

COLORADO MINERS – TRANSPORTATION

Skiing

What do these photos tell you about how miners got around in the winter?

Skiing Near Irwin

This photo of men on skis was taken near the mining town of Irwin, which was located west of Crested Butte in Gunnison County.



Men skiing near Irwin

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

In the late 1800s, skis were called Norwegian snow-shoes. Miners used them during the winter to go from one mountain town to another. At that time, skiers used a long pole to help them turn.

Their Own Words

"I made me a pair of snow-shoes [skis] and, of course, was not an expert. Sometimes I would fall; and, on one occasion, as I was going down the mountain to Gold Run, my shoes got crossed in front as I was going very fast. A little pine-tree was right in my course, and I could not turn, and dare not encounter the tree with the shoes crossed; and so threw myself onto the snow, and went in out of sight."

Source: John Dyer, The Snow-Shoe Itinerant, (Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe, 1890), reprinted in Carl Ubbelohde, et. al, eds., A Colorado Reader, (Boulder: Pruett Press, 1982): 154.

Delivering Mail On Skis

The man on skis in this photo is a mailman. He is delivering mail to a mountain mining camp.



Mailman delivering mail on skis

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

During the winter, mailmen used skis to deliver the mail in the mountains. The threat of avalanches make this a dangerous job.

Their Own Words

“The most welcome of all in the mining camps far up the Rock Mountain peaks are the mail carriers. Brave, hard fellows they are that climb the peaks on snowshoes [skis], delivering the mail and many precious packages that always fill the pouch. Delivering the mails in the mountains in midwinter is a difficult and dangerous work. Sometimes the carrier is swept away by a snowslide, and months roll away before the brave fellow and his pouch are found. . .”

“The carrier in the frontier of the Rocky Mountains straps the mail sack on his back, puts on his Norwegian snowshoes [skis], and, with a long guiding pole, starts on his weary climb over the range. Usually there is a crowd at the post office to wish him good luck. Only men of known strength and courage can do this work, for twenty-five pounds of letters, papers, and packages become very heavy and burdensome in climbing the mountains.”

Source: Colorado Graphic April 18, 1891, in Colorado Magazine, 17 (January 1940): 36.

Women Skiing (1905)

This photo of women on skis was taken in 1905 somewhere in the Rocky Mountains.



Women skiing in the Rocky Mountains

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

By the early 1900s, skiing also was a form of recreation. Women as well as men skied for fun.

Their Own Words

“ . . . In the wintertime my mother used to go out skiing with us. My dad never did, because he didn’t care much about skiing. They made them [their skis]. They had one-by-fours [lengths of wood], and they’d boil them and then stick it in the log cabin [between the logs] and wait until the end turned up. But they made their own skis. They were slick, and, of course, they’d put paraffin or something, wax, whatever they had, on them. Sometimes lard. One night we were ski-riding in the moonlight and there was one pole out in the field. [Mother] said she knew she was going to hit that post, and she did, head-on. So that took care of her skiing. She wouldn’t go skiing with us anymore.”

Source: Iris Self Lyons quoted in Julie Jones-Eddy, ed. Homesteading Women: An Oral History of Colorado, 1890-1950 (New York: Twayne, 1992): 97.

Pack Trains

What do these photos tell you about how early mining camps got their supplies?

Pack Train In Telluride

This is a pack train of burros loaded with wooden boxes. The photo was taken in Telluride sometime during the 1890s.



Pack train of burros in Telluride

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Many of the smaller mines in Colorado were high in the mountains. They could not be reached by railroad or wagon road. The owners of those mines used pack trains of burros or mules to haul in supplies.

Their Own Words

". . . I took our burro, which was eating its head off, and packed grub to the Highland Mary Mine. Usually I could make two trips a day, pack a load up and ride the burro back, at \$3.50 a load. For a fourteen-year-old boy, I made good wages."

Source: Robert Born (1934), CWA Interview Doc. 8/349, Colorado Historical Society.

Hauling Timbers In Silver Plume

The man in this photo is loading burros with wooden planks. The photo was taken at a lumberyard in Silver Plume, a town near Georgetown.



Burros hauling timbers in Silver Plume

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Burros were very useful animals. Miners used them haul lumber and supplies up to the mines. They also used them to haul ore out of the mines.

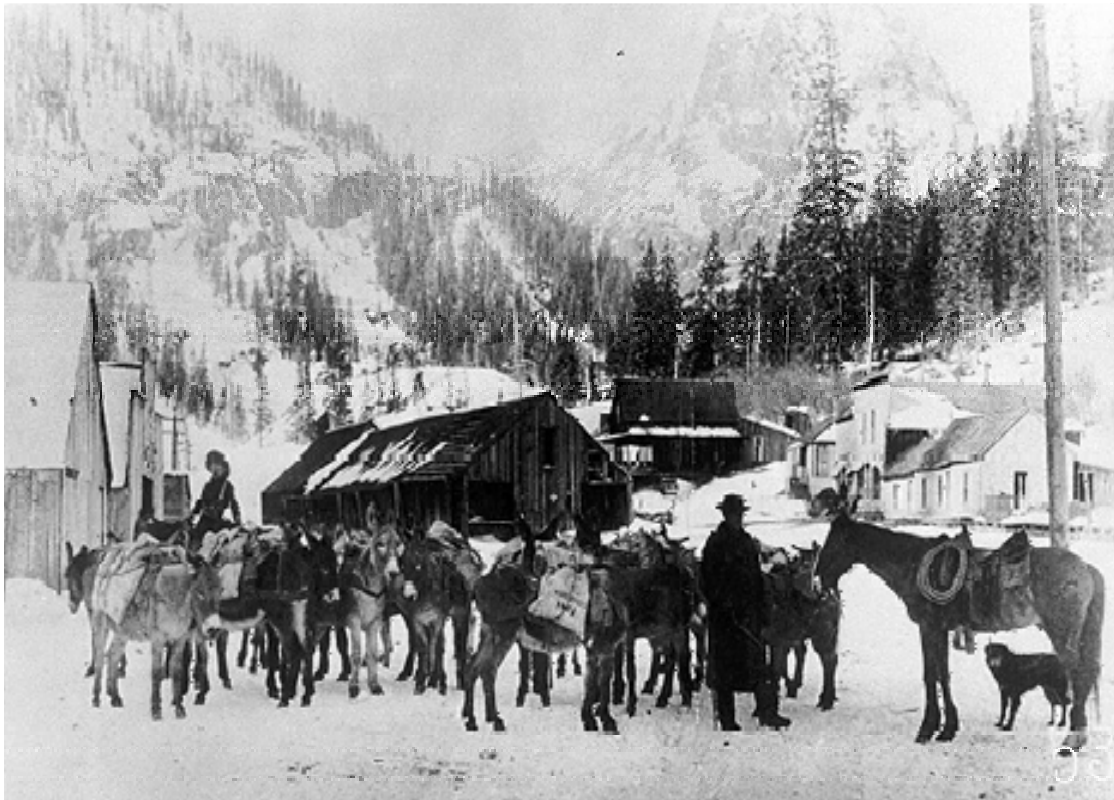
Their Own Words

“Wood is brought to market on the backs of pack mules (a beast scarcely three feet high [indicating these animals were actually burros]) and sells for 25 cents per load. It is astonishing to see how the little beasts are burdened. . . . when the little fellows come to market, with their burdens of hay and wool, one would be at a loss to find the motive power, as they completely enveloped in the commodity, hear and ears, and that is saving a good deal.”

Source: “T,” “A Michigan Correspondent in Colorado, 1878,” Sidney Glazer, ed., Colorado Magazine, 37 (July 1960): 211.

Pack Train At a Mining Camp

This photo shows a pack train of burros at a mine in the mountains. They are loaded with packs filled with gold or silver ore.



A pack of burros in a mining camp

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Miners used pack trains to haul ore from mines high in the mountains to smelters. The smelters removed the gold or silver from the quartz rock.

Their Own Words

"Most pack animals are interesting creatures. I remember one that always wanted to be in the lead on a trail, for she liked to set the pace. Another would go regularly to the cook tent after each meal for the garbage. One year in camp, we had a very canny little mule that seemed to know when moving day was coming, for on such occasions she would wander away from the other animals very early in the morning and hide."

Source: Wallace W. Atwood, The Rocky Mountains (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1945): 58.

Pack Train Near Silverton

This pack train of burros was photographed near Silverton. The burros probably were hauling ore down the mountain.



Pack train of burros near Silverton

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

This photo shows a pack train high in the mountains. The highest mines in Colorado were above timberline. Using pack trains of burros was the only way to haul the gold or silver ore down the mountain to the smelters. Burros were often also the only way to bring in supplies and fuel to the mining camps.

Their Own Words

“A bad pack animal is a terrible problem. He may refuse to stand while the pack is being put into place and may, at any moment, begin to buck the load off. I have seen cereals, hams, bacon, eggs, condensed milk, sugar, flour, and camp dishes go shooting in all directions and spilling down the hill because some pack animal misbehaved.”

Source: Wallace W. Atwood, The Rocky Mountains (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1945): 60.

Horse Drawn Vehicles

What do these photos tell you about how merchants delivered their goods?

Water Wagon In Central City

This is a water wagon. The men on the wagon delivered water to people's houses. The photo was taken in Central City.



Water wagon in Central City

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Why did Central City need a water wagon? During its first twenty years, Central City did not have a public water system. There were no underground pipes delivering water to people's homes. People relied on water wagons for their drinking water.

Their Own Words

"Except in the National Hotel and store buildings there was very little plumbing in town. Bathrooms were few and residents had to buy water by the bucket. The water wagon would come around once a day. People would fill their water barrel in the kitchen, paying five cents or so a bucket. The Saturday-night bath was usually taken in the kitchen in a washtub with water that was heated in a reservoir on the back of the kitchen stove."

Source: William W. Wardell, "Cripple Creek Memories," Colorado Magazine, 37 (1960): 30.

Basalt Supply Company Wagon

The wagon in this photo is a delivery wagon. The words Basalt Supply Co. are written on its side.



Basalt Supply Company wagon

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Merchants used light wagons like this one to delivery goods to customers. Few of the miners rode horses or had wagons of their won. It was expensive to keep and feed a horse. They ordered supplies at a store and had them delivered to their house.

Their Own Words

“The warehouse stood beside the railway tracks and was large enough to hold a number of carloads of groceries of all kinds, as well as hay and grain. There was a large stable in the back which accommodated several saddle horses and the horses used on the order wagon and the delivery wagons. Few residences had telephones and it was necessary for a man to go around town and take orders by using a horse and buggy, the orders to be filled later in the sore and delivered by wagon.”

Source: William W. Wardell, “Memories of Aspen, Colorado,” Colorado Magazine, 30 (January 1958): 116.

Delivery Wagons In Silver Plume

This photo was taken in Silver Plume, Colorado. It shows a freight wagon and team of horses in from of a store. The signs on the window say Roberts Brothers, Groceries, Hardware, Miners' Supplies.



Delivery wagon in Silver Plume

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Merchants like the Roberts brothers ordered groceries and hardware from supply towns down on the plains. These supplies were delivered in heavy freight wagons. The merchants made a profit by selling the goods for more than they paid for them. Most mining town stores were very profitable businesses.

Their Own Words

"About this time I met a boy from Del Norte who offered to sell me his team, wagon and harness for \$200, and as I had been saving my money and had the cash, I took his offer. The very next day I found four passengers for Del Norte at \$20 apiece, and from then on I put in several years taking freight or passengers from Alamosa to Del Norte and Silverton."

"Sometimes, if I only had a couple of passengers for Silverton, I would put in a couple of cases of eggs and a box of butter or maybe a sack of cabbage and a sack of potatoes. Eggs cost thirty-five cents a dozen at this time and brought \$1.10 in Silverton; butter cost thirty-five cents a pound and brought \$1.50; and cabbage and potatoes were a cent a pound in Alamosa and sold for ten cents a pound in Silverton.

"I was just a kid of course, but into the ten years from 1879 until I settled in Alamosa in 1889, I crowded a lifetime of adventure and experience."

Source: Robert Born (1934), CWA Interview Doc. 8/349, Colorado Historical Society.

Hay Sled In Telluride

This photo was taken in 1892 in the town of Telluride. The horses are pulling sleds filled with bales of hay. The sign on the front of the store says HAY, GRAIN AND FEED.



Hay sled in Telluride

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

Merchants and mine operators who owned horses, burros, and mules needed hay to feed them during the winter. They brought the hay from feed stores like the one in this photo. The sleds in this photo are delivering a new supply of hay to the feed store.

Their Own Words

“Well, they used to use the so-called hayracks. They put runners on the hayracks in wintertime, and people came to town on runners. There were also so-called cutters, which were smaller conveyances, usually one-horse, to carry two or four people, probably; there was a lighter rid. Of course, there was always horseback, and there were wagons of various kinds.. and buggies, and the so-called trap that the people in the backseat couldn’t get out until the people in the front seat got out. It was largely horse conveyance in the wintertime.”

Source: Virginia Shepard quote in Julie Jones-Eddy, ed. Homesteading Women: An Oral History of Colorado, 1890-1950 (New York: Twayne, 1992): 77-78.

Railroads

What do these photos tell you about how important railroads were to miners?

Locomotive Near Central City

This photo shows a locomotive of the 1870s with the town of Central City in the background.



Locomotive in Central City

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The first railroad to cross the continent was completed in 1869. It connected Chicago and San Francisco. In time, railroads connected the larger mining towns with Denver and other cities on the plains. Railroads could bring people and supplies to the mining towns and to ship out ore and gold and silver bullion faster and cheaper than horse-drawn wagons.

Their Own Words

"Empire City, Colorado Territory, July 29th, 1869

On the tenth of May word came to Denver by telegraph that the Union Pacific Railroad was completed at twelve o'clock--noon--that day. The track layers from the east and from the west met on the northern border of Great Salt Lake, and the Governor of California drive the last spike. . . . It is a great thing for America, a road from ocean to ocean, nearly five thousand miles in length. . . . Of course this wonderful road does not mean so much to you, but it will be a great thing for Colorado Territory. I should like to ride over the whole length of it; perhaps some time I may."

Source: Emma Shepard Hill, A Dangerous Crossing and What Happened on the Other Side (Denver, 1924): 118.

Trestle Near Black Hawk

The train in this photo is headed up the mountain from Black Hawk to Central City. It crossed the gully at the bottom of the photo on a trestle or bridge made of wood timbers. The building in the center of the photo is the shaft house of a mine. The light-colored material behind the building is rock removed from the mine. It is called a tailings pile.



Trestle near Black Hawk

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

The railroad that connected Central City and Black Hawk benefited both towns. It hauled ore from the mines at Central City to the stamp mills and smelters at Black Hawk. The railroad helped provide jobs for miners, smelter workers, and railroad workers.

Their Own Words

“The first railroad to enter the district was completed to Black Hawk in 1872, the depot being an old stone mill in the lower end of town. Large doors were cut in either end, so the entire train was under cover. This was abandoned when the high line to Central [City] was constructed in 1878, and a new depot was erected nearer the center of town. The high line to Central City was completed in 1878.”

Source: C. H. Hanington, “Early Days of Central City,” Colorado Magazine, 19 (January 1942): 13.

Cripple Creek Train Depot.

This is the railroad station at Cripple Creek. It shows a locomotive and a horse-drawn carriage parked at the station. The photo was taken in 1896.



Railroad station in Cripple Creek

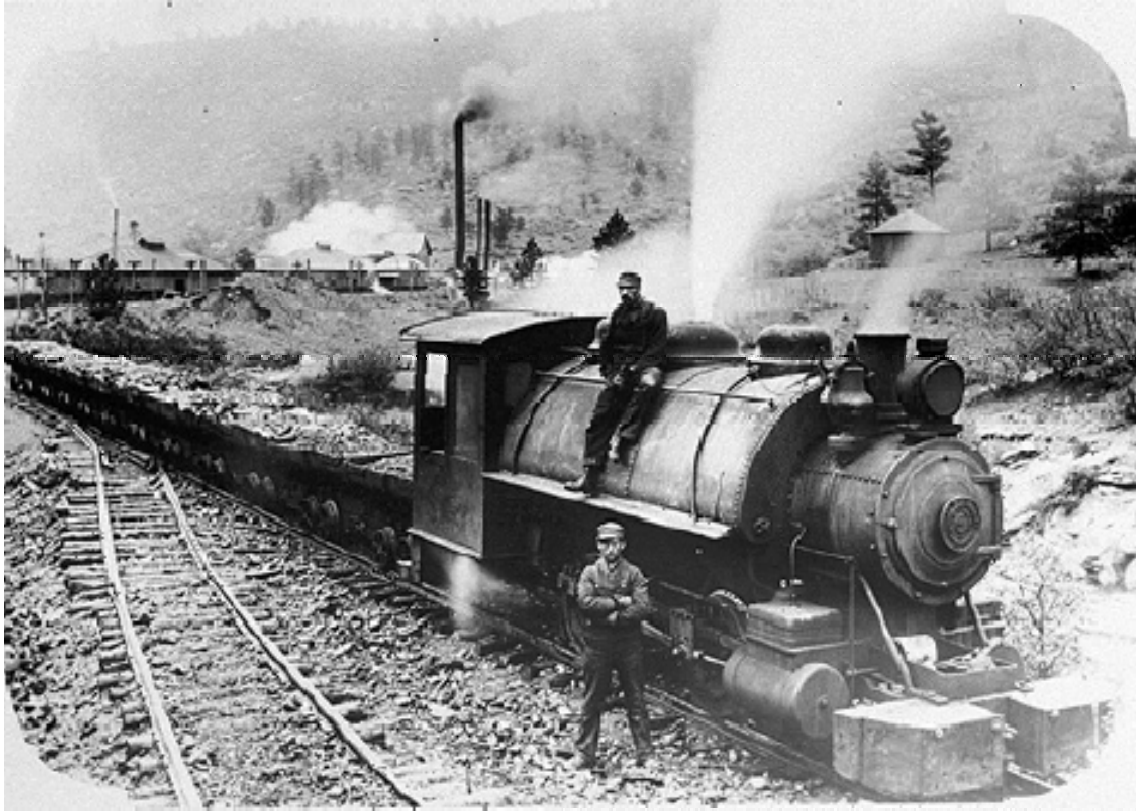
Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

A prospector discovered gold at Cripple Creek in 1890. This mining camp was located in a remote region behind Pike's Peak. It was more than 40 miles from the nearest city-Colorado Springs. The first railroad was built from Colorado Springs to Cripple Creek in 1894, a second in 1895. Railroads helped make Cripple Creek a prosperous mining town.

Coal Train Near Trinidad

This photo was taken about the year 1900 at a coalmine near Trinidad.



Coal train near Trinidad

Photo: Colorado Historical Society

More About This Topic

In time railroads replaced horse-pulled carts in coalmines. The cars in this photo are filled with coal from a mine near Trinidad.

Locomotive Plowing Snow

This photo was taken in the mountains near Central City. The men are shoveling snow off the track.



Locomotive plowing snow

Photo: Denver Public Library, Western History Collection

More About This Topic

Winter snowstorms presented a major problem for railroads operating in the mountains. A heavy snow in December 1913, blocked the trains between Central City and Black Hawk for several weeks.

Their Own Words

“The winter of 1889-1890 was a very severe winter. The railroad was repeatedly being blocked with snow and at one time was completely shut down, being blocked with snow for a period of about seventy-five days, from early February to about the middle of April. The railroad shops were almost completely shut down for several weeks, only a few men retained to keep stationary boilers going and various equipment inside the shop from freezing.”

Source: George W. Champion, “Remembrances of South Park,” Colorado Magazine, 40 (January 1963): 27.