver Plume to Graymount, were closed.

Tourism continued through World War I, but at disappointing levels. The overwhelming popularity of the automobile for summer vacationing cut the tourist numbers. On the Colorado and Southern line only two trains

The advent of the automobile age brought mountain tourists to Colorado but dramatically reduced excursion train revenues.

The dismantlement of the high bridge over Devil's Gate in the fall of 1939 signaled the end of an era. Never again, it seemed, would small black engines churn their way up the grade between Georgetown and Silver Plume.

Crews work to dismantle the Loop in 1939.

ran, and then only from May through September. By 1920 the Argentine Central line and the Sunrise Peak Aerial were closed, and the tracks up Mount McClellan were removed in 1921. Beginning in that year, only one train a day ran to Silver Plume, a schedule that remained unchanged until the last run in 1938.

The Clear Creek line to Central City and Black Hawk was reduced in 1928, and a decade later the line from Idaho Springs to Silver Plume was abandoned and the Georgetown Loop dismantled. The final miles of track, from Golden to Idaho Springs, closed in 1941. The narrow gauge up Clear Creek, a pioneer in its own time, was pulled up, ending a colorful era in railroad history.

Birth of a Historic Park For the twenty years following the closing of the famous Loop, Georgetown and Silver Plume lay quiet but not forgotten. Visitors to Colorado drove past the towns on the way west and occasionally stopped for a glimpse of Colorado's early mining history. Historians and area residents remembered the important role the area played in the opening of the Rocky Mountains, and some envisioned the valley as a place to tell the story of mining and railroads in Colorado's development.

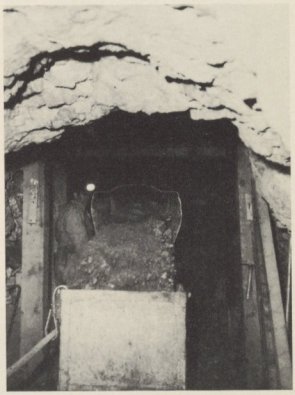
In 1959, the centennial year of the discovery of gold in Georgetown, the Georgetown Loop Historic Park was formed under the leadership of James Grafton Rogers, chairman of the Colorado Historical Society's board of directors. He laid the foundations of the park by negotiating a donation of mining claims and mills, a total of almost 100 acres, including the Lebanon-Everett mine group. Of the famous railroad, only the road bed, a few ties, and

partial bridge abutments remained. The Society began a program of land acquisition and lease with the goal of eventually reconstructing the entire length of the Georgetown Loop.

A major effort in the preservation of the valley came in the 1960s as the Colorado Department of Highways began construction of Interstate 70 through Clear Creek County. In cooperation with the Society and citizens' groups in the county and state as well as local preservation agencies, the department positioned the route of the highway on the mountainside, avoiding the original railroad grade and retaining the integrity of the Loop area.

The Park Takes Shape Construction of the rail line began in 1973 with track and ties donated by the Union Pacific Railroad. Rolling stock was gathered and bridges were set in place. Labor and technical assistance was provided by U.S. Navy Construction Battalion (Seabees), whose efforts enabled the Society and a private railroad corporation to open a portion of track for the first operating season in 1975. The line slowly lengthened, extending down the valley from Silver Plume. By 1977 tracks reached the upper end of Devil's Gate.

The Lebanon Mine complex was also a focus of attention during this time. Starting in 1969, work began on opening the Everett and Lebanon tunnels. The two mines had been closed for many years, and the Everett proved to be too unstable for tours. However, the Lebanon was cleared to its full length and wired for lighting. Outside the portal, a series of archaeological excavations uncovered the sites of four mine buildings. Nineteenth-century photographs of the mine confirmed their original appearance,



TOP: *Teams clear the mine tunnels in 1960.* BOTTOM: *Archaeologists were able to locate the sites of mine buildings from historical photographs.*

and the blacksmith shop, miners' change room, mine manager's office, and toolshed were reconstructed. The Lebanon Mine complex was opened to the public in 1978, offering visitors the opportunity to tour 600 feet of the Lebanon Mine to learn about and experience the rigors of underground hard-rock mining.

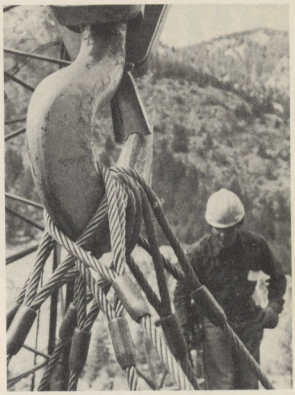
As a part of the Lebanon project, plans for the preservation of the Lebanon Mill were initiated. A major portion of the mill had collapsed, and much of the remaining structure was unstable. Again, archaeological work revealed the foundation's site and construction. The original water-powered turbine still sat beneath the building in the waters of Clear Creek. Working with historians, archaeologists, and a preservation architect, the Society stabilized and rebuilt the mill for the 1978 opening.

Rebuilding the High Bridge The final segment of the railroad's reconstruction began in early 1982 with a $1 million grant from the Boettcher Foundation in honor of E. Warren Willard, a former partner of Boettcher and Company and a dynamic member of the Colorado Historical Society's board of directors. After groundbreaking ceremonies on May 2, building of the historically accurate reconstruction began. In late September 1983, the center span was hoisted into place, and soon the laying of bridge ties and track completed the new Loop. The Devil's Gate high bridge was dedicated by Governor Richard D. Lamm on August 1, 1984.

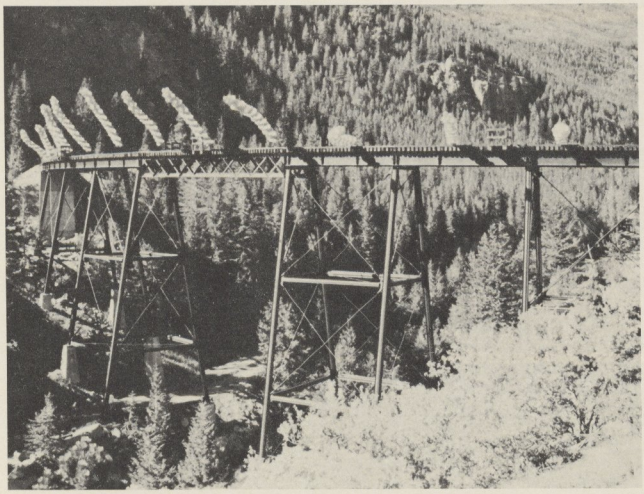
New Horizons for Interpretation With the Georgetown Loop completed, the Society turned its efforts to increasing visitor facilities and historical on-site inter-

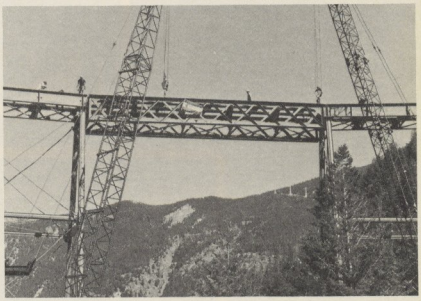
pretation. The Morrison Valley Center and the Morrison Theater, including boarding and ticketing areas, visitor facilities, parking, and a slide show theater, were dedicated on August 19, 1985. The Silver Plume Depot was restored to its original appearance in 1985 and a railroad maintenance facility for the repair and maintenance of train rolling stock was added to the Silver Plume yards.

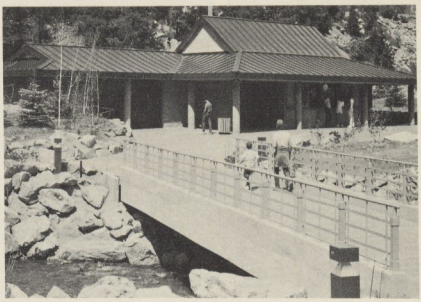
The Colorado Historical Society continues to increase the park's visitor facilities and deepen the interpretive experience of the valley, relating for visitors the history of nineteenth-century frontier mining and railroading and their impact upon the development of the American West.



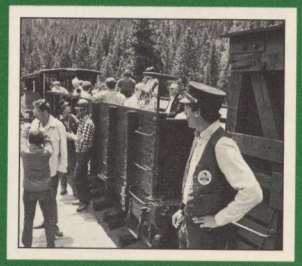
FACING PAGE: *The 1970s saw active reconstruction of the Lebanon Mill, Silver Plume rail yards, and the Lebanon Mine buildings.* RIGHT: *Construction work during the 1980s led to the completion of the high bridge, shown at its dedication below, and the Morrison Valley Center.*

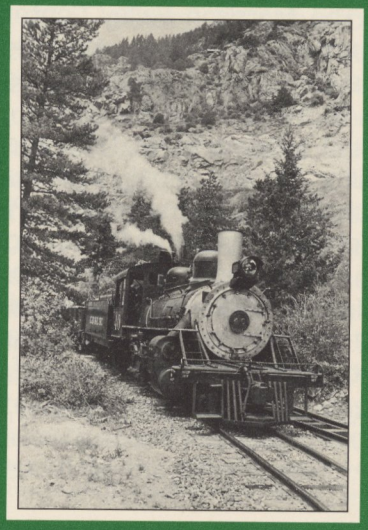






THE PARK





THE HIGH BRIDGE

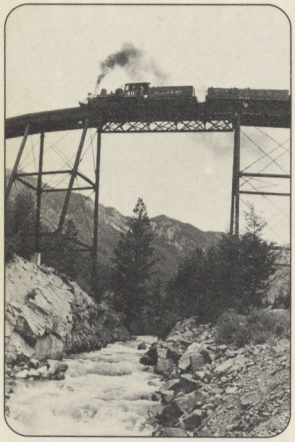
For many years, the most famous feature of the Georgetown Loop was the Devil's Gate high bridge. Widely depicted in photographs of the era, it was the single essential component of the rail line to Silver Plume, bridging the valley's narrowest point as the upper level of the "loop" in the track.

The original masonry piers for the bridge were completed on October 4, 1883, the day before the first car loaded with iron for the span arrived in Georgetown. The Union Pacific contracted with the Phoenixville Bridge Company of Pennsylvania to fabricate and erect the bridge, which was to be constructed on an 18-degree 30-foot curve rising on a 2 percent grade. By November 29 the work was completed. Union Pacific chief engineer Robert Stanton refused to accept the work, however, citing defective riveting and improper placement of the north and south bridge columns. After several weeks of negotiations, the bridge company agreed to make the necessary changes, and the structure was completed on January 24, 1884. Ties and rails were then set in place, and the first test locomotive crossed the Devil's Gate bridge on February 28.

"The Georgetown–Silver Plume Historic District has been found to possess exceptional value in commemorating or illustrating the history of the United States, and is thus eligible for registration as a National Historic Landmark."

UNITED STATES SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR, 1966

FACING PAGE: *Visitors entering the park at the Morrison Valley Center (bottom) board the train for a trip across the Devil's Gate high bridge on the way to the Lebanon Mine complex and the Silver Plume Depot.*



A train is silhouetted against the sky as it crosses the center span of the high bridge.

The bridge rested on four iron towers ranging from 33 to 78 feet in height, with sixteen granite piers at the base. Reaching 300 feet across the valley, it was composed of eight spans of 30-foot iron-plate girders and a center span consisting of a 60-foot iron-lattice girder. The bridge rose 95.6 feet above Clear Creek and looped 75 feet above the lower track.

With the closing of the Colorado and Southern line over the Loop in 1939, the high bridge was dismantled and sold as scrap iron. The reconstructed bridge adheres to the design of the original, although two principal modifications have been made to meet current safety standards. First, the diameter of the tower legs has been increased from 8 inches to 12 and 14 inches, with additional size increases in the tension rods. Second, the base piers are formed of solid concrete instead of granite with rubble fill, as the originals were constructed.

LEBANON MINE COMPLEX

THE LEBANON MINE The Lebanon Silver-Lead Mining Company was organized in 1869 in New York to purchase and develop a group of silver lodes discovered on Republican Mountain in 1865. Founders and trustees included New Yorkers J. Warren Brown, Charles Maynard, Theodore Pohle, and Pohle's brother Julius. In 1870 the company was reorganized as the Lebanon Mining Company. Julius Pohle was sent to Colorado to examine and later manage the company's mining operations.

Digging on the tunnel proper began in 1871 with the object of tapping the rich Hise Lode. The tunnel, approxi-

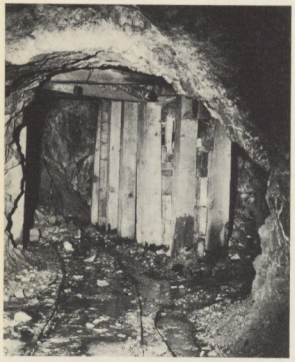
mately 7 feet high, was intended to run 500 to 1,000 feet into the mountain. At the end of two years, it had progressed to 580 feet and intersected several mine lodes. The Panic of 1873, however, temporarily interrupted development of these lodes.

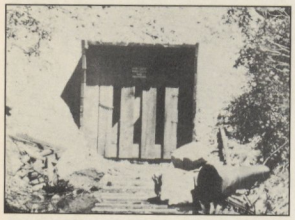
Needing capital to continue, Pohle suggested that the company lease to other operators the rights to veins that had already been intersected. In so doing, the company

The Lebanon Mine and Mill appear near the center of this historic view of the valley above Georgetown.

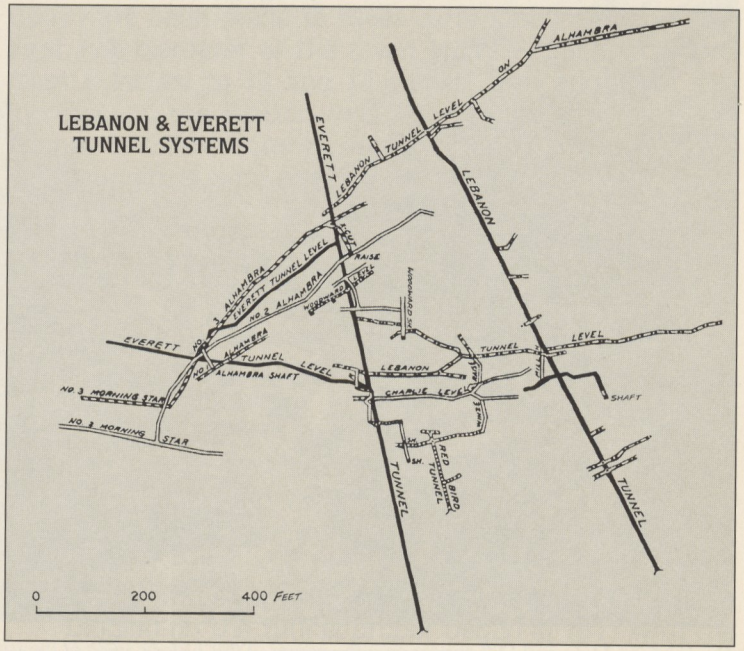
received substantial royalties and was obligated to fewer operating costs. By the end of 1876, nineteen lodes were under development, eleven by lessees and eight by the company. By 1877 the tunnel extended 800 feet and was a profitable producer.

Led by Pohle's careful planning, the mine site developed into a small mining complex. A blacksmith shop and change room were added to the mine office and toolshed. The crushing mill just downhill from the mine had stood since 1871. Inside the tunnel, ventilation was provided





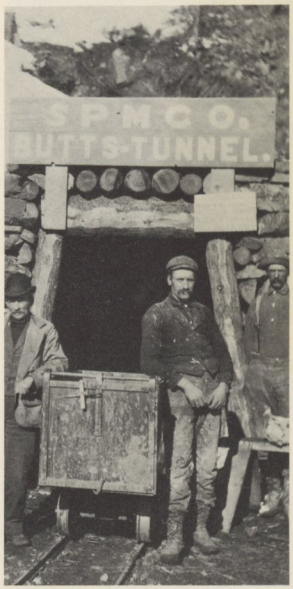
The Lebanon Mine required stabilization in the 1960s. ABOVE: *The interior after clearing.* BELOW: *The tunnel entrance, or portal.*



through an airshaft in Lode 3. Internal rails connected the mine areas to the portals, and mules hauled the loaded cars.

The mining company finally struck the Hise Lode 1,100 feet from the portal in 1881. The cut revealed three clearly defined veins of silver, each three to four inches wide. Development of the lode followed, and in 1883 output increased significantly. The company invested heavily in mining operations that year, installing a compressor near the mouth of the tunnel to operate new pneumatic drilling equipment. These large, cumbersome, air-operated machines drilled five times faster than men using hand jacks and hammers. However, they represented a major capital investment, which the company hoped to recoup in increased production and a reduced workforce. Also in 1883, a spur line from the Georgetown, Breckenridge and Leadville Railroad, under construction from Georgetown, reached the mine and promised reduced shipping costs for ore.

Mining continued to be profitable. In 1885 the Lebanon was one of only fifty mines in the Georgetown area still producing silver ore. The tunnel reached its greatest length of 1,200 feet in 1886, but in that year drastic silver price declines ended further work. By the end of the decade, the mine was silent.



Dressed in workers' clothing of the late nineteenth century, a miner pauses next to an ore car.

THE LEBANON MILL The Lebanon Mining Company had proposed a concentrating and sampling mill at the mine site soon after work on the tunnel began. By the spring of 1871, machinery was en route and construction of the wooden structure was under way, directed by mine supervisor Julius Pohle. The machinery, including a jaw

Workers (left) help to reconstruct the Lebanon Mill, completed above.

crusher and Harz jigs, was soon installed and powered through a turbine using water from adjacent Clear Creek. At the end of 1872 Pohle installed a boiler and engine for year-round operation.

The mill was designed as a small operation to dress and concentrate ores from the mine. Such activity was necessary before 1874, as mills refused to purchase ore without a minimum metal content of forty ounces of silver per ton. Much ore-bearing rock was tossed to the dump, although with proper dressing and concentrating it might have been sold at a profit and shipped at reduced cost.

The first year of operation was the best: the company shipped eighty-five tons of gold and silver ore valued at $47,000. During the next two years Pohle continued to process ores from the Lebanon Mine and purchase ores for concentrating, the majority of which included surface ores that were easily reduced. In 1874, however, the practice of

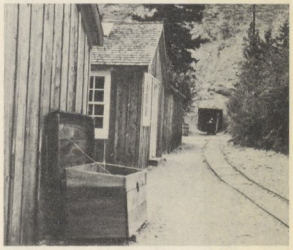
requiring forty ounces of silver was discontinued. Ore prices dropped dramatically, and the company ceased mill operations.

The mill and its equipment were leased to Dr. D. E. Melliss in 1877. After attempting for several months to operate profitably, Melliss abandoned the project. A second lease in 1878 was also short-lived. The mill remained intact but not operational until 1945, when the equipment was removed.

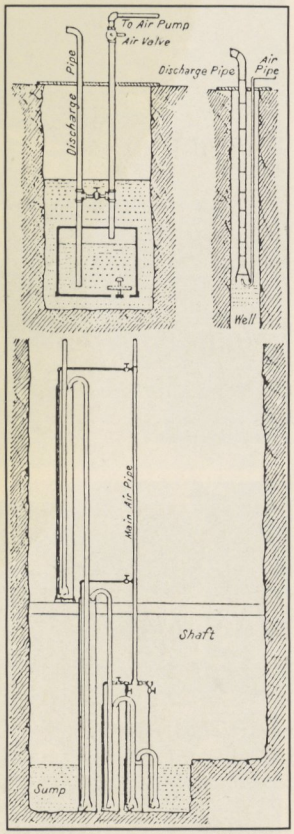
The mine buildings at the Lebanon complex were located during several archaeological excavations on the site during the 1970s. The exterior appearance of the buildings was confirmed through period photographs of the mine area. All four buildings were reconstructed on their original sites by 1978.

MANAGER'S OFFICE The mine manager's office, occupied by Julius Pohle for the duration of the mine's operations, is furnished with office items and mining paraphernalia of the era. Pohle, a native of Germany, came to Colorado in 1870 to inspect the mine properties acquired in Georgetown by the Lebanon Mining Company. When the company announced plans to develop the mines based on Pohle's reports, the family moved to Georgetown and Pohle became the company's chief representative and resident director.

Pohle's work in Georgetown was significant for two reasons. First, although many Colorado mines were owned and managed by eastern or European companies, few sent company officials to the mining site to direct operations. Most relied on local contacts with mining experience.



Built near the mine entrance, the Lebanon's buildings are of traditional frame construction.



Julius Pohle's invention warranted illustration in the 1895 Engineering Record.

Second, as an analytical chemist and former state geologist of New York, Pohle represented a new breed of mine manager in Colorado, replacing the more practically trained prospector and placer miner.

Pohle was well respected for his careful, systematic management of the Lebanon Mine. His skill and knowledge were recognized by his neighbors in 1880 when he was appointed ore commissioner to the 1882 Mining Exposition in Denver. Trustees of the Lebanon Mining Company awarded his successful direction by naming him president and superintendent in 1883. Soon he directed his attention to solving the problem of water in the mine shafts, inventing and patenting a pneumatic air pump which had no moving parts. The Ingersoll-Sergeant Drill Company of New York purchased his invention, and in 1888 Pohle left Georgetown and joined Ingersoll-Sergeant to perfect and market the Pohle air pump.

CHANGE ROOM The change room or "dry" was added to the mine complex in 1877 and provided a place for miners to leave their personal belongings and change in and out of their work garments. Miners' clothing included rough "circular" jackets or coats, loose woolen shirts, overalls or loose pants with suspenders, hats, and heavy boots or "brogans." In winter, gloves and leather or wool jackets added warmth.

A second purpose of the change room was to prevent "high-grading." With the average wage at three to five dollars a day, miners and managers were sometimes tempted to conceal high quality ore in their clothing to sell elsewhere. Requiring the miners to change clothes in a company building discouraged the theft of valuable ores.

BLACKSMITH SHOP AND TOOLSHED Also built in 1877, the blacksmith shop was equipped with a forge. The company was able to sharpen drills and repair equipment on site or make small tools to fill special needs in the mine. Typical of the many types of iron mining tools and pieces of equipment are those housed in the toolshed. Probably constructed soon after mine operations began, such a shed was standard on mine sites.

Open to the public, the mine buildings are furnished to reflect the Pohle years.

SILVER PLUME DEPOT AND YARDS

The town of Silver Plume was founded as a mining camp two miles above Georgetown in July 1870. Named for the Silver Plume Mine on the mountain above the town, Silver Plume was incorporated in September 1880. From the beginning, the town developed as a milling center. Area mines produced large amounts of high-quality ore which were sent by wagon to Georgetown for transportation by train after 1877.

With the completion of the Georgetown Loop in 1884, Silver Plume greeted the new train service. The March 13 *Georgetown Courier* reported that the first locomotive was met by a "procession of benevolent organizations and citizens [which] formed on Main Street and marched to the point reached by the track layers, where addresses were made." Passenger service began several weeks later.

The first station was nothing more than a railroad car. This opened on April 1 with J. J. Whitney, formerly of Lawson, Colorado, as agent. Meanwhile, weather condi-

tions forced delays of several weeks in the preparation of foundations for the permanent depot, which was to be pre-cut in Denver. The Union Pacific prepared all lumber and materials to size and shipped the lot by train to Silver Plume, thus cutting construction costs on site. The materials arrived in mid-April and work was under way a month later for an intended June 1 finish. Delays were cited in mid-July. On September 11 the *Courier* finally announced

that the "Silver Plume depot is completed and in use."

Until 1899, the depot was the only loading point in Silver Plume for passengers and goods. Excursion trains ran regularly from Denver, and the trip from Georgetown—thirty-five cents one way for a twenty-minute ride—was frequently used. The depot was a busy place. Mail deliveries, supplies, and packages for town residents arrived there, and telegraph equipment located in the station master's office provided an important link with the nation. The station's activity reflected Silver Plume's status by 1890 as one of the most productive mining camps in the country.

In the late 1890s the railroad line changed ownership. The Colorado and Southern Railroad, its new owners, were determined to expand the tourist trade. Soon the tracks were extended to the western part of Silver Plume, where a large pavilion had been built. Picnic areas, walking paths, and other visitor amenities were provided for the excursionists. As a result, the depot became a station for local traffic only, while tourist trains passed by, going on to connections with the Sunrise Peak Aerial Tramway and the Argentine Central Railroad at the pavilion.

The slow decline of the railroad reduced business at the depot, which was abandoned by the Colorado and Southern when the Georgetown Loop closed in 1939. During the 1960s the building was used by Loveland Associates as a headquarters for the Loveland ski patrol. Transferred to the Colorado Historical Society in 1968, the building was leased by the Loveland Associates for several years. With the beginning of reconstruction work on the railroad and the operation of the train, the depot was returned to service as the line's ticketing and boarding

FACING PAGE: *The depot appears at the left center of this W. H. Jackson view of Silver Plume.* ABOVE: *the station master awaits the arrival of a train, c. 1913.*

facility. Restoration of the structure was completed in 1985.

The depot has always been located on the southern edge of Silver Plume, but it has been moved several times. The original site lies several hundred feet west of the present location but, as today, it was situated with its bay window facing south. Various other buildings, including houses, tanks, station house, and sheds, have appeared in photographs of the rail yard during the depot's history, but none remains.

With minor exceptions, the restored depot retains its original exterior appearance. Photographs of its first site show that the building and platform sat on lower foundations, closer to the ground than at present. The boarding platform, originally twelve feet wide, has been adapted in size and configuration to accommodate current needs.

The interior of the original depot was divided into four rooms. The freight room, with its unfinished walls, is currently used for visitor facilities. The remaining three rooms provide historical interpretation of the depot and are furnished to the period of 1885 to 1900. These include the waiting room with its historic paint colors and coal stove; the baggage room, filled with passenger luggage; and the station master's office, replete with telegraph, ticketing supplies, and office furniture of the period.

Situated at the eastern end of the Silver Plume rail yards is a new railroad and train maintenance facility. Completed in 1986, the building houses equipment and space for the repair and regular maintenance of the railroad's rolling stock. A viewing window on the southern side of the building allows visitors the opportunity to watch the train work in progress.

Georgetown Loop Historic Mining and Railroad Park
Benefactors: 1960–1985

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U.S. Bureau of Mines
U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Marine Corps
U.S. Navy Seabees (RMCB-15)
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University of Colorado
Stanley R. Wallbank
Clarence Werthan
Western Property Management Company
West/Rail, Inc.
Kayle Wilhelm
William M. Williams
C. Gordon Wolcott

MAP KEY

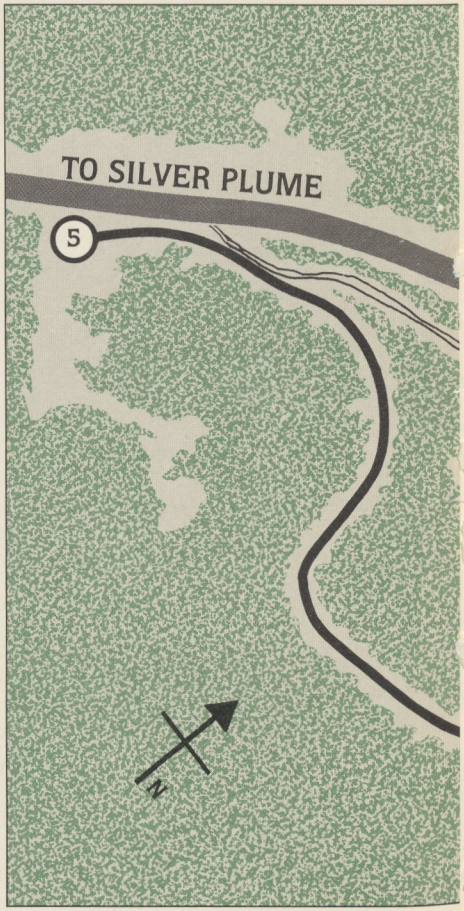
① **MORRISON VALLEY CENTER AND MORRISON THEATER**
Ticket purchase and boarding, interpretive slide show, restrooms, parking

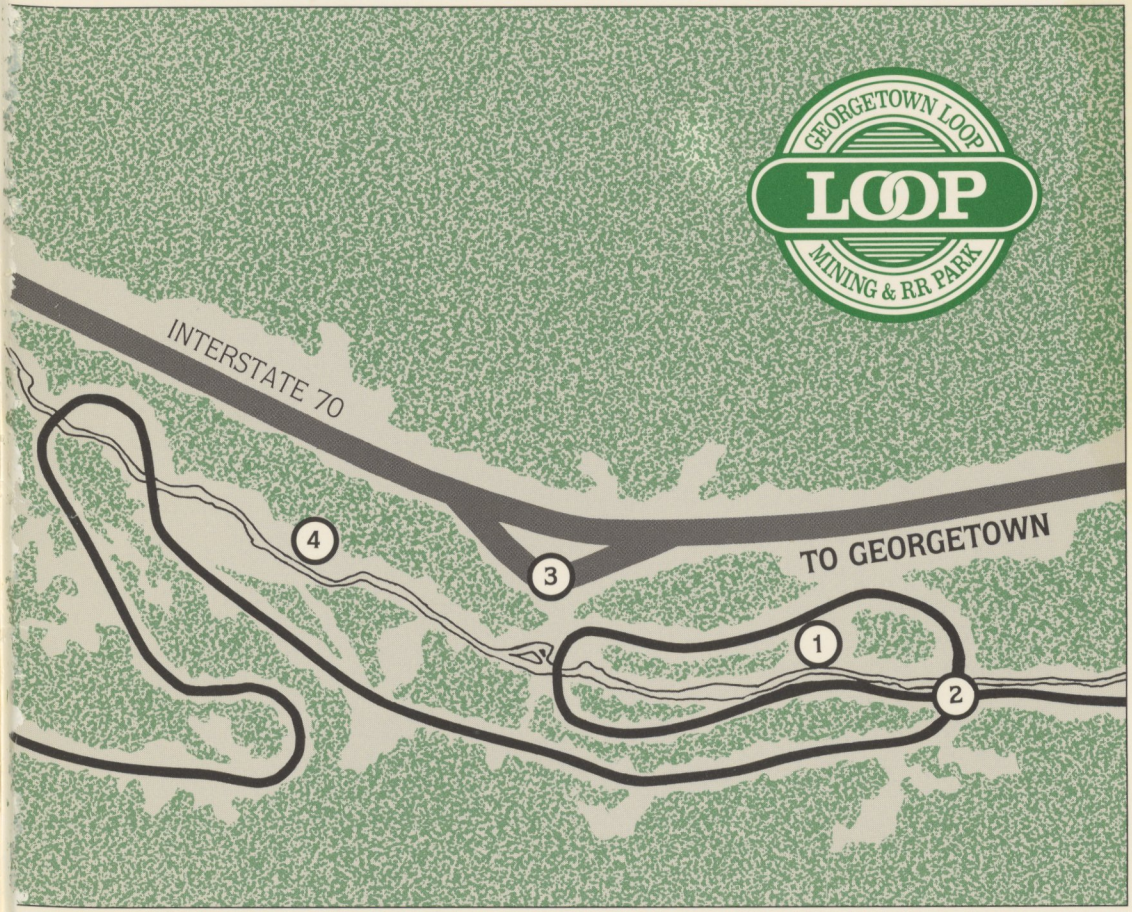
② **DEVIL'S GATE HIGH BRIDGE**
Near Georgetown entrance to park

③ **HIGHWAY OVERLOOK**
Eastbound lane of Interstate 70

④ **LEBANON MINE AND MILL COMPLEX**
Accessible only from train; tours last approximately 1¼ hour by advance ticket purchase

⑤ **SILVER PLUME RAILROAD YARDS**
Ticket purchase and boarding, historic depot restoration, railroad maintenance facility, restrooms, parking, gift and book sales




GEORGETOWN LOOP
LOOP
MINING & RR PARK
INTERSTATE 70
TO GEORGETOWN
1
2
3
4

COLORADO
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY