

Around Colorado By Joshua Berman, Special to The Denver Post

Highway of Legends leads to geology, history and art lessons

LA VETA»

My wife and daughters were in the zone, painting their cotton, wax-splashed canvases with bright sprays of primary colors. We'd signed up for a family batik workshop at Shalawalla Gallery and Gift Shop in the whistle stop town of La Veta in Huerfano County. The cozy room smelled of paraffin and beeswax; this is the working studio of Jonathan and Beth Evans, artists who spend part of the year in northern India, and the rest running this creative setup in southeastern Colorado.

Shalawalla was the first stop on a weekend of exploration along Colorado 12, known as the Highway of Legends. Departing Interstate 25 in Walsenburg, we'd fired up the "Highway of Legends Scenic Byway" audio tour that I'd downloaded from TravelStories, an app that geo tracks your location to tell you about natural and historical features as you drive past them. It turned our car into a classroom as soon as the Spanish Peaks appeared. The audio lesson continued as the highway wrapped around those two snow-capped mountains, finishing back on I-25 in Trinidad.

The Ute, we learned from our deep-voiced narrator, called these mountains *huajatolla*, or "breasts of the earth," and the Spanish called them *dos hermanos*. They dominate the landscape, rising out of nowhere and serving as "a landmark for all the people who passed through here," the narrator reminds us, "Native Americans, soldiers, trappers, traders, settlers and gold seekers. The peaks are part of the gigantic Southern Colorado volcanic field, which began forming 40 million years ago."

We arrived in La Veta (pronounced "la vee-dah"), whose 850 year-round residents reside at

about 7,000-foot elevation. Some of these folks are artists who have opened galleries, workshops and studios — there are also quilting workshops, jewelry making courses and painting classes in La Veta. I loved seeing my family painting, content and concentrated, inspired by working in the same space as Jonathan and Beth Evans, batik masters whose remarkably detailed and realistic batik paintings were on display in their converted train car gallery.

After class, we checked into a comfy, rustic room at La Veta Inn, a restored hotel on Ryus Avenue across from a park and railroad tracks. The hotel and its 17 rooms

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have warm, historic touches, like arched hallways, murals by local artists and stories from the hotel's creaking-wood past. For dinner, we drove 10 minutes up Colorado 12 to Cuchara for steak and wine at Timbers Restaurant (23 Cuchara Ave. East). As we were returning to La

Veta, the girls spotted a fox running across the road in the moonlight.

In the morning, we were off again, twisting into the forest, skirting igneous dikes that radiated outward from the Spanish Peaks like giant rock fins. The narrator continued, "In the early 20th century, yarn-spinning Louis Sporleder ... wrote long legends that he claimed to have heard from Native Americans. These were tales of mischievous demons, evil priests, talking panthers and beautiful princesses."

These were the tales that accompanied us as we topped 9,938-foot Cuchara Pass and continued down the road.



Joshua Berman is the author of "Colorado Camping." Find him at

joshuaberman.net.

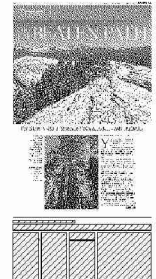
If You Go

Shalawalla Gallery and Gift Shop:

107 W. Ryus Ave., La Veta, 719-742-3453, [facebook.com/ShalawallaGallery](https://www.facebook.com/ShalawallaGallery).

Check the La Veta Cuchara Chamber Calendar for tips on the multitude of art exhibits, festivals and community yard sales. A few to watch out for: In La Veta, look for Art in the Park on July 6-7, Spanish Peaks Music Festival on July 5-6, and monthly Art Walks that feature the town's galleries every fourth Friday in June, July and August. For three classes in one, consider Try Art-Fecta, three dates when you can join batik, jewelry and ceramics classes in one day (July 24, Aug. 21 and Sept. 25).

Where to stay: La Veta Inn (lavetainn.co, 103 W. Ryus Ave., 719-742-5566, from \$109/night), Warehouse Suites (thewarehouseuite.com, 102 W. Ryus Ave., La Veta, 719-742-5278), or the Inn at the Spanish Peaks B&B (innatthespanishpeaks.com, 310 E. Francisco St., La Veta, 719-742-5313).





Surprises await around every corner on the Highway of Legends Scenic Byway, also known as Colorado 12.

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A road trip along the Highway of Legends can include a stop to create or purchase art. Artists Jonathan and Beth Evans run the Shalawalla Gallery and Gift Shop in La Veta, where entire families can sign up to create their own masterpieces.

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