



Attach Profile Sheet:

West Elk Loop

Length: 205 miles

Driving time: 6-8 hours

The twin summits of Mount Sopris and the incomparable Black Canyon of the Gunnison anchor the ends of the West Elk Loop. This magnificent landscape has been home to uncounted

generations of Native Americans, most recently the Utes. White settlers originally came in search of minerals and stayed to farm and ranch.

The coke ovens at Redstone bear witness to the toil that built the communities of today. Carbondale, Hotchkiss, Crawford, Gunnison, Crested Butte and other towns offer a slice of Colorado's rich history, varied lifestyles and natural beauty. The route gives access to the White River and Gunnison National Forests, the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park, Curecanti National Recreational Area, and Crawford and Paonia State Parks.

Attach Itinerary:

Exploring the Northern-most Byways of Southwest Colorado

Total Number of Days/Nights: 4

Travel historic and scenic byways, marvel at geologic wonders, endless views, engineering feats and a remarkable historic timeline that begins with indigenous tribes and moves onward with early explorers, settlers and pioneers. Visit friendly historic towns where some of time seems to have stood still.

Destinations include:

West Elk Loop Scenic Byway

Farms, Wineries and Fresh Produce Stands

Pioneer Town Museum

Crested Butte Registered National Historic District

Kebler Pass

Irwin Cemetery

Grand Mesa National Scenic & Historic Byway

Day One: Gunnison. Start the adventure on the West Elk Loop by 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 along the Loop. The Pioneer Museum is a great stop for train enthusiasts.

Day Two: Crested Butte. Head north to Crested Butte, a National Registered Historic District, where in the 1860s, hopeful gold and silver miners found their way north to the valleys and gulches of the upper East River Valley, and where coke-quality coal made mining a mainstay into the 1950s. Remnants of the coke ovens may still be seen on the east edge of Big Mine Park. From there, head over Kebler Pass and into the Anthracite Creek drainage, meeting Highway 133 at the Paonia Dam. The Irwin Cemetery, located on top of the pass, 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. 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 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.

Day Four: Grand Mesa. Start in Cedaredge to enjoy the Grand Mesa National Scenic and Historic Byway and some Pioneer Heritage. Take a tour of Pioneer Town and learn more about the lives of 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. A feud between an English Baron and local fishermen once became an international issue ending in 1904 with U.S. Congress compensating the Baron with \$25,000 to settle the matter. Take time to visit the locals in the Town of Mesa, where western culture thrives to this day. Connect to I-70 and go west into Grand Junction.