

Colorado Historic Highway Inventory - Historical Summary and Evaluation of Significance

Highway Name: State Highway (SH) 135

CDOT Route Nos. and Milepost (MP) Limits:

<i>CDOT Route</i>	<i>Route Description</i>
135A	From SH 50-A in Gunnison north via Almont To Elk Ave in Crested Butte

Highway Location:

Counties: Gunnison
 Length (Miles): 27.31

OAHP Site Numbers (for previously recorded segments, if applicable)*:

<i>OAHP Site No.</i>	<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Assessment Date</i>	<i>Site Name</i>
5GN.1772	No assessment given on form	1/1/1976	PEARL PASS STAGE ROAD
5GN.1772.1	Officially needs data>Field needs data	11/06/1992>09/22/1992	PEARL PASS STAGE ROAD, STATE HIGHWAY 135

Discussion of Site Forms (for previously recorded segments, if applicable):

Two Colorado Cultural Resources Inventory forms for previously recorded segments of this highway, including 5GN.1772 and 5GN.1772.1, were identified in Compass. Both of these resources correspond to the Pearl Pass Stage Road. Based on information on the site forms, it is unknown if Pearl Pass State Road corresponds to SH 135. The inventory form for 5GN.1772 indicates that no eligibility assessment was made to date while the form for 5GN.1772.1 indicates that more data is required and no assessment was made. SH 135 also passes through the Town of Crested Butte and the Crested Butte Historic District (5GN.271), which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974 and amended in 2002.

Historic Districts located within 250 feet of highway (OAHP Site Number and Name)*:

<i>OAHP Site No.</i>	<i>District Name</i>	<i>Assessment (If Applicable)</i>
5GN.271		Listed on National Register

**Information based on data from Compass provided by OAHP*

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Historical Data:

SH 135 is approximately 27 miles long and extends north from US 50 to Elk Avenue in downtown Crested Butte. This region of Colorado is a mountainous and owes much of its history to mining. The earliest transportation corridors were wagon roads that often followed trails established by Native Americans, explorers, fur trappers, and traders; however, research did not indicate this highway followed an early trail or wagon road. The Colorado Gold Rush of 1859 brought an influx of people to the region in search of fortune and led to the establishment of mining camps throughout the area to supply activities at the mines and those working in the mines. Crested Butte, like the better known towns of Silverton, Placerville, and Ouray began as mining camps and supply centers for mining districts. Crested Butte was incorporated in 1880 and first established as a supply center for nearby hard rock mining camps. A spur of the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad was completed between Gunnison and Crested Butte in 1881, which led to expansion of the town and facilitating the coal mining industry. The coal mining industry boomed during the 1880s and 1890s leading the Colorado Fuel & Iron (CF&I) to purchase land in Crested Butte to provide company housing. Most of the coal was shipped to Pueblo for steel production. (Colorado State Planning Commission 1941; 141; Ubbelohde et al 2006; 175-177; History of Crested Butte; McTighe 1989; 298-299).

Early roads in the region were often built to serve and connect mining camps with nearby mining districts and communities for the movement of people and the transfer of commercial and agricultural goods. The sometimes narrow and rocky canyons combined with the altitude of this mountainous region made road building expensive, dangerous, and difficult. To help finance road construction, toll roads were common in the late nineteenth century prior to the establishment of the Colorado Highway Department. Local residents would often pool resources to build roads. Other roads were financed by wealthy individuals such as Otto Mears, an important figure in the history of road-building in southwestern Colorado. Mears constructed early toll roads between Saguache and Lake City, over Poncha Pass, and between Ouray and Silverton. His influence on road-building in southwestern Colorado is best represented by the construction of the Million Dollar Highway, current U.S. Highway (US) 550, which reflects early and bold efforts to establish roads in the region employing innovative engineering to meet the challenges of the terrain and altitude. Examples of other roads that reflect notable early road-building efforts to traverse mountainous areas of the state, such early crossings of the continental divide, include SH 9, 17, 84, 160, and 389 among others. (Ubbelohde et al 2006; 175-177; Wyckoff 1999; 53-54). The Denver and Rio Grande Railroad between Gunnison and Crested Butte remained until 1955 when the railroad removed the tracks following the closure of the major coal mine in the area. (Ubbelohde et al 2006; 175-177; Wyckoff 1999; 53, Colorado State Planning Commission 1941; 423-425; History of Crested Butte).

The Good Roads Movement and establishment of the Colorado Highway Department in the first decades of the twentieth century led to the establishment of a highway network throughout the region and state (Carter and Mehls 1984: 138-141). Historic state highway maps indicate a road between Crested Butte and Gunnison was constructed by 1916 and paralleled the railroad on the east side, following the contours of the railroad. The road also continued west to Hotchkiss over Kebler Pass beginning in 1916. The route between SH 92 at Hotchkiss and US 50 at Gunnison was designated SH 135 by 1926. By 1954 a gap in SH 135 existed between Bardine and Crested Butte. Around 1970 the former section of SH 135 between SH 92 and Bardine was renumbered as an extension of SH 133.

Road building in mountainous areas addressed challenging terrain and high altitude passes; however, no information was found to indicate the design, engineering, or construction of this highway differed from other roads in the region. This road was one of many that functioned to supply and support towns and area industries by providing links to regional transportation corridors, towns, and cities. Research, literature review, and historic mapping does not indicate that this highway provided direct access to destinations related to important historic themes. SH 135 historically comprised one component of the overall transportation network by linking to other highways, most notably US 50, and providing access to regional and local destinations.

(Unless otherwise indicated, sources used in the preparation of this section included state highway maps, the Highways of Colorado by Matthew Salek, Highways to the Sky: A Context and History of Colorado's Highway System, Colorado State Roads and Highways, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Submission, plans in the Online Transportation Information System (OTIS), and site forms for previously surveyed resources in Compass when available.)

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Not Significant - No historical significance identified
 Significant - Historical significance identified (see details below)

Property Type and Areas of Significance:

A detailed explanation why this highway possesses historical significance is provided in the Significance Statement below.

Cultural:

Criterion A specific requirements

- Early and/or prominent project of the Colorado Highway Department (Transportation)
- Association with a significant event (If applicable, the Area of Significance is indicated in the statement of significance below)
- Association with federal work relief programs (Politics/Government)

Criterion C specific requirements

- Representative example (Transportation)

Engineering:

Subtypes

- Farm-to-Market Road
- Limited Access, Multiple-Lane, Divided Highway/Freeway
- Highway Bypass

Criterion A specific requirements

- Early and/or prominent project of the Colorado Highway Department (Transportation)
- Association with a significant event (If applicable, the Area of Significance is indicated in the statement of significance below)
- Association with federal work relief programs (Politics/Government)

Criterion C specific requirements

- Representative example (Transportation)
- Engineering achievement (Engineering)

Aesthetic:

Criterion A specific requirements

- Early and/or prominent project of the Colorado Highway Department (Transportation)
- Association with a significant event (If applicable, the Area of Significance is indicated in the statement of significance below)
- Association with federal work relief programs (Politics/Government)

Criterion C specific requirements

- Representative example (Transportation)
- Engineering achievement (Engineering)
- Landscape architecture (Landscape Architecture)

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Historic periods of highway construction:

- Pre-territorial (pre-1861)
- Territorial and pre-automobile state roads (1861-1890)
- Automobile age (1890-1930)
- Depression and World War II (1930-1945)
- Postwar Interstate Era (1945-1973)
- Completion and Augmentation of Interstate System (1973-2000)

Level of Significance:

- Local
- State
- National

Significance Statement:

SH 135 is classified as an Engineered Route under the classification system in the MPS.

Criterion A

The road corridor that eventually became SH 135 was constructed by 1916, just a few years after the establishment of the Colorado Highway Department (CHD). Although it was constructed in the early years of the CHD, no evidence suggests that it was a prominent transportation route that provided a direct connection to destinations related to important historic themes. Access for mining activities and was provided by the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad by 1881 which served the area until the 1950s; similarly access to the CF&I housing during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is also more strongly associated with the railroad rather than SH 135. While the route provided vehicular access to Crested Butte, no evidence suggests SH 135 was constructed and facilitated the area's coal mining industry in an important way since most of the coal was shipped via rail. At one point the road also crossed Kebler Pass but this portion of the road is no longer designated as part of SH 135 and research did not indicate that its construction or engineering are distinguished from other mountain pass roads in the region. No evidence suggests that the route was built or improved as part of a Depression-era federal relief program or that it served as an important farm-to-market road or was pivotal in the transfer of agricultural goods or livestock within the region. As such, SH 135 does not possess significance under Criterion A.

Criterion B

Research did not reveal this highway to be directly associated with the events or work of a person important in history, nor does research indicate the highway represents the efforts of a specific individual to secure construction of this highway for the economic development of a community or area of the state. Therefore, this highway does not possess significance under Criterion B.

Criterion C

Research and literature review yielded no evidence to indicate the use of innovative or important engineering techniques that serve to distinguish this highway from other roads within mountainous areas of the state. The highway's design and construction appear to have utilized techniques common to other roads in mountainous areas. Overall this highway appears to reflect the standard types of design and construction practices and it does not appear to possess significance under Criterion C.

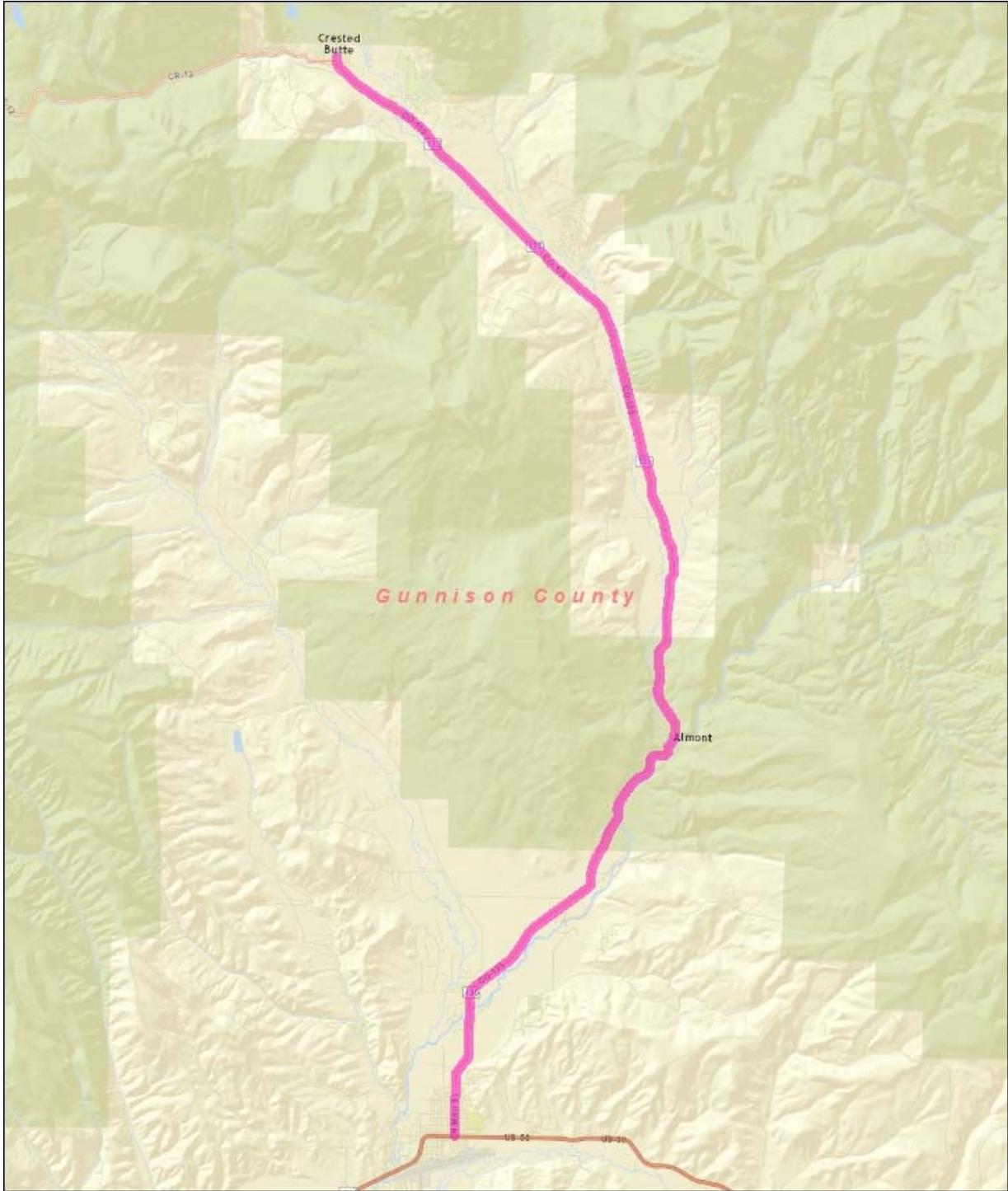
Criterion D

For a property to possess significance for information potential, the information yielded by the property must answer specific important research questions that cannot be otherwise answered. The technology of highway construction is well understood and documented. As such, this highway is unlikely to yield important information that cannot be discerned from archived plans and other records. Therefore, this highway does not possess significance under Criterion D.

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- SH 135
- County Boundary

SH 135



Map indicates the extent of the highway based on CDOT GIS data; portions co-signed with other highways may not be indicated.