

ANIMAS FORKS

Walking Tour

Welcome

Animas Forks, at 11,200 feet in elevation, was originally named Three Forks due to its location at the junction of three trails at the headwaters of the Animas River.

The first log cabin in Animas Forks was built in 1873. By 1876 the community boasted of having a hotel, general store, saloon, post office, and over thirty residential cabins. By 1883 the population grew to nearly 450 people. The majority of miners and supplies arrived over Cinnamon Pass as the route into the mining district was less rugged than the route to the south. The town newspaper, *The Animas Forks Pioneer*, was published between June 1882 and October 1886, and was the highest-elevation newspaper printing press in the United States.

Although Animas Forks had quite a few year-round residents, many left to warmer climates at the first sign of winter. Exploratory mines, mills, and speculative mining ventures led to rapid growth of Animas Forks, but declined when profits did not justify the investments.

Animas Forks rebounded in 1904 when the Gold Prince Mill was constructed to process ore from the Gold Prince Mine located in Placer Gulch. To bring ore to the mill a 12,600 foot aerial tram was built. One unique feature of this tram was that it included an angle station that allowed ore buckets to change directions as the cable entered and exited the angle station. Ore was sent in a northeasterly direction from the mine portal then went in an easterly direction around the flank of Treasure Mountain. The ore buckets then continued in a straight line to the Gold Prince Mill in Animas Forks. Here the ore was processed and the condensed ore sent by rail to a smelter in Durango.

The route of the Silverton Northern Railroad was originally envisioned by Otto Mears as a route to connect Silverton with Lake City. Between 1893 and 1904, tracks were laid from Silverton to Silver Lake Mill, Eureka, and eventually Animas Forks. Animas Forks proved to be the northern terminus for the Silverton Northern Railroad. It is interesting to note that the track between Eureka and Animas Forks was built at a 7% grade — the maximum grade attainable by a narrow grade railroad.



Animas Forks, circa 1880. The Stein Bros. Store and Hall is the building on the left with the large, white false-front.
~Photo courtesy of the Denver Public Library — Western History Department.



On the wagon road between Eureka and Animas Forks. The standing dead trees were killed in what appears to have been a forest fire. Fires were a common threat due to the large number of prospectors and miners that lived in the San Juan Mountains.
~Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.



The Columbus Mine and Mill.
~Photo courtesy of Colorado Historical Society.



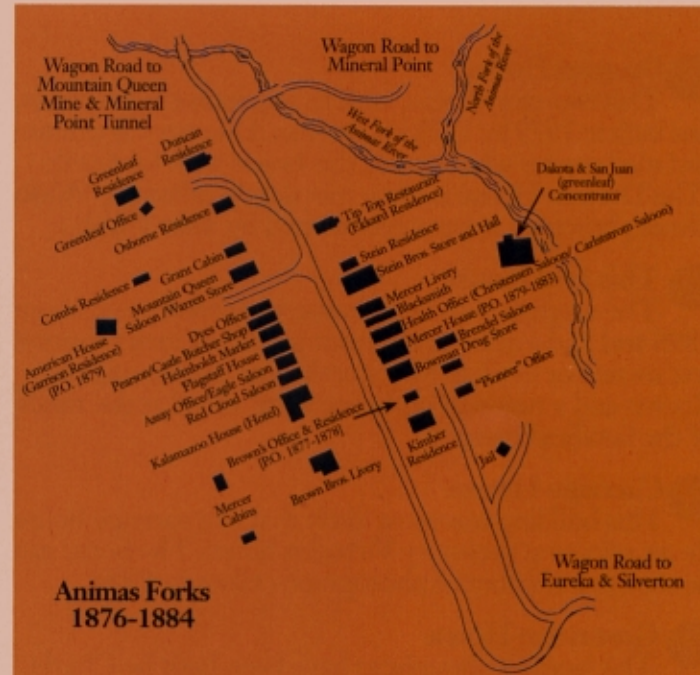
Animas Forks in 1906. The Gold Prince Mill and the Gold Prince Boarding House are visible in the center. The Frisco/Bagley Tunnel workings can be seen in the background.
~Photo courtesy of the Denver Public Library — Western History Department.



Colburn Allison (left) and Winfield S. Patterson survey the portal to what is believed to be the Columbus Mine. The two men owned a number of mines in the area including the Columbus Mine and Mill in Animas Forks.
~Photo courtesy of San Juan County Historical Society



The Kalamazoo Hotel in 1884. The hotel housed the post office and the only telephone in Animas Forks. A kitchen fire destroyed the hotel and thirteen other buildings in the community on October 22, 1891.
~Photo courtesy of San Juan County Historical Society



Animas Forks between 1876 and 1884 during its first boom.
~Map courtesy of Many More Mountains, Volume 2: Ruts into Silverton by Allen Nossman.

Leave No Trace

Animas Forks Needs Your Help!

- Stay on designated roads.
- Do not camp or build fires within 300 feet of any building or structure.
- Do not remove lumber, glass, machinery, or historic artifacts. Leave items for others to see and enjoy.
- Do not write on historic structures - graffiti is vandalism.
- Many of the historic structures are unstable and have numerous hazards.
- Please respect private property and private mine claims.
- Pack out all garbage.



1 Duncan House
This two-story home, with its impressive bay window, was built in 1879 by William Duncan. Duncan was a miner and mail carrier who lived in this house with his family. (The Duncan House is often mistakenly called the Walsh House, however, it was never owned by Tom Walsh.)

2 This Old House
The original two-room house was constructed about 1898 and had a cellar and a front porch. At various times it was owned or lived-in by a storekeeper and by miners. Rooms and a two-seat outhouse were added as the needs of the families changed.

3 Carriage House
This building was most likely that of a carriage house for an adjoining two-story Victorian house. The house can be seen in a number of photographs taken in 1900.

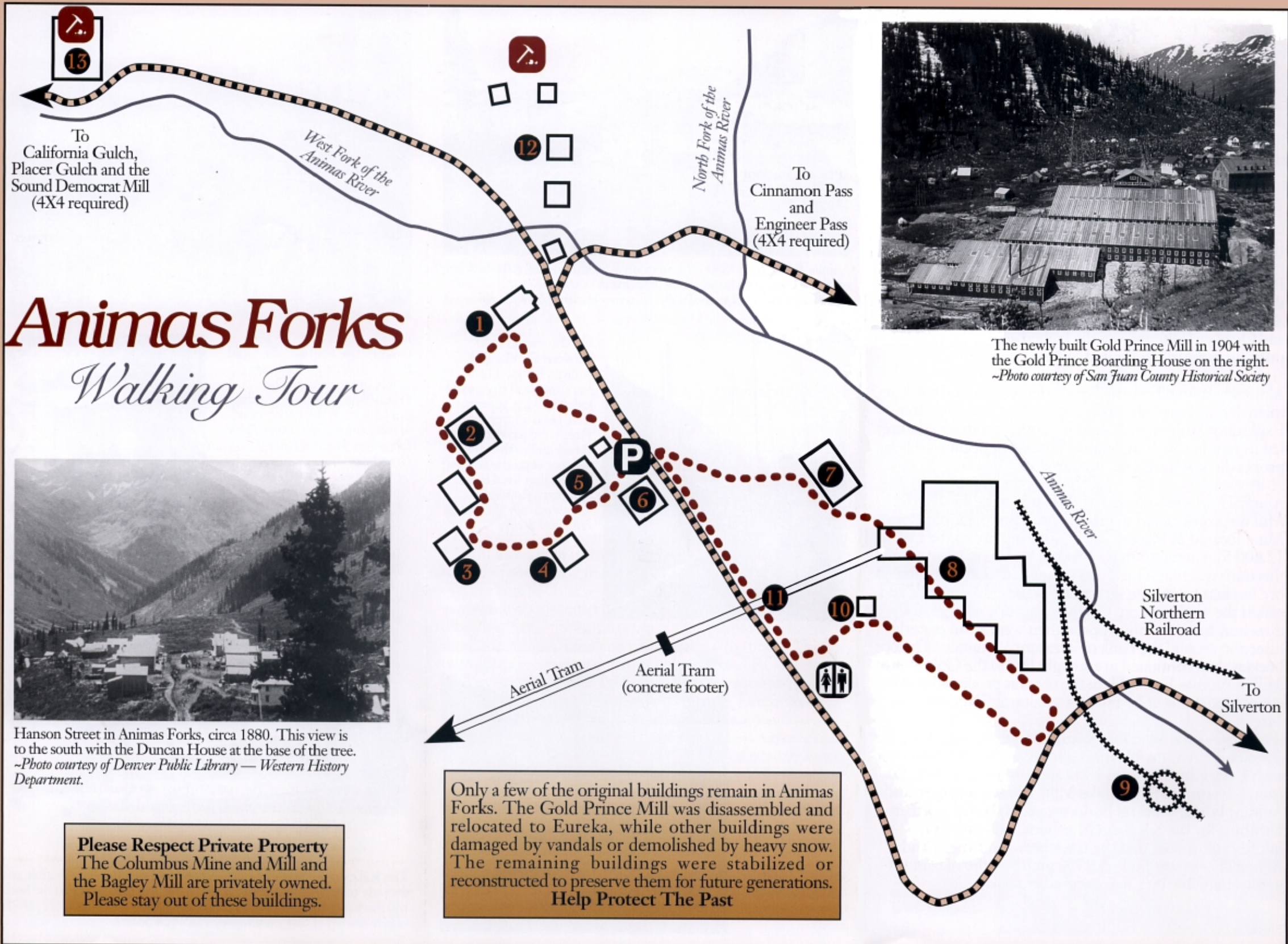
4 Gustavson House
This home is thought to have been built by Charles Gustavson in 1907. Gustavson was an Animas Forks storekeeper and later became the tram operator for the Sunnyside Tram in Eureka. He was described as a "whalebone of a man, light, resilient, and tough." ~*Dusty Citizen of Eureka* by Louis Wyman.

5 Hip-roof House
This house was built about 1898 and remodeled in the 1930s for workers at the Columbus Mine and Mill.

6 Helmboldt Market
This log building is the remains of a general store constructed in 1876. It may be one of only a few buildings that survived the 1891 Kalamazoo Hotel kitchen fire. Logs for this building were cut from the onetime forested hillsides. By 1900, most of the forest had been cut for building materials, mine timbers, or fuel.

7 Gold Prince Boarding House
Nearly 150 men who worked in the Gold Prince Mill were housed in the three-story Gold Prince Boarding House. Today, only the cement foundation remains.

8 Gold Prince Mill
The Gold Prince Mill was owned by Cyrus Davis and Henry Soule. It processed ore from the Gold Prince Mine in Placer Gulch. This one-hundred stamp mill was built in 1904 at a cost of \$500,000 and was the largest concentrating mill in Colorado (336 feet by 184 feet). It was also the first mill in Colorado with a steel superstructure. The mill operated for only six years when it was dismantled, moved, and reassembled in Eureka. When operating the noise from the one-hundred stamps was deafening.



Hanson Street in Animas Forks, circa 1880. This view is to the south with the Duncan House at the base of the tree.
~Photo courtesy of Denver Public Library — Western History Department.

Please Respect Private Property
The Columbus Mine and Mill and the Bagley Mill are privately owned. Please stay out of these buildings.

Only a few of the original buildings remain in Animas Forks. The Gold Prince Mill was disassembled and relocated to Eureka, while other buildings were damaged by vandals or demolished by heavy snow. The remaining buildings were stabilized or reconstructed to preserve them for future generations.
Help Protect The Past



The newly built Gold Prince Mill in 1904 with the Gold Prince Boarding House on the right.
~Photo courtesy of San Juan County Historical Society

9 Silverton Northern Railroad (Turntable)
This level area is the site of the turntable used to turn train engines for the Silverton Northern Railroad. The rail line was completed in 1904 and began transporting high grade ore from the Gold Prince Mill to the New York and San Juan Smelter in Durango.

10 Animas Forks Jail
The Animas Forks Jail was built in 1882. Two-by-six boards were laid flat and nailed together to create a strong wall. The original door with a barred window is currently on display at the San Juan County Museum in Silverton.

11 Gold Prince Aerial Tram
From this site you would be standing beneath the aerial tram that supplied the Gold Prince Mill with ore from the Gold Prince Mine. The tramway was 12,600 feet in length and was supported by 33 tram towers and an angle station. Each ore bucket carried 1,600 pounds of ore. Today, concrete pads and an occasional tram tower can still be found along the tram route.

12 Columbus Mine and Mill
The Columbus Mine was owned and operated by Winfield P. Patterson and Colburn Allison, two entrepreneurs from the Illinois and Iowa. The men came to the San Juan Mountains each summer to oversee their various mining claims in the area. By 1882, the Columbus Mine had number of surface improvements as well as a 107-foot tunnel and a 35-foot shaft drilled into Houghton Mountain. The mine showed good quantities of galena ore which was high in lead, but low in silver. In the 1920s, the Columbus Mill was constructed to process ore from the mine. The mine was worked through 1939 when it closed. The Columbus Mine and Mill are privately owned. Please do not enter the buildings.

13 Bonanza Tunnel (Frisco or Bagley Tunnel & Mill)
In an era of quick investments, the money expended on the Bonanza Tunnel was not well spent. Investors had lofty goals of boring a tunnel into Houghton Mountain to reach valuable ore. The tunnel, nearly 1,000 feet in length was drilled into the mountain, yet profitable ore was never reached. The project changed hands a number of times and was eventually sold to a British mining expert named J.F. Taylor who continued to fund the venture. The venture was changed to Frisco or Bagley Tunnel and the Bagley Mill was constructed. The mill was prefabricated at the San Juan Lumber Company in Durango. All support beams were erected, numbered, disassembled, and reassembled on this site. If you look carefully, you can still see numbered support beams. The Bagley Mill is privately owned. Please do not enter the building.