

The South Park National Heritage Area

www.southparkheritage.org
719-836-4298

Your trip along US 285 passes through the Congressionally designed South Park National Heritage Area from the top of Kenosha Pass through the South Park and on top of Trout Creek Pass.



The South Park National Heritage Area and its gateway communities represent the story of the West from the earliest inhabitants to the present. Once the South Park area was a vast inland sea. Fossils of sea life can still be found all over the region. As a matter of fact the archaeological record offers up evidence of just how the earliest known human residents lived and played in the area.

Good observers driving along highway 285 as it leaves the metropolitan area of the Front Range find that it isn't hard to imagine hunters armed with spears and arrows

stalking game in the deep woods of Platte Canyon or spearing fish in the many rivers and streams that flow into the South Platte River.

All three forks of the South Platte River, which supplies water for the thirsty western plains, are born in the high mountains of Park County.

Circled by mountain ranges, the very high valley of South Park has provided rich grasses that fed a wide variety of animals, most species of which are still here. Travelers are likely to be able to spot antelope, deer, elk, Rocky Mountain Sheep and even buffalo, while back-country adventurers may come across a mother moose and her babies or a bear lumbering along a ridge, and lucky watchers may catch a glimpse of beavers building their dams with a bald eagle watching from a tall nearby pine tree.

All along the 285 corridor travelers will find towns with their roots firmly planted in the history of the rush to settle this high ground by prospectors looking for gold and families hoping to make the high country of Colorado their homes. Sharp-eyed passengers may spot the pathway of the early trains as they examine the rocky walls along the highway near Grant and be able to trace the old railroad beds all along the highway even into Chaffee County and Buena Vista. Near Lake George, in Eleven Mile Canyon the road follows the old standard gauge Colorado Midland rail bed right through three narrow tunnels. In Bailey's McGraw Park, railroad buffs can see the waiting station for Glen Isle where wealthy passengers dismounted to visit the still-thriving lodge and resort camp, and visit a bevy of 1800s depots in Jefferson, Como, Hartsel, and Buena Vista.

Though the speed limit is often 65 miles per hour, this is not a road that the savvy traveler should race through. Each community in the area has much to offer from art galleries to shops selling locally made goods and crafts, from casual hiking trails to rugged trails, from locally-run restaurants to picnic areas overlooking historic mining areas, from a scenic drive to challenging mountain roads, from bicycling paths to horseback riding across the open range. A local festival or celebration is not to be missed. These communities have no shortage of creativity and offer experiences not found anywhere else. (World famous burro races, music festivals featuring local talent that could compete with national performers, fishing tournaments, gem and mineral shows, bike races, fun runs and long distance runs, high altitude foot races, balloon rides, local mountain bike and world renowned road bike races, and just laid-back, local celebrations and concerts.

