

Mountains of Silver

A little over a century ago, the Red Mountain Mining District in the San Juan Mountains of southwestern Colorado was the scene of a "silver rush" with a resulting output of precious metals in Colorado second only to that of Leadville. In a period of less than twenty-five years, more than thirty million dollars in silver, lead, zinc, copper, and gold were taken from the rich deposits in the mines along Red Mountain Divide - an amount roughly equivalent to a quarter-billion of today's dollars. The histories of the communities that sprang into being with these mines, the railroads constructed to service them, and the men and women who lived, worked and died in them are the threads deftly woven into the richly textured story of Mountains of Silver. It's a colorful and varied tapestry that depicts the lives of the prospectors who made the first rich strikes; the land promoters, speculators, and road- and railroad-builders who capitalized on the frenzied rush to the area; and the motley collection of miners, lawyers, merchants, prostitutes, saloonkeepers, and freighters who attempted to profit from the boom. Though the Red Mountain District now lies silent and only a handful of tumbledown buildings testify to the area's former vitality, the bustle and excitement of the glory days come to life once more in the pages of this fascinating history. P. David Smith is the author of six other books about Colorado including Mountain Mysteries, Ouray: Chief of the Utes, Images of the San Juans, A Quick History of Ouray, The Million Dollar Highway and Exploring the San Juan Triangle. A past president of the Ouray County Historical Society, he lectures frequently on Colorado history.

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