**Telluride, Colorado**

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The town of **Telluride** is the [county seat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/County_seat) and most populous town of [San Miguel County](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Miguel_County%2C_Colorado) in the southwestern portion of the U.S. state of [Colorado](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colorado).[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telluride%2C_Colorado#cite_note-GR6-3) The town is a former [silver](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silver) [mining](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mining) camp on the [San Miguel River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Miguel_River_%28Colorado%29) in the western [San Juan Mountains](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Juan_Mountains). The first gold mining claim was made in the mountains above Telluride in 1875 and early settlement of what is now Telluride followed. The town itself was founded in 1878 as "Columbia", but due to confusion with a California town of the same name, was renamed Telluride in 1887, for the [gold telluride](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_telluride) minerals found in other parts of Colorado. These telluride minerals were never located near Telluride, causing the town to be named for a mineral which never was mined there. However, the area's mines for some years provided zinc, lead, copper, silver, and other gold ores.

Telluride sits in a [box canyon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Box_canyon). Steep forested mountains and cliffs surround it, with [Bridal Veil Falls](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridal_Veil_Falls_%28Telluride%29) at the head of the canyon. Numerous weathered ruins of old mining operations dot the hillsides. A free [gondola](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gondola_lift) connects the town with its companion town, [Mountain Village, Colorado](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mountain_Village%2C_Colorado), at the base of the ski area. Telluride and the surrounding area have featured prominently in [pop culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pop_culture). It is the subject of several popular songs. It is especially known for its [ski resort](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ski_resort) and slopes during the winter as well as an extensive festival schedule during the summer.

The [Telluride Historic District](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telluride_Historic_District), which includes a significant portion of the town, is listed on the [National Register of Historic Places](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Register_of_Historic_Places) and is also one of [Colorado's 20 National Historic Landmarks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_National_Historic_Landmarks_in_Colorado). The town population was 2,325 in the [2010 United States Census](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010_United_States_Census).[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telluride%2C_Colorado#cite_note-United_States_Census_2010-4)

**History[[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Telluride,_Colorado&action=edit&section=3" \o "Edit section: History)]**





Historic gold specimen from Telluride

**Mining days[[edit](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Telluride,_Colorado&action=edit&section=4" \o "Edit section: Mining days)]**

Gold was first discovered in 1858. John Fallon made the first claim in Marshal Basin above Telluride in 1875 and early settlement of Telluride followed. The town itself was founded in 1878. Telluride was originally named "Columbia", but due to confusion with [Columbia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Columbia%2C_California), [California](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California), the name was changed by the [post office](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Post_office) in 1887. The town was named after valuable ore compounds of the [chemical element](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chemical_element) [tellurium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tellurium), a [metalloid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metalloid) element which forms natural [tellurides](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telluride_%28chemistry%29), the most notable of which are telluride ores of gold and silver. Although [gold telluride](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_telluride) minerals were never actually found in the mountains near Telluride, the area's [mines](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mining) were rich in [zinc](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zinc), [lead](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lead), [copper](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copper), silver, and ores which contained gold in other forms.

Telluride began slowly because of its isolated location. In 1881, a [toll road](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toll_road) was opened by [Otto Mears](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_Mears) which allowed wagons to go where only pack [mules](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mule) could go before. This increased the number of people in Telluride, but it was still expensive to get gold-rich [ore](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ore) out of the valley.

In June 1889, [Butch Cassidy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butch_Cassidy), before becoming associated with his gang, "the wild bunch", robbed the San Miguel Valley Bank in Telluride. This was his first major recorded crime. He exited the bank with [$](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/US%24)24,580, and later became famous as a bank robber.[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telluride%2C_Colorado#cite_note-8)

In 1891, the [Rio Grande Southern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rio_Grande_Southern) [railroad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Railroad), also begun by Mears, arrived in Telluride, eventually building a two stall engine house, water facilities, a section house and a bunkhouse, sidings and a depot. It continued further up the valley to end its Telluride branch at Pandora, serving the mines and the town until 1952. The cheaper and consistent transportation for passengers and freight allowed miners and goods to flow into the San Miguel town and ore to flow out to the mills and foundries elsewhere. This brought a brief but unprecedented boom to Telluride before the [Panic of 1893](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panic_of_1893).[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telluride%2C_Colorado#cite_note-NGC_Telluride-9)

Around the turn of the 20th century, there were serious [labor disputes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade_union) in the mines near Telluride. The [Colorado National Guard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colorado_National_Guard) was called out and there were deaths on both sides. [Unions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade_union) were formed as miners joined the [Western Federation of Miners](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Federation_of_Miners) in 1896. 1899 brought big changes as union [strike action](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strike_action) led most mines to grant miners $3 a day for an 8 hour day’s work plus a boarding pay of $1 a day. At this time, workers were putting in 10–12 hour days and the mines ran 24 hours a day. [Work conditions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupational_safety_and_health) were treacherous, with mines above 12,000 ft, a lack of safety measures, and bitter weather in winter months. Even the [boarding houses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boarding_houses) were precariously placed on the mountainsides.





Bridal Veil Falls in Telluride

Telluride's labor unrest occurred against the backdrop of a state-wide struggle between miners and mine owners. [Bulkeley Wells](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulkeley_Wells) was one mine operator considerably hostile to the union. The Telluride Miners' Union was led by [Vincent St. John](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vincent_Saint_John). The disappearance of mine guard [William J. Barney](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_J._Barney), which Wells declared a "murder", created much intrigue and national interest. The accusations, animosity, [gunplay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gun), and expulsions which followed were part of an ongoing struggle throughout Colorado's mining communities which came to be called the [Colorado Labor Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colorado_Labor_Wars).

In 1891, Telluride's L.L. Nunn joined forces with [George Westinghouse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Westinghouse) to build the [Ames Hydroelectric Generating Plant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ames_Hydroelectric_Generating_Plant), an [alternating current](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternating_current) [power plant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Power_plant), near Telluride. (Nunn's home can be found at the corner of Aspen and Columbia Streets; next door is the home he purchased for the "pinheads"[[*citation needed*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia%3ACitation_needed)] to study hydro-electric engineering.) The plant supplied power to the Gold King Mine 3.5 miles away. This was the first successful demonstration of long-distance transmission of industrial-grade alternating current power and included the use of an AC [induction motor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Induction_motor), a patented design by [Nikola Tesla](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikola_Tesla) which Westinghouse had licensed.[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telluride%2C_Colorado#cite_note-books.google.com-10) This hydroelectric AC power plant predated the Westinghouse plant at [Niagara Falls](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niagara_Falls) by 4 years.[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telluride%2C_Colorado#cite_note-books.google.com-10) Nunn and his brother Paul built power plants in Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Montana, Mexico, and the Ontario Power plant at Niagara Falls on the Canadian side. Nunn developed a keen interest in education as part of his electrical power companies, and in conjunction with Cornell University built the Telluride House at Cornell in 1909 to educate promising students in [electrical engineering](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Electrical_engineering). Later, Nunn along with [Charles Walcott](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Doolittle_Walcott), started the non-profit [Telluride Association](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telluride_Association). Nunn founded [Deep Springs College](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deep_Springs_College) in 1917. All of Nunn's educational endeavors are going strong today. Each year, the Telluride Tech Festival honors Nunn, Tesla, and Westinghouse, along with current day technology and science leaders.

Telluride’s most famous historic mines are the Tomboy, Pandora, Smuggler-Union, Nellie, and Sheridan mines. Beginning in 1939, the hard-rock mining operations in the Red Mountain and Telluride mining districts began a lengthy [consolidation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consolidation_%28business%29) under the [Idarado Mining Company](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idarado_Mine) (Idarado), now a division of [Newmont Mining](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newmont_Mining). The consolidation ended in 1953 with Idarado’s acquisition of the Telluride Mines. Idarado kept the underground workings and mill operations open at Telluride’s Pandora hard-rock mine until 1978. When the mine officially closed, the [snow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snow) which tormented Telluride's miners became the town's new source of income, in the form of [skiing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skiing) and tourism. The documentary video "the YX factor" chronicles the transition from mining to skiing and the influx of "[hippies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hippies)" in the late 1960s and early 1970s in the words of local residents and commentators such as [Peter Yarrow](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Yarrow) and [Tom Hayden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Hayden).

**Skiing era[**[**edit**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Telluride,_Colorado&action=edit&section=5)**]**

Mining was Telluride’s only industry until 1972, when the first [ski lift](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chairlift) was installed by [Telluride Ski Resort](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telluride_Ski_Resort) founder [Joseph T. Zoline](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_T._Zoline) and his Telluride Ski Corporation (Telco). Zoline bought the land for the future resort in 1969 and began to craft the slopes. Along with his mountain manager, Telluride native Bill "Sr." Mahoney, they slowly and thoughtfully put together a plan for sustained development of Telluride and the region. As mining phased out and a new service industry phased in, the local population changed sharply. Mining families fled Telluride to settle in places like [Moab](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moab%2C_Utah), [Utah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utah), where uranium mining offered hope of continued employment. Mining families were replaced by what locals referred to as "[hippies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hippie)", young people with a 1960s worldview which frequently clashed with the values of Telluride's old-timers. These newcomers were characterized as being idle trust funders who were drawn to the town for a casual life style and outdoor excitements such as [hang gliding](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hang_gliding), [mountain climbing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mountaineering), and [kayaking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kayaking).





A view in Telluride from the ski slopes by Mountain Village.

The new population opposed town growth and economic expansion, including growth due to tourism and skiing. At one point, a serious effort was made to ban cars from the city limits and force visitors to use horse-drawn carts. The 1970s had fluctuating snowfalls and economic recession. However, the town’s now famous music and film festivals were immune from anti-growth criticism and flourished. These festivals exposed hundreds of thousands to the grandeur of the valley for the first time and created iconic associations with elite entertainers. Meanwhile, ski area founder Joe Zoline worked to develop one of the best mountains in North America for expert skiers and created infrastructure for tourism which respected Telluride's need to stay small and beautiful.

As the final ore carts were rolling out of the Pandora mine, tourists began to seriously discover Telluride for its magnificent views, expert skiing, and famous autumn color changes. After the brutal snow drought of 1976 which nearly wiped out the embryonic ski and lodging industry, the town started to rebound economically. In 1978, a stake of the ski area was bought by Ron Allred and his partner Jim Wells to form the Telluride Company. The new owners expanded the infrastructure by adding a gondola connecting Telluride with the Mountain Village.

During the 1980s, Telluride developed a reputation for being "Colorado's best kept secret", which paradoxically made it one of the more well-known resort communities. Wealthy skiers flocked to the world-class mountain all winter, and sightseers kept hotel rooms full all summer. In the 1980s, Telluride also became notorious in the drug counterculture for being a drop point for Mexican smugglers and a favorite place for wealthy importers to enjoy downtime. The town was even featured in the hit song by [Glenn Frey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glenn_Frey) from [*Miami Vice*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miami_Vice), "Smugglers Blues". For this time, Telluride was living up to its Wild West history. This type of attention, helped to differentiate Telluride from Aspen. The festivals and Telluride's bad-boy town image attracted celebrities like [Tom Cruise](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Cruise), [Oprah Winfrey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oprah_Winfrey), and [Oliver Stone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oliver_Stone). By the mid-1990s, Telluride had shed both its mining personality and drug image to establish itself as a premier resort town balancing modern culture with fascinating western history. In 2003, Prospect Bowl, an extension to the ski area opened, providing the resort with many new trails and runs. In 2007-08, the ski area opened some of the most extreme, in-bound, hike-to terrain in the country. Most lifts in the area are high-speed quad chairs capable of holding four passengers. The highest lift on the mountain reaches an altitude of 12,570 feet.