



Foundation Document Overview

Golden Spike National Historic Site

Utah



Contact Information

For more information about the *Golden Spike National Historic Site Foundation Document*, contact: gosp_superintendent@nps.gov or (435) 471-2209 or write to: Superintendent, *Golden Spike National Historic Site*, 6200 North 22300th Street West, Corinne, UT 84307

Purpose



The purpose of GOLDEN SPIKE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE is to serve as a national memorial commemorating the completion of the first transcontinental railroad across the United States.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Viewshed and Historic Landscape**
- **Archeological Features**
- **Last Spike Site, May 10th Event, and Reenactments**
- **Replica Locomotives**
- **Step Back in Time**

Golden Spike National Historic Site contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Natural Resources**
- **Museum Collections and Archives**



Significance

Significance statements express why Golden Spike National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- **The Transcontinental Railroad Links the Nation.** The transcontinental railroad was among the greatest technological achievements of the 19th century. Golden Spike National Historic Site preserves the location where this achievement, which linked the United States politically, economically, physically, as well as in the national psyche, was completed. Coupled with other western expansion migrations, the transcontinental railroad had profound negative impacts on the lifeways and cultures of the American Indians across the West.



- **Preserving a Cultural Landscape.** Golden Spike National Historic Site, set in a vast open landscape mostly unchanged from 1869, retains an unparalleled concentration of historic transcontinental railroad engineering features, archeological sites, and associated cultural landscape elements. It is the only park unit set aside in perpetuity that preserves physical evidence of the technology and methods involved in construction, completion, and maintenance of the transcontinental railroad.
- **Locomotives and Reenactment.** The park's replica locomotives, together with its long history of commemorative activities and reenactment ceremonies, provide visitors a unique opportunity to learn about and experience the transcontinental railroad and have contributed to etching the Last Spike Site into the national consciousness.
- **Technological Feat.** The transcontinental railroad was among the greatest technological feats of the 19th century and represents one of the most ambitious and expensive projects ever undertaken by the federal government. The daunting task of construction across vast expanses of the country, within a relatively short time frame, required the government to forge creative partnerships with private corporations to accomplish this unprecedented construction feat. The legacy of this government-corporate partnership, and the fierce competition that it spawned between the rival railroad companies, is clearly reflected in the parallel grades and other features of Golden Spike National Historic Site.
- **United Effort.** Thousands of American workers and immigrants (Civil War veterans including Buffalo Soldiers, Irish, Chinese, American Indians, Mormons, and others) were employed in the railroad's construction, often toiling under the harshest of conditions in some of the most remote and difficult landscapes of the West.



Description



Golden Spike National Historic Site is in Box Elder County, Utah, 32 miles west of Brigham City and about 90 miles northwest of Salt Lake City. The current authorized boundary of the park contains 2,735.28 acres, of which 2,203.20 are in federal ownership and approximately 530 are privately held.

The park was designated to commemorate the location where the Union Pacific Railroad and the Central Pacific Railroad came together to form the first transcontinental railroad in the United States. The park's resources include the site where the railroad was completed in a "last spike" ceremony on May 10, 1869. In addition, the park incorporates the parallel railroad grades and associated archeological features that remain from the construction. These features include cuts and fills, drainage features, campsites of the workmen, and towns that sprang up around them. Additionally, the park's resources include the Mission 66 visitor center and replica locomotives that provide the main interpretation at the park.

Golden Spike National Historic Site is in the Eastern Great Basin Desert. The viewshed includes hillside and plains grasslands and ranges in elevation from about 5,000 to 6,500 feet above sea level. The scarcity of water in this semi-arid region accounts for its sparse population. Annual precipitation averages 8–12 inches, mostly in the form of snow. Snow depths vary considerably, but average less than 12–14 inches; occasionally, a single storm can produce 6–8 inches of snow. Temperatures range from daytime highs of 20 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter to an occasional 104 degrees in the summer. July and August are the hottest months, and the coldest weather is from late December through February. Winter nights are typically below 10 degrees Fahrenheit. Spring and autumn months are generally mild, although they can vary widely from day to day due to jet stream patterns and the fact that the area is desert.

Flash floods from occasional severe storms and spring runoff, aggravated in some places by adjacent agricultural land use, cause erosion of historic grades, cuts, fills, and trestles, and, as a result, some of the historic grades and associated features have been damaged. Damage also occurs more gradually from natural erosion processes.

During glacial times, the area was under the waters of ancient Lake Bonneville, and prominent old lake terraces are visible throughout the entire area. Today's surface materials consist of fine-grained lake sediments and alluvial detritus. Subsurface deposits consist primarily of Pennsylvanian sandstone, shale, and limestone and Tertiary extrusive materials. Numerous fault lines of Tertiary age run through the Promontory Range.

The region is included in the shadscale-kangaroo rat-sagebrush biome of the northern Great Basin. The major flora in the area consists of sagebrush, rabbit brush, broom snakeweed, Indian rice grass, and a variety of other grasses. A few Utah junipers and an occasional historic box-elder tree can be found. Nonnative vegetation includes Russian thistle (tumbleweeds), tumble mustard, cheatgrass, western crested wheatgrass, and other species. Even in undeveloped parts of the park, the vegetation differs from that in 1869 because of the greater concentration of nonnative species and noxious weeds; however, the visual aspect of these vegetation changes does not appear to have significantly altered the cultural landscape.

Wildlife is varied and consists of larger mammals such as coyote, mule deer, bobcat, badger, and jackrabbit. Small mammals, reptiles, insects, and numerous species of birds are also present. Large numbers of raptors inhabit the area, and accipiters, falcons, hawks, and golden and bald eagles are common during winter months.

The surrounding landscape is relatively unchanged in appearance from 1869, and large undeveloped swaths of ranchland surround the park's 2,735 acres.

