

Trailing Down The Tarryall: The Tarryall Valley



Starting in the town of Jefferson, the 35-mile Tarryall Valley personifies Euro-American settlement in Park County. The legacies of ranchers, miners, educators and others are portrayed in weathered buildings, cemetery epitaphs and on the agrarian landscape itself.



Tarryall School and
the Tarryall Mountains

Duration: 2 Days / 2 Nights

Destinations include:

- *D,SP&P Railroad Depot in Jefferson*
- *Jefferson (frontier) School*
- *Centerville Ranger Station (Interpretive Site)*
- *Bordenville Cemetery*
- *Historic Tarryall Reservoir Complex*
- *Tarryall Reservoir Outlet (Interpretive Site)*
- *Derby Cabin (Interpretive Site)*
- *Ute Creek Trail (Interpretive Site and Bird Watching)*
- *Ute Trail River Ranch*
- *Tarryall Mountain Farms (Historic Williams Ranch)*
- *Hay Creek Overlook (Interpretive Site)*
- *Tarryall (frontier) School*
- *O'Brien Gulch Bighorn Sheep Herd*
- *Forest Restoration at the Hayman Burn Area*

Day One: Town of Jefferson to Ute Trail River Ranch

Pick up a copy of the Tarryall Valley Heritage Tour Map at the Jefferson Store or Jefferson Depot. Before leaving town, visit the Jefferson Depot. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it is one of only a few train depots of this vintage still on its original site. Built in 1880, it served the Denver, South Park & Pacific Railroad until 1937. Now a real estate office, the Depot still contains record books dating back to the early 1900s.

Also in town, the Jefferson School has been a center of activity since its construction in 1901. Built in the same style as many one-room schools of the period, the original bell still rings to announce worship services and town meetings.



When leaving Jefferson on Tarryall Road (County Road 77), imagine a stagecoach pulled by a team of lively horses bounding down a rutted dirt road to the old mining town of Tarryall (Puma City). The first stop on the Tarryall tour is an interpretive pullout at the old Centerville Ranger Station. Continue down the road a few miles to Bordenville Cemetery which preserves the headstones of hardy families who ranched and mined in the valley during the late 1800s. The expansive beauty of the Tarryall Mountain Range unfolds a little farther down the road on the left. Be sure to keep an eye out for herds of elk that roam the foothills of this vast wilderness. Shortly, you will arrive at the Tarryall Reservoir Complex. Originally developed as a warming pond for rearing trout, it is now a State Wildlife Area known for its camping, fishing and migratory waterfowl. At the Tarryall Reservoir outlet, be sure to note the artistry of the dam (circa 1928) and the picturesque waterfall tumbling out of a rugged granite canyon. The interpretive pullout at this site explains more about the reservoir and surrounding ranches. A short distance below the reservoir is the Derby Cabin. Built about 1885, it is typical of the first homesteader cabins in the valley. Another couple of miles down the road will bring you to the Ute Creek Trail and parking area. From this point you can explore the Lost Creek Wilderness Area along Ute Creek Trail as it winds through stands of aspen and wildflowers.



With a great variety of nesting birds along Tarryall Creek and the forest above, bird watching here can become a several hour affair. If you brought your camping gear, Lost Creek Wilderness Area provides unlimited opportunities to enjoy a night under the stars near a rippling creek. If it's a cozy bed you're looking for, Ute Trail River Ranch offers lodging in historic log cabins, another mile down the road.

Day Two: Ute Trail River Ranch to Tarryall (Puma City)

While many visitors may choose to continue touring the Tarryall valley, some will prefer to remain at Ute Trail River Ranch for much of the day. With nine hand-hewn log cabins, this property has served as a secluded guest retreat since the 1930s. The diversity of habitat on and around the property make for some of the best bird watching in the area. With one mile of Tarryall Creek, guests of the ranch also have access to world-class fly fishing without leaving the property. And don't be surprised if you spot big horn sheep, great horned owls or evidence of 19th-Century Ute occupation while wetting a line.

After departing Ute Trail River Ranch, the first stop should be Tarryall Mountain Farms (summer) to buy fresh produce grown on the historic Williams Ranch. This is an educational farm in a frontier ranch setting, demonstrating natural and sustainable farming practices similar to the early homesteaders. About a mile below the farm is the Hay Creek pullout and overlook. Here visitors can view and photograph a 19th-Century ranch, as well as stunning rock formations in the Lost Creek Natural Area.



Designated in 1979 by the Secretary of the Interior, this National Landmark Area is characterized by granite spires, fins and buttresses. As you make your way on down the road, watch for the Twin Eagles and Spruce Grove trail signs. Both of these US Forest Service trails lead into the Lost Creek Natural Area which is now designated as wilderness. McCurdy Peak, which is visible from both trailheads, is the point from which early surveyors established the basis for all property section lines in the state. From here Tarryall Road continues into the town of Tarryall, originally named Puma City. In 1897 Puma City was a bustling mining town with over 400 buildings. Traces of the historic town can be seen in existing homes in this small community. On the south side of town, the Tarryall School site interprets the story of this one-room schoolhouse that educated the children of many homesteaders in the valley. To tour the school and associated teacherage, you may obtain a key at Ute Trail River Ranch. Down the road is the turnoff for Marksbury and O'Brien Gulches where you may encounter the renowned herd of Tarryall bighorn sheep. It is said that most bighorn sheep throughout the West are descendants of this herd. The Utes and other native peoples used this area as their summer hunting and fishing grounds for several hundred years.



A few short miles beyond O'Brien Gulch is the intersection with Matukat Road (#211) that travels along the edge of Lost Creek Wilderness Area. Consumed by the Hayman Fire in 2002, this area now affords a close look at how nature is reclaiming the forest after a devastating wild fire. A short distance below Matukat Road, Tarryall Creek turns abruptly to the east and vanishes into a deep canyon. At this point Tarryall Road follows Tappan Gulch in a southerly direction toward the South Platte River, on its final leg into the town of Lake George.