

Colorado Historic Highway Inventory - Historical Summary and Evaluation of Significance

Highway Name: State Highway (SH) 12

CDOT Route Nos. and Milepost (MP) Limits:

<i>CDOT Route</i>	<i>Route Description</i>
012A	From U.S. 160-A southwest of Walsenburg south via La Veta, Cuchara, and Monument Park and east via Weston To I 25-A in Trinidad

Highway Location:

Counties: Huerfano, Las Animas

Length (Miles): 70.395

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>
5HF.543	Officially needs data>Field not eligible	09/15/2006>06/01/1981	CUCHARA PASS
5LA.10825.1	Officially needs data>Field not eligible	12/23/2004>11/09/2004	
5LA.10828.1	Field needs data	8/13/2004	STATE HIGHWAY 12 (SEGMENT)

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

Three site forms in Compass, 5LA.10828.1, 5LA.10825.1, and 5HF.543, correspond to SH 12. The National Register of Historic Places (National Register) determination for both 5LA.10828.1 and 5LA.10825.1 in 2004 was that more data was needed to make an official determination. Cucharas Pass (5HF.543) was previously documented in 1981 and 2006 as a geologic feature between the Cucharas and Purgatoire Rivers watersheds that was used as a travel route by Native Americans, the Spanish, and locals. Cucharas Pass carries SH 12 and the National Register determination in 2006 for Cucharas Pass stated it was potentially eligible pending a more complete investigation of the pass summit. In addition, SH 12 passes through portions of two National Register of Historic Places-listed historic districts. At its eastern terminus the highway extends through a portion of the Corazon de Trinidad Historic District (5LA.2179) in downtown Trinidad, which is significant in the areas of Urban Planning and Commerce under Criterion A for its association with the growth of the city’s business district as well as Criterion C for its collection of nineteenth century architecture. West of Trinidad SH 12 bisects the Cokedale Historic District (5LA.5782), a former coal camp within the Raton Basic coal field, a region characterized by large amounts of recoverable coal.

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>
5LA.2179		Listed on National Register
5LA.5782		Listed on National Register

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

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Historical Data:

SH 12 is approximately 70 miles long and extends between Trinidad and U. S. Highway (US) 160 just north of La Veta. In Trinidad the highway extends east from Interstate (I)-25 along East Main Street, then turns north on Nevada Avenue and then west on North Animas Street. The road then makes several other turns before leaving Trinidad and extending through a mountainous area in San Isabel National Forest to its northern terminus at US 160.

Historically, the trails, highways, and rural roads that made up the transportation network in southern Colorado facilitated travel through this sparsely-populated region that consisted of agricultural crops and pastures for livestock and mountain to the west. Settlement in this part of the state occurred in the early 1800s in part as a result of regional trade along the Santa Fe and Cherokee Trails, whose routes generally followed the Arkansas River Valley and subsequently formed portions of the route of present-day US 50. The Santa Fe Trail was the earliest major east-west route through this region and remained as such until the 1920s when highways such as former SH 100 (current US 160) and present-day US 287, US 350 and US 385, the major north-south arteries in this region, provided access to previously remote areas in the far southeastern corner of the state. The Santa Fe Trail extended directly through Trinidad and helped establish the city as a regional center for commerce. Trinidad was also located near Raton Pass, which led to New Mexico. The entry of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad into Colorado during the late nineteenth century resulted in the settlement and growth of additional towns in the region like La Junta, Las Animas, Lamar, and that prospered by providing a direct link for conveying commercial and agricultural goods between towns and larger markets as well as transporting industrial materials such as coal. The Denver and Rio Grande Railroad also became prominent in the region during the late nineteenth century.

The first coal mine in the area opened in 1867. In the latter half of the nineteenth century a series of mining and transport companies helped create a network of towns, railroads, and mines in southern Colorado based around the coal fields near Trinidad and Walsenburg. The construction of smelters and steel mills in nearby Pueblo helped fuel the demand for coal and its expansion throughout the region. This area developed into one of Colorado's primary sources for coal after the 1880s. The American Smelting and Refining Company developed Cokedale in 1906 as a mining community that included worker housing in addition to the infrastructure necessary for mining, including washing buildings and coke ovens. Cokedale was located within an area rich in recoverable coal in southern Colorado known as the Raton Basin coal field. (Emrich 1985: 7-1, 7-2). Coal mining remained an important activity in the region throughout much of the twentieth century. Most of the mining activities were generally located east of present-day SH 12 along a belt stretching north from Trinidad to Walsenburg. Trinidad developed into an important supply center for rural areas to the east and as a shipping point for coal and SH 12 provided a direct link between Cokedale and Trinidad (Noel et al 1994: 25, 29; Wyckoff 1999: 167-170; Colorado State Planning Commission, 1941: 192; Wyckoff 1999: 207-209).

Historic state highway maps indicate that a road along the general alignment of present-day SH 12 between Trinidad and Stonewall was constructed by 1916, and extended along the southern periphery of the coal mining areas and bisected the mining town of Cokedale. By 1926 SH 12 was designated and extended east from Stonewall through Trinidad to La Junta; the segment between Stonewall and present-day US 160 was also constructed by this time and designated SH 111 at that time. SH 12 was associated with improvements by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the 1930s that consisted of reconstructing and oil-surfacing approximately 38 miles of the highway west of Trinidad in Las Animas County. (Autobee and Dobson-Brown 2003: E-34) Historic state highway maps indicate that US Highway 350 took over the segment between Trinidad and La Junta by 1939. State highway maps indicate that SH 12 was extended north to US 160 over Cucharas Pass by 1968. The eastern end of SH 12 was changed in August 2004 with the permanent closing of Exit 14A at the University Street Interchange; because SH 12 no longer had a direct interchange to I-25 at University Street, an extension of Nevada Avenue southward to Main Street was constructed to help traffic connect with the Main street interchange at Exit 13.

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

Criterion A

The highway segment now designated as SH 12 is located along a corridor that was established by 1916 and represents an early project by the Colorado Highway Department. The highway was also improved as part of a federal relief project and possesses significance for Depression-Era government programs during the 1930s. SH 12 extended along the southern periphery of an important coal mining region in southern Colorado and provided a direct connection between mining areas from Cokedale to Trinidad, an important shipping point for coal throughout the region. For these reasons, SH 12 possesses significance under Criterion A in the areas of Transportation and Industry for its role in the transfer of industrial goods related to mining at the local level and in the area of Government/Politics at the state level. No evidence suggests that the road served as an important farm-to-market road since the surrounding area has historically been used for mining or undeveloped and forested.

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

This highway is considered to be an early or prominent project of the Colorado Highway Department. However, research and literature review yielded no evidence to indicate the use of innovative or important engineering design or construction techniques that serve to distinguish this highway from other roads and does not appear to exhibit important engineering innovations or important later modifications. The highway's design and construction appear to fall within the established standard practices of state highway design and construction of the time and the highway does not possess significance under Criterion C.

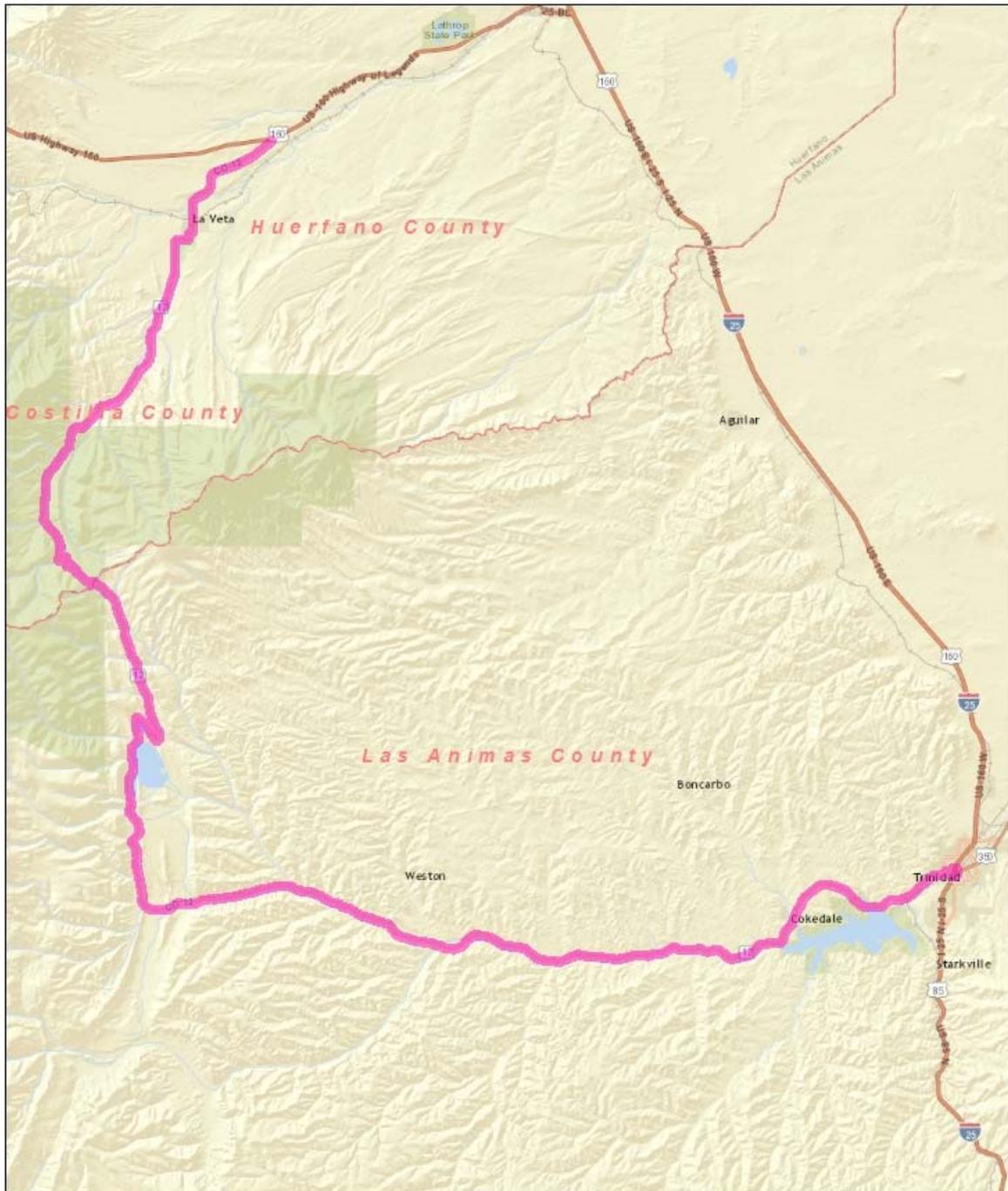
Criterion D

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.

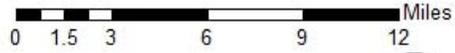
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- SH 12
- County Boundary

SH 12



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