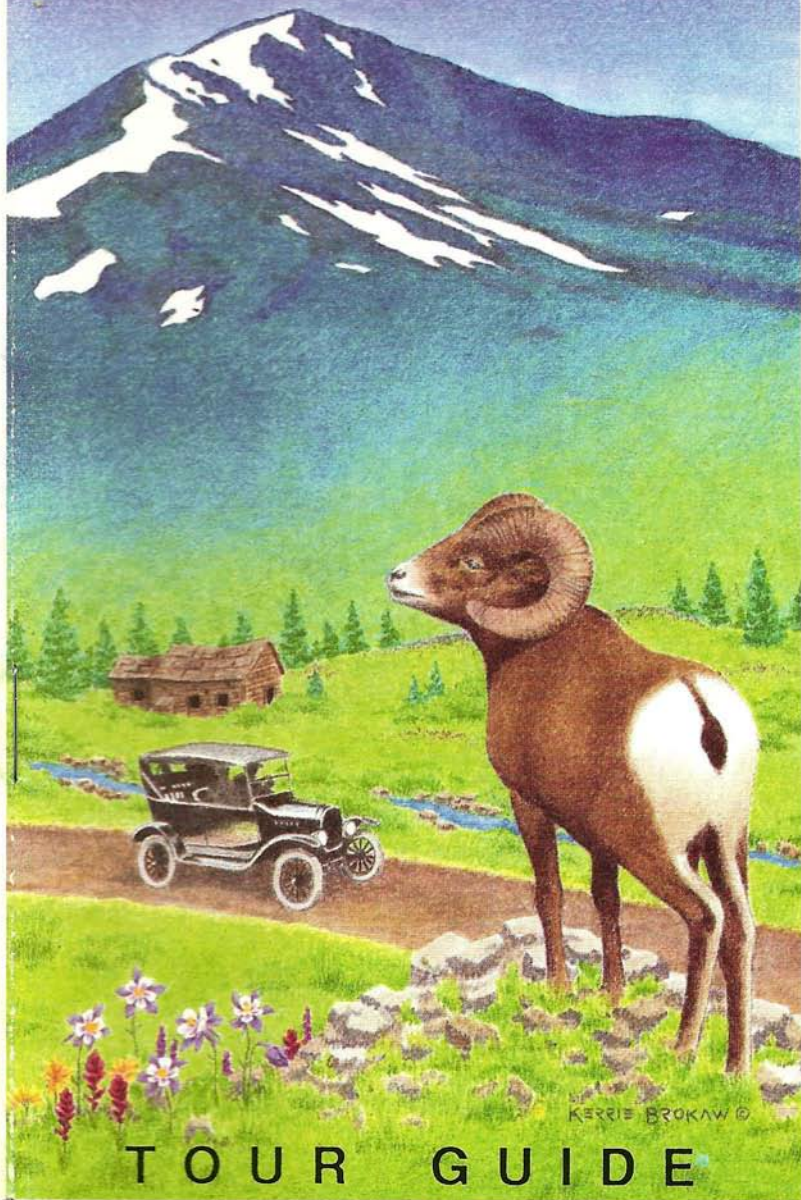


GUANELLA PASS

SCENIC and HISTORIC
BYWAY



KERRIE BROKAW ©

TOUR GUIDE

Park County
Office of Tourism
P.O. Box 220
Fairplay, CO 80440

THE ROUTE

Guanella Pass Scenic and Historic Byway provides a refreshing half-day auto tour loop, beginning and ending in Denver. Most of this 22-mile alpine route is contained in the Pike and Arapaho National Forests. The Guanella Pass turnoff is less than one hour west of Denver on US Highway 285, in the town of Grant. The northern terminus of Guanella Pass is Georgetown, one hour west of Denver via Interstate 70. Approximately 10 miles of the road is paved or oiled, whereas the remaining 12 miles has a gravel surface. Guanella Pass is maintained year-round for passenger vehicle travel from Grant to the Summit. The section of roadway between the Summit and Georgetown is the last to be maintained after winter storms. Large RVs are not recommended on this mountain byway.

From the town of Grant, Guanella Pass follows Geneva Creek Canyon to Falls Hill. At this point it climbs a series of switchbacks that have been constructed across glacial moraine. At the top of Falls Hill the road skirts the edge of Geneva Park, a large mountain meadow composed of glacial soil deposits. As the road leaves Geneva Park and climbs north along Duck Creek, dense stands of lodgepole pine give rise to the spruce-fir forest. Above Duck Lake the road reaches timberline and continues climbing to a summit elevation of 11,666 feet above seat level.

North of Guanella Pass Summit, the road descends through the spruce-fir forest before joining South Clear Creek at Guanella Pass Campground. At this point the road parallels South Clear Creek for the remainder of the route. For several miles the creek gently meanders through willow thickets, interspersed with beaver ponds and lush subalpine meadows. At Cabin Creek hydroelectric plant the valley narrows, dropping past Clear and Green Lakes, to the historic community of Georgetown. A number of pullouts along this section of the route provide outstanding views of South Clear Creek Valley and Georgetown in the distance.

Historic sites may be visited and photographed in Georgetown and at various points along the pass. The historic mining camps of Waldorf and Geneva City offer side excursions for mountain bikers and high-clearance vehicles on either side of Guanella Pass during summer.

#1: GENEVA CREEK CANYON

Soon after the Denver, South Park and Pacific Railroad reached Platte Canyon in 1878, the small town of Grant became a shipping and supply point for lumber, railroad ties and area gold mines. Today Grant supports three businesses: The Twin Spruce Bar & Grill; the Grant Country Store; and the Platte River Inn (restaurant and lounge) which also has a liquor store, US Post Office and overnight lodging.

From an elevation of 8,500 feet above sea level in Grant, Guanella Pass winds upward through Geneva Creek Canyon. The perennial waters of Geneva Creek support a mixed forest of spruce, fir, pine, aspen and cottonwood trees along the valley bottom. Between Grant and Falls Hill, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep frequent the rocky crags east of the road. Orange-colored rocks lining the bed of Geneva Creek are the result of high concentrations of iron carried by the creek from old mines upstream.



Foot Bridge Over Geneva Creek. (Photo By Gary Nichols.)

The U.S. Forest Service maintains Geneva Creek Picnic Ground and Whiteside Campground, 1.7 and 2.4 miles northwest of Grant, respectively. Threemile Creek trailhead, just beyond Whiteside Campground, is the first of several Forest Service trails which provide hiking access into the Mount Evans Wilderness Area.

Another mile up the road and across Geneva Creek is the Tumbling River Ranch, one of Colorado's outstanding guest ranches for half a century. Amenities at the ranch include ranch houses with fireplaces, heated pool, spa, sauna, jeep tours, fishing and overnight pack trips.

#2: FALLS HILL

Four and a half miles northwest of Grant is the first set of switchbacks encountered on Guanella Pass. The abrupt climb up Falls Hills to Geneva Park marks a distinct change in geology and native vegetation.

During the last glacial epoch, rock debris was transported by a glacier down Scott Gomer Creek valley to the east. As this glacier converged with Geneva Creek valley to the west, it created a rock dam or terminal moraine. From its gentle course at the top of Falls Hill, Geneva Creek now cascades 300 vertical feet in $\frac{1}{5}$ of a mile over this moraine, to the west of the roadway.

On the east side of the road at the second switchback, Scott Gomer Creek cascades over large boulders next to the road. These boulders, as well as others strewn across Falls Hill, provide evidence of the valley glacier that deposited them. A small road pullout allows visitors to stop and observe this geologic phenomenon.



Scott Gomer Creek at Falls Hill. (Photo By Gary Nichols.)

Continuing up Falls Hill, the roadway rounds the last curve and enters Geneva Park. Abyss Lake trailhead, Burning Bear Campground and the Mount Evans Wilderness Area are immediately to the east. At this point, both the road grade and stream gradient are considerably more gentle than in Geneva Creek Canyon. Extending northwest from Burning Bear Campground, Geneva Park was created when large quantities of stream sediments were deposited behind the Falls Hill moraine.

#3: GENEVA PARK

Geneva Park is a large mountain meadow which supports a diversity of wildlife and is surrounded by peaks exceeding 13,000 feet.



Geneva Park Above Falls Hill. (Photo By Gary Nichols.)

The coming of the railroad to Grant in 1878 prompted increased logging activity in the Platte Canyon area. By 1890 logging had extended as far as Geneva Park. Among the largest operators in the area were the Gomer and Buno families, after whom streams and trails in the area have been named. Remnants of the old Scott Gomer mill and flume are still visible on Burning Bear Creek, west of Burning Bear Campground. Another historical sawmill site is situated in Buno Gulch at the upper end of Geneva Park.

This forest was nearly denuded prior to 1905, as many loggers cut timber illegally to supply numerous sawmills in the area. In 1905, public lands around Geneva Park were proclaimed National Forest and the U.S. Forest Service finally established control over timber resources.

The threatened greenback cutthroat trout has been reintroduced in Buno Gulch west of Geneva Park. Historically this fish occurred throughout the Rocky Mountains but was unable to compete with hatchery-raised brook trout, a species which is not native to this area. A recovery team has been working for several years to return the greenback to stable levels and Buno Gulch is one of the areas selected for this project. In order to ensure the success of the species and the project, fishing is not allowed in the Buno Gulch drainage.

#4: GENEVA CITY TOWNSITE

The road to Geneva City townsite diverges west from Guanella Pass at Duck Creek Picnic Ground. This wagon route was constructed in 1874 to serve the mines at the head of Geneva Creek and the smelter at Smelter Gulch. Today the road to Geneva City is rocky for about a mile west of the campground. For the next two miles the road parallels Geneva Creek through long meadows with beaver ponds and vibrant stands of aspen. This section of road is one of the most enjoyable mountain bike rides in the area for the casual rider.

The parking area at Smelter Gulch (Shelf Lake) trailhead is the site of an ore smelter which operated in the 1870s. Beyond this point the road becomes steep and very rocky as it climbs west toward Geneva City. It is recommended that only vehicles with high clearance or experienced mountain bike riders proceed beyond this point.

Those who endure the last three miles of rocks and steep grades are rewarded with fields of Colorado columbines (during summer) and a spectacular view of the valley below. The actual townsite of Geneva City is situated in the basin above timberline at the head of Geneva Creek. Here, historic mills and cabins dot the landscape in all directions. However, because the network of old roads in the basin are often impassable, it is recommended that visitors park at timberline and hike a short distance to the structures that remain. Visitors are asked to take only pictures and leave only footprints to ensure that our heritage resources endure for future generations.



Miner's Cabin at Geneva City Townsite (Photo By Gary Nichols.)

#5: GUANELLA PASS SUMMIT

Heading north from Geneva Park, Guanella Pass follows Duck Creek toward the summit. Just below the summit is Alpendorf on Duck Lake. This privately-owned mountain retreat offers chalet rentals and fly fishing for guests. Two miles beyond Duck Lake, the summit of Guanella Pass affords a panoramic view of several mountains, including Mt. Bierstadt (14,060 feet) to the east. The jagged ridge or "arret" extending north from Mt. Bierstadt is known as the Sawtooth. This dramatic feature was created by valley glaciers during two epochs of geologic history. The brass plaque at the summit parking area recognizes the effort and dedication of Paul Byron Guanella (1913-1984). As Road Supervisor for Clear Creek County, Byron spearheaded the construction of Guanella Pass road, which now bears his name.



Byron Guanella (Left) at The Summit. (October, 1954.)

Two different alpine plant communities have evolved on either side of Guanella Pass summit. In the valley to the east, the willow shrub community supports numerous ptarmigan, a grouse-like bird that spends its entire life cycle above timberline. On the drier hillsides west of the road, a variety of dwarf flowering plants dominate the "tundra" landscape. Often less than an inch high and smaller than a dime, these delicate treasures have taken hundreds of years to become established in this harsh environment.

The summit of Guanella Pass is a popular recreation area for hikers, climbers and cross-country skiers. Either Square Top Mountain or Mount Bierstadt may be ascended in one day. Scott Gomer trail provides hiking access into the Mount Evans Wilderness Area, east of the summit.

#6: WETLAND COMMUNITY

The riparian or wetland community north of Guanella Pass Campground is characterized by beaver ponds and willow thickets along the meandering channel of South Clear Creek. This area provides critical habitat for a diversity of resident animals. A large beaver population has created the numerous dams and lodges visible along the stream.



South Clear Creek Wetland. (Photo By Gary Nichols.)

A distinct change in soils and plants can be observed between the valley bottom and the uplands to the east. Soils adjacent to the stream contain deposits of fine sand, silt and decomposing organic debris which remain moist throughout summer. In contrast, upland soils tend to be rocky, dry and shallow. This situation has created distinctly different plant communities. Dominant plants along the stream include willows, grasses and sedges. A variety of song birds utilize this habitat as summer nesting grounds. A sharp eye may catch glimpses of Wilson's warblers or white-crowned sparrows darting from one thicket to another. Beaver are the most likely mammals to be seen, although a host of other animals come to water on a daily basis. In contrast, the upland community is dominated by large Englemann spruce trees. Here, red squirrels, gray jays, juncos and mountain chickadees are common.

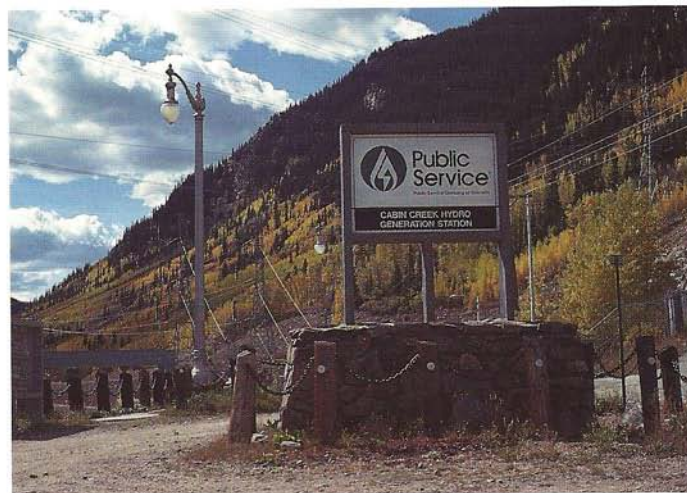
A distinct example of "timberline" is visible above the valley to the east. Timberline is the highest elevation at which trees are capable of growing. Although regional climate is usually a determining factor, local soil conditions, wind and moisture availability also influence the elevation above which trees cannot become established.

#7: CABIN CREEK HYDRO PROJECT

Constructed in 1968, Cabin Creek Hydroelectric Plant is operated by the Public Service Company of Colorado. A reservoir above the plant stores water from South Clear Creek which, when released, plunges through a 4,300-foot tunnel to spin two huge turbines, thereby generating electricity during peak power demands in Denver. The water then flows into the lower reservoir for storage.

When the demand for electricity diminishes, the turbines are reversed and serve as pumps. Steam electric generators in Denver then provide power to pump the water from the lower reservoir back into the upper reservoir, to be used over and over again without wasting water. An interpretive display provides a detailed explanation of the facility on Guanella Pass Road.

In an effort to offset the visual impact of this facility, the Public Service Company has worked with local government to provide campgrounds and improve existing facilities. Current plans include development of handicapped facilities at Green Lake (1/2 mile north) in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service.



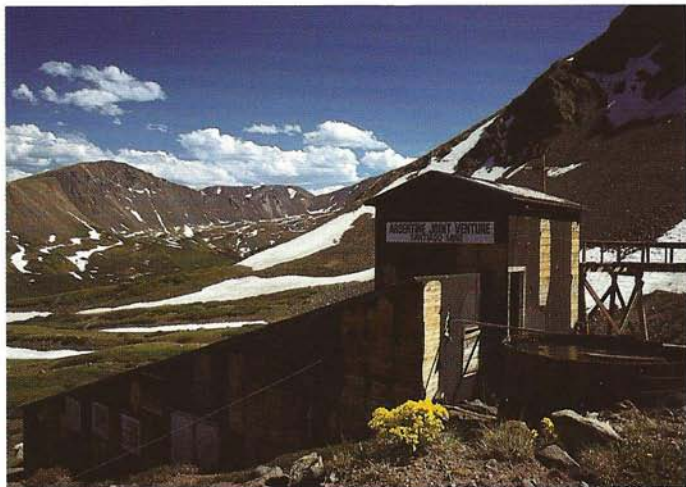
Cabin Creek Hydroelectric Plant. (Photo By Gary Nichols.)

A large stand of quaking aspen above the power plant turns hues of yellow, red and orange during autumn. The leaf pigments which give rise to these colors are present throughout summer and fall but are masked by green chlorophyll during June, July and August.

#8: WALDORF CUTOFF

Across the creek from the small parking area at the Waldorf cutoff is the Marshall Tunnel. The creek has been rerouted through this rock tunnel in order to protect a mining claim. Georgetown Reservoir and the historic Lower Silver Dale site can be seen down valley from the parking area. This site once supported mines, mills and numerous residences. Near the head of Georgetown Reservoir is the 19th-century site of a silver smelter operated by black miners who came to Colorado after the Civil War. Lorenzo Bowman, a prominent black miner from Missouri, was the first person to successfully smelt silver ore in this area.

From Guanella Pass, the Waldorf cutoff immediately climbs a series of switchbacks to the southwest. This dirt road soon meets the abandoned Argentine Central Railway bed, known historically as "The Stairway to the Stars." Built in 1906 to access the Argentine Mining District, the Argentine Central also transported tourists to the top of Mt. McClellan (13,587 feet). Today the railway bed provides motor vehicle access to the townsite of Waldorf, which supported some of Colorado's earliest silver mines.



Santiago Mine Near Waldorf Townsite. (Photo By Gary Nichols.)

Waldorf cutoff offers a wonderful half-day excursion for jeeps and mountain bikes, west of Guanella Pass. It is recommended that only high clearance vehicles attempt this steep, narrow road.

#9: GEORGETOWN

Two branches of South Clear Creek created the valley now occupied by Georgetown. Gold mining lured prospectors to the area in 1859, but valuable silver became the town's claim to fame. Known as the "Silver Queen," Georgetown had over 5,000 residents in the 1880s. Over ninety percent of existing structures in the old part of town were built prior to the turn of the century.



Georgetown, circa 1886. (Photo Courtesy Denver Public Library, Western History Dept.)

Georgetown and Silver Plume (2 miles west) were designated a National Historic Landmark District in 1966. The Hamill House is a nineteenth-century structure which was meticulously restored to its 1880s appearance by the Georgetown Society, Inc. (now Historic Georgetown, Inc.).



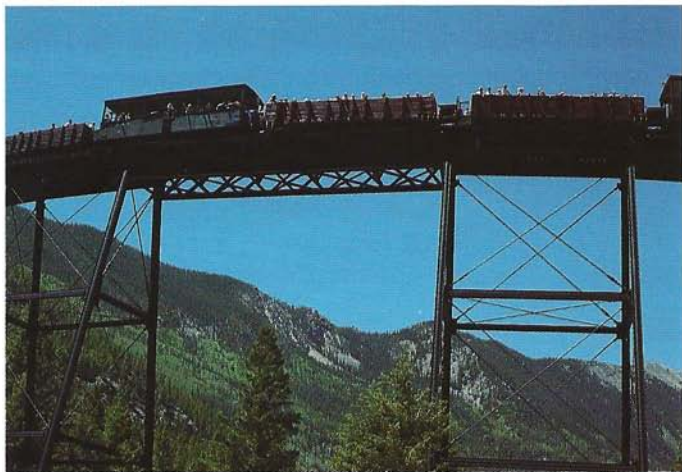
Hamill House, Georgetown. (Photo By Gary Nichols.)

GEORGETOWN (cont.)

The Georgetown Energy Museum is open on weekends during the summer. Maintained by Historic Georgetown, Inc., this museum interprets the early equipment and operations used to generate hydroelectric power in the area (see page 10 for a description of the modern hydroelectric plant currently in operation on Guanella Pass).

Louis Dupuy's Hotel de Paris is one of the few restored commercial buildings in the Rocky Mountain West. In 1954 the Colonial Dames of America purchased the property and have spent years carefully recreating the interior of this lovely hotel.

The "far-famed" Georgetown Loop Railroad, a 19th-century engineering marvel, has been reconstructed by the Colorado Historical Society. Narrow gauge train rides between Georgetown and Silver Plume are available daily throughout the summer months. Tours of the Lebanon Mine and Mill are also available to those riding the train.



Georgetown Loop Railroad. (Photo By Gary Nichols.)

The Colorado Division of Wildlife has constructed a Rocky Mountain big horn sheep viewing station at the north end of Georgetown, by the lake. A sizeable herd of 150 to 200 animals inhabit the mountains above Georgetown and Silver Plume. Interpretive materials and pay-per-view telescopes are available at the site.

For More Information, Please Contact:

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Georgetown Loop R.R.
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**Clear Creek Ranger Dist.
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Historic Georgetown, Inc.
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