

South Park City

- a visit back in time to the 1880s -

Living History Days, Aug. 11-12, breathes life into the past



LATE SUMMER

Visiting South Park City on a typical late summer day gives one a chance to reflect quietly on the past. (Photo courtesy of Gary Beuthel)

By *Laura Van Dusen*

On a typical visit to South Park City, one can walk through the furnished structures of the uninhabited, restored 1880s frontier town and imagine what life must have been like when the county was new.

But on Living History Days weekend, Aug. 11-12, the ghosts of the past will live again as re-enactment actors and history enthusiasts populate the street and buildings, dressing as early-day pioneers and acting the part of characters from the past.

And they are characters – painted ladies, gunfighters, gamblers, cowboys, preachers, schoolteachers and townspeople – who come out to demonstrate life as it was 130 years ago in the early days of Park County.

On that weekend, visitors get a feel for the hustle and bustle of a Colorado frontier town. One can walk into Rache's Place Saloon and ask the bartender for a sarsaparilla, ginger beer or root beer, perhaps sharing the bar with an 1880s-era cowboy, railroader or saloon girl. Or one can venture down the street for a scoop of ice cream at the J. A. Merriman Drugstore.

Visitors are invited to dress in vintage clothes on Living History Days to feel right at home.

All of the structures in the one-block dirt street that make up South

Park City came from historic area mining camps and towns of the 1870-1890 period. And all the buildings, from pioneer homes to early day businesses to schools and churches, are realistically furnished with items from Park County frontier days.

Several new exhibits will open this year, and most are planned to be ready by opening day on May 12.

A large mineral display is in the process of being moved to the Summer Saloon building. It will give visitors a close-up look at several Colorado specimens.

A milk house exhibit is being designed that will show visitors how

foods were refrigerated before the days of modern appliances.

And a gold-panning exhibit is being planned that will give visitors a chance to learn the process and keep any gold they find.

In partnership with Park County Historic Preservation and the South Park National Heritage Area, modern technology is coming to South Park City. A walking tour is being developed in which a visitor can use a smart phone while walking through the museum exhibits. Users of this technology will be able to access the walking tour not only at the museum, but also will be able to view it at any time on a smart phone to help plan the visit. Photos of the restored town will be part of the smart phone walking tour.

South Park City, located at 100 4th St. in Fairplay, is open in 2012 from May 12 (weather permitting) to Oct. 15. Admission is \$9 for adults and \$4 for children 6-12. Children under age 6 are admitted free. The website, www.southparkcity.org, has a wealth of information as well as a discount admission coupon. Visitors age 65 and older can either use the \$2 discount coupon from the website or ask for a \$2 senior discount at the entrance station, but they cannot use both discounts. Hours vary depending on the season. Check the website or call 719-836-2387 for times.



1880S COWBOY

Johnny Vitt, a regular at Living History Days, poses for a photo in front of Simpkins General Store at the 2011 event. (Photo by Laura Van Dusen/The Flume)