

Exploring the Northern-most Byways of Southwest Colorado

Total Number of Days/Nights: 5

Itinerary Summary: Travel the scenic and historic routes of the West Elk Loop Byway, Grand Mesa National Scenic and Historic Byway and the Unaweep Tabaguache Byway. Marvel at geologic wonders, endless views, engineering talents, and a remarkable historic timeline that begins with indigenous tribes, and moves onward with early explorers, settlers and pioneers.

Destinations include:

West Elk Loop	Wineries and Fresh Produce
Pioneer Museum	Farm Tours
Kebler Pass	Pioneer Town
Irwin Cemetery	Unaweep Tabeguache Byway
Mesa National Scenic & Historic Byway	Hanging Flume

Day One: Gunnison, CO

Start the adventure on the West Elk Loop heading into Gunnison on Hwy. 50. The West Elk Loop derives its name from the West Elk Mountains, which the Loop circumnavigates. Major geological upheavals created the rugged landscape and rare natural beauty encompassed by the Loop. The Pioneer Museum is a great stop for train enthusiasts. The museum includes an authentic railroad depot, narrow gauge train, and water tank, a turn-of-the-century farmhouse filled with artifacts, and a schoolhouse complete with desks, chalk boards and historic photographs.

Day Two: Crested Butte, CO

Head north to Crested Butte, “Wildflower Capital of Colorado,” where in the 1860s, hopeful gold and silver miners found their way north to the valleys and gulches of the upper East River valley. Crested Butte prospered from silver mining, but the coke-quality coal gave it staying power and made mining a mainstay into the 1950s. Remnants of the coke ovens may still be seen on the east edge of Big Mine Park, located at Third and Bellevue. From there, head over Kebler Pass and into the Anthracite Creek drainage, meeting Highway 13 at the Paonia Dam. The Irwin Cemetery is located on top of the pass and includes the grave of Mary Bambrough, who died in 1881 of scarlet fever at the age of 17. A poem adorns her grave marker.

Day Three: Paonia, CO

Head south toward the North Fork Valley of Delta County. The journey follows a route once traveled by Spanish explorers Friars Dominguez and Escalante, and travels through an area that was once home to the Ute Indians. Later, early pioneers recognized the agricultural potential of the valley and set down roots here. This bounty is still harvested today. The rich agricultural landscapes provide opportunities to experience wine tastings, roadside produce stands, and farm tours providing modern-day agricultural experiences guaranteed to keep anyone entertained and well fed.

Day Four: Grand Mesa, CO, Grand Junction, CO

Head south on Hwy. 133, connect to Hwy. 92 and follow 92 to Hwy. 65. Head north on Hwy. 65 to the Grand Mesa National Scenic and Historic Byway for Pioneer Heritage. In Cedaredge, take a tour of Pioneer Town with the three stacked lumber silos, pioneer village and numerous exhibits, including Doris’s Doll and Toy Museum. Pioneer Town provides an opportunity to learn more about the lives of the settlers. A quick spur trip along Land’s End Road

provides access to the Raber Cabins and then on to the Land's End Observatory. Each site offers interpretation and stunning views of the valley below, including five mountain ranges. The Grand Mesa has over 300 lakes and history that may be enjoyed by all ages. Ask about the Baron and the Fishermen. Connect to I-70 and go west into Grand Junction.

Day Five: Norwood, CO

From I-70 take the Delta-Montrose exit and follow the signs to Hwy. 50. Once on Hwy. 50, watch for the Unaweep Tabeguache Byway exit in Whitewater and turn west onto Hwy. 141. The Unaweep Tabeguache Byway provides a journey through geological time zones and engineering wonders. The Ute Indians called the canyon "Unaweep," a Ute word for "canyon with two mouths." This is the only canyon in the world with a watershed divide in the middle of the canyon. Features along the Byway include Driggs Mansion, Thimble Rock and the Hanging Flume. The Flume was built suspended above the Dolores River to transport water to a placer mine on Mesa Creek. Remnants of the wooden flume still cling to the canyon walls today.

SPECIAL DATES FOR THIS ITINERARY:

Crested Butte Wildflower Festival, Crested Butte, held mid-July every year.

Color Sunday, Grand Mesa, held the last Sunday in September. For a schedule, visit www.grandmesabyway.org.