



**Rocky Mountain National Park
Continental Divide Research Learning Center**

Historic Mining Towns

The Question: What evidence is left of three historical mining towns in RMNP?

Historians often consider the discovery of gold near Denver in 1858 to be a major benchmark in Colorado history. With that finding and the discovery of other minerals came people and settlement. Many fortune-seekers staked mining claims in the area that would later become the park. Three areas on the west side blossomed into full-fledged towns: Lulu City, Dutchtown, and Gaskill. These towns, however, were very short-lived and lasted less than a decade before the new settlers deserted them, and they became ghost towns. While various clean-up efforts initiated by the National Park Service removed most of the structures and artifacts some archeological evidence remains that could help tell the story of these towns.



Lulu City in the late 1880s.

The Project: Perform a broad surface survey of historic mining towns in the park.

As part of the nationwide Systemwide Archeological Inventory Program (SAIP), an NPS program, William Butler, Park Archeologist, and a team from the University of Northern Colorado conducted a five-year broad study of the archeology of the park. The surveys started in areas with high visitor use where archeological sites are most likely to be destroyed, followed by areas along roads with moderate impact, and finally they surveyed remote areas that were least likely to be damaged by visitors. Within these general areas archeologists surveyed specific sections based on the likelihood of finding a site. Surveying focused on places where people were more likely to live and work, such as meadows, and avoided thick forests and steep slopes. Groups of surveyors walked in rows across the sites and surveyed, recorded, and photographed the evidence and remains that they found.



Remains of a cabin in Lulu City in 1953.

The Results: While little is left of these early towns, the few remaining structures and artifacts reveal information about boom and bust mining in the area.

These towns followed the boom and bust model of many early mining towns. Lasting no longer than six years, these towns grew on the promise of gold and collapsed when little gold was actually found. Lulu City, a town of 500 at its peak, only lasted from 1879 to 1883. Of the many shops and cabins that settlers built in Lulu City, including a grocery, butcher shop, post office, and a saloon, the only visible structural remains are those of a log cabin. Researchers found several building platform outlines as well as some scattered artifacts. The remains of Dutchtown, a small settlement of a few cabins that lasted from 1879 to 1884, are somewhat less substantial. Structural remnants of four cabins as well as a small section of Dutchtown Road were found. Two of the cabins include the signs of rock fireplaces, and one cabin has two nearby depressions, possibly from an old outhouse.

Gaskill, the town that endured the longest from 1880 to 1886, had a peak population of 50. Despite its small size, it boasted two saloons, two general stores, and two restaurants. Surveyors found partial remains of 17 structures, including cellars and foundations of cabins, a saloon, a hotel, and a sawmill. Researchers also found a collapsed log structure on the west edge of town and are still investigating its original owner and use. While archeologists have found some remains at Lulu City and Gaskill, more thorough research needs to be done to find out a more complete history of mining on the west side of the park. Dr. Butler believes that these towns are valuable archeological time capsules that could shed light on the history of the area.