

# United States Department of the Interior National Park Service National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determination for individual properties and districts. See instruction in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

## 1. Name of Property

historic name San Luis Southern Railway Trestle

other names/site number Rattlesnake Trestle / 5CT.398

## 2. Location

street & number abandoned section of Costilla County Road 12 [N/A] not for publication

city or town Blanca [X] vicinity

state Colorado code CO county Costilla code 023 zip code 81123

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [X] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ] nationally [ ] statewide [X] locally. ([ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Georgina Cortez State Historic Preservation Officer November 17, 2003  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria.  
([ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register [ ] See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register [ ] See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register
- other, explain [ ] See continuation sheet.

Edson H. Beall Signature of the Keeper 1-6-04 Date of Action

San Luis Southern Railway Trestle  
Name of Property

Costilla County, Colorado  
County/State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not count previously listed resources.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
0	0	sites
1	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing.**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Railroads in Colorado, 1858-1948

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Function**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation/rail-related  
Transportation/road-related  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Not in use  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Railroad Trestle  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete  
walls Stone  
\_\_\_\_\_  
roof \_\_\_\_\_  
other Wood  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

San Luis Southern Railway Trestle  
Name of Property

Costilla County, Colorado  
County/State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**  
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**  
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**  
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**  
(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey  
# \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record  
# \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation  
Engineering

**Periods of Significance**  
1910-1939

**Significant Dates**  
1910

**Significant Person(s)**  
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above).  
N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**  
N/A

**Architect/Builder**  
San Luis Southern Railway Company

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:  
Colorado Historical Society

San Luis Southern Railway Trestle  
Name of Property

Costilla County, Colorado  
County/State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** .42

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1. 13 451530 4137700  
Zone Easting Northing

2. Zone Easting Northing

3. Zone Easting Northing

4. Zone Easting Northing

[ ] See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Joseph Gallegos, Costilla County Commissioner (Edited by Chris Geddes)

organization Costilla County date August 26, 2003

street & number 352 Main telephone (719) 672-3372

city or town San Luis state CO zip code 81152

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional Items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Costilla County

street & number 352 Main telephone (719) 672-3372

city or town San Luis state CO zip code 81152

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Park Service

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San Luis Southern Railway Trestle  
Costilla County, Colorado  
Railroads in Colorado MPS

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**DESCRIPTION**

Location: County Road 12, approximately 4 miles south of Blanca

Setting: Over Trinchera Creek Canyon and Rattlesnake Gulch

Structure length: 190 feet

Structure width: 14.5 feet

Roadway width: 13.2 feet

Main span number: 12

Superstructure: Timber stringer

Substructure: Stone masonry abutments

Floor/decking: timber deck

Other features: timber beam guardrails,  
1 eyerod with turnbuckle  
timber stringers

Erected: 1910 (estimate)

Designer: Unknown

Fabricator: Southern San Luis Valley Railroad

Contractor: Southern San Luis Valley Railroad

Alterations: None

The Rattlesnake Trestle may be found by taking County Road 12 south from Highway 160 in Blanca for 4 miles. Heading south, farming stretches as far as the eye can see with potatoes, grains, alfalfa, vegetables, cattle, sheep, and buffalo being the result of the locals' labor. Out of nowhere one is suddenly over a gorge. The gorge is approximately 125 feet deep with thick freatofite growth at the bottom; resembling a miniature Rio Grande Gorge with the high altitude desert terrain surrounding it. The dull brown prairie brush that is predominant at the top of the gorge contrasts with the bright green willow wetlands at the gorge bottom. The complete panoramic view of the gorge, known as Rattlesnake Canyon, with Mt. Blanca adding her majestic powers to the scene, can be viewed by taking a walk across the Rattlesnake Trestle from the south.

The Rattlesnake Trestle is a twelve-span two-story frame trestle, 190 feet long and 46 feet high. Each pier rests on concrete and solid rock footings that span across Trinchera Creek's Rattlesnake Canyon. It is constructed of thick timbers (18" x18") and 4" thick planking thought to come from nearby mills. The present condition of the trestle, considering the historic fabric (wood) and age, is good. The decking is deteriorating but not rapidly. In Costilla County the environment is extremely dry, which helps keep the historic bridges and structures from rapid deterioration. The trestle is showing signs of wear, but is still in good shape.

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Historic Image



Denver Public Library- Western History Department: SLVS train, engine number 106, engine type 2-8-0. Call Number OP- 15124. Southbound freight train, crossing "Rattlesnake Gulch"; 5 cars. Photographed: near Blanca, Colo., October 1, 1953.

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**SIGNIFICANCE**

The San Luis Southern Railway Trestle is eligible for the National Register by having met the registration requirements for the "Drainage and Separation Structures" property type as delineated in the *Railroads in Colorado 1859-1948* Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF).

The trestle is eligible under Criterion A for its association with the operation of the San Luis Southern Railway (SLS). The Railway was a project of the Costilla Estates Development Company, a business organized to sell lands within the Sangre de Cristo Land Grant. The 32-mile standard gauge railroad ran almost due south from Blanca and was built to serve the towns and farms of the Development Company. Daily freight and passenger service was inaugurated in 1910 and continued until 1939.

The trestle also meets the registration requirements under Criterion C for its engineering significance as an excellent example of timber stringer railroad bridge construction and also of exceptional length and height. This 12-span timber trestle is 190 feet long and 46 feet high, which is unusual for this intermountain plateau. Considering its age, the bridge is in fairly good condition and is the only known remaining San Luis Southern Railway trestle.

**Historical Background**

The Costilla Estates Development Company was organized in 1902 by a group of Colorado Springs investors who purchased the Costilla Estates (part of the original Sangre de Cristo land grant) from the U.S. Freehold and Emigrant Company. The company owned about 500,000 acres within Costilla County, Colorado and Taos County, New Mexico. The land was bordered by the Sangre de Cristo and Culebra mountain ranges on the east and the Rio Grande River on the west.

The San Luis Southern Railway was also a project of the Development Company and its purpose was to develop 70,000 acres of land in the lower region of the Costilla and Culebra watersheds. In 1908, Louis D. Blauvelt came to work for the Development Company. Blauvelt engineered the construction of the Colorado Springs and Cripple Creek District Railway (the "Short Line") and also worked on the Denver, Northwestern and Pacific Railway (the "Moffat Road"). His first responsibilities were to lay out townsites and begin construction of the railroad that would connect the Development Company's planned communities. The railroad was incorporated on July 3, 1909 as the San Luis Southern Railway, though it was known locally as "the Southern." Construction began immediately in order to provide transportation for the new residents and their crops. By the end of September, 50 teams were grading the right of way and the grading to San Acacio was complete by early March 1910. The 15.8-mile inaugural trip from Blanca to new San Acacio occurred on April 14, 1910.

Additionally, part of the Development Company's strategy was the construction of Sanchez Reservoir in the southern part of the county, and a planned rail line to Taos. The "Development" started out economically strong with a rail line from Blanca to San Acacio, but the Costilla Estates developer had bad data about weather fluctuations, and the development was not a success. Today there are some

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remnants of that dream; although there is still farming in the Mesita area, it is not to the extent the Costilla Estates Development Company envisioned.

Rattlesnake Trestle was built in 1910 by the San Luis Valley Southern Railroad to span Rattlesnake Canyon. Rattlesnake Canyon was carved out by Trinchera Creek that originates from the Trinchera Peaks watershed in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, a section of the Rocky Mountains. The creek empties into Mountain Home Reservoir, then flows into Smith Reservoir (constructed in 1913 a few hundred feet east of the trestle) and ends up emptying into the Rio Grande. Today Smith Reservoir is a state-managed recreation area that is utilized mainly for fishing and known for its large trout.

By 1927, the railway owed Costilla County a total of \$6,554.30 in taxes for the years 1924-1927. Fires, deteriorating tracks, and numerous accidents continued to take their toll on the San Luis Southern. Most of the money generated went towards upkeep of the railroad's ancient steam engines, resulting in ill-fated experiments with rubber tires, hybrid junkers, and primitive internal combustion engines.

The railroad operated in receivership until 1928 when a group of Denver businessmen, headed by Charles Boettcher, purchased the railroad in 1928 and changed its name to the San Luis Valley Southern Railway. Boettcher utilized every means at his disposal, including bus and truck service and a planned rail extension, to make the railroad profitable but the Depression ruined his ambitious plans. The line resumed its previous unprofitable operations with daily freight and passenger service continuing until 1939.

The Rattlesnake Trestle was indispensable to the San Luis Valley Southern Railroad. It is not surprising that in 1930, the trestle was listed as their most valuable asset at \$7,500. However, four years later in 1934, it was in deteriorated condition and of great concern to San Luis Valley Railroad. In 1949, the company filed a petition for abandonment, despite a local petition protesting such a move. New, local management was able to keep the railroad operating. In 1951 the railroad was sold. The new owners were associated with the St. Louis Waste Materials Company, and as might be expected, they immediately initiated plans to scrap the railroad. In 1952, an engineering company hired by the scrap metal firm presented its abandonment petition report. The report concluded that the railroad was extremely dangerous to continue operating in its present condition. "The immediate expenditure of \$156,000 was necessary to continue operation and \$322,135 was needed to restore the property to normal operating conditions" (Griswold 1980:115).

Agricultural conditions were also bleak by 1952, as it was the last time there was adequate rainfall in the area to support any volume of crops. Sanchez Reservoir had its maximum storage just six years earlier and the amount of water available for irrigation was slowly decreasing. With a diminishing water supply, fewer and fewer farms were able to operate. Those farms that did survive relied on wells rather than irrigation ditches as their main source of water. As agricultural production decreased because of water shortages, the railroad began transporting locally mined minerals- such as volcanic rock from west of Mesita.



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It seemed abandonment would be automatic, given all the evidence presented to the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC). But protests in early 1953 from local shippers and other interested persons continued to delay the abandonment of the Southern. In 1953 came another name change when the Southern San Luis Valley Railroad was formed and acquired the assets of the railway. Despite legal abandonment, the railroad continued to operate and during that first year, the new company was able to substantially reduce the debt. However, these efforts were still not sufficient. In 1957, the railroad headquarters moved to Blanca and the ICC finally gave approval to abandon the southern 29 miles of the railroad.

When the San Luis Southern Railroad's petition to the Interstate Commerce Commission to abandon the railroad was granted September 5, 1957, the Costilla County Road and Bridge Department took it over for use as a vehicular bridge on County Road 12. County Road 12 runs parallel to the old railroad tracks and is one of the most utilized county roads for transporting the produce from the large farms in the northern part of Costilla County. On March 15, 1958, the 29 miles of track to Jaroso were officially closed, leaving only two miles in operation around Blanca. All of the railroad's structures south of Rattlesnake Trestle and the rails were offered for sale, with the exception of the Mesita Depot, which was considered only good for firewood. The Jaroso Depot was moved to a farm about a mile north of its original location. In 1958, the San Luis Valley Railroad abandoned the trestle. Cost efficiency, however, obligated Costilla County to build a dual culvert creek crossing at a lower elevation in 1983 to replace the Rattlesnake Trestle, bringing about the abandonment of the bridge. Its 25-year use as a motor vehicular bridge had come to an end.

From the time that the San Luis Valley was part of Mexico to the present, agriculture has played an extremely important role in the way the residents of the Valley exist. Agriculture and access to a consistent water supply were the driving forces for the building of the San Luis Southern Railroad and thus the Rattlesnake Trestle. The trestle is a rare historic structure that will lend itself to the preservation of Colorado's railroad and agricultural heritage.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Fraser, Clayton B. and Strand, Jennifer, H. *Railroads in Colorado 1858-1948* National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 1997. On file at the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society, Denver, Colorado.
- Griswold, P. R. "Bob." *Colorado's Loneliest Railroad, The San Luis Southern*. Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing, Company, 1980.
- Wilson, Holly. *San Acacio San Luis Southern Railway Depot* Colorado State Register nomination. Office of Archaeology & Historic Preservation, Denver, Colorado, 1998.

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Costilla County, Colorado  
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**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The bridge is located on County Road 13, 4 miles southwest of Blanca. The boundaries of the nomination consist of a rectangle of land 25 feet out from the footprint of the bridge.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The nomination includes all the land directly and historically associated with the bridge.

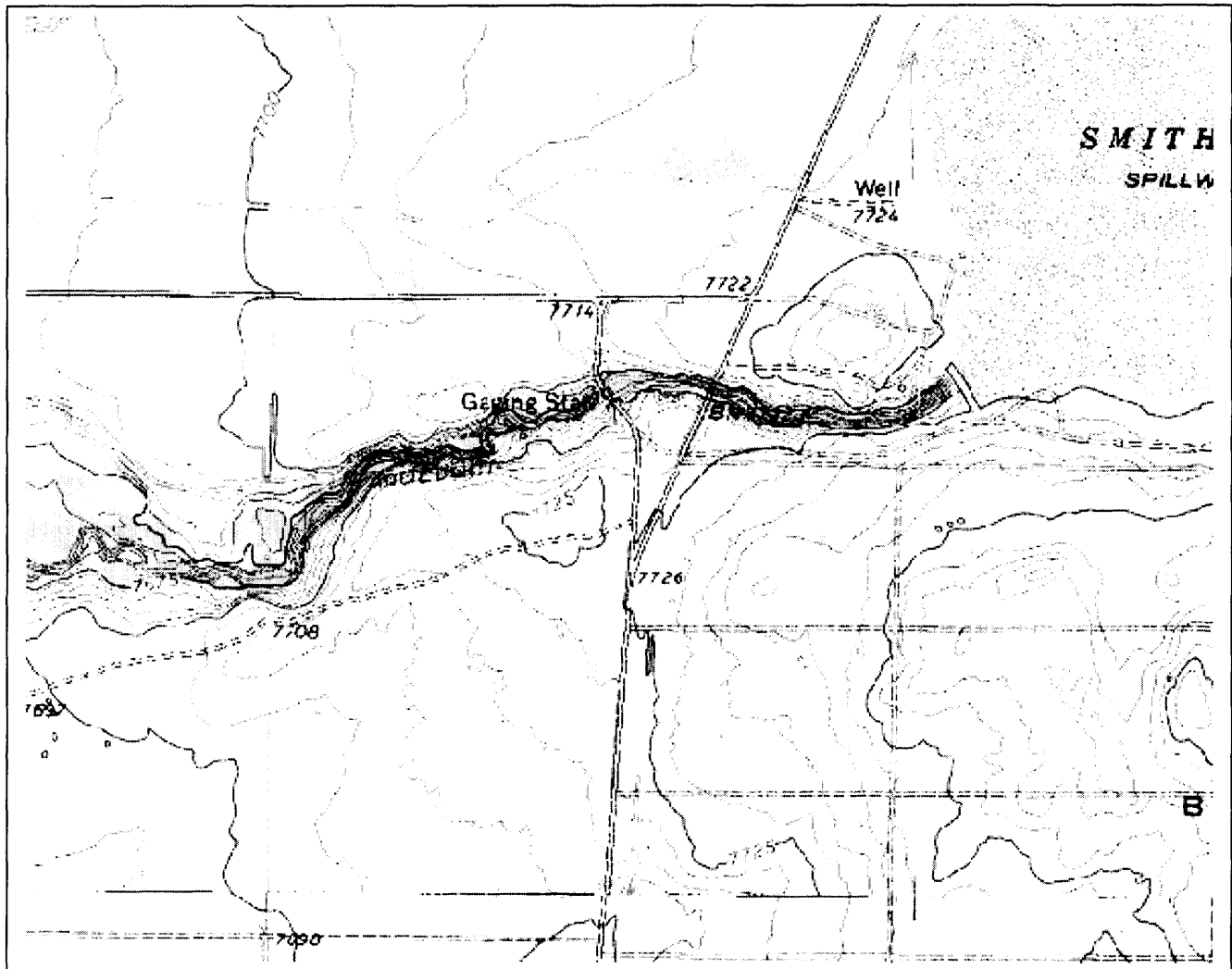
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**USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAP**  
Blanca Quadrangle, Colorado  
7.5 Minute Series  
Unsurveyed



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**PHOTOGRAPH LOG**

The following information pertains to photograph numbers 1-6 except as noted:

Name of Property: San Luis Southern Railway Trestle  
Location: Costilla County, Colorado  
Photographer: Tara Medina  
Date of Photographs: August 12, 2003  
Negatives: Costilla County Commissioners Office

<u>Photo No.</u>	<u>Photographic Information</u>
1	Northwest view of trestle
2	Northwest view of trestle
3	Northwest view of trestle
4	Northwest view of trestle
5	Northwest view of trestle
6	West view of trestle