



- Special to the Daily/Breckenridge Heritage Alliance

Breckenridge's Engine No. 9 to head home

Historic locomotive's return to Breck secured for November

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It's taken almost a century, but Breckenridge's Little Engine That Could will soon make its final journey home.

The long-awaited return of historic steam engine No. 9 to Summit County should take place in early November, the Breckenridge Heritage Alliance recently announced.

It will be housed in a special open-air shelter at the Rotary Snowplow Park on Boreas Pass Road, which was part of an agreement between the Colorado Historical Society and the town to bring the restored train back to Breck. The BHA also hopes eventually to develop the park with outdoor exhibits, picnic space and a train-themed play area for children.

The community has awaited the arrival of the steam engine that served Breckenridge and Summit County from the 1880s through the late 1930s for nearly three years.

"This is a tremendous win for the whole community," said Larry Crispell, a BHA board member.

No. 9's return to Breckenridge was stalled by complications in the agreement to bring it back. The agreement included restoring another historic engine that was in Breckenridge and trading it for No. 9.

Historic engine

For over 50 years, the steam engine was responsible for making the treacherous journey over the High Line, modern-day Boreas Pass Road, from Denver, bringing news, supplies and people to the small mining towns of Summit County.

"When Engine No. 9 came over Boreas Pass ... and tooted its whistle, everybody in the town looked up," Crispell said. "They knew the newspapers were coming in, the mail was coming in, their mother was coming back from Denver, they knew there was going to be fresh meat at the grocers. It was the life link to the outside world."

Crispell said Breckenridge's rich history as a mining town gives it a unique draw for tourists and sets it apart from the newer ski resorts nearby. "Heritage tourists" choose to visit Breckenridge as much for its stories of gold mining and carefully preserved historical sites and artifacts as for the skiing, Crispell said.

"I think the most important piece of getting engine No. 9 back is it's really like we're recouping an authentic piece of our history," said Larissa O'Neil, executive director of the Heritage Alliance. "This is the train that really served Breckenridge and the Summit County area."

The town's history is also a source of pride for the community. Community members and businesses donated over \$40,000 in cash and materials to construct the engine's shelter in Rotary Snowplow Park.

"The people of Breckenridge realize that they are so fortunate living in a town that's alive with history," Crispell said. "People have stepped up on numerous occasions."

Engine No. 9 currently resides in Palisade. It will be brought to Breckenridge when the shelter is finished and weather permits. Additional information on the No. 9 project is available online at www.breckheritage.com.