

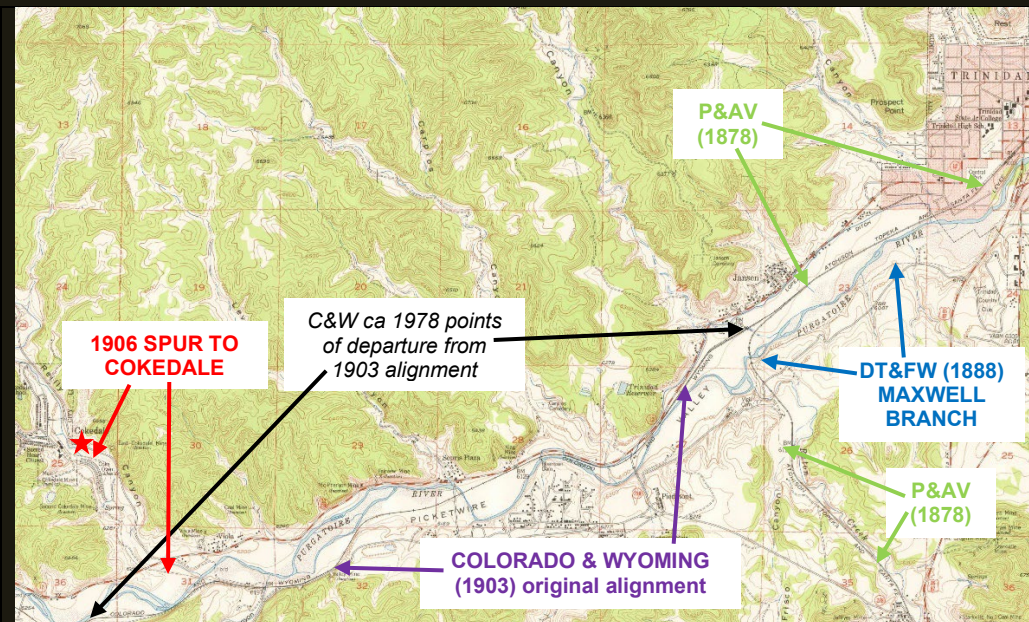


The area that would become the town of Cokedale began as a tent colony in 1899 to mine what would become the largest producer of metallurgical coal (coke) in the West. Also in 1899, the Colorado and Wyoming Railway, a subsidiary of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, planned a line to access the coal fields along the Purgatoire River west of Trinidad, Colorado, including the future Cokedale. The line began at junction with the Pueblo & Arkansas Valley Railroad (1878), which by 1899 was fully incorporated into the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad, at a location called Jensen. From Jensen, the line headed west along the Purgatoire River 10 miles to Segundo, where the tracks arrived in 1901 and the C&W built a five-stall roundhouse and operating headquarters. In 1903, the line was completed west to Stonewall, 26 miles west of the starting point at Jensen.

In 1906, the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) founded the town of Cokedale and developed the mines, coking ovens (this location), and other facilities. A spur was constructed, presumably also in 1906, from a connection with the C&W (1903) at a location 4 miles west of Jensen; this spur extended at least one mile northwestward up Reilly Canyon to the coke ovens (see photo below showing trains at the ovens). A 1951 topo map shows the spur as an abandoned grade (see below topo map); the symbol for the grade continues northwestward past Cokedale another 7 miles up Reilly Canyon and onto the adjacent topo map (not shown here) to the ghost town of Boncarbo. Boncarbo was the location of a coal mine established in 1915 by ASARCO, so it is possible that the grade on the topo map represents an 8 mile spur from the C&W (1903) to Boncarbo. I could find no topo maps for this area during the time period when the spur would have existed. In any event, after four decades of producing high-grade metallurgical coal, ASARCO closed the mines in 1947 and by 1951 (date of below topo map) the spur that extended at least to Cokedale and possibly to Boncarbo was gone.

In 1978, the US Army Corps of Engineers dammed the Purgatoire River and the resulting Trinidad Lake inundated part of the C&W (1903) right-of-way. The inundated part of the of the C&W (1903) included the location of the switch to the spur to Cokedale, which by this time was gone. Due to the building of the dam, a five mile section of the C&W (1903) was realigned to run south of Trinidad Lake. In 2003, the C&W (1903) was abandoned, but the first 2.3 miles of track was left in place for car storage.

Eastward view of the Cokedale ovens. The Cokedale spur ran through the flat area just beyond the ovens (as shown in below topo map) and a siding ran between the two rows of ovens (as shown in below photo).



1951 topo map (scale 1:24,000). Red star = current location. The coke ovens are shown just below the red star. Note the abandoned spur to Cokedale, which connected to the C&W (1903) at a junction with the part of the C&W (1903) that was realigned prior to being inundated by Trinidad Lake ca 1978.



A Denver and Rio Grande Western train is parked on a siding of the Cokedale spur that ran between the two rows of ovens ca 1930.



Southward view of the other side of the Cokedale ovens. The 2 bare trees in the center of the photo are growing along the small drainage of Reilly Canyon and the berm just on the other side of the trees and the stream is the fill grade of the Cokedale spur. The spur may have extended 7 miles to the northwest (right) up Reilly Canyon to Boncarbo and the connection to the C&W (1903) is one mile to the south (left) down Reilly Canyon to the confluence of this stream with the Purgatoire River. The ovens were served by one or more sidings off of the main spur.

MINING COAL IN COKEDALE

The mines of Huerfano and Las Animas Counties generated over 60% of Colorado's coal output in the early 1900s. Across the highway are the remains of coking ovens that serviced three mines.



Coal Into Coke

Coking is a necessary ingredient in smelting iron ore. The process burns with intense heat. The purpose of coking coal is to remove impurities such as sulphur and phosphorus as possible.

Dealing With Leftovers

The huge black mountain in front of you is a slag pile - impurities that are left out of the coal. If you are here on a cold day you may see steam rising from heat generated within the pile.

Not Quite A Ghost Town

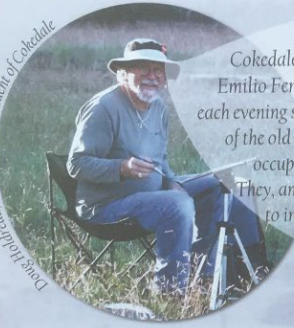
The American Smelting and Refining Company closed the mines and ovens and ceased operation in 1947. Since so many residents wanted to continue living there, the mining company sold them their houses for \$100 per room and \$50 for the lot and Cokedale was incorporated in 1948.

Through the town, visit some of the historic buildings, including the Cokedale museum.

Cokedale Mining Museum

COAL

David Hildreth, artist, former resident of Cokedale



"When I first came to Cokedale (1976) the gas lights were gone," but Emilio Ferraro whose job it had been to light them each evening still walked his route, sharing his memories of the old coal camp. Most of the houses were still occupied by old miners and their families. They, and the artifacts of their histories served to inspire my imagination and my art."



Art work by Amber McCreesh

COKEDALE

Waitlisted for Cokedale



DOUG HOLDREAD

Cokedale is Colorado's best example of an intact coal camp, a self-contained company town. The Cokedale Historic District consists of 117 buildings, virtually all built in 1906-07. Cokedale was built as a model town for 11,500 people "with a light bulb in every house."

The Coke Ovens, now collapsed, sweep dramatically along Reilley Creek. Four different railroads stopped between these two rows to load coal for transport to El Paso, Texas. A lovers' lane, located atop a hillside outside of town, provided a key form of entertainment - watching the lights of 350 ovens against a dark sky backdrop.

Today this charming small town is the gateway to a series of coal mines (Primero, Tercio, and Cornell) and Coal Camps (Sopris, Valdez, Primero, Segundo, Tercio, and Cornell).

A Good Company Town

American Smelter and Refining Company (ASARCO) had a reputation for paying better wages, and giving its families better treatment than other area mines. ASARCO cared for its miners by providing housing, a town, a doctor and a school. The company brought in domestic steam coal that cost miners only \$.33 (thirty-three cents) per month per household, made sure families had enough food, and forgave many individual debts.

In the years between 1901-1947, 1,500 miners speaking 23 languages extracted 1500 tons of coal per day, which yielded 800 tons of coke. In the process, 20 miners perished.

Explore Cokedale

Travelers are invited to the Historic Mercantile building where they can visit the Cokedale Museum by appointment. For information, call Town Hall 719-846-7428.

Start here for a self-guided walking tour through town.

This region is home to the highest concentration of Black Bears in the Lower '48.

