



SPANISH PEAKS COUNTRY

visitor guide

— 2022 —

WELCOME TO SPANISH PEAKS COUNTRY



Spanish Peaks Country in Southern Colorado has drawn explorers, settlers, and visitors for centuries. Cut by a scenic highway wrapped in tales and tradition and packed with natural wonders, outdoor recreation, and artistic inspiration, this unique corner of Colorado is not only where legends roam... it's where they play, create, explore, and thrive.



PHOTO BY KELLY BURGESS

Experience the small-town charm of Walsenburg, La Veta, Gardner, and Cuchara. Get the “full stories” on the TravelStorys app with free, self-guided audio tours including a driving tour of the Highway of Legends and historic walking tours of Walsenburg, La Veta and Cuchara. Listen and be amazed by the people, events, and geological wonders that shaped Spanish Peaks Country.

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INFORMATION

SPANISH PEAKS COUNTRY WELCOME CENTER

400 Main Street, Suite A

Walsenburg, CO 81089

719.738.3000

SpanishPeaksCountry.com

hello@spanishpeakscountry.com

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GETTING HERE



- PUBLIC LANDS
- HIGHWAY OF LEGENDS
- POINT OF INTEREST
- STATE PARK OR WILDLIFE AREA

ALL DISTANCES ARE BASED ON A STARTING LOCATION OF WALSENBURG. MAP NOT TO SCALE.





OUR COMMUNITIES

CUCHARA


Cuchara is a charming mountain village tucked on the eastern slopes of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in the heart of the Cucharas River Valley.

Surrounded by the San Isabel National Forest with all its lakes, mountains, and wilderness, this village is a favorite respite for Colorado hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts. At the heart of Cuchara is a charming downtown area with colorful shops, restaurants, and lodging, and nearby Cuchara Mountain Park offers year-round opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Cuchara offers wonderful views of dramatic West Spanish Peak, one of two geological towers once used as guide-posts for traveling American Indians and pioneers.

GARDNER

Gardner is a small community halfway between the Wet Mountains and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in Upper Huerfano County. Settlers founded Gardner at the base of Gardner Butte, Muddy Creek, and along the Westcliffe/Silver Cliff and Walsenburg stage line. In the '60s and '70s, Gardner became an epicenter of the counterculture



movement. That influence continues throughout Spanish Peaks Country today.

LA VETA

La Veta sits on the eastern side of La Veta Pass and at the northern opening of the Cucharas River Valley. A busy trading center a century ago, La Veta is now known for its community of artists and ranchers and breathtaking scenery.

La Veta may be small and laid-back, but it's also the art hub of Spanish Peaks Country. Galleries featuring local, national, and international artists dot La Veta's quaint Main Street.

Visit La Veta in June for the Spanish Peaks Country Fest, in July for Art in the Park, or during the first weekend in October to experience La Veta Oktoberfest, a more

than 30-year-old tradition featuring a German Biergarten and dancing in the streets.

WALSENBURG

With I-25, Highway 160, and Highway 10 meeting in Walsenburg, this quaint, Southern Colorado gem is a popular stop for travelers who delight in its small-town charm, history, and natural wonders.

Visitors enjoy Walsenburg's antique shops, the Walsenburg Mining Museum, the Museum of Friends, and the Walsenburg Golf Course. Walsenburg is also adjacent to Lathrop State Park, a favorite destination for boating, swimming, hiking, and more.

Walsenburg was originally settled as La Plaza de los Leones in 1852 but is named after Fred Walsen, a businessman who settled here around 1870. It was Fred who opened the first coal mine in the county just west of town in 1876. Walsen Mine was the largest and most productive coal mine in Huerfano County.

Cool fact: Robert Ford, outlaw Jesse James' assassin, operated a combination saloon and gambling house in Walsenburg.



ANNUAL EVENTS

JUNE

HUAJATOLLA HERITAGE FESTIVAL

A special multi-day event in Spanish Peaks County that honors the area's Hispanic and Native American cultures.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN STAR STARE

A premier star party for individuals of all ages and all skill levels looking for an educational, astronomical activity in a pristine outdoor Colorado environment.

SONIC BLOOM FESTIVAL

Hummingbird Ranch is home to the Sonic Bloom Festival, one of the longest-running music festivals in Colorado and a mecca for electronic and jam band fans alike.

SPANISH PEAKS COUNTRY FEST

Spanish Peaks Country Fest is the premier country music festival in Southern Colorado. It welcomes guests to experience the biggest artists playing at the foot of the beautiful Spanish Peaks.

JULY

FRANCISCO FORT DAY

A day filled with fun that includes bed races, duck races, a chicken drop, activities for kids, performers, and a craft and food market. Enjoy traditional art demonstrations like blacksmithing, baking, and wool spinning.

ART IN THE PARK

During this art festival, all kinds of handmade arts, crafts, jewelry, apparel, paintings, ceramics, wood, and more are available for purchase. Enjoy music and great food at this weekend event.

FOURTH OF JULY

Celebrate the Fourth of July throughout Spanish Peaks Country. Cuchara, La Veta, and Walsenburg host events for the whole family!

AUGUST

GARDNER CHUCKWAGON SUPPER

Each summer, hundreds of old friends from throughout the nation travel to Gardner to eat a chuckwagon-style meal, reminisce about old times, and

enjoy pleasant camaraderie during the annual event.

STONEWALL CENTURY RIDE

A challenging road bike ride along one of Colorado's most beautiful scenic highways. Join the race and enjoy some of the best road biking Southern Colorado has to offer.

MARATHON OF LEGENDS

This running race is a team relay, which means teams can be made up of 2 to 11 members who split the 26.2-mile course any way they choose. Runners can run a single leg or as many as ten.

DOG DAYS OF CUCHARA

Bring your dog, dress up like a dog, or wear a crazy hat. Anything goes! This street party and parade offer live music, a family parade, kids' games, big and little dog races, face painting, a photo booth, a dog jog, and more.

SEPTEMBER

SPANISH PEAKS INTERNATIONAL CELTIC MUSIC FESTIVAL

Become enchanted by world-renowned Celtic artists and scholars guaranteed to keep you singing, dancing, and enjoying music day and night in various locations throughout Spanish Peaks Country.

MOUNTAIN MINING DAYS

Enjoy an end of summer celebration at Miners Plaza in Walsenburg. The fun starts with a downtown parade featuring marching bands, horses, collectible cars, and more. Along 6th street, food and artisan vendors, a kids' zone with fun games, face painting, and other activities await.

SPANISH PEAKS HARP RETREAT

Harpists come from around the globe for classes and workshops with world-renowned Celtic harpists that last from five to 10 hours each. With a very low pupil to teacher ratio, these classes provide opportunities to connect with each other and the instructors.

OCTOBER

LA VETA OKTOBERFEST

This incredible day includes a car show, a German band, dancing in the streets, over 60 arts, crafts, and food vendors, a Veteran's tribute, and a German Biergarten.

NOVEMBER

HOLIDAY PARADE OF LIGHTS

Come to Spanish Peaks Country for a themed light parade that ushers in the holiday season in downtown Walsenburg.



ATTRACTIONS

MISSION: WOLF

Mission: Wolf is a peaceful sanctuary for captive wolves and wolf-dog crosses in the mountains of Spanish Peaks Country. They are given a second chance at a happy life while also acting as ambassadors for the quarter of a million wolves currently in captivity.

Volunteers teach visitors how wild wolves are vital to a healthy ecosystem. The main goal, however, is to educate the public about resolving conflicts between humans and wolves with the hope of ensuring a better future for wolves.

LATHROP STATE PARK

Colorado's first state park, Lathrop State Park features two lakes and nearly 1,600 acres of recreational land nestled among the piñons and junipers of the Spanish Peaks' foothills. Martin Lake offers water skiing, power and sail boating, and swimming. Horseshoe Lake is a peaceful haven for canoeists, kayakers, and other wakeless boaters.

Lathrop State Park's Hogback Nature Trail is one of the area's most popular hiking trails, and when visitors are done with their hike, they'll often relax on the



park's beach or hang out on the rocks. There is also a playground for the kids.

CUCHARA MOUNTAIN PARK

Opening in 1981 as Panadero ski area, the Cuchara Mountain Park was purchased by Huerfano County in 2017 using funds raised by the Cuchara Foundation. The park is roughly 50 acres, mostly at the base of the old ski resort. Volunteers have rehabbed the former ski rental office into a day lodge that is open selected weekends and holidays to visitors. The remainder of the park is open to the public and

provides access to National Forest Service land. The park has a disc golf course and hosts events such as running races, archery competitions, and full moon snowshoe hikes.

BISHOP CASTLE

Bishop Castle is an elaborate and intricate one-man project named after its constructor, Jim Bishop. Tucked in the trees, visitors will discover a frontier fortress made of stone collected from the surrounding San Isabel National Forest.



PHOTO BY SMANGOLD PHOTOGRAPHY

The castle reaches over 16 stories high, has three large cathedral windows, wrought iron walkways, and a steel fire-breathing dragon. Bishop Castle is always open and free to the public. The castle dragon is fired up on weekends Memorial Day through Labor Day.

THE GREAT SAND DUNES NATIONAL PARK AND PRESERVE

Nestled in Southern Colorado, the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve features North America's tallest dunes, which rise over 750 feet high against the rugged Sangre de Cristo Mountains. This fragile and complex ecosystem is an outdoor playground unlike any other.

Aside from hiking the dunes, visitors also surf them on a sand sled or sandboard. In late May, Medano Creek runs at its peak flow, making it a terrific time to splash, wade, and float in the cool, snowmelt waters.

MONUMENT LAKE

At 100-acre, stocked Monument Lake, you'll find northern pike, catfish, brown trout, green sunfish, rainbow trout, bream/bluegill, perch, and sucker.





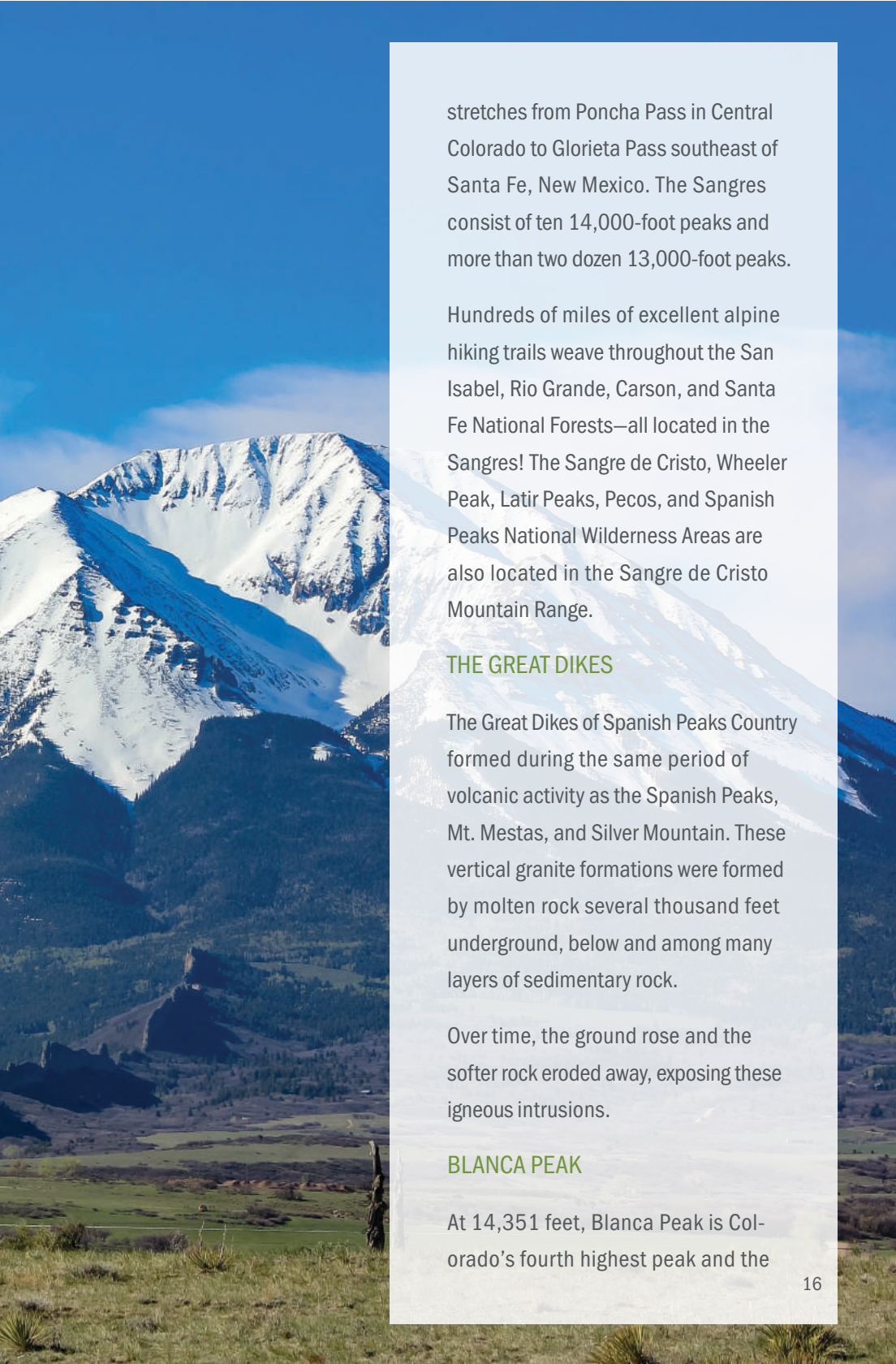
MOUNTAINS & GEOLOGY

THE SPANISH PEAKS

The Spanish Peaks are prime examples of stocks and dikes, which are made of magma that came from the mantle beneath the Earth's crust and surged upward into cracks about 25 million years ago. When the magma cooled and hardened beneath the Earth's surface, it formed into the Spanish Peaks. The peaks have inspired many legends and a wide variety of names. The Ute, a Native American tribe, called them Huajatolla, meaning two elders or guardians. Spanish-speakers called them Dos Hermanos, or two brothers. Today most people just call them the East Peak and the West Peak.

THE SANGRE DE CRISTO MOUNTAIN RANGE

The Sangre de Cristo Mountain Range is one of the longest ranges on Earth. It



stretches from Poncha Pass in Central Colorado to Glorieta Pass southeast of Santa Fe, New Mexico. The Sangres consist of ten 14,000-foot peaks and more than two dozen 13,000-foot peaks.

Hundreds of miles of excellent alpine hiking trails weave throughout the San Isabel, Rio Grande, Carson, and Santa Fe National Forests—all located in the Sangres! The Sangre de Cristo, Wheeler Peak, Latir Peaks, Pecos, and Spanish Peaks National Wilderness Areas are also located in the Sangre de Cristo Mountain Range.

THE GREAT DIKES

The Great Dikes of Spanish Peaks Country formed during the same period of volcanic activity as the Spanish Peaks, Mt. Mestas, and Silver Mountain. These vertical granite formations were formed by molten rock several thousand feet underground, below and among many layers of sedimentary rock.

Over time, the ground rose and the softer rock eroded away, exposing these igneous intrusions.

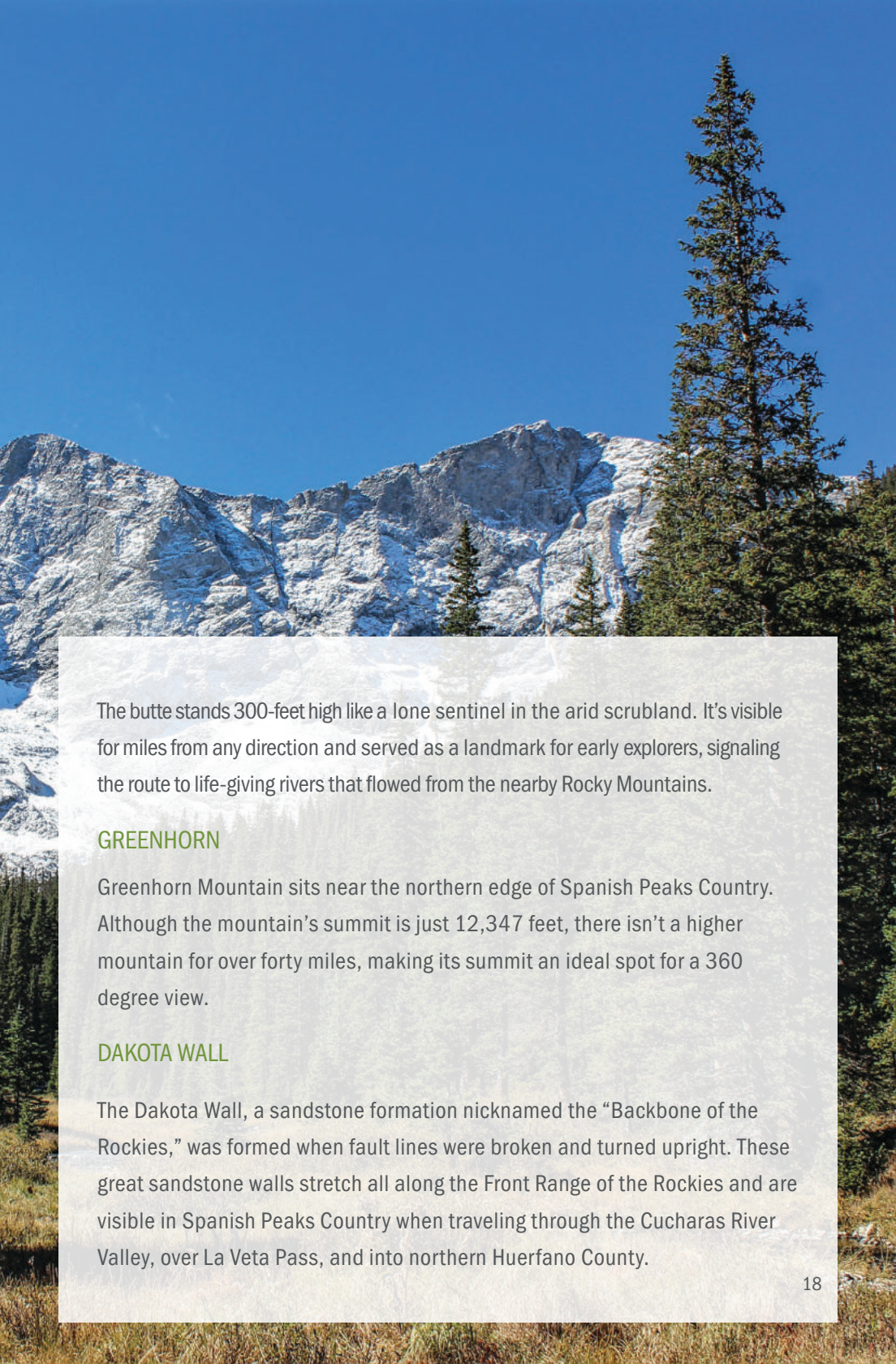
BLANCA PEAK

At 14,351 feet, Blanca Peak is Colorado's fourth highest peak and the

highest summit of the Sierra Blanca Massif and the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. It lies approximately 20 miles northeast of Alamosa and approximately 15 miles southeast of the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve. Several major creeks flow from Mt. Blanca's Peak—Holbrook Creek, Huerfano River, Blanca Creek, and Little Ute Creek.

HUERFANO BUTTE

Huerfano Butte lies ten miles north of Walsenburg, just off Highway I-25, and is a conical-shaped circular plug that draws hundreds of visitors every year. Surrounded by rolling hills of sagebrush and sparse grass, it seems out of place as it rises from the ground.



The butte stands 300-feet high like a lone sentinel in the arid scrubland. It's visible for miles from any direction and served as a landmark for early explorers, signaling the route to life-giving rivers that flowed from the nearby Rocky Mountains.

GREENHORN

Greenhorn Mountain sits near the northern edge of Spanish Peaks Country. Although the mountain's summit is just 12,347 feet, there isn't a higher mountain for over forty miles, making its summit an ideal spot for a 360 degree view.

DAKOTA WALL

The Dakota Wall, a sandstone formation nicknamed the "Backbone of the Rockies," was formed when fault lines were broken and turned upright. These great sandstone walls stretch all along the Front Range of the Rockies and are visible in Spanish Peaks Country when traveling through the Cucharas River Valley, over La Veta Pass, and into northern Huerfano County.

A mural of a Native American man with a horned headdress is painted on a brick wall. The man has a serious expression and is looking slightly to the right. The headdress is dark with two prominent, curved horns. The background of the mural is a textured, brownish-gold color. The brick wall is made of reddish-brown bricks with dark mortar lines. The overall scene is lit with warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise.


THE HIGHWAY OF LEGENDS

State Highway 12, the Scenic Highway of Legends, ties Walsenburg, La Veta, Cuchara, Stonewall, Trinidad, and Aguilar together with a ribbon of asphalt that journeys through some of the nation's most beautiful national forests, state parks, wildlife areas, and mountain ranges.

Highway 12 was designated a Colorado State Byway in 1987, a National Forest Byway in 1988, and a National Scenic Byway in 2021. The Scenic Highway of Legends starts at the cities of Trinidad, Aguilar, and Walsenburg.

The Byway takes visitors through the San Isabel National Forest and crosses the 9,994-foot Cucharas Pass and the 11,248-foot Cordova Pass.

The Byway is home to unique geological, cultural, and historic features and includes a myriad of legends from the Native Americans, Spanish Conquistadors, and pioneers, miners, trappers, and ranchers who explored and settled this region.



The Highway of Legends features unique geologic formations known as dikes—sheets of rock formed in a fracture of pre-existing rock body. Up to 400 of these rock formations dot the route and are easily spotted as they extend up from the earth like spokes on a wheel.

THE HIGHWAY OF LEGENDS AUDIO TOUR

Download the TravelStorys App and experience the Legends of Spanish Peaks Country. This loop will take you up into the mountains at 10,000 feet and down into the flat plains. You'll drive through historic cities and towns, former mining camps, and even a few ghost towns.

You'll find out about the ancient geologic changes that have formed the surrounding landscape over millennia and hear tales of the old West, with its covered wagon trains and gun battles.

GET OUTDOORS

HIKING

Hiking abounds with trails crisscrossing the countryside from north to south. The Hogback Nature Trail in Lathrop State Park and Lily Lake Trail north of Walsenburg are some of the region's most popular trails. In La Veta, many people head to the Wahatoya Lakes State Wildlife Area for a hike around the Wahatoya Lake and Daigre Reservoirs. Cuchara, with its lush pine forest, is made for hiking, and some of the locals' favorite hikes start at Blue and Bear Lakes. Learn more at lavetatrails.org.

FISHING

With a wide range of waters, from high mountain lakes and streams to rivers, reservoirs, and lakes, you'll find a variety of cold and warm water fish. Popular fishing holes include Lathrop State Park, Wahatoya Lake and Daigre Reservoir, Blue and Bear Lakes, and North Lake.

BIKING

Whether you're into a mellow ride or something more intense, the towns

of Walsenburg, La Veta, and Cuchara have the trail for you. Take your cruiser or road bike on the Cuerno Verde Trail in Lathrop State Park or test your mountain biking skills on Baker Trail #1301. Other options include our dirt and gravel roads ideal for gravel biking.

OHVING

Relieve stress, enjoy Southern Colorado's great weather, and have loads of fun on a four-wheeling adventure. Spanish Peaks Country offers miles of trails for the novice and experienced rider. Popular OHV (off-highway vehicle) areas include Cuchara Recreation Area, Cordova Pass, Greehorn Mountain Trails, and Medano Pass Primitive Road.

CAMPING

There are plenty of places to pitch a tent or set up your camper in Spanish Peaks Country. Down near Cuchara, Blue and Bear Lakes and Purgatoire Campground offer beautiful mountain views. Stay close to Walsenburg and camp at Lathrop State Park or head north and camp at Aspen Acres Campground or La Vista Campground.

HUNTING

There are several areas for hunting within Spanish Peaks Country; GMUs 84, 861, and 85 are popular, as well as the Wahatoya State Wildlife Area. Wildlife range from black bears, mountain lions, and elk to rabbits, turkeys, and doves. Many areas are only accessible by foot or horseback, making for a quiet experience ideal for bagging a big one.

DARK SKIES

There are few places better for stargazing than Spanish Peaks Country. With a county-wide lighting ordinance limiting atmospheric light pollution and a plethora of public lands, this part of Colorado has some of the brightest stars in the state. Head to

the Southern Colorado Astronomical Park to catch the Milky Way or even a falling star!

HORSEBACK RIDING

Bring your horse to the 2-mile Equestrian Trail at Lathrop State Park or book a horseback riding trip with the historic Yellow Pine Ranch

LEAVE NO TRACE

Those of us in Spanish Peaks County highly value earth stewardship. We also value our visitors. Yet, we value them even more when they're careful to leave no trace during their outdoor adventures. We ask that anyone who visits and enjoys the outdoors in Spanish Peaks County follows the best practices to protect our natural spaces and leave minimum impact.

PHOTO BY BOB VIXIE



ART, MUSIC, AND CULTURE

WALSENBURG MINING MUSEUM

Walsenburg was called the “City Built on Coal” during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and nowhere else in Spanish Peaks County will give you as much opportunity to learn why than the Walsenburg Mining Museum located in the 1896 Jail. Follow the battles between the coal miners and mine operators, examine artifacts associated with the mining industry, and walk among dioramas depicting mining life.

MUSEUM OF FRIENDS

The Museum of Friends (MoF), located in historic downtown Walsenburg, is a Contemporary Art Museum incorporated in 2007 by artists Brendt Berger and Maria Cocchiarelli. The museum’s name stems from the fact that the initial 500-piece collection of paintings, photographs, and sculptures were gifts to Brendt and Maria from friends. Today, friends



and new artists continue to donate their work, expanding the permanent collection to over 1,600 works of art.

FRANCISCO FORT MUSEUM

The Francisco Fort Museum in downtown La Veta houses artifacts representing multiple eras of Spanish Peaks Country's history, including American, Spanish settler, and pioneer artifacts. More specifically, visitors to the museum will view weapons, wagons, saddles, clothing, a one-room schoolhouse, and a saloon from Old La Veta's Main Street containing the bullet-scarred bar owned by Bob Ford after he shot Jesse James.

FRANCISCO CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Performances continue year-round at the Francisco Center for the Performing Arts. Advance tickets to Francisco Center for the Performing Arts' shows, when made available, normally go on sale online approximately four weeks before the first show date.

LA VETA SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS

With well-known, respected instructors, La Veta School for the Arts has established a strong reputation for

offering quality, educational, and artistic experiences in one of the most breathtaking parts of Colorado.

Workshops include anything from photography and painting to more unique offerings like Navajo sand painting and bronze clay jewelry making.

LA VETA CREATIVE DISTRICT

La Veta was designated a Colorado Creative District in 2021 as art galleries featuring local, national, and international artists dot La Veta's quaint Main Street.

FOX THEATRE WALSENBURG

The Fox Theatre, a Walsenburg historic landmark, dates back to 1917 when it was named the Star Theatre. Upon its opening, the Walsenburg World reported, "Besides being a high-class picture show-house, the Star is now Walsenburg's largest and best-equipped hall for plays, vaudeville, or conventions."

Today, The Fox Theatre fosters, promotes, and increases the public knowledge and appreciation of the arts and cultural activities in Southern Colorado by playing movies and hosting live music and events.



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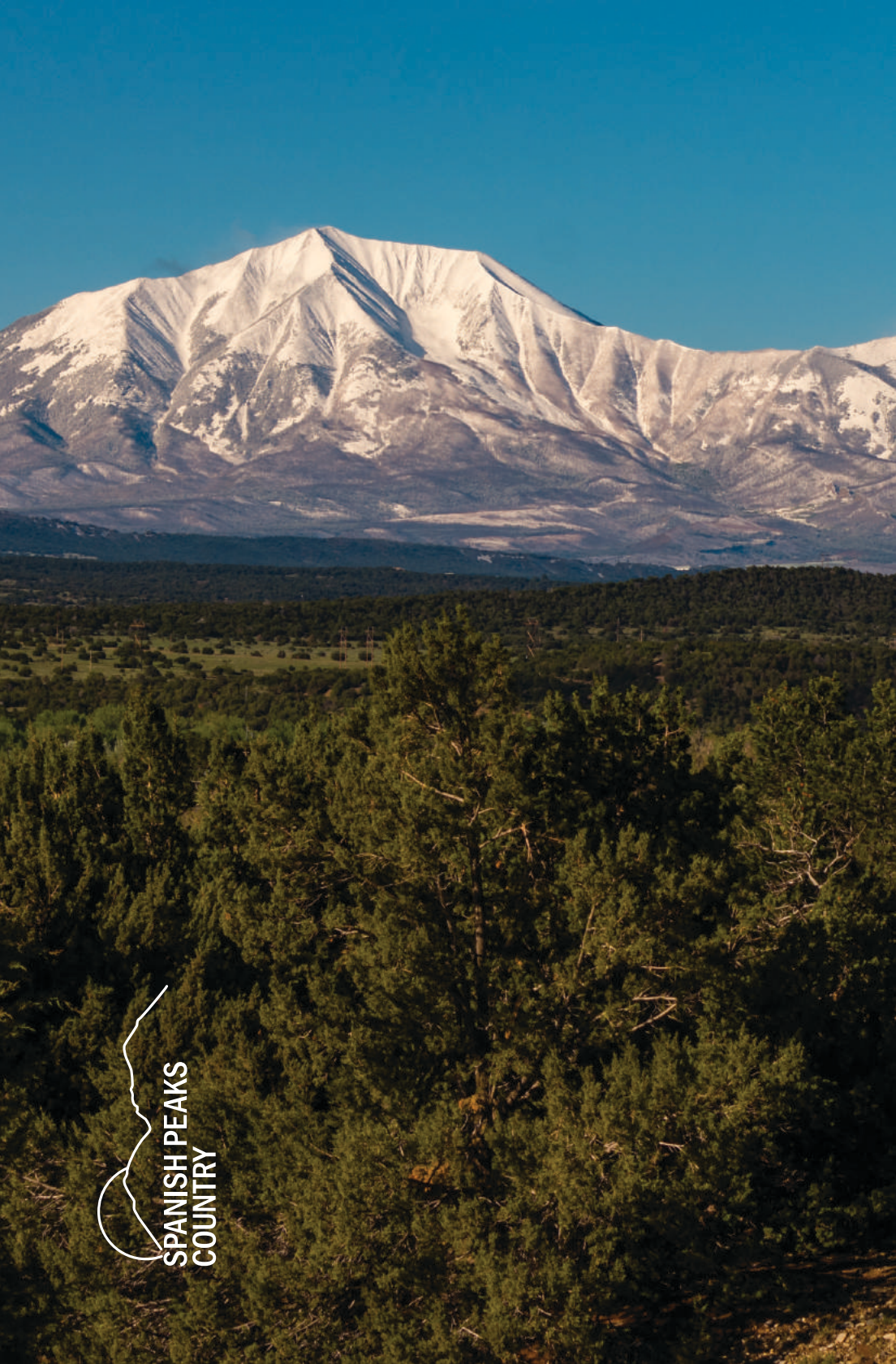
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