

Camp Hale

Camp Hale was created to train US soldiers to fight in the mountains during World War II. The camp was built in the Pando Valley near Leadville in 1942. There, troops of **the Tenth Mountain Division** learned to ski, snowshoe and climb. They used their training to fight in the Apennine Mountains in Italy in 1945. After the war, soldiers who trained at the camp helped build ski areas in Colorado. Camp Hale is now part of the White River National Forest.

Origins

In 1942 the United States was involved in World War II. The US Army



10th Mountain Division Training for WWII
at Camp Hale.

created Camp Hale to train soldiers to fight in the mountains during winter. The army built its training camp near Leadville. It was a good place for the camp. It could house 15,000 troops. It had a high elevation and was near 12,000-foot mountains. The Eagle River provided water. A highway and a railroad provided transportation.

It was named Camp Hale for Brigadier General Irving Hale, who was from Denver. The camp used 1,457 acres of the Pando Valley. To build the camp, the army had to move the Eagle River and a highway.

Training the Tenth Mountain Division

The troops of the Tenth Mountain Division arrived at Camp Hale by January 1943. Soon the camp had more than 1,000 buildings and about 15,000 men.

Camp Hale was enormous. It had barracks, a hospital, stables, a veterinary center and a field house. It had parade grounds, recreation areas, and gun and combat ranges. Men learned how to survive in winter conditions and fight in the mountains. They practiced skiing, snowshoeing, and mountain climbing.

Training was hard. Camp Hale's soldiers were often miserable. They nicknamed the camp "Camp Hell." They had to practice with heavy packs at high altitude. Soldiers got altitude sickness and frostbite. Coal smoke from trains, stoves, and furnaces filled the valley. Some soldiers got a cough they called the "Pando Hack."

Camp Hale also housed other troops. One was a unit of soldiers who supported the Germans or opposed the war. The army grouped them together and sent them to far-off Camp Hale. Here they were assigned basic jobs.

There were also German prisoners of war at Camp Hale. Once, some German prisoners escaped. They made it to Mexico before being arrested.

The Tenth Mountain Division fought in northern Italy in the winter of 1945. Their training helped the US defeat Italy and Germany during World War II.

Postwar Training and Recreation

In 1945 the buildings at Camp Hale were torn down. The materials were sent to Fort Carson to reuse. Camp Hale was sometimes used as an army training center.

In 1965 the army closed Camp Hale. They gave the land to the White River National Forest. The Forest Service began to restore the valley to its natural state. They buried building sites and planted trees. They made two campgrounds and a picnic area. Visitors can take a tour of the old Camp Hale site.



Ski Practice at Camp Hale

Training at Camp Hale included instruction in skiing techniques.

In 2015 the Forest Service worked to restore the Pando Valley. Camp Hale had moved the Eagle River into a straight, narrow ditch. This destroyed most of the valley's wetlands. They are working to move the Eagle River so it will run as it did before Camp Hale. The river's length will be three miles longer. If approved by the Forest Service, the project will restore much of the wetlands.

Encyclopedia Staff. (2015, September 10). Camp Hale. *Colorado Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from <https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/camp-hale>



Camp Hale, Pando Valley ~ 1944



Ambulance, Camp Hale, Colorado 1943 - 1944



Ski troops parade in “whites” at Camp Hale, Colorado 1943 - 1944; They are wearing their "whites" the winter camouflage uniforms and carry white skis on their right shoulder as rifles are normally carried while on parade.

Source: The Denver Public Library

<https://digital.denverlibrary.org/digital/collection/p15330coll22/id/15881/rec/25>



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ps 1943 -1944; Members of the 10th Mountain Division, march behind a "weasel" snow-track (snowcat) vehicle. Source: The Denver Public Library <https://digital.denverlibrary.org/digital/collection/p15330coll22/id/83183/rec/58>



Men of Camp Hale carrying their skis, 1943-1944





Ski training about face on skis executed by all of L87th with Lieutenant William J Bourke in Command Camp Hale, Colorado, 1943-

1944



The Commissary at Camp Hale ~1944

Source: Photo Courtesy of the [Colorado Snowsports Museum and Hall of Fame](#) and the Davis Family



Having a little fun!

Source: Photo Courtesy of the [Colorado Snowsports Museum and Hall of Fame](#) and the Davis Family



A poster commemorating the 10th Mountain Division ski troopers who fought during World War II in the Italian campaign.

Source: Colorado Snowsports Museum & Hall of Fame

<https://www.snowsportsmuseum.org/shop/climb-to-glory-poster>



Entrance to Camp Hale, Colorado, 2019



Bunkers at Camp Hale, 2019



Bunkers at Camp Hale, 2019



Concrete ruins of the Field House at Camp Hale, 2019



Concrete ruins of the Field House at Camp Hale, 2019



Concrete ruins of the Field House at Camp Hale, 2019



The Pando Valley, 2019



Monument to honor the men of the 10th Mountain Division