

# SCENIC DRIVES

The mountains surrounding Ouray provide some of the most spectacular scenery in the United States, much of which can be seen driving a regular passenger car.

Some drives suggested here are paved roads; some are dirt roads. At no time, however, will you need a four-wheel drive vehicle unless you go beyond the suggested route.

A free, detailed map of Southwest Colorado can be picked up at the Ouray Visitor Center. The following books are available for purchase at many of Ouray's local shops: "Scenic Driving Colorado", "San Juan Skyway", "One Drive In A Million", "Million Dollar Highway", and "Historical Touring Guide to the San Juan Skyway".

Things to remember before starting out:

- 1) No matter which drive you take, be sure to take your camera. If you didn't bring your camera, you may purchase a disposable camera at any of Ouray's shops.
- 2) It is important that the driver enjoy the scenery as much as the passenger. So, whenever possible, be sure to pull off the side of the road. Simultaneous "driving and looking" makes most passengers very nervous and can end a marriage faster than hanging draperies.
- 3) You are taking the drive to relax and enjoy the scenery. Don't allow the foolish driver following you too closely to spoil your excursion. Continue to drive at a safe speed and then, where possible, pull off the side of the road and allow them to pass.
- 4) Driving in the mountains is different than driving on flat terrain. The most important thing to remember is don't ride your brakes. You should use your lower gears both for going uphill and downhill. Whether you have standard or automatic transmission, shift into your second or third gear, depending on the steepness of the grade, for providing more power to go uphill or slowing the car as it goes down a steep grade. By slowing the car down in this way, you can avoid keeping your foot on the brake and having your brakes get hot.
- 5) Watch carefully for various curve and road signs and adhere to the posted speed limits. Also, watch for wildlife, particularly deer. When there are signs warning of wildlife, be especially alert.
- 6) If you are a passenger in the car it is very easy to feel a lack of control. Believe it or not, many people find it easier to drive than ride. Sit back and enjoy the scenery and allow the driver to concentrate on the road.

## SHORTER EXCURSIONS

### CAMP BIRD ROAD

The road to the famous Camp Bird Mine is a compacted dirt surface leading back into an area that was heavily mined for gold and silver.

Immediately south of Ouray, just past the first switchback on Hwy 550, turn right at the highway sign for Box Canyon Falls and, at the immediate "Y" in the road, continue left. Follow the Yankee Boy Basin sign. Most cars can manage this road as far as the Camp Bird Mine, approximately 5 miles. It is not suitable for sports cars with low clearance.

Do not attempt to drive much beyond Camp Bird. The road doesn't look bad from there but it can turn rugged quickly. There is plenty of space to turn around at this juncture and return. Some guests like to park their car and hike the remaining distance into the Yankee Boy Basin. It's another 3 miles of steep grade if you feel the urge. Be sure to pull your car completely off the road in a safe place where it is out of the way of traffic.

Take a picnic. There are some great places to stop for a snack or an elaborate champagne and caviar lunch.

**ROUND TRIP TIME:** Round-trip driving time, without long stops, should be about 1 hour. This does allow time for Kodak moments.

### OWL CREEK PASS

This is a great half-day excursion. Be sure to plan a picnic lunch to take and enjoy just at the crest of the pass beside the stream. The road is a compact dirt surface which can get "washboard-y" in places.

There is usually wildlife on this drive -- more so than other trips. Some guests enjoy this trip in the late afternoon when the deer are grazing.

Turn right 2 miles north of Ridgway onto County Road 10 when you see the highway sign reading Owl Creek Pass and Silver Jack Reservoir. The road crosses several large ranches with forks going both to the left and right. Continue to follow the signs saying Owl Creek Pass.

After entering the national forest area, you will drive past Chimney Peak off to the right. You might also recognize other sights from the movie True Grit, which was filmed in this area. As you approach the pass, watch for a beautiful meadow on your left surrounded by aspen trees. This is the location where John Wayne and the “bad guys” rode their horses directly toward each other, firing their guns at the end of the movie.

From the pass, you can continue on to the Silver Jack Reservoir where they have some good lake fishing. Be sure to follow the signs taking the left fork immediately beyond the pass.

**ROUND TRIP TIME:** You can easily spend a half-day in this area if you go all the way to the reservoir. If you just drive to the pass and back, without much stop time, it would take approximately 2 hours.

## **OURAY TO SILVERTON & RETURN**

If you don't have time to enjoy the full San Juan Skyway, which takes 6 to 7 hours, you should at least enjoy the Million Dollar Highway to Silverton.

The drive between Ouray and Silverton is breathtaking. There are plenty of “photo ops” so take your camera!

Most guests are surprised that there are no guardrails on much of this highway. During the winter months, snow-plow drivers continuously monitor the conditions of this highway and plow 24 hours a day. The only place to put the accumulated snow is off the side.

The Million Dollar Highway was an old toll road built in the 1880's by Otto Mears. Just beyond the pull-out for Bear Creek Falls, 2 miles south of Ouray, Otto Mears set up his tollgate at the narrowest point in the “road”, to collect his \$3.75 from each “vehicle”.

Red Mountains #1, #2 and #3, towering above Ironton Park, glisten in the sunshine in colors of bright gold and orange. This natural coloring is caused by the oxidation of the iron in the soil.

Throughout this drive you will find the mountainsides dotted with old mines, weathered buildings and ore dumps. Millions of dollars in gold and silver were laboriously dug from these area mines.

The Idarado Mine, located just this side of Red Mountain Pass, closed down mining operations about 20 years ago. They are, however, continuing to work on land reclamation

This drive is spectacular both going and coming. As an extra treat, the Aspens in the fall are truly magnificent.

**ROUND TRIP TIME:** This round trip takes 2 hours, depending on the number of times you stop for photographs.

## **ALL DAY EXCURSIONS**

### **SAN JUAN SKYWAY LOOP**

This 7 hour, 232 mile loop can be a long day depending on how much you dally along the way. You'll be passing through Ridgway, Telluride, Cortez, Durango and Silverton. Even though the backgrounds of these towns are similar, each of them is unique, so allow some time for exploring each one.

You can start out on your circle loop going either way -- south through Silverton and Durango or north and west through Ridgway and Telluride. In determining your route, remember that you'll want to be driving between Durango and Ouray, on Hwy 550, during the daylight hours.

The San Juan Skyway encircles half of the largest mountain range in Colorado, includes ancient lands of the Anasazi and many of the largest, most productive mining camps in the United States. Many refer to this route as the most scenic drive in America.

You may be interested in exploring Mesa Verde. It can take the better part of a day to visit the ruins themselves so don't try to include this stop on this circle loop unless you leave very early and don't plan to make any other stops along the route.

The Ouray Visitors Center stocks a detailed Southwest Colorado map so stop by and request one. This map is very helpful in pinpointing the various attractions around the San Juan Skyway.

### **BLACK CANYON OF THE GUNNISON & MORROW POINT LAKE BOAT TOUR**

This all-day excursion gives you a good look at the Black Canyon from the top down and bottom up. Boat tours are scheduled six days a week (closed Tuesday) from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Leaving Ouray by 7:30 a.m. allows you plenty of time to tour the Black Canyon south rim visitor's center and many of the overlooks in that immediate area before driving further east on Hwy 50 to the Curecanti National Recreation Area for a boat tour.

If you've only planned for a half-day excursion, you might take in more of the Black Canyon overlooks along the south rim and then return to Ouray about mid-day without including the boat tour in your trip. If you've allowed longer and you're interested in a lake-level view of the canyon, continue driving another 30 miles (45 minutes) east on Hwy 50 to the dam. The 42-passenger pontoon boat tour originates from there. Driving east toward the dam, watch for the Pine Creek Trail. Once you have parked your car, you have a 1-hour walk down 232 steps to get to the boat dock. It is important that you be prepared for this kind of hike and allow for extra time to get down to the boat dock.

A National Park Ranger relates the lake's story and you'll get a fisheye view of the canyon. The cost of this boat tour is \$10.00 (adults), \$5.00 (seniors with Golden Age/Access Card) & \$5.00 (children 2 to 12). Children under 2 years are free. We recommend the 11:30 a.m. boat tour that lasts 1-1/2 hours. That allows time to return to Ouray before 5pm. You must call 970 641-2337, ext. 242, in advance to make reservations.

The Ouray Visitor Center stocks U.S. Dept of the Interior brochures for both the Black Canyon of the Gunnison and the Curecanti National Recreation Area. If you plan to do either of these excursions, stop by and pick one up.

### **UNAWEEP-TABEGUACHE SCENIC AND HISTORIC BYWAY**

This spectacular drive through the UnawEEP Canyon to Uravan takes you through a land of contrasts -- arid deserts and lush green valleys.

There are many unique points of interest along this historic byway: Uravan, where 60% of the uranium used for the U.S.'s first atomic bomb was

mined; the hanging flume, an engineering marvel which turned out to be a financial embarrassment and maintenance nightmare; East Creek and West Creek, two streams separated by a divide, each flowing in opposite directions; petroglyphs (rock art) attributed to the Uncompahgre people who inhabited the region from about 0 to 1300 A.D.

To start your "tour" of the canyon, drive north from Ouray and turn west at Ridgway on to Hwy 62. At the Placerville junction, follow Hwy 145 northwest through Norwood and Nucla. Just beyond Nucla, Hwy 141 turns north towards Uravan. Your canyon drive will end in Whitewater, a small ranching community just south of Grand Junction. From there you are about 2 hours from Ouray. To return to Ouray, drive south on Hwy 50 & 550.

Historical literature on the Unaweep Canyon and information on the above mentioned interest points is available at many of Ouray's book stores.

### **COLORADO NATIONAL MONUMENT – RIM ROCK DRIVE**

Colorado National Monument was established in 1911 to preserve one of the grand landscapes of the American west. Along the 7-mile Rim Rock Drive, you'll see bold, brilliantly colored, towering masses of naturally sculpted rock throughout a 32 square mile area of plateau and canyon country.

Throughout the drive along the rim, there are several short foot trails leading back into the canyons. There are also plenty of overlooks and two picnic areas with tables, charcoal grills, water and restrooms along the Rim Rock Drive.

To reach the entrance to the Colorado National Monument, drive north from Ouray on Hwy 550 & 50 to Grand Junction. When you reach Grand Junction, follow Hwy 50 north to the intersection of Grand Avenue (Hwy 340) and turn left onto Hwy 340. From there, follow the signs to Colorado National Monument to enter the park at the East Grand Junction Entrance. The charge to enter the park is \$5.00 per car. The Visitor Center is about three-fourths of the way along the Rim Rock Drive. You will exit the park at the West (Fruita) Entrance onto Hwy 340. Turn south and follow Hwy 340 back to Hwy 50 and back south to Ouray. It will take you 2 hours to return to Ouray.

Check for the Official U.S. Department of the Interior Map and Guide for the Colorado National Monument at the Ouray Visitor Center or pick up one when you get there.

### **GRAND MESA SCENIC & HISTORIC BYWAY**

Although this scenic drive is pretty throughout the summer season, the fall months, with the spectacular aspen colors, is a beautiful time of year to make this drive.

Drive north from Ouray to Delta (1 hour) and turn east onto Hwy 92. Just east of Delta, you will be turning north onto Hwy 65 going toward Cedaredge. You will slowly tour upward to an altitude of 10,000 feet, first through the rolling hills of apple orchard country and then into the higher aspen groves. Be sure to look back as you rise in altitude since you have a magnificent view of the San Juan and Cimarron Ranges and the beautiful green valleys below.

The 53 square miles of the Grand Mesa makes it the largest flat-topped

mountain in the country. Dotted with more than 220 lakes and streams, it literally "begs" you to stop and cast your line into one of them to try your hand at trout fishing.

If you didn't pack your lunch in Ouray, be sure to stop in Cedaredge and get a picnic lunch to enjoy on the Mesa at any number of spectacular locations.

Follow the signs to Grand Junction and return via Hwy 50 south. It will take you 2 hours to return to Ouray.

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Information subject to change.