

Nederland Mining Museum FAQs

1. When was gold first discovered in Colorado? In Boulder County? Where? Gold was first discovered in 1857 along the South Platte River about 5 miles above Cherry Creek, a central Denver neighborhood with some of the city's oldest houses. In January, 1859 gold was discovered in Gold Run Creek, south of the community of Gold Hill.
2. What types of ore were mined here? The main ores mined in Boulder County were gold, silver, and tungsten.
3. What is tungsten used for? Tungsten has a chemical property that helps strengthen or alloy steel when heated. It was extremely useful to armor tools and equipment, especially during World War I. Tungsten was later used in light bulbs, but is still used for high speed cutting tools, as well as rocket engine nozzles.
4. Where were the towns of Caribou and Tungsten? Caribou was located due west of present-day Nederland at 10,000 feet. You can still drive to the old town site, but the town itself burned down twice and little of it remains. The town of Tungsten, Colorado was located where Barker Dam is now. At the height of the boom, up to 3,000 people lived there.
5. How did Nederland get its name? Nederland is the Dutch word for Netherlands, or lowlands. At the time the Caribou silver mines were operating, the ore was milled in what is now Nederland, at a much lower elevation. Dutch investors in the mines gave it the name of Nederland.
6. What is the Switzerland Trail? The Switzerland Trail was a narrow-gauge railroad built in the 1880s to transport mining supplies from Boulder up into the foothills. Its original terminus was Sunset up past Wall Street. Later, it was extended to Ward and eventually Eldora. The railroad was turned into a tourist train in the early 1900s for wildflower excursions until a flood shut down the railroad in 1919.
7. When was the Boulder Canyon Road constructed? The Boulder Canyon Road was completed in 1871. It was a one-lane road that crisscrossed Boulder Creek 33 times. It wasn't until 1955 that the road was widened and straightened to become the road it is today.
8. What is milling? Milling is the process in hard rock mining of turning rock into concentrate. Mills, like the stamp mill in the museum, pound the rock over and over until it becomes a fine powder or concentrate. Chemicals (or magnets in the case of tungsten) then separate the valuable minerals (like gold or silver) from the rest of the rock.

9. What is placer mining (or gold panning)? Placer mining, also known as gold panning, is a collection of *mining* methods that use water to separate valuable ore from the surrounding sediment. Because gold is heavier than other minerals, gold deposits normally sink to the bottom of the pan.

10. Which is heavier, gold or silver? Gold is heavier - or denser - than silver.

11. When was the museum building built? What was its purpose? It was built in 1937 as the Boulder County Maintenance Facility/Garage, thus the garage door. Road maintenance equipment was stored here.

12. What is assaying? Assaying is the process of determining how much ore is worth. The ore is melted down and chemicals, like nitric acid, were used to determine the proportions of metal in a sample of ore, thus determining its overall value.