



The railroad that would become the Colorado Central Railroad was originally chartered as the Colorado & Clear Creek Railroad in 1865 by Loveland and other entrepreneurs in the town of Golden, which at the time was the capital of the Colorado Territory. Loveland and his partners planned a standard gauge railroad up Clear Creek Canyon to mining centers west of Denver, which was never realized. In 1866, the name of the company was changed to the Colorado Central & Pacific Railroad, in 1867 the company was reorganized with Union Pacific investors, and in 1868 the company changed its name to the Colorado Central Railroad and finally began some actual construction on a line connecting Golden to Denver. The CC connected Golden to Denver in 1870 and was a 14 mile branch line connecting Golden to the national rail network at Denver, which by 1870 had the Denver Pacific and Kansas Pacific railroads.

Golden is located at the base of the Rocky Mountain front at the mouth of Clear Creek. In 1871, with a standard gauge railhead in place, Loveland's Golden interests regained control of the CC from UP and by September 1872, 150 men were at work in the mountains west of Golden to extend a narrow gauge line to the mining communities up Clear Creek. In October 1872, the CC line between Denver and Golden (14 miles) was converted from standard gauge to dual gauge to allow narrow gauge trains to travel from Denver to the mines in Clear Creek Canyon. By December 1872, the narrow gauge line had been extended 13 miles west from Golden up Clear Creek and another 8 miles up the North Fork Clear Creek to mines at Black Hawk. Legal and financial battles for control of the CC between Loveland's Golden interests and UP continued during slow expansion into the mountains. In 1877, with Loveland in control and with UP financial backing, the CC expanded its line another 7 miles up Clear Creek (from its confluence with the North Fork and the Black Hawk branch line) to Idaho Springs and by August 1877 built another 13 miles to Georgetown, which immediately became the "Silver Queen of Colorado" and the end of the CC line. In 1879, a larger silver strike at Leadville prompted the CC to try to be the first rail line to reach Leadville, but that opportunity was lost in 1880, when the Denver & Rio Grande completed its line to Leadville. Nonetheless, the CC/UP wanted a piece of the Leadville traffic and in 1881, the UP organized the Georgetown, Breckenridge & Leadville Railway to extend the CC narrow gauge line west from Georgetown to Leadville. The route to Leadville from Georgetown required overcoming narrowing of the valley west of Georgetown and average grades over 6 percent (too steep for standard locomotives). UP chief engineer Jacob Blickensderfer devised a system of curves and bridges, including the Georgetown Loop, that reduced the average grade to 3 percent. In 1884, the first train arrived in Silver Plume, at the top of the difficult grade but only 3 miles as the crow flies up Clear Creek from Georgetown, and the GB&L stopped at Graymont, 3 miles past Silver Plume; the final GB&L was about 10 track miles. In the 1880's and into the early 1900's, Georgetown/Silver Plume, with its intervening narrow gauge rail loop, became a tourist center with seven trains a day running out of Denver at the height of its popularity. The last train from Denver to Silver Plume ran in 1938 and the line from Idaho Springs to Silver Plume was abandoned along with the Georgetown Loop. In 1941, the final miles of narrow gauge track from Golden to Idaho Springs were removed.

During the 1959 centennial celebration of the discovery of gold in Georgetown, the Colorado Historical Society started plans to reconstruct the Georgetown Loop. Construction of the rail line began in 1973 after the UP donated track and ties, and rolling stock was gathered and bridges set in place. The first operating season of the new Georgetown Loop Railroad was 1975, using the small amount of completed track. In 1982, a grant from a board member of the Colorado Historical Society financed the final segment of reconstruction and in 1984 Governor Richard D. Lamm dedicated the completed reconstruction of the Georgetown Loop to Silver Plume. The Georgetown Loop Railroad reconstructed most of the original GB&L grade. Additional visitor amenities have been added and the Georgetown Loop is now a popular excursion railroad, as it was in the late 1800's.

Westward view up Clear Creek Canyon at the upper end of the Georgetown Loop Railroad at Silver Plume, which has a re-built depot and sidings.



From foreground to background in this northward view at Silver Plume: the Georgetown Loop Railroad tracks, the Georgetown Loop Railroad passenger loading area, stored rail cars at the Georgetown Loop Railroad Silver Plume Yard, U.S. Highway 6, tailings from silver mines, and snowcapped peaks above 12,000 feet elevation.



Eastward (downstream) view of the Georgetown Loop Railroad at Silver Plume. The left track is the mainline down to Georgetown, the right track goes to an engine house. The end-of-track is behind (west) of the viewer.



The Georgetown Loop Railroad end-of-track at Silver Plume. The original GB&L end-of-track was 3 miles west of here (behind viewer) at Graymont.