

## ADMISSION:

Adults \$3.00, Children 10 and under free

Guided tours available daily, mid-June through Labor Day, weekends in September.

Your admission fee and generous donations are the primary source of funds for Ashcroft Ghost Town providing ongoing preservation, brochures, privies, picnic tables, staff, etc.

Please take only pictures and leave the wildflowers for others to enjoy. The Ghost Town of Ashcroft is a National Register Historic Site maintained as an educational resource by the Aspen Historical Society.

## ASPEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY:

- Wheeler/Stallard Museum and Archives – 620 West Bleeker St., Aspen
- Holden/Marolt Mining and Ranching Museum – Marolt Open Space, Aspen
- Ashcroft Ghost Town - 11 miles south of Aspen on Castle Creek Road.
- Independence Ghost Town - 16 miles east of Aspen on Hwy 82.

The Aspen Historical Society provides Victorian West End Walking tours; bike tours; live interpretation; HISTORY COACH tours; exhibits; public archives; historic photographs and research; educational programs for children and adults; and special events.

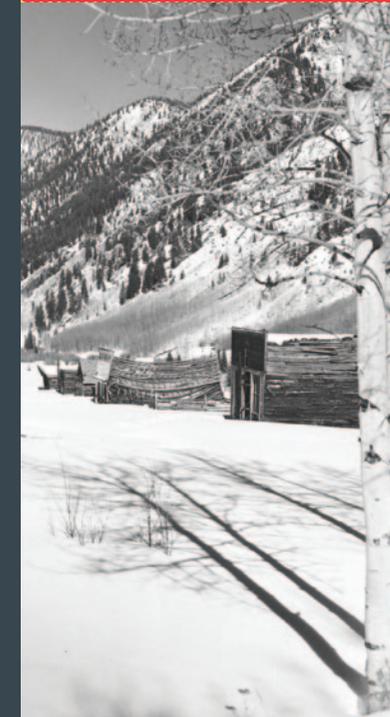
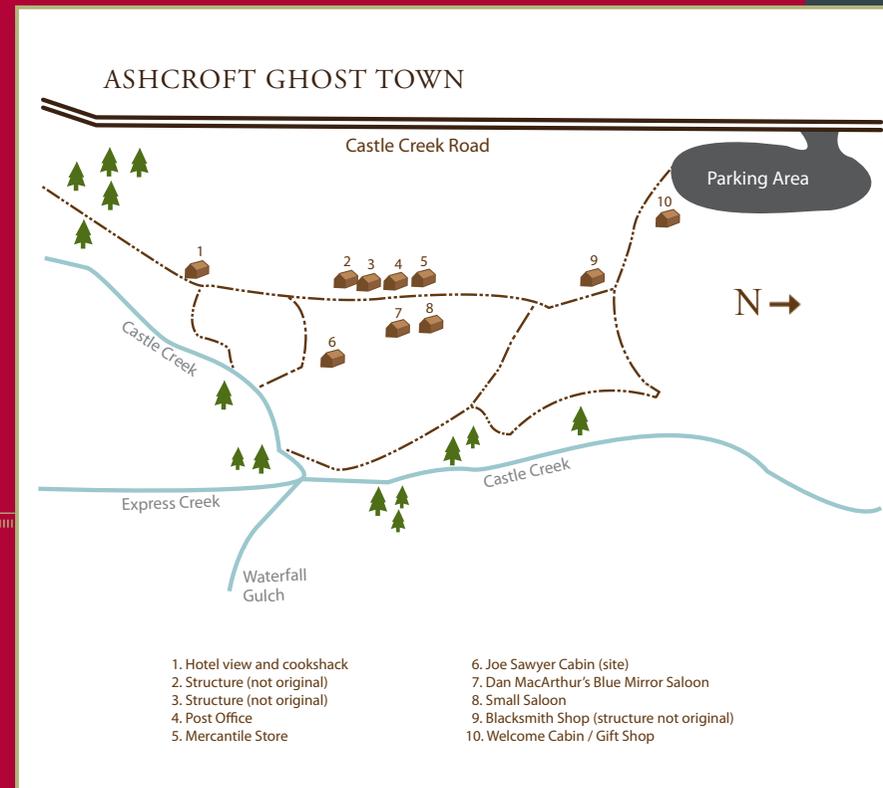
Call (970) 925-3721 or go online to [www.aspenhistory.org](http://www.aspenhistory.org) for more information.

With special thanks to the U.S. Forest Service, Aspen Center for Environmental Studies, Pine Creek Cookhouse and John Wilcox, Pitkin County Commissioners/Pitkin County Land Management, Northern Ute Indian Tribe, the Environment Foundation founded by the employees of Aspen Skiing Company, Roaring Fork Outdoor Volunteers, and all our volunteers.



# Ghost Towns

## ASHCROFT GHOST TOWN



## ASHCROFT

# Ghost Town



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## ASHCROFT GHOST TOWN

Elevation 9,521'

Welcome to the upper Castle Creek valley. Since the beginning of time and long before this valley received its current name, geologic forces have had many different ideas about what this land should be. From violent mountain-building events to massive glacial cutting epochs, this continually changing place has, for the moment, settled on the landscape we experience today.

The mountains directly around you, which rise to 13,000' – 14,000', are covered with a rich Spruce/Fir forest ecosystem.

Interspersed with pastoral meadows, deciduous aspen trees and starkly bare avalanche chutes, this habitat provides sustenance and protection for the native flora and fauna. Valuable riparian areas encourage a rich biodiversity at the same time that high mountain tundras nourish tiny indigenous flowers.



The very nature that brings us here today has been drawing humans and animals for thousands of years. The Ute Indians, or Nuche, were able to find all they needed to flourish in these mountains, but by the late 1800s those minimal needs had given way to the insatiable wants of the United States' belief in "manifest destiny." Ultimately this valley, whose surface ecology has supported an intricate balance of plants and animals for millennia, was also hiding a buried treasure – silver – irresistible to the hordes of American pioneers.

In the geologic blink of an eye, the upper Castle Creek valley was changed forever.

In the spring of 1880, prospectors Charles B. Culver and

W.F. Coxhead left the boomtown of Leadville to search for silver in the Castle Creek Valley. After vigorously promoting their findings back in Leadville, Coxhead returned to find 23 more prospectors had joined "Crazy Culver" in the camp they named Castle Forks City. They formed a Miner's Protective Association, built a court house and laid out streets all in just two weeks. Each of the Association's 97 members paid \$5 - or one day's work - to draw for building lots. By



1883 the camp, now called Ashcroft, had a population of about 2,000 and boasted two newspapers, a school, sawmills, a small smelter, and 20 saloons - bigger than Aspen and closer to the railroad in Crested Butte.

As quickly as it boomed, however, Ashcroft went bust. The mines, initially producing 14,000 ounces of silver to the ton, turned out to be just shallow deposits. Promised rail links to Crested Butte never materialized while major strikes in Aspen, already the county seat, lured away investors and workers.

By 1885 there were only 100 summer residents and \$5.60 in the town's coffers. Only a handful of aging, single men made Ashcroft their home by the turn of the century. Historian Jon Coleman called these men "prospectors with dismal prospects, boosters with nothing to promote, and town fathers with no children." They owned mining claims but spent their time hunting, fishing, reading and drinking in Dan McArthur's bar.

Stories were exchanged for drinks and they served as an informal employment service, matching sporadic work at the remaining mines above Ashcroft with an unstable work force. Every four years they elected municipal officers from among themselves. "Judge" Jack Leahy, who died in 1939, was the last of the original citizens. He cultivated a reputation as a scholar and legal expert and wrote long melodramatic poetry.

In the 1930s there was a new flurry of interest in Ashcroft, this time by international sportsman Ted Ryan and his partner Billy Fiske, captain of America's 1928 gold medal Olympic bobsled team. They built the Highland Bavarian Lodge (5 miles north of Ashcroft on Castle Creek Rd.) and planned a European-style ski resort with an aerial tramway to nearby Mt. Hayden. WWII ultimately put an end to their plans and sadly Billy Fiske died in combat. Ryan then leased Ashcroft to the 10th Mountain Division, America's soldiers on skis, for \$1 a year for mountaineering training in the summer of 1942. After the war, ski area development, much like the silver mining, moved to Aspen and Ryan later deeded the site to the USFS.

In 1948 Stuart Mace, a veteran of WWII and commander of a canine division, at Ted Ryan's request brought his family and dog sled operation to Ashcroft, acting as the town steward. Eventually Mace



and his famous Toklat huskies were featured in the popular 1950's TV series "Sgt. Preston of the Yukon" for which the ghost town was fitted with false fronts to create a "Canadian" set. Given use of five acres by Ryan in exchange for caretaking the Highland Bavarian's remaining holdings, Mace devoted the rest of his life to protecting the area from development and restoring the ecology. In 1974 he was joined in that effort by the Aspen Historical Society. Ashcroft soon became a National Historical Site and AHS received the first USFS permit ever granted to a historical society to preserve and interpret a ghost town.

After many years of hard work and dedication, Stuart passed away in 1993. Through the stories still told by the ghost interpreters, his teachings remain.

Today, Ashcroft Ghost Town features 10 restored buildings and three buildings still in their original condition. An interpretive walk follows the old road and allows access to the town without destroying the delicate wildflowers.

