

Highway of Legends Scenic Drive

Raton, NM - Trinidad, Stonewall, Cuchara, La Veta, and Walsenburg Colorado

Distance: 250 mile round trip – 6-8 hours

Elevation: Highest point 9,994 feet at Cuchara Pass

Points of interest: Historic settlements along the Purgatoire River Valley.

Remnants of coal mining works and communities. Stunning mountain scenery as the highway circles around The Spanish Peaks into the Sangre de Cristo mountains. Visit the historic towns along the route dating back to the early 1800s.



An excellent smart phone app - TravelStories – provides a Highway of Legends audio driving tour starting in Trinidad. Audio walking tours are also available from Travelstories for the towns of Cuchara, CO; La Veta, CO; and Walsenburg, CO through which you will pass. Links for these audio tours are provided at the end of this document. Install the app and download the tours prior to your departure from the Casa as cell phone coverage is spotty along the route.

Depart the Casa del Gavilan and turn left (north) onto Highway 21. Turn right in Cimarron onto Highway 64. Bear left on the north side of Cimarron toward Raton. Proceed 35 miles to the intersection at Interstate 25. A short distance west of this point once stood the Clifton House, a stop on the stagecoach route - later adding a trading post, blacksmith shop, and post office. The roadside historical marker reads: *“Three-quarters of a mile west of here at the Canadian River crossing was the popular overnight stage stop on the Old Santa Fe Trail. Clifton House was built in 1867 by rancher Tom Stockton.”* With the arrival of the railroad in 1879, the Santa Fe Trail and the stage line ceased. Clifton House was abandoned and burned to the ground in 1885. Part of one adobe wall and scattered foundation stones along the west bank of the Canadian River are all that remain of this two-story structure.

Turn left onto Interstate 25 North. The Interstate passes along the east side of the city of Raton, the largest city in this part of New Mexico with a population of about 6,000. Raton is the county seat of Colfax County. If you have some extra time, leave Interstate 25 at exit 450 for the business route through Raton. Turn left at the bottom of the exit ramp. This will put you onto Second Street – the main route through town. Follow this route north through the newer businesses on the south side of town, then into the old town area on the north. Solano’s Boot and Western Wear – on the right at the corner of Park Avenue - is an authentic western-wear store providing clothing, hats, and boots to the local ranching community. The Raton Museum is across the street on the left. The El Raton theater is further north on the right. Completed in 1930, the El Raton still shows films. The Shuler theater is just past the El Raton and has hosted concerts, plays, and other stage events since 1915.

Continue along Second Street and rejoin Interstate 25 on the north side of Raton. You will notice there are no tall trees along either side of Interstate 25 north of Raton. This is due to the “Track Fire” of 2011 that burned 28,000 acres of Ponderosa Pine forest leading to the closure of I-25 - the only north-south highway for 100 miles in either direction - for four days. The fire was started by exhaust from all-terrain vehicles, though the operators were never identified. The fire was brought under control by 900 firefighters, 10 tanker aircraft, 7 helicopters, 600,000 gallons of water and over 200,000 gallons of retardant. In the end, it was much-needed rain that contributed to containing the fire. In the years since the fire, grass, shrubs and small trees have slowly begun to grow on the fire scar. It will be a generation or two before the landscape begins to look as it once did before two careless ATV operators forever changed the landscape in this area.

As the Interstate continues the climb to Raton Pass, it winds around sandstone, shale, and mudstone layers of the Trinidad and Vermejo formations created over 60 million years ago when this area lay along the shoreline of the Western Interior Seaway. This seaway covered most of what are now the Great Plains. Sea fossils can be found in these formations. Further north toward the pass the highway continues through the sandstones, shales, and coal seams of the Raton and Poison Canyon formations laid down after the area was lifted thousands of feet above sea level. All of these layers, which formed over millions of years, are capped with basalt lava flows of Raton Mesa ejected 3.5 to 9 million years ago. Capulin Volcano, 35 miles to the east, erupted about 30,000 years ago.

Raton Pass was a treacherous route for travelers in the 18th and early 19th centuries. In 1719, the governor of New Mexico, Colonel Antonio Valverde Y Cosio, crossed the pass. His subsequent report of the journey was so discouraging many travelers avoided the route. In 1821 Mexico won independence from Spain and opened to trade with its northern neighbor, leading to the establishment

of the Santa Fe Trail. Most of the Santa Fe Trail traffic took the Cimarron Cutoff further to the east, avoiding the Raton Pass and Cimarron. The longer and more difficult route by way of Bent's Fort (near La Junta, Colorado), continuing through Raton Pass and Cimarron, had the advantage of more water and better grazing for livestock during dry years. The Raton Pass route was also less prone to Indian attacks, so was more popular with smaller, less defensible wagon trains.

It wasn't until 1866, when "Uncle" Dick Wootton, a former mountain man of the old west, obtained charters from both Colorado and New Mexico territories, leased land from Lucien Maxwell, and built a toll road through Raton Pass, thus making the journey significantly easier. Ute Indians were employed in the construction of the 27-mile road through the pass. Wootton built a hotel with a toll gate in front. The toll was \$1.50 for a wagon and a quarter for a horse and rider. Indians were always allowed to pass at no charge. Wootton's home also served as a stage stop for the Barlow and Sanderson stagecoach which continued south to Clifton House and Cimarron. In 1878, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad purchased the much-sought-after right of way to the Raton Pass from Wootton. The arrival of the railroad brought an abrupt end to the storied Santa Fe Trail. Through the years, Wootton married four or five times (reports vary) and fathered twenty children. By 1893, when Wootton died at the age of 77, he had outlived all but one (or possibly all) of his wives and all but three of his children.

In 1908-1909, the State of New Mexico used convict labor to construct a highway crossing the mountains near the Raton Pass. Thousands of motor-tourists used this highway to cross the pass in 1915 on their way to and from the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego, as well as the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco. In 1926 the road was officially designated US Highway 85. During 1942, the highway was realigned to the original route laid out by Wootton along the Santa Fe Trail which offered fewer tight turns and more gentle grades than the 1908 route. In the 1960s, the highway was reconstructed into Interstate 25.

As you near the Raton Pass, just to the west lies the tracks of the Burlington, Northern, & Santa Fe Railroad which continues through a tunnel on the highest point of the rail line between Chicago and Los Angeles. Amtrak operates the Santa Fe Chief passenger train - one train eastbound and one train westbound - along this route each day. The elevation of the tunnel is 7,588 feet, which is 210 feet below the actual pass. The railroad tunnel was originally completed in 1879. A second tunnel was constructed in 1908, and the original tunnel closed in 1953. Most long-haul freight trains now use the Belen Cutoff in central New Mexico which was also completed in 1908. Since the completion of the Belen Cutoff, only Amtrak and local freight use the steeper grade and tunnel of the Raton Pass. The tunnel is a half-mile long and ends just before the Colorado State Line.

Crossing over Raton Pass, you'll find a breathtaking view of southern Colorado. Note how the view looks exactly like what one would expect from Colorado - long snow-covered mountain ranges with pointed peaks overlooking endless plains. On your return trip, when you cross Raton Pass into New Mexico, the view is dramatically different - and exactly what one would expect of New Mexico with flat-topped mesas and open plains. There are few places in the country where the landscape changes so dramatically at the state line to match what one would expect of each state. Ahead and to the left, you'll see the dramatic East and West Spanish Peaks rising to 13,626 feet (West) and 12,683 feet (East). These peaks were originally created far underground as "intrusions" - formed when molten lava pushed its way up into the Earth's crust without breaking through the Earth's surface. The surrounding landscape then erodes away over millions of years, leaving the more durable lava formations towering high above the plains. Ahead and to the right is the tall, narrow mesa of Fisher's Peak. While this looks like a volcano core, it's actually just a very tall, narrow mesa. Fisher's Peak is the highest point in the U.S. east of Interstate 25. Colorado has just opened the new Fisher's Peak State Park.

If you're interested in seeing the original railroad tunnels of the AT&SF Railroad, take exit 2. Keep turning to the right and pass underneath the interstate. Follow this road around to the left to a closed gate and entrance to the twin tunnels beyond. Following the road the way back you came will put you quickly back onto I-25 heading north.

At mile marker 3 on the left across the canyon (west), are the mission-style remains of the St. Aloysius Church that once overlooked the town of Morley. The church was completed in 1917. Originally a stop along the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe railroad, easily mined coal was discovered nearby in 1906. The Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, owned by John D. Rockefeller, opened a mine south of town to provide coal to its iron works in Pueblo, Colorado. Due to the presence of explosive gases, electric or gas-powered vehicles could not be used in the mine. Instead, a herd of 150 mules was kept onsite and used to haul coal cars out of the mines through the early 1950s when the mine closed. At its peak in the 1920's, six hundred people called Morley "home" with over one hundred homes, a well-stocked company store, school, hotel, livery, saloon, and even a YMCA. When the mine was shut down in 1956, the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company chose to demolish the townsite to avoid liability for trespassers and squatters. The demolition crew felt it sacrilegious to demolish the church, so St. Aloysius remains as a testament to the once-thriving community that it watched over. There is no public access to the church or townsite.

The town of Trinidad was founded in 1862 by twelve Hispanic families from northern New Mexico led by Dan Felipe Baca. They built a plaza surrounded by thick adobe walls to defend against the Ute Indians who had lived in the area for centuries and didn't take well to the encroachment. Within several years, Trinidad had a general store, Catholic church, and school. While both Anglos and Hispanics settled the area, tensions were occasionally strained between the two groups as the Purgatoire Valley was settled.

Continue north on Interstate 25 to exit 13-B for Main Street. At the bottom of the exit ramp, turn right onto Main Street. At the first stop sign (in front of the Sonic), turn left onto Nevada/Santa Fe Trail. Proceed $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile, then around the traffic circle. If you wish to visit the Colorado Visitors' Center, it's the red brick building with the green roof (looks like a train station) on the far left of the traffic circle. If you want to skip the Visitor's Center, depart the traffic circle to the west under the I-25 overpass to follow Hwy 12 West. Continue on Hwy 12 as it dog-legs left then right, and left then right again as it winds its way out of town.

Four miles out of Trinidad on the left is Trinidad Lake State Park. You can turn left into the park, if desired. Once inside the park, the visitors' center is on the left. The "day use fee" for Trinidad State Park is \$9 per vehicle. This pass can also be used at the newly established Fisher's Peak State Park east of Trinidad, or any other Colorado State Park on the same day.

West of Trinidad Lake you'll follow the Purgatoire River west into the mountains. According to www.travelstories.com:

Legend has it that when this area was part of Spain, a troop of soldiers set out from Santa Fe. They were destined for Florida (state). With them they carried a chest full of gold to pay the Spanish army stationed there. The journey was long, so they made a camp at the base of a canyon, near a riverbed. They should have arrived in Florida soon thereafter, but they were never seen again. Some say it was a fight with local Native Americans that led to their deaths, but nobody knows for sure. They were Catholics travelling without a priest and they died without their last rites. It's believed that their souls were condemned to wander in purgatory for eternity. The chest of gold carried by the soldiers was never found, either. In remembrance of the lost men, local Spanish settlers named the river "El Rio de las Animas Perdidas en Purgatorio", or the River of Lost Souls in Purgatory. Over time, as others passed through, the name changed. French trappers shortened the name to "the Purgatoire" - meaning simply purgatory. As English speakers moved in, and the name Purgatoire wasn't the easiest to pronounce. It became: Picket Wire. If you haven't passed it yet, this road takes you through the community of Picket Wire.

A 1905 newspaper story in the Las Vegas (New Mexico) Daily Optic called the coal fields around Trinidad and Raton "...the biggest coal mines west of Pittsburg-bigger than any single mines in Indiana, Ohio, or Illinois, producing from 3,000 to 4,000 tons per day." Just past mile marker 63 on the right is the turn-off to the former coal camp of Cokedale. On the right, you'll see an enormous pile of coal slag, produced from burning coal in the ovens to make coke. Coke is a refined type of coal produced by heating coal in ovens to drive off the impurities so the coal burns much hotter. On the right is a parking area with signs about Cokedale. Across the highway on the left are the 350 coke ovens of Cokedale used from 1906 until the coal camp was closed in 1946. While the facades of the ovens are still wonderfully intact, the brick ovens have collapsed over the years. You can drive south along the front of the coke ovens for a better view. There is an area to turn around about a quarter of a mile down the road toward the end of the coke ovens. Following the small road further will bring you to the Riley Canyon area of Trinidad Lake State Park, but it's a narrow road.

From the parking area on Hwy 12, at the information signs, turn north (right) on County Road 57.7 past the panels into the canyon. The town of Cokedale is one of the most intact mining camps in the Southwest, and is recognized as a National Historic District added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. Cokedale, as well as many other coal mining camps in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico, were called "camps" instead of "towns" as they were never meant to be permanent. The homes and other structures were only meant to remain as long as the coal seam held out, which was understood to be a finite amount of time. Once the coal was gone, or too deep to be profitable to mine, the camp would be closed and the homes and equipment moved to the next camp. Notice most of the homes are compact, square, and have a pyramid hip roof coming to a point in the center at the chimney. This made the homes easy and cheap to build, and small enough to transport to the next camp, when necessary, to be placed upon a new foundation. Many of the homes have been added onto over the years. When the Cokedale mine closed in 1947, many other mines in the area were already closed due to the railroads shifting from coal to diesel, steel mills changing from coal to electric, and homes changing from coal to natural gas. There would be no more coal camps, so there was no need to move the homes. Residents were given the option to buy their homes and remain in what became the "town" of Cokedale. Instead of the camp being lost to the ravages of time as so many others, Cokedale continues to be a vibrant community with a storied past.

Proceed ¼ mile off Hwy 12 and turn left at the “Cokedale Museum” sign. At the end of the road, turn left onto Spruce Street, then right onto Elm Street. The Cokedale Museum is in the two story tan stucco building 200 yards ahead on the right. After visiting the museum, continue around the loop road on Elm Street across the back of the town. Turn right onto Spruce Street which will take you back out to the entrance road.

When you get back out to Highway 12, turn right to continue your drive. As you drive through the canyon you will occasionally see thin seams of coal in the rock wall along the road cut. As the land was lifted and the seas receded around 50 million years ago, this area supported a huge amount of plant and animal life for millions of years. Organic matter decomposed to form these rich coal beds. The best coal beds to exploit were those tall enough for a man and mule to walk into to access the face of the coal seam - as was the Van Houten mine with 6-foot thick coal seams. Thin veins of coal were much more difficult to work as men had to hunch over or crawl to reach further into the mountain, and swing a pick in difficult positions, as work in the mine progressed through the years. The minimum thickness of a mineable coal bed was understood to be 14 inches.

Further along the highway you’ll pass through other coal towns of Segundo (second) and Primero (first), named for the sequence of mines as they were developed. Next comes the town of Weston. In the late 1800s the town was attacked by Jicarilla Apache Indians on a regular basis. On August 25, 1888, the Maxwell Land Grant Company tried to seize the town, as well as Wet Canyon to the north, for it’s lumber resources. As you look across the canyon to the south, you’ll see the roadbed of the railroad that once hauled coal from the mines.

At noted at www.travelstories.com:

In 1872, the owner of the Denver and Rio Grande railway line thought he would do well to make his own rails. The company he founded, Colorado Fuel and Iron, became the largest steel and coal mining company in the American West. Coal from Southern Colorado mines travelled north by rail to a steel plant in the neighboring city of Pueblo. There, the coal fired up the blast furnaces. Iron ore from a nearby valley was forged into everything from nails to rails. It was those rails that would eventually connect the two coasts. The trains that would pass along the rails would change the picture of America's industry and trade forever. And remember - all of this was powered by Southern Colorado coal. Without it, America's development would have been very different.

West of the town of Vigil at mile marker 43, spring often brings large fields of blue Rocky Mountain iris with the snow-capped peaks of the Culebra mountains behind. Passing mile marker 42, the New Elk mine is ahead on the left. The New Elk Mine was opened in the 1950s along a six-foot coal seam with an estimated 80 million tons of coal available for mining. The mine closed in 1989 when contracts with local power utilities expired. The mine then had another short lease on life, reopening for a short time in 2010. The mine is still kept operating in the event coal prices return to suitable levels, though this seems unlikely with the significant increase in natural gas production which is generally less expensive to produce than coal. In 2019, plans were underway to reopen the mine to ship coal to Europe and South America. This is the last mine in the Purgatoire Valley.

In the town of Stonewall, near mile marker 38, stands a remarkable geologic feature known as “The Dakota Wall”. This massive stone wall was formed horizontally as thick sandstone beds at the bottom of the Western Interior Seaway 100 million years ago. Subsequent layers of sandstone, shale, mudstone, coal, and other materials built up over the Dakota Sandstone over millions of years, compressing it into very hard rock. About 30 million years ago, the Sangre de Cristo uplift pushed up through the lower depths, largely in a single block. The land faulted (fractured) on the east and west sides of the mountain range. The Sangre de Cristo mountains rose, either as a single block or a series of broken blocks. As the blocks pushed up through the layers of rock and earth, the Dakota Sandstone was broken and folded nearly upright, like a tree root pushing up through a concrete sidewalk. This line of broken Dakota Sandstone runs along the entire front range of the Rocky Mountains from Canada to Mexico in various forms. This same process formed the “Flatirons” along the front range west of Denver, and The Garden of the Gods in Colorado Springs. For the next few miles, the highway curves in and around the Dakota Wall as the sandstone slabs wind around the lifted mountain blocks.

You’ll find the Stonewall Shopping Bag on the right side of the highway a good place to stop for food or something to drink before continuing your exploration. Across the highway from the Stonewall Shopping Bag is a gated stone entrance to a camp that once housed German prisoners of war during World War II. In later years, the camp hosted Boy Scouts and church groups.

By 1888, tensions around the Maxwell Land Grant in the Cimarron and northern New Mexico area had quieted down somewhat, with new difficulties brewing the Stonewall area. On August 25, 1888, fifty armed and masked settlers, as well as a large contingent

of riders led by O.P. McMains – totaling about 200 people – surrounded a group of deputies in a resort hotel in town. The deputies refused to surrender; a shot rang out. A small battle quickly broke out. When word of the battle reached Trinidad, “Uncle Dick” Wootton (mentioned earlier regarding Raton Pass) quickly traveled to Stonewall to restore calm. In the end, two settlers were dead, and six deputies were charged with murder, however not much changed and the Maxwell Land Grant Company continued to evict settlers from the Purgatoire Valley.

From here the highway leaves the Purgatoire Valley and turns north along the foothills of the Culebra Range of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, the magnificent snow-capped peaks to the west. The tallest of these is Culebra Peak at 14,049 feet. This is the same peak that can be seen from the Casa del Gavilan highway gate looking north, and across the highway from the Colfax Tavern outside of Cimarron. Culebra Peak is one of Colorado’s few “fourteeners” (peaks over 14,000 feet) located on private land.

Mile marker 33 brings you to the red stone gate of Monument Lake Resort, constructed mostly by hand, using local materials, by the Works Project Administration in 1937. The resort originally included a fish hatchery which supplied a million trout each year turned into the lake, as well as a zoo with a bear and free-ranging buffalo. The lake’s name was derived from a stone formation that rose 15 feet above the water in the middle of the lake that resembled two Indian chiefs. The formation collapsed into the lake in 1999 and is no longer visible. Public toilets are available on the right side of the highway near mile marker 30 at the end of the lake, as well as just past mile marker 20 on the left side of the highway at the Cuchara Day Use Picnic Area.

Three miles beyond Monument Lake, the highway circles around North Lake which was constructed in 1907 to provide water to the city of Trinidad 30 miles to the east. Fly fishing is popular in North Lake for Brook, Rainbow, and Brown trout, as well as Kokanee salmon. Fishing licenses are available at the Stonewall Shopping Bag and Trinidad Lake State Park.

The highway continues the climb to Cuchara Pass, the highest point of the Highway of Legends at 9,995 feet. You’re now entering the San Isabel National Forest, originally set aside as Forest Reserve in 1902 and renamed San Isabel National Forest in 1907. The Forest is over one million acres and includes 19 of Colorado’s 53 fourteeners. Upon reaching the pass, you can turn right onto County Road 46/Forest Road 415 for ½ mile to the John B. Farley Flower Overlook Observation Site. The wildflowers are particularly stunning in late spring and early summer.

After crossing the pass, the highway winds downhill into the village of Cuchara. The Cuchara Day Use Picnic Area is on the left just prior to reaching the village. Toilets are available at this facility. In the village of Cuchara, on the east (right) side of the highway, is a trail that climbs to the top of the Dakota Wall around which the highway has been winding since the town of Stonewall. The trail is a two-mile round-trip with a climb of 680 feet (see the link at the end of this document). Just past mile marker 17 is a road on the left with a short drive back to the Spring Creek Trailhead.

The village of Cuchara is at 8,500 feet, so you’re halfway down from the Cuchara Pass to the plains. Leaving Cuchara the road continues to wind down the mountains another few miles until again passing through the Dakota Wall, after which the highway starts to straighten out. Passing through the Dakota Wall, West Spanish Peak rises in front, with East Spanish Peak hidden behind. The highway then starts to skirt around the base of West Spanish Peak. Beyond mile marker 12, a massive rock wall rises on the right side of the road. Just beyond this wall, pull over at the turnout on the left side with the information boards just past mile marker 11. This rock wall looks much like the Dakota Wall which you’ve been winding around for the past 30 miles, but it’s a very different type of rock formed in a very different way. This is known as The Devil’s Stair Steps. It’s what is called a volcanic “dike” – similar to a dam. A dike is created when the surface of the Earth cracks open and molten lava from far below rises toward the surface to force open the crack further open and fill it with lava.

As we discussed previously, the Spanish Peaks were formed far underground. Twenty five million years ago, when the magma pushed up to form what would become the Spanish Peaks, the enormous pressure created more than 400 cracks radiating out like spokes in all directions from the Spanish Peaks into the surrounding landscape. These cracks filled with lava, which cooled underground over thousands of years along with the Peaks themselves. The overlying rock and soil weathered away leaving these lava dikes, as well as the Peaks themselves, rising high above the surrounding landscape. Similar dikes were formed from Baldy Mountain on Philmont Scout Ranch running 15 miles northeast into the Valle Vidal area. It is impossible to comprehend the geologic forces that created The Spanish Peaks and their surrounding dikes. The dikes, some of which are above ground while some remain buried, are from one to one hundred feet wide and up to 25 miles long. This is one of the best places in the world to view so many well-formed radial dikes in one location. The Spanish Peaks and surrounding dikes were designated a National Natural Landmark in

1976. Keep an eye out for Rocky Mountain sheep in this area as they sometimes come down the mountain to graze along the highway and pose for tourists.

Further along, the highway enters an ancient volcano field. You'll see a very dark tower of rock on the left which is the remains of a volcano core. Lava rose through this opening but did not erupt over the top of the cone of cinders and ash. The surrounding earth and rock have worn away leaving the much harder volcanic "plug" standing on its own. This plug is known as Goemmer Butte (pronounced like the first part of "beautiful") after a local family. A butte is a hill, mountain, or mesa which is narrower than it is tall. Across the highway on the right is another dike known as "Profile Rock" for its similarity to a person's facial profile.

Two miles beyond Goemmer Butte Highway 12 comes into the historic community of La Veta. In 1862, Col. John M. Francisco, and Judge Henry Daigle built Fort Francisco on land purchased from the Vigil-St. Vrain Land Grant. Originally the Fort was a square built around an open plaza in the center-the only gateway opened to the north. The Fort was built of adobe two foot thick, with dirt floors and dirt roofs and gun ports along the parapets for defense. The community was named "Spanish Peak". A Post Office opened on the plaza in 1871. A railroad depot followed in 1877, the rail line being the highest in the world at the time. The town was renamed La Veta (Spanish for "mineral vein") in 1871. The old depot building at the La Veta Pass summit is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The historic La Veta depot still stands next to Main Street. The Rio Grande Scenic Railroad operates The San Luis Express between Alamosa and La Veta. There are daily departures from Alamosa to La Veta, through the Forbes/Trinchera Park, around Horseshoe Curve, along the edge of the San Isabel National Forest, and through two tunnels. For more information see <http://www.riograndescenicrailroad.com>.

The Francisco Fort Museum is on the left side of Highway 21 in the center of town. Interpretive exhibits depict many facets of pioneer life. These include a country store, a ranch/tack room, fashions, housewares, furniture, fauna, musical instruments, military items, photographs, and all types of antiques. Galleries, shops, and restaurants are scattered through the town. Watch the road signs as Highway 12 turns right, then left, then right again, and left again, as it winds its way through town.

When you're done in town, follow Highway 12 north out of town. When you reach Highway 160, bear right toward Walsenburg. Walsenburg was originally settled as Plaza de los Leones in 1862, but later renamed after Fred Walsen, a businessman who settled here about 1870. It was Fred Walsen who opened the first coal mine in the county just west of Walsenburg in 1876. Main Street Walsenburg has two museums, a municipal swimming pool and a nine-hole municipal golf course. Just west of the golf course is Lathrop State Park, which has lakes for swimming, boating, windsurfing, and fishing. The Walsenburg Mining Museum, located in the 1896 Huerfano County Jail at 112 West Fifth Street, offers exhibits and memories of the 100+ coal mining camps in the County.

In Walsenburg, turn left onto Main Street, then right onto 5th Street following the signs for Interstate 25 South. A rest area is available 34 miles ahead, just north of Trinidad. From the rest area, it's about one hour back to the Casa. A few miles south of Raton, take exit 446 for Highway 64 west toward Taos. Bear right at the end of the exit ramp. In Cimarron, turn left onto Highway 21 back to the Casa.

There are a number of fine restaurants in Trinidad and Raton if you're interested in dinner on your return trip. For something special, Rino's (pronounced Reeno's) Italian Restaurant on Main Street in Trinidad features superb Italian cooking. In addition, the owner and waiters occasionally break out in song to entertain the guests. Dinner options in Raton are Mulligan's, The Historic Ice House, and Pappas' Sweet Shop, among many others. The Colfax Tavern is closer to the Casa, leaving less drive time after dinner. They serve thin crust pizza, green chili cheeseburgers, and other dishes. Cimarron offers the St. James Restaurant, Blu Dragonfly Brewing, and the Cree-Mee Restaurant.

TravelStorys smart phone app tours:

Driving tour Highway of Legends – 2 hours: <https://travelstorys.com/tours/105/Highway%20of%20Legends>

Walking tour of Cuchara – 30 minutes: <https://travelstorys.com/tours/214/Walk%20Cuchara>

Walking tour of La Veta – 45 minutes: <https://travelstorys.com/tours/211/Historic%20La%20Veta>

Walking tour of Walsenburg – 45 minutes: <https://travelstorys.com/tours/210/Historic%20Downtown%20Walsenburg>

Trail guide to the Cuchara-Dakota Wall Trail in Cuchara, CO:

<https://www.alltrails.com/explore/recording/ckt-hike-on-dakota-wall-near-dike-trail-cuchara-colorado--2>

Trail guide to Indian Creek Trail outside of La Veta, CO:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/psicc/recreation/recarea/?recid=12748&actid=51>

Highway of Legends

