

A Very Special Place

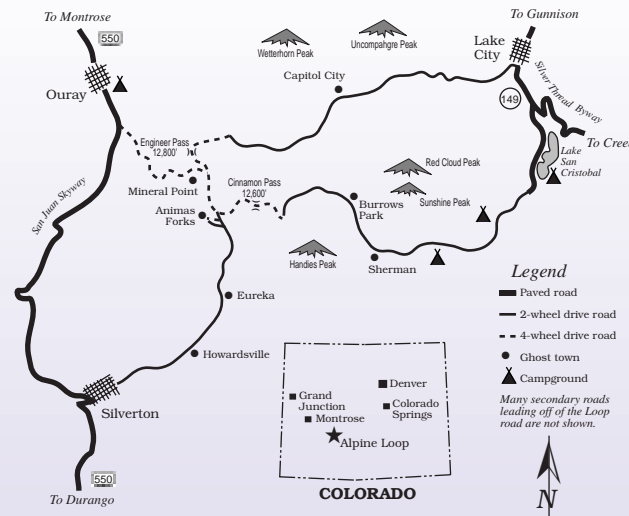
Tucked away in the San Juan Mountains of southwestern Colorado is one of the true gems of our public lands. Sculpted by the forces of volcanoes, glaciers, wind and rain, the resulting mountains, valleys, streams and lakes are a masterpiece of nature's artistry. Native Americans came to these mountains for centuries to hunt and gather food. In the late 1800s they were replaced by miners who came in search of a different livelihood -- silver, gold, lead, and zinc. These hardy pioneers carved a network of roads through this rugged terrain to enable them to transport ore and supplies by mule-drawn wagons.

Today, most of the mines are closed but the roads still remain. They are used by a different sort of adventurer -- folks who travel by 4-wheel drive or motorcycle or mountain bike. Although technology has made it easier for us to visit these mountains it has not diminished their beauty or the adventure to be found here. One thing that *has* changed is the name.

We now call this system of roads the Alpine Loop National Back Country Byway. Most of the area is public land managed for you by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Forest Service. It is wild country and perhaps not suited to everyone's taste. But, if you are able to appreciate nature on her own terms, we think you will agree this is a very special place.



Engineer Pass, 12,800 feet, byway's highest point



What is a Back Country Byway?

The Alpine Loop is part of the National Scenic Byway system -- a selection of the country's most scenic roads identified and managed for the enjoyment of the millions of people who drive for pleasure. Unlike most scenic byways, which are located on paved highways, back country byways focus on the out-of-the-way sights to be found on gravel and dirt roads. These are routes that may not be suitable for all vehicles. However, for those with appropriate vehicles, the back country byway program can offer an intimate view of a variety of areas off the beaten track.

The Alpine Loop is one of the outstanding examples of the back country byway system. It covers 65 miles of roads between the towns of Lake City, Ouray, and Silverton (see map). Depending on winter snows, the Loop opens about late May/early June and closes in late October. About two-thirds of the route is dirt road suitable for 2-wheel-drive cars, so everyone can experience a portion of this scenic area. In order to traverse the entire route, however, you will need a 4-wheel-drive, high clearance vehicle. If you don't have such a vehicle, you can rent a 4-wheel-drive vehicle in the surrounding communities or go on a 4-wheel-drive tour that allows you to sit back and enjoy the scenery. Wherever you venture along the route you will be surrounded by the best the Rocky Mountains have to offer.

Lots To See and Do

In addition to the outstanding scenery, visitors can enjoy a wide array of other outdoor recreation activities. The rivers, streams, and lakes attract fishermen in search of rainbow, brook, and cutthroat trout. Hikers will enjoy the many trails that can be accessed from the Alpine Loop including routes up five peaks over 14,000 feet.

History buffs will want to explore the many structures, mines, and ghost towns left over from the late 1800s. Photographers will especially appreciate the abundance of colorful alpine wildflowers in late July/early August and the explosion of fall colors during September. Vehicle recreationists can spend weeks exploring the many designated roads that lead off the main route.

More and more mountain bikers are enjoying the Alpine Loop for challenging single and multiday rides. Winter sports enthusiasts can find ample area to snowmobile or ski on the 80 miles of groomed trails near Lake City. Whether you have a day, a week, or a month, you won't run out of things to do in this area.



Mill Creek Campground

Amenities

The Alpine Loop itself has rustic facilities including three campgrounds, a picnic area, and 10 restrooms along the way. More developed facilities are available in the surrounding communities including visitor information centers, motels, resorts, RV sites with hookups, restaurants, groceries, gas stations, auto repair, sporting goods, and much more.



Marmots and wildflowers are common sights



Upper Animas River Valley

FOR MORE INFORMATION
An informative 20-page visitor's guide is available for the Alpine Loop and surrounding area. It includes a detailed map and points of interest along the route. The "Alpine Explorer" is available from local BLM offices and visitor centers for \$2.50.

A variety of other maps and publications about the Alpine Loop visitor services and facilities are available from the following:

Bureau of Land Management
Gunnison Resource Area
216 North Colorado Street
Gunnison, CO 81230
(970) 641-0471

Lake City Chamber of Commerce
Visitor Information Center
(on Silver Street center of town)
P.O. Box 430
Lake City, CO 81235
(970) 944-2527 (800) 569-1874

Bureau of Land Management
San Juan Resource Area
701 Camino del Rio
Durango, CO 81301
(970) 247-4874

Ouray Chamber Resort Association
(north end of town by the pool)
P.O. Box 145
Ouray, CO 81427
(970) 325-4746 (800) 228-1876

U.S. Forest Service
Gunnison National Forest
216 North Colorado Street
Gunnison, CO 81230
(970) 641-0471

Silverton Chamber of Commerce
Visitor Information Center
(south end of Greene St. at the "Y")
P.O. Box 565
Silverton, CO 81433
(970) 387-5654 (800) 752-4494

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

To request a free brochure about visiting colorful Southwest Colorado call:
Southwest Colorado Travel Region
1 (800) 933-4340



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BLM

Colorado The Alpine Loop



Above historic Shepherd Meadows



Historic structure at Animas Forks ghost town



Fishing opportunities

