

HIGH COUNTRY *Shopper*

FEATURED

High Country Highlights: Pioneer Town - Explore the Past

Stu Carlson - Staff Writer Aug 28, 2019



Bar I Ranch Silos - original to the site.

Photo by Stu Carlson

Entering the town of Cedaredge on Highway 65, travelers are greeted by three classic wooden silos that beg for a closer look. Discovering that there is an entire reconstructed historical town behind them is a dream come true for history buffs and curious families alike. Welcome to Pioneer Town; a place where history comes alive and anyone can get a taste of what things were like in the Surface Creek area over 100 years ago.



Main Street

Photo by Stu Carlson

The ever-growing project exemplifies the best kind of community spirit. Volunteers, generous local contractors, benefactors, memberships and several fundraising events have all contributed to the development and success of the museum from the beginning. Donated, local, antique artifacts, that could have disappeared in auctions, have been preserved by the Surface Creek Valley Historical Society and several long-time residents.

Through the collaboration of local volunteers, this spectacular living museum spans over five acres and consists of twenty-four buildings, each with their own unique displays. The exhibits contain all local artifacts from the pioneer era, which covers the historical period from the late 1800s through the early 1900s. The unique nine and eleven sided construction of the original Bar I Ranch silos showcase the extraordinary craftsmanship of times past and hint at what's to be found inside the museum.



Photo by Stu Carlson



Photo by Stu Carlson

Keen attention to detail is evidenced throughout Pioneer Town and visitors are encouraged to leave no stone unturned during their tour. Few of the areas are off-limits. Only the most delicate displays, that have been roped off or have been placed under glass, are for viewing only. The hands-on, family-friendly approach to experiencing the museum creates a unique immersive experience.

As you stroll through the grounds, be sure to take note of the wide variety of mature trees that were strategically planted around the five-acre property. Long-time Surface Creek member and Pioneer Town Volunteer, Charlie Baker, began the tree planting project and was the chief groundskeeper until he passed in 2015. The Arboretum is dedicated to him and showcases the many tree varieties that can thrive in our semi-dry altitude.



Just some of the local brands in the blacksmith shop.

Photo by Stu Carlson



Paul Michaels' working Blacksmith Shop

Photo by Stu Carlson

Walking down the creaking wooden boardwalks of Old Main Street is the best kind of time machine. The Sand Creek Schoolhouse has a working school bell attached to a rope that is irresistible to ignore. Guests are encouraged to ring it and in the nearby Peterson's impossibly small cabin, you can almost hear the stirrings of their nine children as they prepare to head to school. Next door, the well-stocked Coalby Store would have been a place to pick up dry goods, mail and information.



Part of the extensive arrowhead collection in the Sutherland Indian Museum

Down the street, the Charles States Museum shouldn't be missed. Here you can see a variety of displays from locally crafted needlepoint to dinosaur footprints found in the area, one of which is in the running for the largest ever found on record. The Girling Mercantile is fun to tour and you will marvel at the thought of squeezing a foot into the narrowest of shoes displayed there.

As long as court is not in session, you can mosey into the Lizard Head Saloon and belly up to the bar or take a seat at the poker table. Mind your p's and q's while you're there though or you could wind up in the original, unheated 1905 jailhouse. The detail and craftsmanship that went into the making of the handmade dolls at Doris's Doll and Toy House is nothing short of astonishing and the Sutherland Indian Museum is not to be missed. Arrowhead enthusiasts will find a hard time leaving this museum as it hosts one of the most extensive collections in the west.



The Stolte Shed.

Photo by Stu Carlson

The award-winning Chapel of the Cross is a simple, but beautiful church, built in prairie style architecture, and is situated in a park-like setting. It is an ideal place for a memorable event. Together with the Stolte Shed, an original packing shed that was relocated from the Stolte orchard, the buildings present the perfect venues for weddings and receptions. Both are available for rental year-round.



Chapel of the Cross Church

Photo by Stu Carlson



Museum entrance and Welcome Center for the Grand Mesa Scenic Byway

Photo by Stu Carlson

This comprehensive collection of artifacts and recreated buildings offers a unique experience to spend a day in the past and marvel at the life of the early pioneers of Surface Creek. Through the generous donations of many community members over several years, the museum has become one of the finest historical exhibits in Western Colorado. An unparalleled, hands-on experience awaits any would-be time travelers. All you have to do is step inside.

Find out more about the museum, including hours of operation, on their website at pioneertown.org and don't forget to spend some time checking out the Welcome Center for the Grand Mesa Scenic Byway at the museum's entrance. Be sure to check out the annual Antique and Classic Car Show at Pioneer Town during Applefest!