

Colorado Historic Highway Inventory - Historical Summary and Evaluation of Significance

Highway Name: State Highway (SH) 149

CDOT Route Nos. and Milepost (MP) Limits:

<i>CDOT Route</i>	<i>Route Description</i>
149A	From SH 160-A at South Fork Northwest via Creede and Lake City To SH 50-A west of Gunnison

Highway Location:

Counties: Gunnison, Hinsdale, Mineral, Rio Grande

Length (Miles): 116.774

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.5950.2	Field not eligible	8/16/2011	OLD SPANISH TRAIL (NORTHERN BRANCH) / SAGUACHE & SAN JUAN TOLL ROAD - SEGMENT

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

One Colorado Cultural Resources Inventory form (5GN5950.2) for previously recorded segments of this highway was identified in Compass - the Northern Branch of the Old Spanish Trail/segment of Saguache & San Juan Toll Road (5GN5950.2) This resource dates to the nineteenth century and was determined not eligible through field review in 2011. According to the inventory form no intact portions of the trail exist due to improvements by wagon roads and SH 149. SH 149 passes through the Lake City Historic District (5HN.68) along Gunnison Avenue in Lake City, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978 under Criterion A and Criterion C in the areas of Commerce, Architecture, and Entertainment/Recreation.

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>
5HN.68		Listed on National Register

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

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Historical Data:

SH 149 is approximately 117 miles long and stretches south from U.S. Highway (US) 50, west of Gunnison, at the eastern end of Blue Mesa Reservoir, southeast through Lake City and Creede to US 160 at South Fork. Southwestern Colorado is a mountainous region that owes much of its history to mining. The earliest transportation corridors in southwest Colorado were wagon roads that often followed trails established by Native Americans, explorers, fur trappers, and traders; however this highway is not associated with any known trails. Later, the Colorado Gold Rush of 1859 brought an influx of people to Colorado's southwestern region in search of fortune and led to the establishment of mining camps through the area to supply activities at the mines and those working there and local agricultural activities to support these activities. Towns throughout the region like Silverton, Placerville, and Ouray began as mining camps and supply centers for mining districts. Ouray was established in 1875 and boomed throughout the 1880s after silver deposits were discovered in nearby hills. SH 149 passes through Creede, established in 1890 and was among the last silver mining towns established before the Panic of 1893. Agricultural activities persisted in the mountain valleys throughout the area, including cattle ranching. (Colorado State Planning Commission 1941; 141; Ubbelohde et al 2006; 163, 175-177).

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 and founder of Lake City, which he envisioned as a transportation center. SH 149 passes through Lake City. 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 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 mountain areas of the state, such as early crossings of the continental divide, including SH 9, 17, 84, 160, and 389, among others. (Ubbelohde et al 2006; 175-177; Wyckoff 1999; 53-54; McTighe 1989; 245)

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 along the general corridor of present-day SH 149 by 1916. The road was designated SH 149 by 1926. A 1940s guidebook sponsored by the Colorado State Planning Commission and compiled by the Writer's Program of the World Projects Administration includes SH 149. The guidebook characterizes the route stating: "State 149, a back-country road, traverses a rugged region where game and fish abound." The book also promotes the route as a tourist destination noting the good accommodations available for travelers, including free campgrounds. According to Salek, the middle portion between Creede and Lake City was turned back by 1954. By 1964 the route was extended southwest from Creede over gravel to the Spar City turnoff. Blue Mesa Reservoir was constructed in 1966 and the highway's northern end was realigned at that time. Several changes occurred in the late 1960s and 1970s; SH 149 was extended from Lake City to Spring Creek Pass by 1970 and approximately six miles southwest of the Spar City turnoff by 1974. The entire route was in place as it is today and paved by 1984.

(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 149 is classified as an Engineered Route under the classification system in the MPS.

Criterion A

The road corridor that eventually became SH 149 was constructed by 1916, just a few years after the establishment of the Colorado Highway Department (CHD), and represents an early project completed by the CHD that possesses significance under Criterion A in the area of Transportation at the state level. The route is also considered a prominent project of the CHD because it passes directly through Lake City, envisioned as a transportation center by its founder, road-builder Otto Mears, and promoted as a specific route for automobile tourists by the middle of the twentieth century in a WPA 1940 guidebook, noting such features as accommodations and free campgrounds. The highway also passes through the Lake City Historic District and likely contributes to the significance of the district for its role in facilitating commerce at the local level. For these reasons, SH 149 possesses significance under Criterion A in the areas of Transportation and Entertainment/Recreation at the state level and in the area of Commerce at the local level.

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. Research did not indicate that the road has an important association to mining or industry that distinguishes it from other roads in the region in other areas of significance.

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.

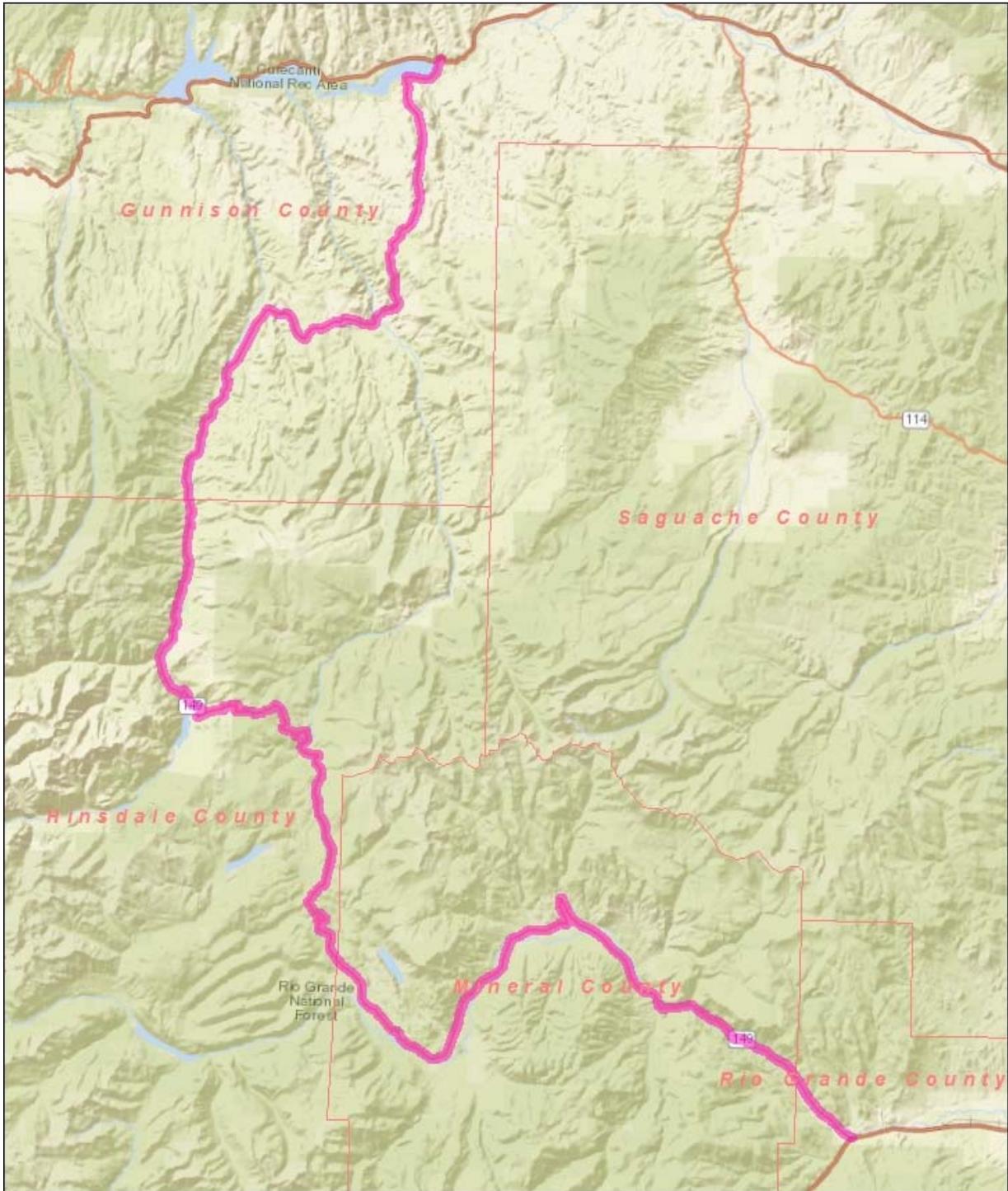
Criterion D

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.

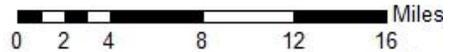
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- SH 149
- County Boundary

SH 149

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