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The Leadville, Colorado & Southern Railroad

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Abstract

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The Leadville, Colorado & Southern Railroad



The historic Colorado & Southern passenger depot is still serving its original purpose.

IN THE SUMMER OF 2017, MY FAMILY AND I WERE ON A BIG train-cation in the Colorado Rocky Mountains. As part of our trip, we visited Leadville, one of the highest incorporated cities in America, at an elevation of 10,152 feet above sea level. Leadville was founded in 1877, as a mining town.





This is the old Colorado & Southern freight depot that can be seen not far from the passenger depot.



The Leadville, Colorado & Southern still uses the old roundhouse originally built by the Colorado & Southern.

By 1880, Leadville was a booming town with a population of around 15,000, boasting more than thirty mines, several newspapers, an opera house, and

boasting more than thirty mines, several newspapers, an opera house, and quite a few saloons. In 1880, the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad (D&RGW) reached Leadville with their narrow gauge system. Competing with the D&RGW for the rich mining contracts, the Colorado & Southern (C&S) soon reached Leadville as well.



Looking back at the town of Leadville, as our train departed.



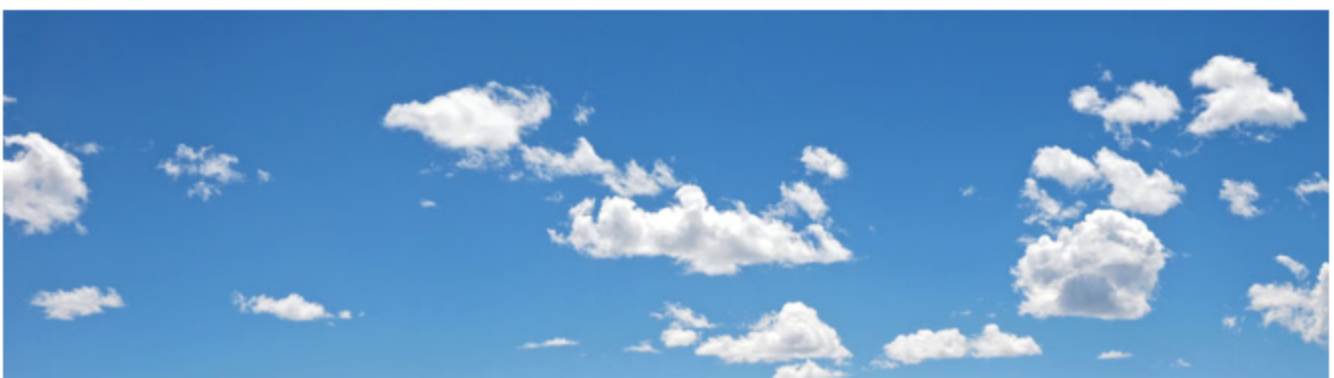


This old building was built as the St. Vincent's Hospital in 1901.

Today, little remains of the old narrow-gauge lines into Leadville, but a small portion of the Colorado & Southern's line can be experienced. The Leadville, Colorado & Southern was started in 1980 when the Burlington Northern, successor to the Colorado & Southern, began selling off its assets in Leadville.



The remains of an old cabin that was built to house track crews.





The valley far below opens up, as the train traverses the ridge. Far in the distance, the bulk of Mount Massive can be seen towering over the valley.

The line itself was converted to standard gauge in 1943, due to heavy wartime traffic to the Climax Mine. Today, the train is powered by former Burlington Northern GP9's and features an assortment of covered and open cars, as well as a caboose. The trip takes riders on a twenty-one mile round trip from Leadville to the continental divide, near the still active Climax Mine.



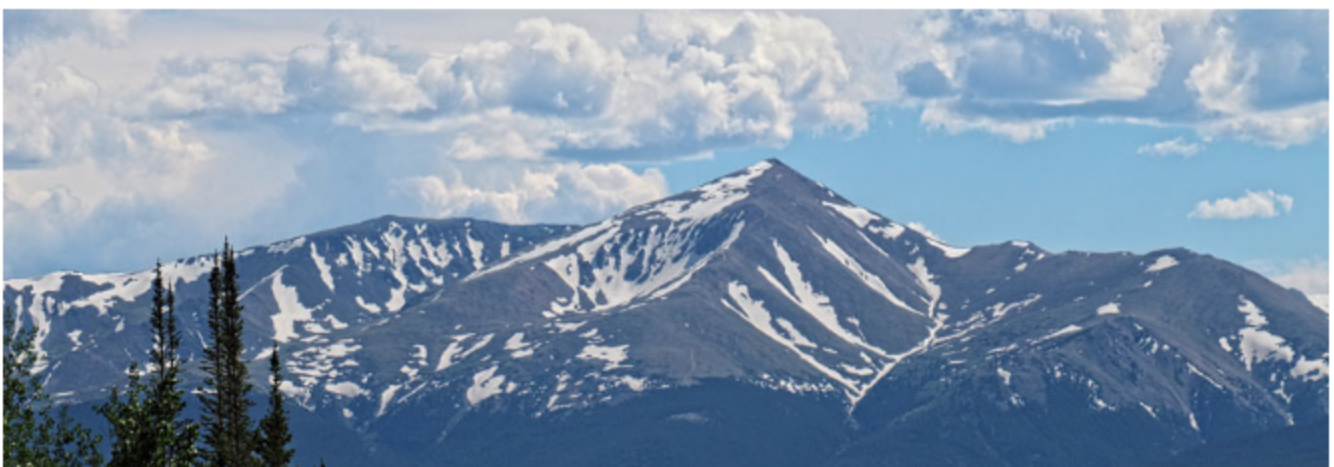
The line curves and winds along the ridgeline. Our GP9 can be seen leading the train.

The line curves and winds along the ridge line. Our GP9 can be seen leading the train around the bend.



On the other end of the train is the caboose. The mountain in the background rises above the tree line.

The breathtaking ride takes you alongside the mountain and through the San Isabel National Forest as the train climbs to over 1,000 feet above the Arkansas River Valley. Along the way, you can see incredible views of the rugged mountain peaks, including two of Colorado's biggest *fourteeners*, Mount Massive and Mount Elbert. (*Fourteeners* is a western mountaineering term for mountain peaks of at least 14,000 feet.)





Mount Elbert is Colorado's highest peak at 14,439 feet above sea level.

The trip takes about two and one-half hours and is an absolute delight. At the farthest point on the line, the train stops so that passengers can get out and stretch their legs. Here too, you can see the old Colorado & Southern water tank, and even take a tour of the locomotive. Then, the train traces its way back into Leadville, where you get a second chance to see what you missed on the way out.



The original water tower was built by the Colorado & Southern. Due to realignment of the track, the water tower is farther away from the current rail bed than it would have been when originally in operation.

I would also highly recommend staying a night in Leadville because it is a beautiful, unique town. We stayed at the historic Delaware Hotel, originally

built in 1886. We also took some time to walk around downtown Leadville and enjoy some of the fantastic local eateries.



This is the head frame at one of the abandoned mine sites, above town.

We also went up to the mining district to see what was left of some of the old mines, above town. There are bike trails and some 4×4 trails that wind around


the remnants of the once prosperous mines.



In working the shot, I moved around the old mine frame to see the sunset, over the distant mountain peaks.

If you find yourself near Leadville, do not miss the Leadville, Colorado & Southern. It is an absolutely beautiful trip through the aspens and pinon pines, to the top of Colorado!





Behind this old building, is actually the Union Pacific's Tennessee Pass line, that is in partial abandonment. Standing over it all, is the bulk of Mount Massive.

Jason Stamper – *Photographs and text Copyright 2018*

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