

A WALK THROUGH HISTORY ALONG THE UTE PASS TRAIL

By Jan Pettit

The Ute Pass Trail is one of the oldest routes in the U.S. The progress of Colorado and El Paso County (named for this pass) follow closely with the progress along the trail.

The Ute Indians and other Shoshonean tribes are believed to have migrated over it over 1000 years ago. The Indian trail originated just below the springs of Manitou, where trails of the plains came together, followed through Ute Pass which was the easiest access to the mountain meadows of South Park, and extended on into the White River country in Utah.

As the Indians traveled the trail dragging travois, the route became as easy to follow as a country road. French and Spanish explorers recorded the trail and trappers, including Kit Carson, frequented the route. When gold was discovered, the Ute Pass Trail was advertised as the easiest and safest route to the gold fields. Colorado City grew as a supply town as freighters and prospectors headed for the mountains. In 1872 a new route along the Fontaine Qui Boille (fountain that boils), now called Fountain Creek, that somewhat parallels the present highway was opened, and the old trail fell into disuse. In recent years water and gas lines have followed the route and the area was closed for many years as a part of the Colorado Springs watershed.

THE UTE PASS TRAIL - POINTS OF INTEREST

Leaving the community of Cascade, one heads East on Highway 24. Just below town, near a large "4% Grade" sign, is a parking area on the right. A trail on the road bank leads toward the mouth of French Creek (usually dry), and a stone stile crosses the fence into private property. Hikers are welcome as long as they stay on the trail.

In the late 1870's Lucius French ran a shingle and lathe mill where French Creek joins Fountain Creek. A water mill supplied the power for his mill. In later years he had a ranch in this area. Remains of an earthen dam which formed a reservoir where he cut ice can still be seen on the valley floor.

As the trail winds upward among the large boulders you are probably walking on the original Indian trail. In this area you will see a white marble marker inscribed U.P.T. This is one of fifteen such markers that were set along the trail from Cascade to Manitou Springs in 1912 by the El Paso County Pioneers Association. Buckskin Charlie (Chief of the Southern Utes), Chipeta (widow of Chief Ouray) and 75 Ute Indians from the Ignacio Reservation in Southern Colorado rode down the trail, accompanied by many pioneers. The picture of Buckskin Charlie on this guide was taken on this occasion by Anne Cusack Johnson. Buckskin Charlie remarked "I seventy years old, I never so happy in all my life". The entire group sang, laughed, and whooped along the trail, occasionally veering off the wagon road to follow the route they had used for so many years.

Crossing over the pipeline cut, you again near the original trail and will pass another 1912 marker. A great deal of the route you follow is the wagon road that was constructed over the

Indian trail in 1860. The Colorado City Town Company furnished grub for workers willing to work on improving the road. Picks shovels, and ox teams to draw logs for bridges were the equipment used. Where big rocks blocked their way they dug pit holes under them and sunk them, or built fires on the rocks in order to break them into workable sized pieces. Parts of the Indian trail were straightened so that long strings of oxen needed to pull the heavy freight wagons could negotiate the curves.

Long's Ranch one of the earliest known ranches in Ute Pass, was a comfortable place with a large house, barns and dairy sheds. Below one shed are troughs where cold water- was piped to cool the dairy products that Mr. Long sold to Ute Pass communities. He ran a saw mill further up the valley when he first arrived. He hunted the mountain lions,

bear, and deer that ventured into the area and the walls of his house were covered with the hides of these animals. His dairy cattle grazed in the valley of Cascade. The unusual cement work with stones a big as golf balls has withstood the elements for years, as the ranch was abandoned before 1912.

The Indians told of three campsites along the trail between Cascade and the springs of Manitou.. One campsite was likely located near a small spring at Long's Ranch. The remaining campsites have been lost with time. During the 1860 rebuilding of the wagon road, a new access was made ascending from below Rainbow Falls (across from the old bottling works) to join the trail at the marked intersection. Some people think they still see wagon ruts in this area.

There is an altitude marker at the point where the trail starts the descent to Ruxton Creek. Buckskin Charlie explained that the area before you was neutral territory where the Utes smoked the pipe of peace with the powerful Indian tribes who were normally their enemies. Here they cached their arms and substituted choke cherry branches to denote that they were unarmed and came in peace. The Utes made a yearly trek to the "medicine waters" with their sick. They believed the springs were the abode of a spirit who breathed through the water, causing it to bubble. Early explorers of this region noted

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As you make the steep descent through Rattlesnake Gulch you are on the original trail the Indians used. The first recorded wagon headed for the gold fields was pulled by oxen up the steep slope in 1859. At times as many as twelve teams of oxen were used to haul a single wagon up this slope. It is easy to see why a more gradual access was built the following year. In 1912,

the Indians followed Ruxton Creek to the large Soda Springs marked by a boulder. Here, for the last time on this trail, they offered prayers and sang their traditional songs as they had done for centuries.