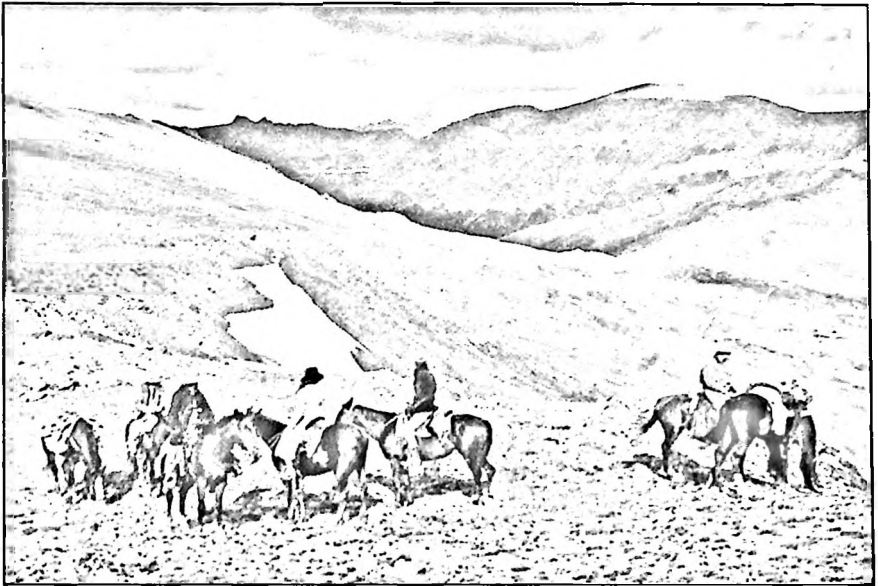




The DENVER WESTERNERS
ROUNDUP

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Arapaho pack trip, 1914

People of the Kawuneeche Valley
by Dave Lively, C.M.
(presented September 23, 2015)

Our Author

Dave Lively is a dynamic speaker who specializes in shining some light on absent narratives. He creates programs about local history for groups large and small. His stories of remarkable characters from the past engage audiences and bring deeper understanding and appreciation for where we are today.

Dave is a well-known local historian, and appears in “The Living Dream,” a documentary appearing on PBS stations in 2015. He is a speaker for the Rocky Mountain National Park Centennial Speakers Series and conducts historical seminars and tours for Rocky Mountain National Park, Rocky Mountain Conservancy, Trail River Ranch education center and History Colorado.

He is President of Historic Fraser, Vice Chair and West Slope Representative of Colorado Preservation, Inc., Past President of Grand Lake Area Historical Society and Past Chairman of the Grand County Historic Preservation Board.

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How many times have you wondered, "Boy, wouldn't it have been great to have been born over 100 years ago when times were easier, slower, and less complicated?" You would have been around about the time Rocky Mountain National Park was established in 1915.

As you reminisce of your last visit to the west side of Rocky Mountain National Park you might be reminded of the wilderness, the wildlife, or even the wonder. If you have not visited Rocky you possibly imagine the same thoughts just by hearing the name, Rocky Mountain National Park. Do your thoughts include the people? The people who came to the west side of Rocky long before Rocky Mountain National Park was established or even the folks who are here now?

I'd like to introduce you to some of these people.

While we share the memories of a few, think of the millions who have also wandered into the Kawuneeche Valley. There are so many stories and I will bring you a few in this short time we have together.

Let's go back in time beyond the 100 years of Rocky. Over 11,000 years ago the Paleo Indians roamed the area. They were doing what we all do in one way or another. They were doing what was needed to get food. There is evidence

of them coming through the area. These people, sometimes known as "the elephant hunters of the West," most likely only used the area we now call Rocky Mountain National Park and Trail Ridge Road as an infrequent crossing point.

Let's move forward in time to about 3,500 years ago. The natives of that time built game drives to herd animals such as elk and mountain buffalo into a type of chute where men were hidden. These game drives were complex and took years to assemble. They were built out of rocks stacked on top of each other as high as several feet. Imagine some of the rocks they had to roll across the ground. As the animals came close they were able to use their spears to take their food. The introduction of the bow and arrow would not happen for more than a thousand years.

As these natives crossed the mountains over the centuries they created a series of trails, which most likely followed animal trails.

As we fast forward, the Ute came to the area just several hundred years ago. Like their predecessors, these newcomers migrated over the top of the mountains to the beautiful valley and lake they called "Ungarpakareter" meaning Red or Orange, after the sunsets that produce the orange glow upon the water. We now know it as Grand Lake.

Some of the trails became known by the Ute as the Warrior's trail, the steepest and hardest to navigate, and the Dog trail, now the valley of the Fall River Road, because the dogs could pull a small travois across the snow that does not melt in the tight canyon until mid July. The Child's trail, was steep enough in places the children were required to get off their horses and walk. The Big trail was the most heavily traveled. Even today it is used as the primary hiking trail between Grand Lake and Estes Park, and known as Flattop Mountain trail.

The Ute would usually travel and camp in small "bands" of thirty to forty people, sometimes all related family members. They knew a certain area of the land would support this size group. They used a democratic system of leadership. They would vote a leader for the band. Sometimes a leader would oversee a couple of bands. There may have been three or four bands located within the 20-mile long valley at any given time. One exception to the small groups was the annual gathering for the Bear Dance. This occurred in the spring near the time bears would be coming out of hibernation.

The Ute built wickiups, a cone of small trees and branches around a center post tree, to live in during the summer months as they hunted and fished. They would return to the eastern plains or move to what is now western Colorado during the colder winter months. Relying on small individual fire rings for each "home" rather than a larger communal ceremonial fire conserved their resources of gathered dry wood.

The later part of the 1700s brought the Arapaho – "Father of All" – to the region as they were being forced to continue westward from the plains by attacking tribes. The Ute and Arapaho certainly had confrontations but would also attempt to avoid one another when possible. Since the Ute would travel over the ridges only occasionally the Arapaho were able to use the Ute trail system and visit the valley they named Haquiahana, the valley of the wolf. With the lack of smart phone communications the Ute and Arapaho were sometimes found in the same place at the same time and battles would ensue. Some are known by stories passed down while others are known only by names of locations that have been left, such as the meadow known by the Arapaho as "Big Battle," today known as Baker meadow. One battle was along the shores of the lake Ungapakareter. The Ute remembrance of the battle was that their lookout was, for some reason, not on Scout Rock thereby allowing the Arapaho and Cheyenne to attack their lakeside encampment. For protection the Ute hurried their women and children onto rafts and sent them out on the waters of the lake. As occurs, a wind came up during the battle and the rafts were overturned. All of the women and children perished within the frigid waters while only a few Ute warriors survived as victors. In the Arapaho version the Ute fatalities were small, consisting of one man, two women and a baby. The baby was found in a tree where apparently the mother had left it for protection. The Arapaho warriors had no way to take care of a baby so the child was killed.



Grand River outlet

It is said if you go out early in the morning you may see the mist rising in silhouettes or you can hear the screams of the women and children coming from the waters of Spirit Lake, the name given to the lake by the Ute after the battle.

About three miles north of the lake the Arapaho established a racetrack at one of their favorite camping spots. A man would stand at each end of the track as the horses swirled around him. They would bet on the horses and riders. Gambling was common in the area long before the white men ever showed up! The winners often received the losing horses, or they would use captured people from other tribes as currency.

Many years later, as the national park idea was being explored, the Colorado

Mountain Club contacted the Arapaho at the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming and in 1914 two of their elders, Gun Griswold, age 73, and Sherman Sage, age 63, who had both lived in the area when they were children, and interpreter Tom Crispin came by train and automobile to Estes Park. With Oliver Toll taking notes and local rancher, Shep Husted to identify local names, they rode horseback for two weeks discovering the names the Arapaho had used in the area. Numerous peaks, valleys, and areas were identified. We use many of those names today such as Kawuneeche, Never No Summer, Tonahutu, and Onahu. Tonahutu means "Big meadow." Onahu means, "where he warms himself." A stream flowing through their camping area was named Onahu. One of the favorite racehorses liked to sneak near the fire to warm

himself. They would shoo him away and pretty soon he would be back near the fire. This horse died near the stream they named after him. On early maps it was known as Fish Creek. After the 1914 pack trip it was changed back to Onahu.

During the early part of the 1800s the Kawuneeche Valley area was not officially a part of the United States. Spain had claimed an area of the land west of what would be come to known as the Troublesome River, near present-day Kremmling. That land was later known as Texas. The Louisiana Territory ran east from the Continental Divide. The land between was considered Ute territory. The Ute lands were not officially relinquished to the United States by treaty until 1868. The west side of Rocky is in the area where the Ute land existed.

I'm sure the Ute had a name for the river running through the valley but we do not know what it was.

The Arapaho name for the river was Kawuneeche, which loosely translates to Coyote Creek. Many have heard and have read Kawuneeche Valley means Coyote Valley or the Valley of the Coyote. The Creek part got dropped somewhere and is usually translated incorrectly; the English translation should be Coyote Creek Valley. In 1919 the Colorado Geographic Board changed the name of the valley from Haquihana, Arapaho for wolf valley, to Kawuneeche.

In a 1776 Spanish exploration, Father Escalante named the river El Rio San

Rafael. Explorers, possibly French trappers, found a large river many miles downstream from the valley and named it the Grand River. As they moved upstream in search of new beaver dams they discovered, or stumbled upon, the "headwaters" of the Grand River and named it Grand Lake. The river above Grand Lake was considered a tributary and was also named the Grand River. Due to a lack of understanding of which rivers started where and flowed together, many different names were used for the Grand River. An 1839 map by David Burr indicated Grand River. The name Grand River appeared on Fremont's map in 1843. With no shortage of political bickering between Colorado, Utah and Arizona, the name was changed in 1921 to what it is known today, the Colorado River. The change matched what it was already being called in Utah. Today, the Colorado flows 1,450 miles with the same name and touches the lives of over 30 million people.

The largest natural lake in Colorado, Grand Lake is over one mile long and three-fourths-mile wide.

The Arapaho camped on the side of the lake into the fall and early winter. As the early winter temperatures drop the ice begins to form on the lake and the warmer water creates a rising mist. The Arapaho who ventured onto the thin ice discovered very large buffalo tracks coming out of, and back into, the open water. Their Chief declared that a giant white spirit buffalo lived in the waters of the lake and rose out of the waters in the mist. He gave the lake the name "Spirit Lake." Some stories say

the Ute also called it "Spirit Lake" after the battle with the Arapaho where their women and children perished.

In 1863 Irish writer M. O'C. Morris called it Still-Water Lake. Apparently he didn't see the winds and waves the Ute and people of today see. Phimister Proctor, who spent much time at Grand Lake from 1875 to 1885, remembered another Indian name "Meteor Lake, because of the number of meteors visible at certain times of year. The fool whites changed the name to Grand Lake."

By the mid 1850s a few European people had stumbled onto Grand Lake. One trapper, Phillip Crawshaw, built a small cabin on the west shore of Grand Lake. In the meager information known about him, he would visit the cabin for a summer or two and then roam to another area before returning to stay at his cabin for a few summers. It isn't known where he spent his winters or other summers.

In 1867 William Byers of the *Rocky Mountain News* removed Joseph Wescott from the sulphur springs area where he had come to recover from arthritis resulting from his Civil War injuries. Byers had "purchased" the land and springs from the Ute to develop a town, Sulphur Springs, in preparation for the coming of the railroad that David Moffat was planning. Joseph Wescott moved about twenty-eight miles into the cabin left by Crawshaw. Wescott would eventually lay claim to the property on the west and south shore of Grand Lake and begin to sell lots in what he named Grand Lake City. Several stories surround his nickname

"Judge" Wescott. A prominent story is told of a couple who wanted to get married but found the long 57-mile round trip to the court in Sulphur Springs to be too far. Wescott is reported to have told them he could perform the ceremony and after that was known as "Judge." The six-shooter he often carried on his hip could have led to no one disputing his claim. In 1869 the Proctors were the first family to stay year round. One of their sons, Alexander Phimister, became the world-renowned sculptor, who made the statues of the Indian and Cowboy in Denver's Civic Center Park.

A number of gold and silver mines came and went between the late 1870s and mid 1890s. The gold and silver were of such poor quality and quantity that no one went to the expense of building a mill in the area. If you were a miner you would load your ore into wagons and go over the Berthoud Pass wagon road to Georgetown to find out you didn't make very much money. The Wolverine was by far the largest of the mines. It had a bunkhouse for the workers and a mine camp building for the manager, Louis Gaskill. Louis Gaskill was involved in the opening of Berthoud Pass as a toll road. He and his family lived on the top of the pass and collected the fees. After a couple of years of those conditions he ended up at the Wolverine mine. The Toponis mine was owned by James Bourn and Alexander Campbell. They also owned six or seven other mines.

Another miner of the area, Joseph Shipler-owned and operated a half dozen mines. His cabin still stands, in poor condition. After all it is over 120 years old. Gus Spitzmiller took over one of



Harbison family at Grand Lake, 1897

his mines, and was a lot better plumber than he ever was a miner. Gus started Grand Lake Plumbing Company, which operates today. The smaller Diamond Crystal mine was operated and closed by "Squeaky" Bob Wheeler.

By 1890 all the mines were closed and the towns were just empty buildings. The busy communities turned into ghost towns like those seen in so many other places in Colorado.

As miners came to the area it drew entrepreneurs such as James Cairns, who knew mining the miners would be more profitable and wanted to start a general merchandise store. In 1881 Wescott was

willing to sell him property, but he decided instead to go around to the north side of Grand Lake where he could homestead property for free and later sell. When Cairns started selling lots he called the area Grand Lake Village. That is the Village of Grand Lake we know today. Both towns on Grand Lake coexisted for more than ten years.

The Arapaho called the mountain at the east end of Spirit Lake (now Grand Lake) "Middle Mountain." If you look at the mountain from the surrounding hills it is easy to see why they called it that. It sits right in the middle of a number of peaks and tree-covered hills. In 1874 William H. Jackson, photographer

of the West, called it Round Mountain. In 1890 H. H. Bancroft called it Round Top. Some old timers called it Mount Wescott to memorialize Joseph Wescott. The official name is Mount Craig after Reverend Bayard Craig. His friend David Moffat also named the town of Craig after him.

There were more riches in the mountains of the Never Summer range than gold and silver... WATER!

The farmers of the plains of Colorado looked to the mountains for the water they needed for their crops. Specifically the west side of the range was where the snow was deeper and stayed longer into the spring. By 1890 the Larimer County Ditch Company had begun construction of the "Grand River Ditch" to bring some of the wet gold to the plains. It employed several groups of workers including many Japanese. The Japanese were not allowed to live with the others and dug caves into the side of the mountain to live and keep their few belongings. Using men with picks and shovels and a small amount of dynamite at an altitude of 10,175 feet, after two years of construction the six-foot-wide and ten-foot-deep ditch extended two miles. Some effort has been made to get a rough approximation of the number of men working on the Ditch, but the results have not been successful.

The ditch was extended in phases as additional water needs were fulfilled. The final phase of the Grand River Ditch was completed in 1936 using heavy equipment. The entire 14.5 miles diverts between 20 and 40% of the snowmelt that previously flowed into and helped create the Grand, now Colorado, River.

As time went on more and more people were moving into the front range of Colorado and were in need of water. A plan was created to remove more water from the Colorado River and send it through the mountain to Estes Park and downstream to supply more irrigation water and later drinking water for the cities. The Big Thompson Project, named for the river that would carry the water east, created a tunnel under Rocky Mountain National Park. The Park Service was not happy with the plan of moving water through the Park so the engineers started the tunnel from both sides just outside the Park with the majority of the tunnel piercing the Continental Divide underneath the Park. The engineering was so exact that when the east and west bores met they were off by less than one-half inch. The reservoirs we see today, Shadow Mountain and Granby, work to move water upstream under the Continental Divide through the Alva B. Adams tunnel.

It took roads to bring people in and out of the area. One of the first in the northern area of what is now Rocky Mountain National Park was a wagon road from Ft. Collins to Lulu City. It was the Stewart Toll Road. It arrived in Lulu to the sounds of the City band on August 12, 1880. By September a stage road from Lulu City to Grand Lake City was underway. Another wagon road was created from Lulu City through Gaskill over the mountain to Teller City and on into the larger town of Walden.

The Georgetown, Empire and Middle Park Stage Line owned by Lewis Gaskill and William Cushman developed

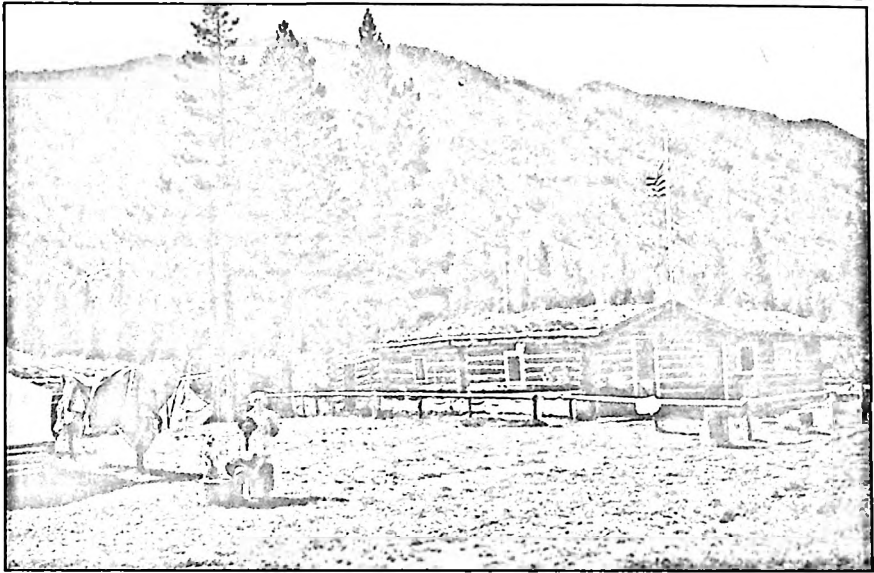
and opened the Berthoud Pass toll road in 1874. They were allowed by the State of Colorado to charge a toll to recover their expenses. Lulu City was 76 miles from Georgetown via Grand Lake City. They offered a stage four times a week. Each stage fare was \$10, or from Denver by rail and stage for \$14.30. The legend states a sign on the stage read "first class passengers ride all the way, second pass passengers may have to get out and walk on the pass and third class passengers will get out and push."

By 1910 people were traversing Tombstone Ridge between Grand Lake and Estes Park by horseback. The automobile was finding its way into the mountains and the State of Colorado made the decision to build a road between the two towns. It was to follow the Fall River canyon and, using a series of switchbacks down the western side of the mountains, continue down the Kawuneeche Valley to Grand Lake. Construction began in 1912 using mostly prison manpower. Progress was slow. By the opening of Rocky Mountain National Park in 1915 the road extended approximately four miles from Estes Park. In 1919, using more heavy equipment than men, the 28-mile road was completed. The State of Colorado and the National Park Service spent several years "discussing" the ownership of the roadway. Finally, after the threat of closing Rocky Mountain National Park, the State deeded the roadway to the National Park Service in 1921. Due to narrowness and high maintenance the decision was made to immediately replace Fall River Road with a modern road, which would carry traffic both directions. The new road was surveyed

over Tombstone Ridge without so many tight switchbacks and steep grades. Construction started with heavy equipment working from both sides at once. The question immediately arose "Who would drive over Tombstone Ridge?" Trail Ridge Road opened in 1931 and was named for the Child's Trail it crosses several times. The majority of Fall River Road was removed with the exception of the one-way gravel road that exists now.

In the early 1880s a small number of pioneers came into the Kawuneeche Valley to homestead. In the valley homesteaders such as the Hedricks, Mitchells, Millers, Houses, and others, were starting their ranches to raise cattle. Like the miners, many early homesteaders found the hard work and short summers did not provide a subsistence for them and their animals. Many abandoned their homesteads for easier pursuits or changed over to tourist operations.

After the mining era ended "Squeaky" Bob Wheeler left to fight in the Spanish American War. He loved the area so much he returned in 1906 to build a hotel for people coming by horseback from Estes Park. He called it Camp Wheeler or "Hotel De Hardscrabble". Bob had a very high-pitched voice that "squeaked" when he got excited. His "hotel" was on the side of the Grand River and had tent cabins. They consisted of log walls about three feet high with a canvas roof. Imagine riding your horse for a couple of weeks and looking down on this place along the river. You know what you were in for? A bath and maybe a good meal. As a matter of fact



Squeaky Bob Wheeler at Hotel de Hardscrabble

Bob was known as a good cook, but not that much of a housekeeper. After you left he would turn your sheets over and sprinkle them with talcum powder. When the next guest left he would turn the sheets over and sprinkle them with talcum powder, changing them only once in a while. Once a year he would take a wagonload of sheets to Grand Lake and hire women to wash them in the lake.

Due to the financial losses suffered in the depression of 1893, in 1896 the Harbison family, parents Andrew and Mary, daughters, Annie, age 28, and Kittie, age 24, and a son, Rob, age 20, came to the Kawuneeche Valley to homestead and begin a dairy ranch. The parents already had a homestead near the City of Greeley they did not prove

up. The family decided that Annie and Kittie would file for homesteads side by side for a total of 320 acres of trees and meadows. Rob wasn't old enough to file or there probably would have been 480 acres. Their half-brother, Harry, had come to Grand Lake with his family in 1891 and settled at Columbine Lake about two miles outside the Village of Grand Lake.

Both the "Harbison girls" wrote descriptions of their life at the ranch. Annie wrote this of coming to Grand Lake:

"July 15th 1896 – Father came to Grand Lake. Sept 11 1896 – Kittie and I came to Grand Lake. Nov 1 1896 – Mother and Bobbie came to Grand Lake, Harry and I went to Denver after them. We were storm stayed from Tuesday until

Friday at the Big Chief Mine. Friday Mother and I started to walk leading "Jersey" and "Lady." The snow was 18 inches all the way over the range. We all got to the old stage stop this side of the range near the top. That night wet and cold. The next night we stayed at the Block home the other side of Coulter. The next night we got to Columbine Lake and glad to get home."

The trip she wrote about is over Berthoud Pass from Denver to Grand Lake. The Big Chief Mine was located near the town of Empire, about sixty-two miles from their ranch. They had two horses, four people and the cow and calf. The first day, after their three-day snow delay near Empire, they made it to the stage stop on top of Berthoud Pass, the next day to the Block home about twenty-four miles south of the ranch and the last day just that last twenty-four miles to Harry's home at Columbine Lake.

The Harbison ranch operated as a dairy ranch into 1954. Although some tourist cabins were added later, it was the only homestead to remain loyal to its original plan of dairy ranching.

On January 26, 1915 Rocky Mountain National Park was established as the tenth national park. It was signed into law in January but the dedication was put off until September 5 so they would have better weather for the ceremonies. September 5, 1915 it rained off and on all day. Soon after the opening of Rocky many area ranchers found themselves at odds with the National Park Service. Government officials wanted the cattle and ranches removed from the

Park so it could be enjoyed in its natural setting. Some people sold their land to the National Park Service while others, such as the Harbisons, resisted and ran their operations for many years.

In 1917 the Holzwarth family came to the valley to establish a cattle ranch about ten miles north of Grand Lake and eight miles north of the Harbisons. John Holzwarth hosted a group of friends from Denver to come fishing. After several days of fishing and drinking they left. Mama Holzwarth and the children stated if they had to wait on guests and clean up after them they should be charging them. And with that the Holzwarth Ranch began the transition from cattle ranch to the first dude ranch in the area, the Holzwarth Trout Lodge. The family operated the ranch until the 1960s when the decision was made to sell to the National Park Service in the early 1970s. It was then opened as a historic interpretive site known as the Never Summer Ranch and continues to be operated by the Park as the Holzwarth Historic Site and is a wonderful place for you to visit to see what life was like in the Kawuneeche Valley during the early part of the last century.

How is today different than in the past? There are still more than a dozen inholdings within Rocky where families still maintain their home or summer cabin. The Park has made agreements to eventually own all of them but total elimination of inholdings is still years off.

A dedicated staff and volunteers operate Rocky Mountain National Park. The

west side, known as the Colorado River District, utilizes full-time year-round National Park Service employees, seasonal employees, and a summer volunteer corps of near 100 people to ensure the visitor has a safe and memorable visit to the west side of Rocky Mountain National Park.

On your next trip to Rocky Mountain National Park and the Kawuneeche Valley, in addition to enjoying the theme of the 2015 Centennial celebration of Rocky, Wilderness, Wildlife and Wonder, remember the thousands of individuals whose lives provide the backstory of this spectacular mountain valley.

Acknowledgements and Further Reading

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Thanks to the Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado River District, interpreters and volunteers at the Holzwarth Historic Site for stories of the Holzwarth family.

Thanks to the Harbison family descendants for sharing family stories.

Rocky Mountain National Park map
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