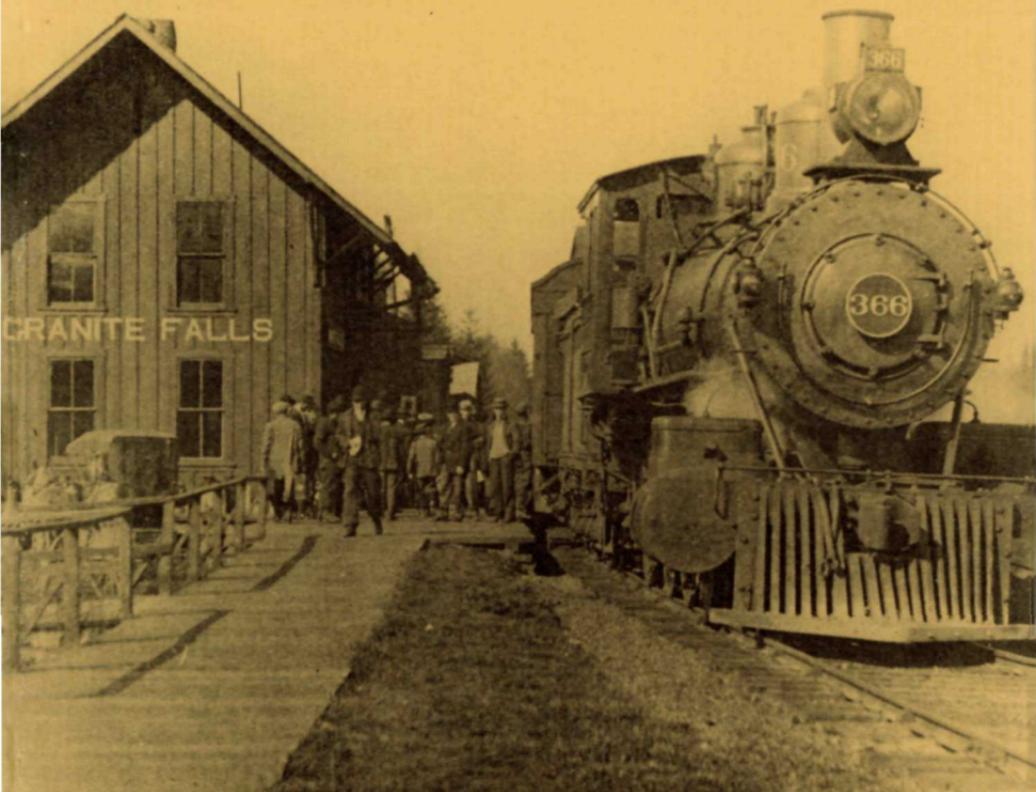


# MONTE CRISTO HISTORICAL TOUR



**MT. BAKER-SNOQUALMIE NATIONAL FOREST**

**FOREST SERVICE**

**U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Pacific Northwest Region**



## ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet is a guide for your trip to one of the most famous mining districts in the Northwest in the decade of the 1890s.

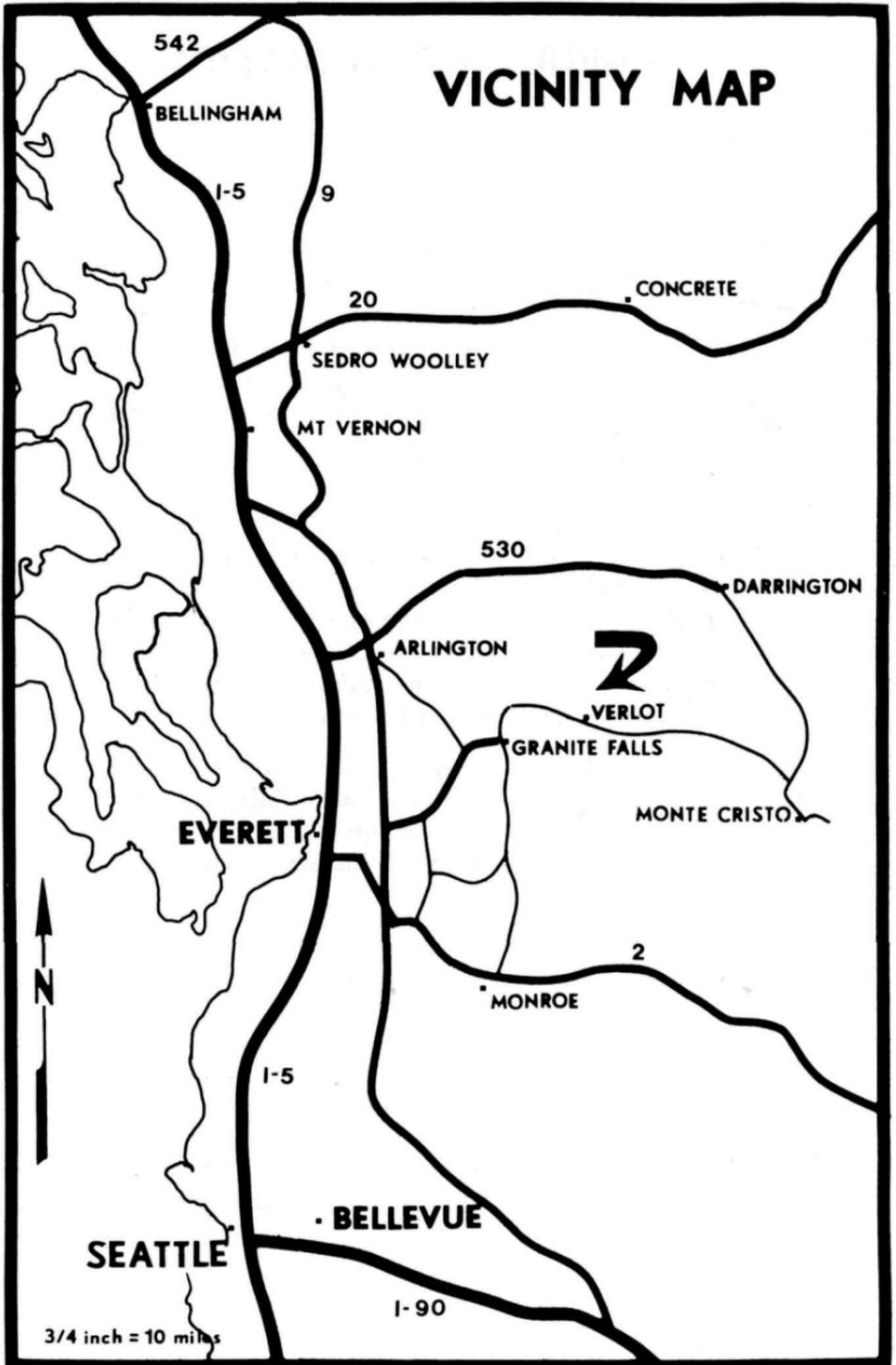
You may begin your tour at the Granite Falls Historical Society Museum in Granite Falls or at the Verlot Ranger Station. As you drive up the valley of the South Fork of the Stillaguamish River on the Mountain Loop Highway you are retracing the route taken by miners, loggers, homesteaders, and railroad men eastward into the Cascade Mountains.

Many of the historical sites have remains left on the ground. We urge you to park your car, take your booklet with you, and walk through them.

The tour ends at the town of Monte Cristo, which is now a privately owned resort. A parking or visiting fee may be charged by the owners.

To leave the Monte Cristo country you may either return via Granite Falls or continue around the Mountain Loop Highway to Darrington.

# VICINITY MAP



NOTE: Map of tour stops located in back of brochure.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

In the summer of 1889 Joe Pearsall and Frank Peabody hiked their way from Index up Silver Creek to the headwaters of the Sauk River. Across the valley they saw traces of a major vein of lead and silver. Financed by a Seattle-based corporation including J.M. Wilmans, Fred Wilmans, and Leigh Hunt, owner of the "Seattle Post-Intelligencer" newspaper, the men returned to the site in the summer of 1890. There they started development of a camp they called Monte Cristo, and began building a wagon road down the Sauk to its mouth at the Skagit River landing of Sauk City (near present-day Rockport).

During that year the Wilmans' interests learned that a New York-based syndicate of wealthy capitalists—centered about the Wall Street firm of Colby and Hoyt — were planning to develop the city of Everett as a major manufacturing center on Puget Sound. The Wilmans group convinced the Easterners that the wealth of Monte Cristo would fit into their strategy.

Thus in July 1892 the syndicate formed the Monte Cristo, Pride of the Mountains, and Rainy Mining Companies, taking over most of the major properties, and extending tunnels into the veins above the town.

To process the ore a large concentrator was erected at Monte Cristo, while at the same time in Everett a major smelter was built. To carry the ore down to the smelter the syndicate began construction of the Everett and Monte Cristo Railway in the spring of 1892. This was a standard guage railroad which ran seventy-two miles from the smelter in north Everett through Snohomish, Hartford, Granite Falls, Silverton, over Barlow Pass and into Monte Cristo. By 1894 trainloads of concentrates were being shipped out of the town and down to the smelter.

But the Silverton and Monte Cristo Mining Districts did not prove up to expectations. Ore values were too low, veins ran out, and operating costs were too high. The boom ended when disastrous flooding of the railroad in 1897 turned the townspeople into refugees who had to walk out to safety. Anything they could not carry on their backs was left behind. Mining gradually resumed after the floods when various new owners tried to make a profit, but when the winter snows came in the depression year of 1907 the drills finally were silenced.

As mining jobs were lost most settlers left the valley. Others homesteaded or worked in the woods for a living. Several mills ran for short periods, especially at Gold Basin and Black Creek, but all were dependent on the rails to reach distant, unpredictable markets.

In 1915 the Rucker Brothers took over the section of railroad from Hartford to Monte Cristo, renaming it the Hartford Eastern Railway. For many years they ran passengers up to the inn they constructed at the foot of Big Four Mountain. With the depression of the 1930s the railroad was scrapped, to be replaced by the Mountain Loop Highway. This is now the major route through the valley, and the one you will take on your tour.



## **VERLOT RANGER STATION**

The U.S. Forest Service began administering public land in the valley in 1908, with local headquarters near Silverton. In 1936 the Monte Cristo Ranger District was organized and a new headquarters built for it at Verlot near the National Forest boundary.

In front of the station you may see the symbol of the Historical Tour, an authentic ore car from a Monte Cristo mine. These cars were pushed along steel tracks from the mine face to the ore dump outside. From here the ore was loaded into wagons or buckets of aerial tramways for shipment to the concentrator or railroad.

Information about the tour, as well as current road, trail, and campground conditions, is available at the ranger station.

## GOLD BASIN

Gold Basin, now the site of a large campground, was once a bustling little town of 72 people, with a store, post office, and school. Originally homesteaded by the Hempel and Rohde families, in 1910 the land was purchased for the Gold Basin Lumber and Shingle Company. A large sawmill was constructed south of the railroad (now the highway) to cut timber from the first major Forest Service sale in the valley. Unfortunately, poor markets and transportation problems with the railroad caused the mill to shut down in 1913.

You may walk through this site to see the pond, log chute, boiler house, storage facilities, and other remains of the mill.



## **BLACK CREEK MILL**

This photograph, taken from the bridge across Black Creek, shows the Moose Shingle Company as it looked during construction in 1914. In the center is the mill building, with the power house to the right and the storage dam below to the left.

Massive cedar trees were cut down by hand, then sawn into blocks and sent down a chute into the creek. From the mill pond blocks went up the ramp to the saws. In 1915 the mill was producing 50,000 to 60,000 high quality shingles per day to be packed, dried in the huge storage shed, and sent out on the railroad.

Shingle mills were always an unpredictable business due to overproduction and wild fluctuations in price. This mill was built by P.A. Liberty, who dismantled his shingle mill near Bothell and moved it here to take advantage of a Forest Service sale of cedar, hemlock, and silver fir. It changed hands several times until a prospective new owner failed to get financing. It was scrapped in 1920.



\*Shoofly Curve lies just past the Moose Shingle Company. Originally Tunnel No. 7 on the railroad, its collapse caused track to be laid around the point in a sharp bypass curve, a "shoofly".

\*Boardman Creek. At the mouth of the creek next to the highway bridge are remains of the old railroad trestlework.



## **BLACK CHIEF MINE**

To the left of the highway where the railroad once crossed the river at Red Bridge is the Black Chief Mine. This short adit into the rock face is typical of many of the small mines and prospect holes which abound in the Silverton and Monte Cristo Mining Districts.

This prospect was dug by Alf Eldred (shown above), who with his brother Alton explored many of the ore bearing veins in this part of the valley. Most of the men who found pay streaks sold them to outside investors or larger corporations, as costs were high for mining and shipping the low grade ores.



## **“THE SINKHOLE”**

This deep, clay pocket has been known for years as “The Sinkhole”. When the railroad was constructed here in 1893 the contractors found that the pilings of their trestlework kept sinking into the blue clay and shifting down toward the river. The same problem confronts the modern highway builder.

A dramatic view of this shifting may be seen by following the short path to the viewpoint. Originally the trestlework you see to your left was exactly in front of you. Since the Hartford Eastern Railway maintenance crews abandoned these timbers in 1936 they have shifted and tilted precariously until most of them have been swept away by the river.

\*Tulalip Mill. Adjacent to The Sinkhole the Rucker Brothers constructed a saw mill and camp to cut timber from a large Forest Service sale near Silverton. Nothing is visible now but the mill pond to the right of the highway.

## SPERRY-IVERSON MINE

Just past Marten Creek on your left are the Sperry-Iverson Mine and cabin sites. The mine's location was handy to the railroad (now the highway), while the cabin above was next to the Forest Service trail which ran from the road end at Verlot up to Silverton and Monte Cristo.\*

A.D. "Dick" Sperry was an early prospector who discovered a mineral belt in the Marten Creek — Long Mountain region in the 1890s. Although Sperry Peak is named for him, he was not above "salting" a mine with richer ore to make a quick sale to an unsuspecting buyer. He is shown above on the left with Frank Kazenski in Silverton.



\*Long Mountain. To your left is Long Mountain, scene of a major early forest fire. Although it has been replanted by the Forest Service, dead white snags still show the path of the blaze.

\*Forty-five Mine and Tramway. To your right, between Marble Peak and Blackjack Ridge, ran a 9,000 foot aerial tramway bringing ore down to the railroad from the Forty-five Mine over the divide in the Sultan Basin.



## SILVERTON

The Silverton Mining District was the center of a booming silver and copper rush beginning in 1891. Most of the ore came from veins in Silver and Anacortes Gulches on Hall Peak south of the river. From north of the river came copper from the Bonanza Queen Mine on Long Mountain, and silver from mines on Deer Creek and Helena Peak.

The presence of these mineral deposits caused the syndicate to build the Everett and Monte Cristo Railway up the South Fork of the Stillaguamish rather than up the North Fork to Darrington and then via the Wilmans' wagon road route.

By the time the locomotives arrived on June 28, 1893 the town boasted two hotels, a post office, two general stores, a meat market, a saloon, an assay office, a printing office, and a sawmill. Shown above is the south side business district in 1892.

## BIG FOUR INN

Originally this site was known as Trout's Marsh, the last homestead in the valley above Silverton. Between 1920 and 1949 it was the location of Big Four Inn, a major railroad hotel built by the Rucker Brothers and served by their Hartford Eastern Railway.

In 1924 over 6,000 visitors came to hike, sightsee, play tennis, golf on a nine hole course, dance, hold conventions, or just relax. It was a popular, first class establishment with quality service and prices to match. But business declined with the onset of depression and abandonment of the railroad in the 1930s. During World War II it served as a rest center for the U.S. Coast Guard. The day after the Labor Day weekend in 1949 it caught fire and burned to the ground, leaving only the fireplace, foundations, and sidewalks.



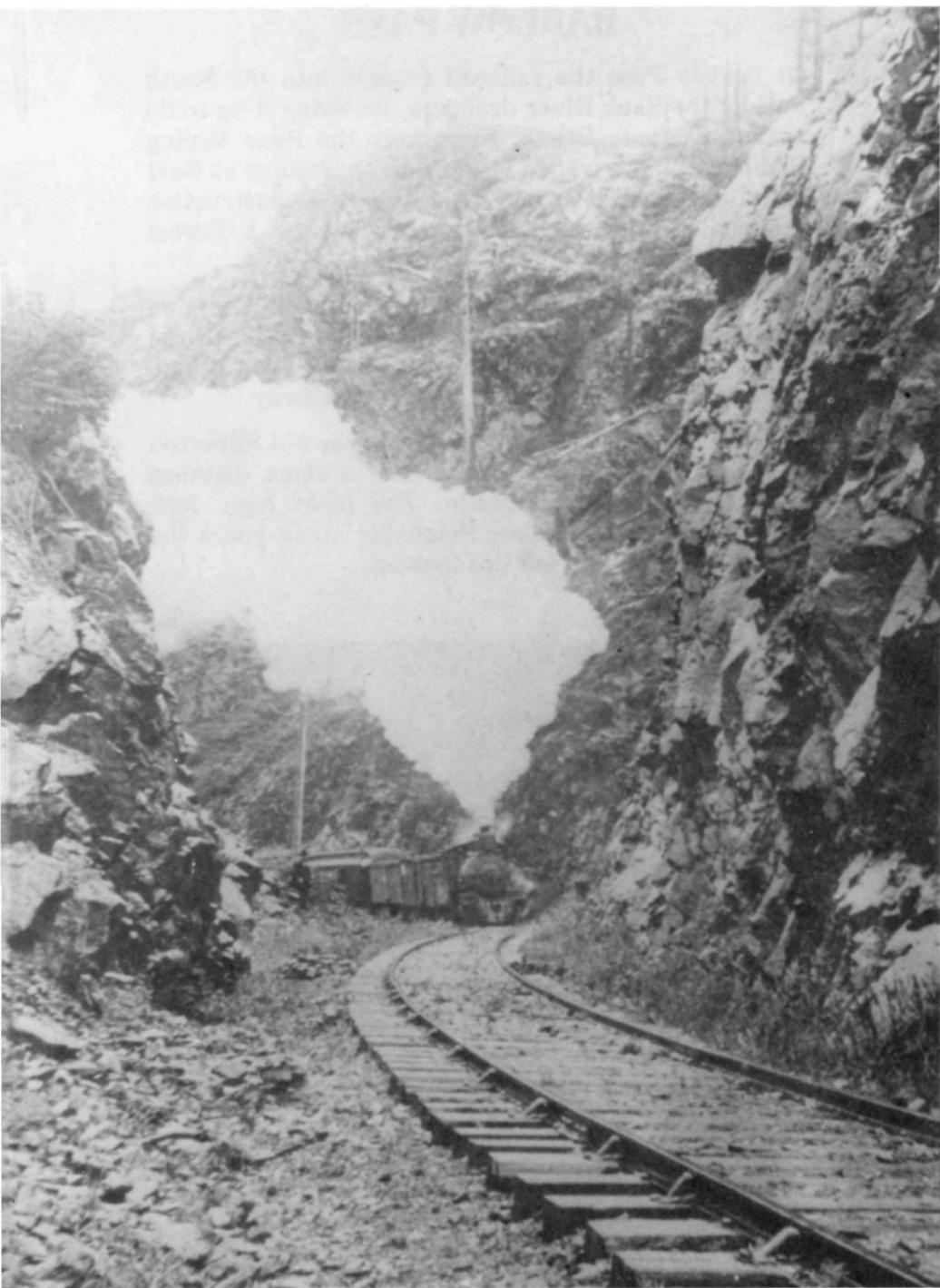
## BUCK CREEK BURN AND THE "BARLOW CUT"

Walking a short distance down the trail from Barlow Pass leads you to the grade of the Everett and Monte Cristo Railway. From here you may walk for half a mile along the old roadbed, high above the traffic below. You almost can hear the whistle of a big 10-wheeler echoing through the rock cuts and narrow valley as the locomotive strains up the steep grade to cross the pass. Deepening snow and the threat of avalanche always made reaching the summit a goal of winter time engineers.

Notice how small the trees are, then raise your sight up to the side of Mount Dickerman to the north. There you may see the telltale white snags of the forest fires of 1905 and 1914 which burned off this entire slope. Although the Forest Service replanted young trees afterward, the fire damage to the shallow soils in this harsh environment has severely retarded their growth.

This photograph shows the planting camp, with boxes of young seedlings arriving on the horse-drawn rail car.





## BARLOW PASS

At Barlow Pass the railroad crossed into the South Fork of the Sauk River drainage, following it up to its source at Monte Cristo. From here the Penn Mining Company built a wagon road to its operations at Goat Lake, and the flat area served first as a construction camp site for the railroad men, then as a Forest Service guard station.

Shown below is the original Forest Service building on the left and the Penn warehouse on the right. In the foreground is one of the gas cars used to haul passengers on the Hartford Eastern Railway.

At the edge of the clearing is part of the old Silverton to Monte Cristo trail, which leads a short distance north to the railroad grade. The right hand fork switchbacks up to Barlow Point, for many years the site of a Forest Service fire lookout.





## WEDEN HOUSE

Beginning in 1910 the warehouse and buildings shown above served as the supply base for mines up in Gothic Basin. Claims were developed to the south of Weden Lake and to the north on Del Campo Mountain, which was named for the Del Campo Mine.

Although the Northwest Consolidated Mining Company built a 7,000 foot aerial tramway to haul out ore in 1907, the most successful operation was at the Mackinaw Mine, south of the river. Development of this property lasted until the early years of World War II, while continued exploratory drilling by a Canadian corporation occurred as recently as 1969.

These buildings have disappeared, but the area where they once stood is now a popular jumping off place for hikers and mountain climbers going into the basin.



## MONTE CRISTO

Your tour ends at the townsite of Monte Cristo. Ore from the Pride of the Mountains and Mystery mines was sent down to the concentrator by aerial tramways from Mystery Ridge southeast above the town. Other mines were located on Wilmans Peak and above 76 Creek. While most miners stayed at bunk houses up at the tunnels, supervisors, businessmen and workers for the concentrator and railroad lived in houses on planked Dumas Street or across the tracks below the rail yards.

Over 200 residents were here in 1902 when these people lined up outside the Monte Cristo Mercantile Company for their photograph. By 1920 the U.S. Census listed only one. Monte Cristo had become a ghost town.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The U.S. Forest Service gratefully acknowledges the help given to the Historical Tour by many groups and individuals. Without them the tour could not have been completed. We especially thank the following:

The Everett Highriders Four-Wheel-Drive Club

The Granite Falls Historical Society

Evergreen Area Council, Boy Scouts of America

Snohomish County Road District #1

Snohomish County Parks Department

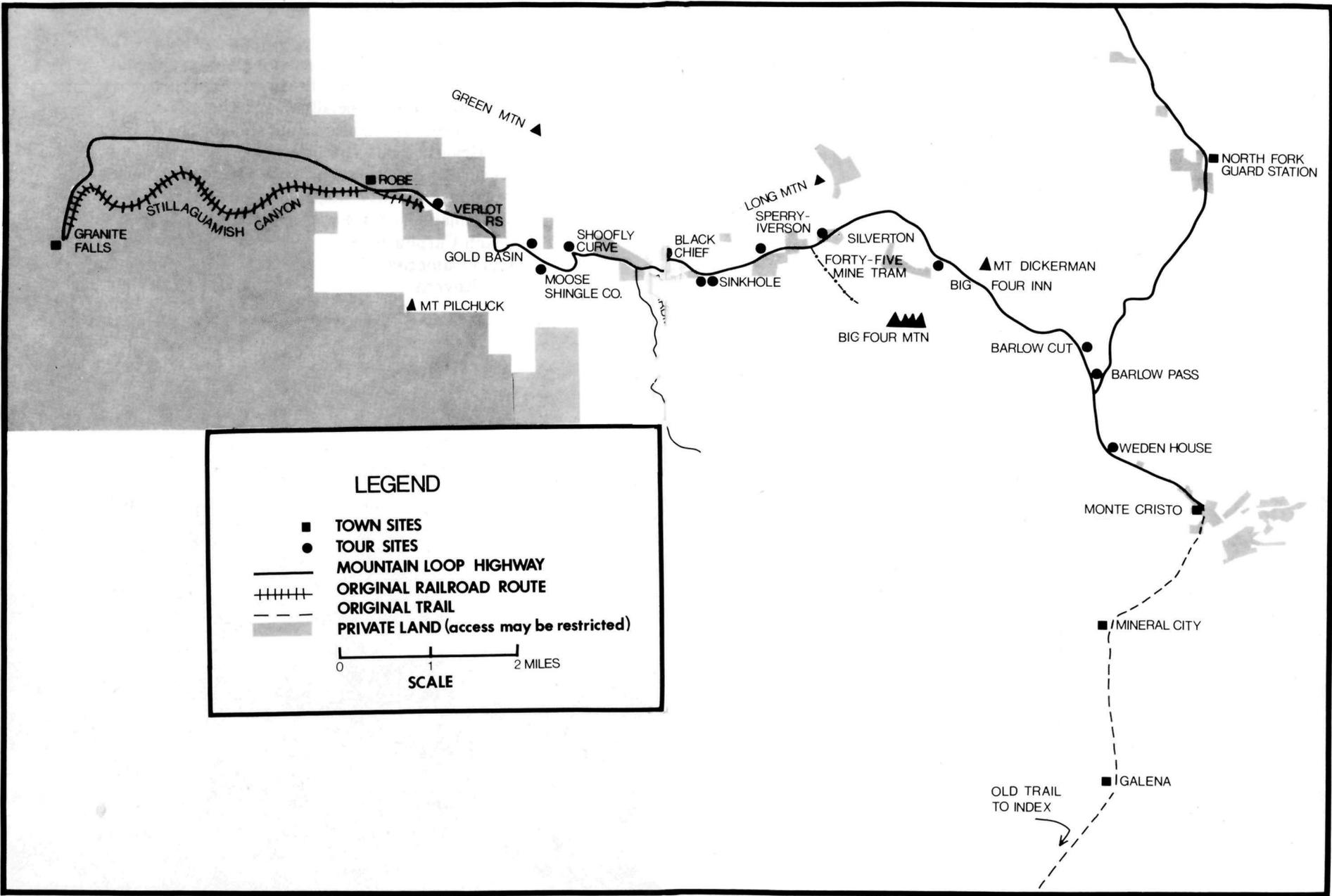
Lytton Carpenter

David Cameron

Bob Stevens

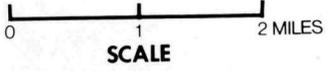
Photographs: U.S. Forest Service





**LEGEND**

- TOWN SITES
- TOUR SITES
- MOUNTAIN LOOP HIGHWAY
- ++++ ORIGINAL RAILROAD ROUTE
- - - ORIGINAL TRAIL
- PRIVATE LAND (access may be restricted)



OLD TRAIL TO INDEX

# NOTES:

**MONTE CRISTO**



**HISTORICAL TOUR**

