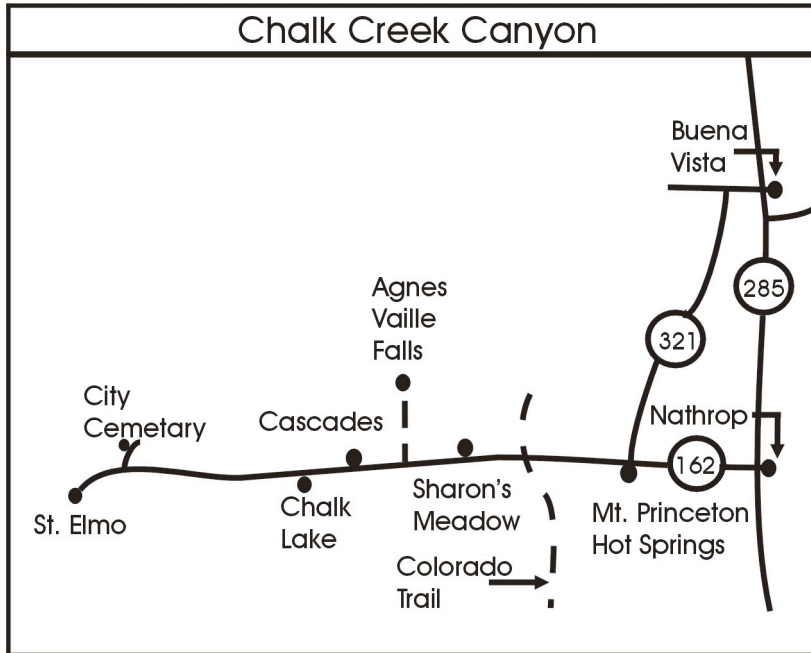


Day Five: Five Canyons Along the Arkansas

Today, instead of just driving by all this wonderful scenery, we're going to get up close and personal with some of it. This morning, we'll make a foray into the Sawatch Range where we'll enjoy nature's beauty and serenity in Chalk Creek Canyon, take a look at Colorado's best-preserved ghost town, and hike along the Colorado Trail. This afternoon, we'll drive through spectacular Arkansas River Canyon, experience the heights and depths of the Royal Gorge, and explore our way up Phantom Canyon to Cripple Creek...if you're game.

Speaking of being game...If you're on an extended tour and have a taste for adventure, you may want to try whitewater rafting on the Arkansas River. (See the photograph at the beginning of this book.) This is the best place in Colorado to experience the sport; some 300,000 rafters and kayakers come here every year, mid-May through early September. For that reason, *advance reservations are usually necessary*. You have a choice of fairly calm water starting about 12 miles north of Salida, or you can experience rougher water both north and south of Buena Vista. The half-day, 10-mile, Class III-IV Brown's Canyon trip is the most popular, at about \$45-50 per person. There are more than 60 state-licensed outfitters running the Arkansas River, so ask your innkeeper to recommend one. Those in the Buena Vista area which have been recommended to us are:

- **American Adventure Expeditions**, located in Johnson Village; P.O. Box 1549, 12844 E. US 24/285, Buena Vista, CO 81211; 719-395-2409, 800-288-0675, www.americanadventure.com, raftinginfo@americanadventure.com.
- **Dvorak's Kayak & Rafting Expeditions**, 17921 US 285, Nathrop, CO 81236; 719-539-6851, 800-824-3795, www.dvorakexpeditions.com, info@dvorakexpeditions.com.
- **Noah's Ark**, P.O. Box 850, Buena Vista, CO 81211; 719-395-2158, www.noahsark.com.
- **Wilderness Aware**, departs from Johnson Village, P.O. Box 1550, Buena Vista, CO 81211; 800-462-7238 or 719-395-2112, www.inaraft.com, rapids@inaraft.com. (We used this outfit; they did an excellent job.)



Chalk Creek Canyon and St. Elmo

You should know, before we begin this drive, that there are no services or public bathrooms, except for those at Mt. Princeton Hot Springs Resort.

From the traffic light in Buena Vista, let's head west on Main Street one-half mile to County Road 321/Rodeo St. where we'll turn left, drive 8 miles across the mesa to County Road 162 and then turn right toward the Continental Divide. You'll see Mount Princeton Hot Springs Resort at the junction of CR 321 and CR 162. It's here that we suggest you take a mileage reading, so we can better guide you.

As we enter Chalk Creek Canyon between Mt. Princeton on your right and Mt. Antero on your left, you may be interested to learn a couple of things. The first is that this is one of several places in the Upper Arkansas River Valley where geothermal springs bubble up from deep in the earth. The springs have provided soothing baths for human beings since they were first discovered by Native Americans many years before white men came. (If you are on an extended tour, Mount Princeton Hot Springs Resort is a good place to experience swimming or soaking in clean, clear, odor-free hot mineral water).

The other thing is related to the first: the white cliffs on your right have been made "chalky" by the leaching of hot springs upward through fissures in the rocks. The powdery white rock is called kaolinite. As you'll see, the cliffs add an element of beauty to the canyon that will help you remember this drive for a very long time. (See the photograph at the beginning of this book.)

To get maximum enjoyment from this 10-mile drive, we'd like to suggest that you get out of the car four or five times before reaching St. Elmo in order to better take in the serenity of this canyon and the San Isabel National Forest. Four spots in particular provide especially nice viewing.

First is Sharon's Meadow, a wildlife viewing area, three miles from the CR 321/162 junction, on the right. Our last time at Sharon's Meadow, we saw six bighorn sheep feeding, about 20 feet from the road. The reader board provides interesting information on the flora and fauna of the area.

Second is Agnes Vaille Falls, one mile farther, also on the right. We recommend the one-half mile hike to the falls, not to see something spectacular (it's not), but, as we suggested earlier, to "get up close and personal" with the scenery. You'll have another chance to hike, along the Colorado Trail, in a little while.

Third, a mile later, you'll come to the Cascades, which is also worth a close-up look if the water is flowing well.

Lastly, one mile past the Cascades, you'll come upon Chalk Lake, on your left. Here, you'll see a beaver hut and a beaver dam holding water back from the road.

Have you been noticing the pleasant vistas along Chalk Creek and the beautiful aspen groves on the left? Harking back to our tutorial on trees while in Rocky Mountain National Park, you'll remember that the presence of aspens means we're in the montane life zone, somewhere between 7,000 and 9,500 feet in elevation.

When you arrive in St. Elmo (10,012 feet), we suggest that you walk to the other end of town, slowly taking it all in, then return to our narrative.

* * * * *

OK, you're back. Here's the scoop on St. Elmo.

Would you believe that some 1,000 people lived here during the 1880's and 1890's? And that the Denver, South Park and Pacific Railway came up Chalk Creek Canyon to St. Elmo? (Yes, that was the old railroad roadbed you were driving on.)

Originally called Forest City, St. Elmo was a junction point for wagons and stagecoaches heading up the North Fork of Chalk Creek and over the Continental Divide at Tincup Pass (to your right and up the mountain). When the railroad completed the Alpine Tunnel through the Divide above town in 1882, St. Elmo became the trade and transportation center for the mines in this area. The tunnel was in use intermittently until 1910. The railroad continued operations along Chalk Creek and its South Fork (to your

left) until 1926, particularly in support of the Mary Murphy Mine, which was the most famous and productive silver mine in the area.

In addition to the usual services, such as restaurants, saloons, livery stable, blacksmith, druggist and hardware store, St. Elmo had five hotels, a sawmill, a hydroelectric power plant and four ore-crushing stamp mills.

Knowing that, you may be able to imagine what this town was like in its heyday...miners, travelers and merchants carrying on their business in the various establishments...wagons, stagecoaches and horses moving about the main street...the train chugging and whistling toward town...the stamp mills thudding in the distance...all nearly drowning out the clang of the blacksmith's hammer on his anvil. This may be a "ghost town," but it was once a good-sized, living, breathing business center and community, typical of others throughout these mountains.

What makes it atypical is that so much of St. Elmo still stands. Elsewhere, fires, scavengers, vandals, time and the elements have reduced most of the old mining camps to a few log cabins and miscellaneous structures. St. Elmo, however, is now protected by preservationists, its residents, and its status as a national historic district—so future generations can see and enjoy the real thing.

Mostly, we have Annabelle Stark (who used her shotgun to run off intruders who were a danger to her beloved town) to thank for the preservation of St. Elmo. Annabelle and her brother, Tony, ran the Stark Brothers General Store, and Home Comfort Hotel, on the second floor, until the 1950's. (See the photograph at the beginning of this book.)

**** skip to end of chapter ****

It's Dinnertime!

- **Bronco Billy's Steakhouse** (in Buffalo Billy's Casino), American, sports-mounted wildlife, Thur-Sun, 233 E. Bennett Ave., 719-689-2142, no website, \$\$-\$\$\$.
- **Down Under Steak House** (in the Midnight Rose Casino), American food, Australian ambiance, Thur-Sun, 256 E. Bennett Ave., 719-689-0303, no website, \$\$-\$\$\$\$.
- **Maggie's Restaurant** (in the Colorado Grand Casino), American cuisine, late 1880's, 300 E. Bennett Ave., 719-689-3517, no website, \$-\$\$.
- **Stratton Room** (in the Imperial Hotel; our preference), American cuisine, Victorian ambiance, 123 N. Third St., 719-689-7777, no website, \$\$-\$\$\$.

Ginnodo-recommended Accommodations

- **Cripple Creek Hospitality House & RV Park**, PO Box 957, 600 N. "B" St., Cripple Creek 80813, 719-689-2513, 800-500-2513, fax 719-689-2513, www.cchospitalityhouse.com, \$-\$\$.
- **Hotel St. Nicholas**, PO Box 1459, 303 N. Third St., Cripple Creek 80813, 719-689-0856, 888-786-4257, fax 719-689-2877, www.cripple-creek.co.us/stnick.html, akelly600@aol.com, \$.
- **Last Dollar Inn B&B**, PO Box 1199, 315 E. Carr Ave., Cripple Creek 80813, 719-689-9113, 888-429-6700, fax 719-689-0868, www.cripple-creek.co.us/lastdinn.htm, packy578@concentric.net, \$-\$\$ (we really like this place).
- **More B&Bs at** www.innsofcolorado.org, and www.coloradobnb.com.

AAA- or Mobil-recommended Motels/Hotels

- **Carr Manor**, PO Box 189, 350 E. Carr Ave., Cripple Creek 80813, 719-689-3709, fax 719-689-2140, www.carrmanor.com, reservations@carrmanor.com, \$\$-\$\$\$.
- **Gold King Mountain Inn**, PO Box 1329, 601 E. Galena Ave., Cripple Creek 80813, 719-689-2600, 800-445-3607, fax 719-689-3426, www.gkmi.com, \$-\$\$.

Woodall's-recommended RV Parks & Campgrounds

- **Cripple Creek Hospitality House & RV Park**: from center of town at jct 2nd St & Bennett Ave, go 1/4 mi W on Bennett Ave, then 5 blocks N past school on B St.; 800-500-2513, www.cchospitalityhouse.com
- **Eagles Landing RV Park**: Cripple Creek; from center of town at jct 2nd St & Bennett Ave, go S 2 blocks to Warren and turn right; 719-689-2006, www.cripplecreekrv.com.
- **KOA-Cripple Creek**: from jct Hwy 67 & Teller 81, go 1/2 mi S on Teller 81 toward Victor; 719-689-3376.
- **Lost Burro Campground**: Cripple Creek; from center of town at jct 2nd St & Bennett Ave, go 1/4 mi W on Bennett Ave, then 200 feet N on B St., then 3-1/2 mi NW on CR 1; 719-689-2345, 877-689-2345, www.lostburro.com, lostburro@ccvnet.net.
- **Mueller State Park**: Divide; from Cripple Creek, go 14-1/2 mi N on Hwy 67; 719-687-2366, <http://parks.state.co.us/parks/mueller>.