

# Cultural History in Boulder County

## Living Map Program

**Presentation Theme:** All living creatures need food, water, shelter and space to survive. Human presence in what is now known as Boulder County goes back at least approximately 13,000 years. Earliest native peoples relied on the local landscape, plants, and animals to meet these needs. As Anglo settlement expanded westward, successive waves of people came to Boulder County where they also relied on the local landscape and resources to provide their needs.

### Life in Boulder County

For millennia prior to the arrival of miners and other white settlers, nomadic groups of Native Americans moved through this area, often following the great bison herds. Local archaeological evidence (Mahaffy Cache) suggests that humans have been at least seasonally present in Boulder County for approximately 13,000 years.

Efforts by European descendants to settle and develop the Boulder and St. Vrain Valleys really began with the Gold Rush of 1859. Since that time, the population of the county has grown significantly and Boulder County has become home to a large university and many thriving businesses. Today, only a handful of people still seek the precious metal that in the mid-nineteenth century beckoned the masses to head west in search of their fortunes.

Using our 12 X 16 foot “Living Map” of Boulder County, we will explore ways in which Native Americans may have viewed this area and taken advantage of some of the natural resources and terrain features. We’ll then take a look at some of the mining history of the area. Finally, we’ll discuss the continued settlement of Boulder County following the mining-boom days.

- **DO NOT WEAR SHOES ON THE LIVING MAP – SOCKS ONLY!**

### Activity Set-up

- Unfold Living Map and place on floor, north edge to blackboard
- Place town labels on map that are most relevant to the program location: e.g., Nederland, Boulder, Louisville, Lafayette, Lyons, Longmont, etc.
- Place the “We Are Here” label on the map at the program location
- Place landmark labels on map that are most relevant to the program location: e.g. the Flatirons, Longs Peak, Continental Divide, Arapaho Glacier, Haystack Mountain, etc.
- Place landmark labels or scale models on the map showing likely travel corridors for Native Americans and areas known to have been sites where large animal kills took place (e.g. Buffalo jump, a hunt on the plains, over-wintering site at Rabbit Mountain, etc.)
- Place mining camp labels on map depicting some of the more active or profitable hard rock mining locations: e.g. Gold Hill, Gregory Diggings, Caribou town site, Wall Street, etc.
- Place agricultural markers (i.e. scale model plow and oxen team, etc.) on the map indicating places where some of the more successful farming efforts have taken place.
- Place reservoir labels on map that are most relevant to the program location: e.g. Buttonrock Reservoir, McIntosh Lake, Boulder Reservoir, Union Reservoir. Discuss the importance of reservoirs to local farmers.
- Place labels on the map representing various ghost towns in Boulder County as well as labels showing towns that survived. Discuss reasons why some towns made it and others did not.

*Note: You can also have students help you place these labels as you talk about them.*

## Activity

- Presenters stand at north side of map at front of room
- Arrange students around the remaining three sides of the map, standing for the intro and orientation to the map so they can see everything, and sitting for the remainder of the exercise
- **Question:** What is this a map of? (Boulder County – area: 742 square miles)
  - **Question:** What is a “county”? (a geographic area and unit of local government)
  - Colorado is divided into 64 counties
  - Boulder County is one of the original 17 counties created in 1861 as part of the Colorado Territory (Colorado became a state in 1876)
  - Largest county in Colorado: Las Animas County in SE Colorado (4,771 square miles)
  - Boulder County area is 742 square miles (51 of 64 counties in land area)
- **Question:** Where is north on this map? (Place north arrow on map and have students identify which sides they are standing on)
- **Question:** Where are we today? (school location; orient students to the map: towns, drainages, landmarks, etc.)
- **Question:** Where do most of the people in Boulder County live? (On the plains east of the mountains)
- **Question:** Where do plants and wild animals in Boulder County live? (Everywhere!)
- Boulder County has more biodiversity (many types of plants and animals) than most places. **Question:** Why do you think that is? (Because of five different life zones and diverse ecosystems in Boulder County, created by the dramatic elevation changes)
- **Question:** Where do you think the lowest and highest elevations in BoCo are? (East edge of map where St. Vrain Creek leaves BoCo [just under 5,000 feet], and northwest corner of map at Longs Peak [over 14,000 feet])
- **Question:** How much does the elevation change between the lowest point in Boulder County and the highest point? (about 9,000 feet of elevation change)
- **Question:** What and where is the Continental Divide? (The high peaks on the western boundary of Boulder County that determine whether water flows west to the Pacific Ocean or east to the Atlantic Ocean)
- **Question:** Where do you think Native Americans most likely set up their camps? (The high country was cooler in the summer, and the winters were less harsh on the plains.) **Hunting?** (This depended on what they were hunting...bison on the plains, elk and deer in the foothills, fish in the streams, etc.) **Gathering edible plants?** (Wild edible plants are often found in life zone transition areas (ecotones) where berries and similar plant foodstuffs grow best)
- **Question:** What did Anglo explorers likely find to be the greatest challenge associated with this area? (Finding passage through the mountains to the western slopes was one of the greatest challenges for early explorers)
- **Question:** The years from 1820 to 1840 saw the peak of the fur trade era. What animal were trappers mostly interested in trapping? (*Castor Canadensis* or American beaver) Why were beaver pelts so highly prized? (The hat trade in Europe and the eastern U.S. were producing hats made from beaver felt, and every man who wanted to keep up with modern fashion had to have one.)
- **Question:** What was discovered on the banks of the South Platte River in June of 1858? (Gold was discovered by a party of men under the leadership of William Green Russell of Georgia)
- **Question:** Besides gold, what other kinds of rocks have been mined in Boulder County? (Silver, tungsten, coal, and other types of “hard” and “soft” rocks have been mined locally)
- Many people who originally came to the Rockies to find their share of gold ultimately failed at that endeavor. However, some stayed in the area and found other ways of making a living. **Question:** What are some of the ways in which people made a living in Boulder County other than mining? (Farmers, ranchers, shopkeepers, and other business-people of all kinds were successful in Boulder County, often selling their goods or services to those still seeking gold.)

- The University of Colorado at Boulder was founded in 1876, the same year Colorado became a state. CU was largely responsible for the development of Boulder from a simple mining town, and although it is considered an institution of higher learning, it is also a major business. **Question:** What other businesses or government agencies also made their home in Boulder, or have major operation centers here? (IBM, NOAA, NIST, Whole Foods Market, Google, Crocs, Amgen, Seagate, and many others have large operations in Boulder County)
- Today, many people enjoy exploring the outdoors in Boulder County. **Question:** What are some of the recreational activities that people like to do here? (hiking, biking, rock climbing, nature study, hunting and fishing, skiing and snowshoeing are all activities that people enjoy in Boulder County.)
- If you have enough time, invite a few students to tell you their favorite place in Boulder County, and then see if they can find that place on the Living Map.
- **Conclusion:** For more than 10,000 years, many different people have moved through and lived in Boulder County. If we are good stewards of our local landscape and resources, hopefully many more generations of people will call this special place their home.

**\*NOTE: This outline is only a suggested program template. Please modify or tailor to be appropriate for your program and group.**