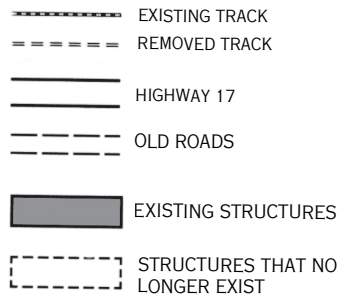


CUMBRES PASS, COLORADO

ELEVATION 10,015 FEET

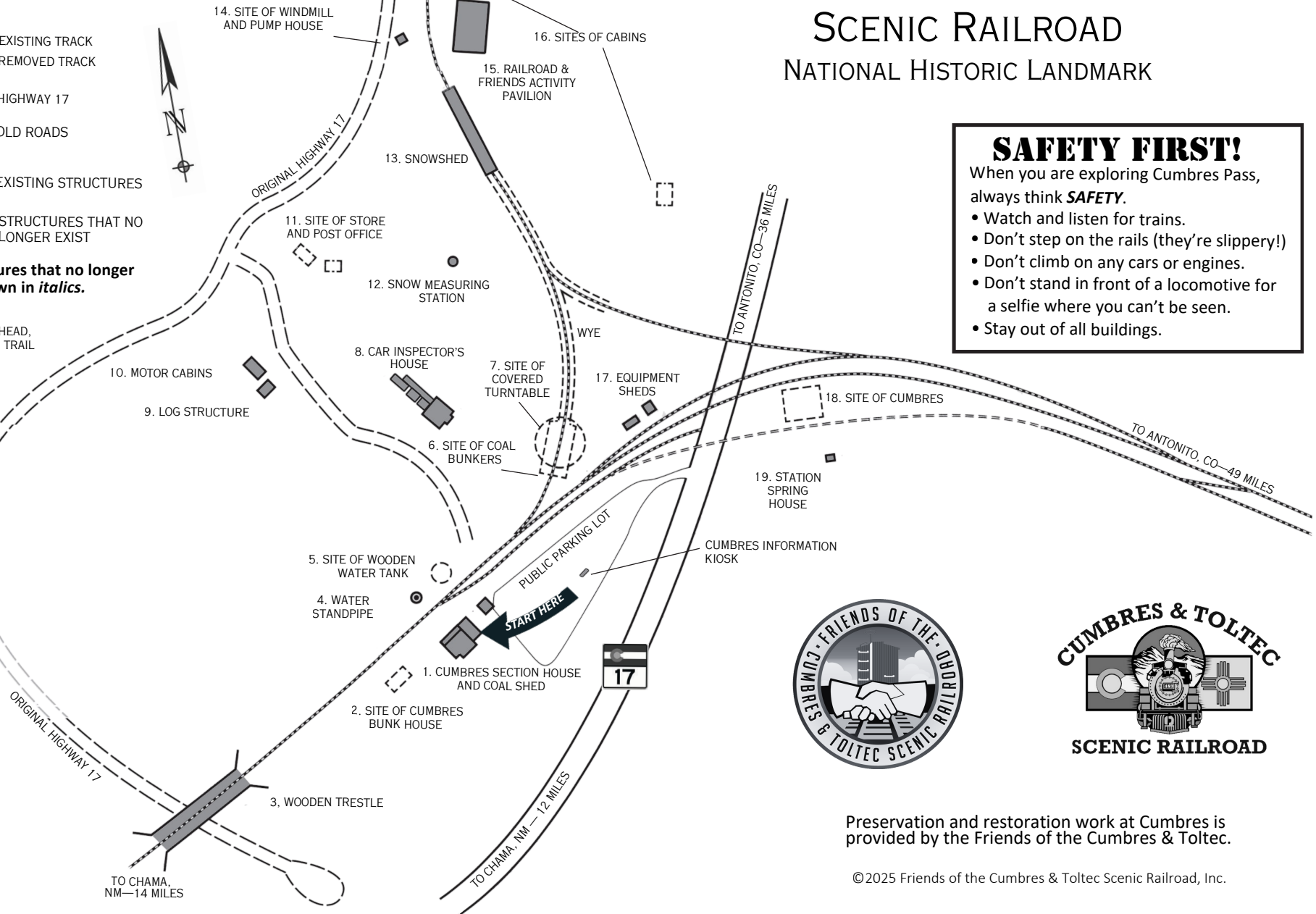
CUMBRES & TOLTEC SCENIC RAILROAD

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK



NOTE: Structures that no longer exist are shown in *italics*.

PARKING AND TRAIL HEAD,
CONTINENTAL DIVIDE TRAIL



SAFETY FIRST!

When you are exploring Cumbres Pass, always think **SAFETY**.

- Watch and listen for trains.
- Don't step on the rails (they're slippery!)
- Don't climb on any cars or engines.
- Don't stand in front of a locomotive for a selfie where you can't be seen.
- Stay out of all buildings.



Preservation and restoration work at Cumbres is provided by the Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec.

©2025 Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad, Inc.

The Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad (C&TS) is 64 miles of what was once the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad, part of a system built to haul ore from the mines above Silverton, Colorado, to Denver. During almost ninety years of operation, the trains carried ore, livestock, lumber, coal, oil, passengers, and mail. In 1970, the States of Colorado and New Mexico joined together to purchase the railroad from the D&RGW to preserve the finest example of historic narrow gauge mountain steam railroading in the country, to provide tourist enjoyment, educational opportunities, and economic development to the region.

It began long ago. In the spring of 1880, crews started laying track west out of Antonito, Colorado. By mid-December, they reached the highest point on the line, an unnamed passage that had been used for centuries for travel between the San Luis Valley to the east and the Chama Valley to the west. After the railroad was built, the pass came to be known as Cumbres, the Spanish word for “crests” or “summits.”

At Cumbres, the railroad built the infrastructure needed to maintain communication with train dispatchers to the east and west, sell passenger tickets, house track maintenance crews, and conduct air brake inspections of the trains descending the 4% grade west to Chama.

In the 1920s, people began traveling by automobile, and the dirt road of State Highway 17 was graded over the summit. Cumbres became the site of a general store, a gas station, a post office, and “motor cabins.” But as more highways were built, the need for railroad transportation decreased. The D&RGW ended passenger service in 1951 and by the late 1960s the railroad decided to stop freight shipments as well. When it sought formal abandonment, the States of New Mexico and Colorado purchased the historic 64 miles of railroad between Antonito, Colorado, and Chama, New Mexico.

Although no one lives here now, Cumbres is still vital to the operation of the C&TS: trains that have labored up the 4% grade from Chama stop to fill with water for the next part of the journey; the second engine that has helped pull a long passenger train from Chama to the summit separates from the train to return to Chama; trains coming from Antonito stop here for brake inspection prior to their descent into Chama. From 1989 to the present, volunteers from the Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec have worked on restoration projects for structures and rolling stock at Cumbres and throughout the railroad. Today, Cumbres will come alive once again when you stop, explore, and rediscover its history.



1. The Section House was built in 1882 and resembles section houses throughout the D&RGW system, all built from similar plans. The house contained a dwelling area for the section foreman and his family. The section foreman’s wife cooked in the kitchen and served both her family and the entire section crew in the dining room. It was inhabited until 1968. In the years before gasoline-powered track speeders, section crews were responsible for maintaining about seven miles of track in each direction from the Section House. There were seven section crew settlements between Antonito and Chama. When equipment enabled crews to cover longer distances, some of the settlements were abandoned. Today, the only Section Houses that remain are at Cumbres, Sublette, and Osier. Both the interior and the exterior of the Cumbres Section House have been restored by the Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec.



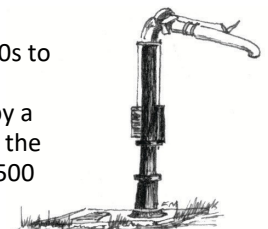
The small building to the east of the Section House is a **Coal Shed** that stored coal used for cooking and heating in the Section House and other buildings at the west end of the Yard. There was a similar storage shed at the Cumbres Station (18) at the east end of the yard.

2. Site of the Bunk House. Built in 1882 from the same plans as the Bunk House in Chama and Sublette, this structure provided quarters for track and road crew members. It was removed in the 1960s. The site markers resemble the wood blocks that formed part of the foundation. Originally, there were nine bunk houses, one at each section house between Antonito and Chama. Only three remain today.

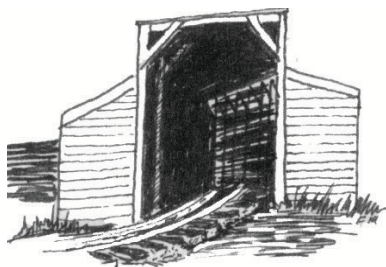


3. Wooden Trestle. The Trestle was built to enable the railroad to cross a ravine and proceed around Windy Point. It marks the beginning of the 4% grade to the west. Below the Trestle is the dirt road of the original State Highway 17. The highway was rerouted to its present right-of-way and paved in 1969 and 1970.

4. Water Standpipe. This has been used since the 1930s to fill locomotive tenders. Water flows by gravity from a cistern on the hill above the spout. The cistern is fed by a spring several miles to the north. The cistern replaced the wooden water tank (5). The locomotives use about 3,500 gallons of water in their 14-mile climb from Chama to Cumbres.

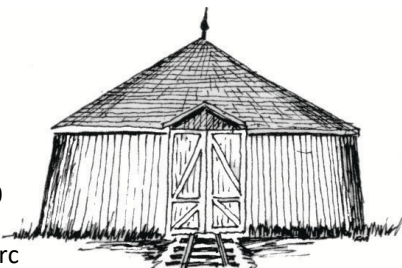


5. Site of Wooden Water Tank. This tank was like others that can be seen along the line at Chama, Cresco, Los Pinos, Osier, and Lava. Water tanks had to be located every 7-10 miles because the smaller locomotives of the early era could only hold enough water to go about that far. Water for the tank was pumped by the windmill (14) from a nearby lake. The site markers show the location of the foundation timbers for the tank. The map shows a simulated “drip line,” which is the 24-foot circumference of the tank.



6. Site of Coal Bunkers. When the turntable was removed in 1916, the snowshed was rebuilt with coal storage on either side of the portal, as shown in dotted lines on the map. The Bunkers covered much of the same area where the turntable had been.

7. Site of Covered Turntable. The dotted circle on the map shows the location of the Covered Turntable on the long leg of the snowshed used between 1885 and 1916. It was a gallows-type turntable, measuring 50 feet in diameter and was used to turn locomotives. The map location shows the arc of the turntable wall.

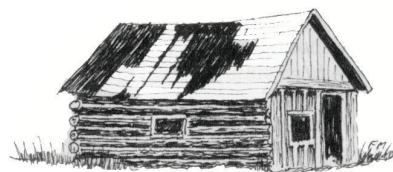


8. Car Inspector's House. Built in 1911, this was the residence of the railroad employee who oversaw testing of the brakes of all cars on trains headed down the 4% grade to Chama.

The employee also carried out minor repairs on cars and brakes. In later years, it also housed members of the track section maintenance crew. A covered walkway near the back doorway led to an outhouse. Inside the corridor, there was coal storage and pens for sheep, pigs, and chickens.



Beginning in 1990, the Friends of the C&TS have performed preservation work to counter the harsh climate of Cumbres Pass. When it was clear that the building would not survive another winter, it was torn down. The structure you see today was built as a replica.



9. Log Structure. This is the remains of a log cabin structure. While it may have been either a residence or a store, its history remains unknown. It was still standing in the 1980s, but has since collapsed.

10. Motor Cabins. Ken Lively, son of the Cumbres Pass telegrapher and station agent Charles Lively, built these cabins in the 1930s to offer overnight accommodations for tourists traveling either by automobile on State Highway 17, then a dirt road, or passengers from the San Juan Express who wished to spend time on the summit. Later, the structure was converted into the Cumbres Pass Store and Gas Station.



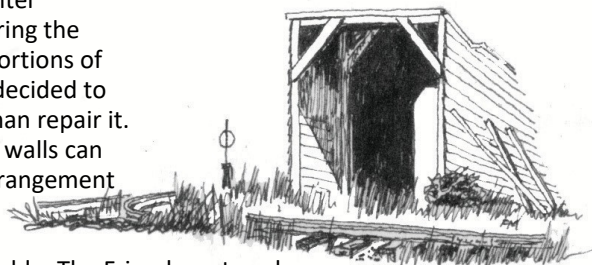
11. Original Site of the Cumbres Store, Gas Station, and Post Office. Since Cumbres Pass was a favorite place for people to visit, hunt, and fish, the structure was built and operated in the 1930s by Ken Lively. Some stayed overnight in the Motor Cabins (10), while others arrived on the morning San Juan Express, spent the day, and left on the evening train. For those who were traveling by automobile, the store sold gasoline and supplies. In the early 1940s, the store, gas station, and post office moved into the Motor Cabins structure (10). In either location, the store was only accessible from late spring until fall due to the massive snowfall on the pass. Buildings as remote as the store and the Motor Cabins had to wait for the spring thaw before opening to the public.

12. Precipitation Measuring Station. This non-railroad device is one of many placed around the West in the early 20th century. It was designed to measure both rain and snow precipitation and was checked by officials on foot. Today a satellite-based system, located elsewhere on the pass, is monitored remotely by the Natural Resource Conservation Service, USDA.



13. **Snowshed.** This is all that remains of a longer snowshed, shown on the map as dotted lines, that covered the wye at the pass. Until 1916, the snowshed ended at the covered turntable (7). Geographic and climatic conditions often produced heavy snowfalls and deep drifts.

The D&RGW used snowplows, flangers, snow fences, and snowsheds to keep the trains operating through the winter. This shed was not maintained after 1968. The harsh winter weather, with snow sometimes covering the twenty-foot-high structure, caused portions of the shed to collapse. In 1970, it was decided to demolish all but the tail end rather than repair it. Some of the footings of the removed walls can still be seen. The wye, a triangular arrangement of track, enables cars and locomotives to be turned to face the opposite direction, not unlike a turntable. The Friends restored the surviving section of snowshed between 1990 and 1994.

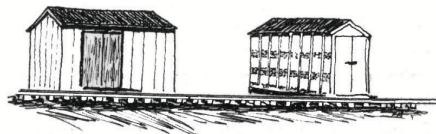


14. **Pump House and Windmill.** This structure was built in 1881 or 1882. Water was pumped from a lake to the north to a wooden water tank (5) that supplied water to fill the locomotive tenders. The illustration shows the Windmill that drove the pump. It was later replaced by a gasoline engine. In the 1930s, this system was replaced by the water standpipe feeding directly from the cistern.

15. The old **Cumbres Activity Pavilion** was damaged due to heavy snows. Plans for a new pavilion are being discussed.



16. **Sites of Cabins.** Herders, trappers, and other non-railroaders lived at Cumbres in the 1950s. They lived in log cabins or former grounded railroad car bodies, portions of which can still be seen.



17. **Equipment Sheds.** These small buildings house tools and equipment for today's maintenance crews.

18. **Site of the Cumbres Station.** The station was built in 1882 and was demolished by the railroad in 1954, three years after the San Juan Express passenger service was discontinued.

Station Agent Charles Lively lived there with his family year-round from 1909 to 1938 and photographed much of the activity around Cumbres.

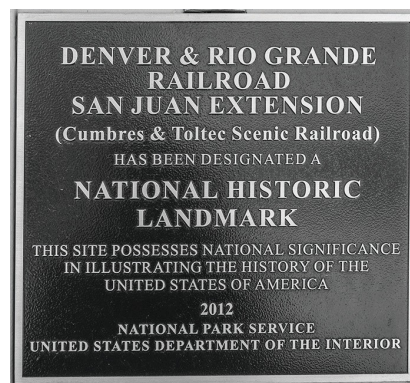
The station agent's office, dispatch area with controls for the semaphore mounted on the station, ticket window next to a small waiting area, living room, and kitchen were located on the first floor. Living quarters for Lively and his family were on the second floor. The semaphore was relocated to the Cumbres Section House (1) when the station was demolished. The station complex also included a coal storage shed, similar to the one next to the section house, as well as an outhouse.



Many of Charles Lively's photographs are displayed on the kiosk in the parking area and are part of the extensive Friends photographic library.



19. Up the hill from the station site is the **Spring House**. It provided water to the station agent's family, railroad drinking water for locomotive water bags, water for the caboose water tank, and a place to store food at cooler temperatures. It was probably built in 1882, the same time as the Cumbres Station.



On October 12, 2012, the **Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad**, once part of the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad's San Juan Extension, was designated a **National Historic Landmark** by the National Park Service for possessing "national significance in illustrating the history of the United States."

The Denver & Rio Grande San Juan Extension was instrumental in opening the southwest corner of Colorado and the northwest corner of New Mexico to economic growth through the transport of ore, livestock, freight, and passengers from 1880 to 1968. The Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad preserves that nearly ninety-year history by illustrating the history of narrow gauge steam railroad operation for the enjoyment and education of this and future generations.